



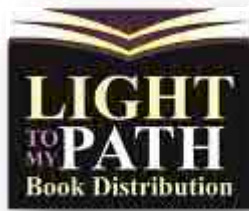
NO LONGER ME

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS
ON WHAT IT MEANS TO
WALK IN THE SPIRIT

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

No Longer Me

Biblical Reflections on
What It Means to Walk in the Spirit



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Preface

In a day when almost anything seems possible through technology and human wisdom, we need to be reminded again why we need the Holy Spirit and His enabling power. In a day of mass communication, we need to learn how to distinguish the voice of God from all other voices calling for our attention. In a day where individual rights and freedoms are championed, we need to hear afresh the call of God to surrender and obedience. In a day of emphasis on education and training, have we come to a place where we no longer see our need of dependence on God?

The subject of what it means to walk in the Spirit is one that cannot be reduced to a small study of this nature. Learning to walk as God requires is a lifetime effort. Scripture, however, does speak powerfully of the need of a strength greater than our own to live the life God has called us to live. It reminds us of our true nature and brings stern warnings to anyone who would seek to live and serve in fleshly wisdom and strength and not in the power of God's Spirit.

Could it be that one of the great tragedies of the Christian life is that we have never truly learned the importance of the Holy Spirit's role in our lives? True and victorious service is possible only as we rely and walk in the leading and enabling of God's Spirit.

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It is my hope that this study will reveal our need of God's Spirit and show us what it means to walk in tune with Him. It is my prayer that the Lord will use this effort to point each reader to the importance of the Lordship of God's Spirit in our lives.

F. Wayne MacLeod

Chapter 1 - Crucified with Christ

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Understanding what it means to walk in the Spirit is not something that can be accomplished in a study like this—it is a lifelong learning process. All I can hope to achieve is to point the reader to a series of Bible passages that speak to various aspects of what it means to walk as Christ intended. For our purposes in this reflection, let's begin at the cross of Jesus.

What happened when the Lord Jesus went to the cross? We know what happened in the physical world but if we had the eyes of Christ and could see what was happening in the spiritual world, what would we see?

Paul tells us in Galatians 2:20 that when the Lord Jesus died on the cross, we died with Him. Notice how Paul put it in Galatians 2:20 – “I have been crucified with Christ.” This is a difficult concept for our minds to grasp but it is essential that we understand what Paul is telling us here.

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What does Paul mean when he tells us that he was crucified with Christ? When Jesus died on the cross, He did not die for Himself. As the perfect Son of God, He never sinned. He died, not for anything He had ever done, but for you and me. Imagine, for an instant, that you were in debt. Your debt was so great you could not possibly pay it. Along comes a friend who goes to those to whom you are indebted and pays what is owed. Though it is your friend's money that paid the debt, it has all been done in your name. It is as if you had paid that debt personally. In the books, the payment is recorded as "paid in full".

When Paul thought about the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, he realized that the cross paid his personal debt. The transaction records of heaven stated that Paul's debt was paid in full. When Jesus died, it was just as if Paul had gone to the cross himself.

Paul so personalized what happened on that cross that he no longer considered himself alive. He chose to live his life with the understanding that he died the day Jesus died. "I no longer live," says Paul. When Jesus died, I died too. There are two principles I would like to underline here in what Paul is saying.

First, the law of God demanded that the soul that sinned die:

4 Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die. (Ezekiel 18)

Paul did not take what the Lord Jesus had done lightly. He knew that according to the Law of God, he had been sentenced to die. While Jesus took his place on the cross, Paul chose to live his life in the reality that this death was

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for him. He would live now understanding that Jesus' death was his death.

Second, the death of Christ demanded a response. With his penalty paid, Paul could no longer live as he had formerly lived. He was morally accountable to the one who died on his behalf. He chose to live no longer as he did in the past. He chose to die to all the sinful passions that had formerly placed him under this penalty of death. He would show His gratitude to the Lord by living only for Him.

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5)

Notice in Galatians 5:24 and Galatians 2:20 that we have been crucified with Christ. This is something that has already taken place. If I belong to Jesus, I have been crucified to the sinful nature.

When I come to the cross I lay all that I am and have down. I accept Christ's death as my own and choose to live as one whose old nature has died with Christ on the cross. The day I came to the Lord, a spiritual transaction was made. I died to myself and my sin and was born again as a new creature into the kingdom of God. I became a new person.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this, is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5)

Notice what Paul says here. He tells us that the "old has gone." This is a finished work. Our old selves died with

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Christ. We died to who we were and what used to motivate our thoughts and actions. We are no longer the people we used to be. We have been born again as a new creation. The cross changed everything. I rise from the foot of that cross, not only forgiven but changed.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will have to admit that we still feel the pull of the flesh with its lusts and desires. If we have died to this flesh, why do we still feel its pull? Let me answer by saying that there is a world of difference between dying to the flesh and the flesh itself dying. As long as I live in this mortal body, I will be tempted. Evil and sin are still alive in this world. Jesus was tempted by sin, the flesh and the devil. He was tempted because these great enemies have not been completely defeated.

When I died with Christ, however, a new life was planted in me. This is the life of the Holy Spirit. The day I died with Christ I chose to reject the flesh with its lusts and attractions. I chose to kill their influence in my life. I chose to no longer be governed and ruled by the flesh but by the new life of the Spirit in me. This is the life I chose to live. I no longer trust the flesh. I no longer identify myself with that old nature. The old nature is no longer who I am in Christ. I chose to divorce the old nature and renounced any right to it. It also has no longer has any right over me. The bond between us has been legally broken. If I return to that old nature I commit spiritual adultery. My allegiance now is to Christ and His Spirit in me and to them alone.

Understanding that I was crucified with Christ ought to change how we see ourselves. We have been released legally from the flesh and are now children of God. If I have been crucified with Christ and legally separated from the old nature—I no longer find my identity in it. That is no longer who I am.

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There is a custom in some places for a woman who marries to take on the name of her husband. She no longer uses her maiden name. Instead she chooses to identify herself with her husband and his name. She will, should God desire, raise a family under this new name. This is how it is for us. We have taken on a new name. We walk with our heads held high. We are now part of a new family. We are children of God. We carry His name with us now. We are joined with Him and no longer identify with our old name and what it represented.

How we see ourselves will dramatically impact how we live. If you see yourself as one who is crucified with Christ, then you will live as one who has been crucified to the flesh and its influences. If you see yourself, as Paul did, hanging on the cross with the Lord Jesus, then you will live your life with the understanding that you are no longer alive to the flesh and its influences. You will bury that old body and move on in your new life.

The old nature that used to define us has been crucified with Christ. The life we live now we live by faith in Jesus and what He has done. We live as new creatures. We live our life with the understanding that we are crucified with Christ. We live with the understanding that we have a new name. We no longer identify with the old nature. We live our lives with this truth burned deeply into every thought and decision. I get up in the morning and remember that the person I used to be died with Jesus on the cross. The life I now have is a new life. When the flesh rises to tempt me, I turn my back. I have divorced that old flesh and now have a new allegiance. I have no more right to please this old nature. It is considered dead to me.

The first thing I need to understand is who I am. I now define myself by the cross and my death on the cross with

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the Lord Jesus. I have been crucified with Christ. Everything changed that day. My allegiance to the flesh died. I now live in the reality of my crucifixion with Christ. That reality changes how I see myself. It changes how I live. Who I used to be is no longer alive. I am legally separated from the flesh. I have taken on my new identity and live in its wonderful reality.

If I am to learn what it means to walk in the Spirit I must first come to the cross and die to the flesh. I must understand that my old way of thinking has been crucified with Christ. My old way of life is no longer what defines or motivates me. I am a new creation. The life I live now is under Christ and His purpose. We cannot learn to walk in the Spirit if we first do not understand this principle.

For Prayer:

Father, Your Word teaches that the soul that sins should die. I confess that I have sinned and deserve the ultimate penalty for that sin. I thank You, however, that the Lord Jesus died on my behalf, paying the full price for my redemption. I recognize that when He died, He died for me, taking the penalty that I deserved. When I came to the cross, I died with Him. I died to my old way of living. I died to the sin that placed Him on the cross. I rose from the foot of that cross a new person –set free from sin. Help me to live in the reality of this new life. Teach me to look to you for direction and guidance. Teach me to die daily to the sinful impulses and reasoning of the old nature. Teach me instead to look to you and walk in this newness of life you have given. Teach me what it means to walk as a new creation in Christ.

Chapter 2 - No Good Thing

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh, For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. (Romans 7)

This statement of Paul is a very difficult one. Yet it is at the heart of what it means to walk in the Spirit. Let's take a moment to consider the man who spoke these words. The apostle Paul was a well-trained and dedicated believer in the Lord Jesus. Through his ministry, the cause of Christ was wonderfully advanced. Here was a man who loved the Lord enough to lay down his life for Him. He was mocked, threatened, beaten, stoned and left for dead on the road. He suffered for the cause of the Gospel and never gave up. Numerous souls were won to the Lord. Many churches were planted. His impact continues to be felt in this day as the largest part of the New Testament was written by him. What was his secret? He has just told us. His secret was in his understanding that nothing good lived in his flesh.

It is one thing to say that we are sinners and that our hearts are wicked, but it is totally another to live in the reality of this truth. Before we examine the implications of Paul's teaching, it may be helpful to look at what the prophet Jeremiah said about the heart and flesh of humankind in Jeremiah 17:

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9 The heart is deceitful above all things
and desperately sick;
who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17)

Jeremiah makes a strong point here. He not only tells us that the heart is deceitful but it is more deceitful than “all things.” In other words, there is nothing more deceitful in the universe than the heart of man. Consider this for a moment. Where do the most violent crimes originate? When you think about the terrible events of history, what was the source of these events? Did these things not begin in the desires of a sinful heart?

The human heart is capable of terrible evil. Out of that heart comes lust, envy, jealousy and bitterness. From their source in the heart, these evil thoughts find their way into our words and actions. The sinful desires of the heart have started wars. They have been the cause of the most vile and terrible crimes this world has ever seen. They have wrecked homes, destroyed reputations and split churches.

Notice that the prophet tells us in Jeremiah 17:9 that the heart is “desperately sick”. The word he uses here could also be translated by the word, “incurable.” In other words, it cannot be fixed. It is so desperately sick that there is no longer any hope of a cure.

It took me a long time to understand the reality of this statement. I believed it as a doctrine, but never really understood its implications for my personal life. Many believers are the same. They teach that the flesh is evil and that nothing good dwells in the flesh but they still trust the wisdom and strength of the human flesh.

Listen to what the prophet tells us in Jeremiah 17:5:

Chapter 2 - No Good Thing

5 Thus says the Lord:

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the Lord.

6 He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.
He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land. (Jeremiah 17)

Consider what the prophet is saying in these verses. He tells us that the person who trusts in the flesh is cursed. The person who trusts in the flesh will be like a bush in the desert which has no water to drink and withers away in the heat. He will dwell in a parched place of no blessing. He will be planted in a salt land where there will be no fruit or growth in his life.

Do you see what the prophet is saying? If you trust in the flesh you will not prosper. You will perish and wither away. All blessing will flee from you. The joy and the fruit of the Spirit will not be evident in your life. There have been times when these words of Jeremiah have perfectly described my life as a believer. This is the natural result of trusting in the flesh.

What do we need to understand from Paul and Jeremiah? We need to understand that we dare not trust the flesh. The writer of the book of Proverbs understood this truth as well.

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lead on your own understanding.
(Proverbs 3)

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Proverbs 3:5 is a direct command of Scripture. We are told in very clear terms here that we are not to lean on our own understanding. To lean on is to trust or to find support in. In our day, education and training is becoming more easily accessible. We like to see ourselves as people who are mature enough to make wise decisions. Many of us have had years of experience and with that experience comes great wisdom and understanding. We like to think that somehow all this wisdom and understanding will be of benefit to us. The writer of the Proverbs tells us not lean on that understanding. All too often our experience and understanding can be our downfall.

If we really believe that no good thing dwells in our flesh this will be evident in the way we think and minister. We need to trust the leading of the Holy Spirit more than we trust our own reason. This may seem to be quite radical for some but it is at the heart of what Paul and Jeremiah are teaching us here.

If I truly believe that in my flesh dwells no good thing, I will distrust what comes from the flesh. If I believe what the Scriptures say about not leaning on my own understanding, I will not base my decisions on what I think is right but rather upon the teaching of God's Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit in my life. If I believe that there is no good thing in my flesh, I will trust more in the promises of the Word of God than in what I see around me. When faced with worry about finances, I will not look at my earthly bank account but to the promise of God to supply all my needs.

If we truly believe that in our flesh nothing good dwells, it will have a very dramatic effect on how we do our business as church leaders. I have often been amazed at how many decisions were made in the early church through prayer. As the church gathered to deal with their problems, they

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got on their knees and sought the Lord. Very often, the Lord would reveal to them what they needed to do in that time of prayer. How often have we handed over the leadership of our churches to business people who are skilled in decision making? Would it not be as wise to have a simple man or woman of prayer? I am not downplaying the importance of committees in churches. What I am saying is that if we truly believe that nothing good dwells in our flesh then we will be more prayerful in our business meetings. We will be less concerned about pleasing people and more focused on seeking God and His purpose.

Sometime ago I remember reading about a man of God who spoke out against the church of his day because they no longer sought pastors who were Spirit filled men of prayer. Instead, they chose them because of their education and how they could answer theological questions. Correct doctrine is vital if we are to be effective in our service of the Lord. How often, however, have we so emphasized education and experience in our selecting a pastor or leader for our church that we have downplayed the importance of his spiritual life and dependence on the direction and enabling of the Spirit of God.

As you go through life, are you trusting your fleshly wisdom? How much of your day is spent seeking the purpose of the Lord and His will? Are you willing to let the Lord change your plans? Are you willing to open your eyes to see what He wants to do? Will you surrender your agenda for His? Proverbs 3:6-7 challenges us:

6 In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

7 Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. (Proverbs 3)

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Notice what we are told to do here. We are to “acknowledge” God in all our ways. What does it mean to acknowledge God in our ways? It means to bring Him into our plans and to recognize His Lordship over every decision and action we take.

If we are going to acknowledge God in all our ways, this means putting aside our own ideas and plans to walk in obedience to His purpose. The writer of Proverbs makes this clear when he goes on in the next verse to tell us: “Be not wise in your own eyes” (Proverbs 3:7). How many times have I been wise in my own eyes and felt that I could make decisions myself. I did not consult the Lord but did what I felt was best. This is what the writer of Proverbs is telling us not to do. Don’t be wise in your own eyes. Remember that the heart is deceitful above all things. Those who trust in the flesh will be like a desert with no blessing. Seek God. Seek His will. Seek Him in everything you do. Bring Him into every plan you make. Commit your ways to Him and let Him lead you.

Notice finally the promise of God for those who will acknowledge Him instead of being wise in their own eyes:

8 It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones. (Proverbs 3)

God knows what is best for us. His plan is so much greater than anything we could ever imagine. As we walk in His purpose, the path may not be easy but it will bring healing and renewal.

If we are to learn to walk in the Spirit, we must accept what Paul tells us in Romans 7:18 -- there is nothing good in our flesh. Instead of trusting our own reasoning and wisdom, we will listen to the Word of God and the leading of His

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Spirit who lives in us. We will commit all our decisions to the Lord and seek Him and His purpose. How thankful we need to be that while our hearts and flesh are deceitful, God has given us His Word and His Spirit to be our guide in all matters. May we learn to walk in tune with them.

For Prayer:

Lord God, the apostle Paul tells me that there is nothing good in my flesh. This is a hard statement for me. I see the reality of this, however, in the world around me and in my personal life. Forgive me for the times when I have not acknowledged You and brought You into the decisions I have made. Forgive me for trusting my own fleshly wisdom more than Your Word and the leading of Your Spirit.

Jeremiah tells me Lord, that those who trust the flesh will be like a shrub in the desert that sees no good. Help me to take this seriously. Help me not to lean on my own understanding or to be wise in my own eyes. Teach me instead to seek You in all my ways. Lord, I thank You that You have given me Your Word and Your Spirit to be my guide. I have often neglected them in favour of my own understanding. Teach me from this point forward to rely on Your Word and Your Spirit to be my only sure guide in life and practice.

Chapter 3 - Lean Not

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding. (Proverbs 3)

In the last chapter, we touched on Proverbs 3:5 but I would like to take a second look at this important passage. We have seen what Paul and Jeremiah taught about the flesh and the human heart. Because of the corruptness of the sinful human heart we cannot rely on it to direct us in the ways God has planned for us. We are commanded instead to acknowledge the Lord and let him direct our paths.

The concept is very simple. Don't trust your own reason, experience and understanding. Instead acknowledge the Lord by bringing Him into every decision you make and let Him direct and lead you in the way you should go.

In my culture, we measure maturity in our children by how independent they are. If our children are unable to make decisions, we feel we have failed them as parents. On the other hand, we feel that we have been successful if we raise children to no longer need us and depend on us for everything. This is not how it is in the spiritual realm. The mature Christian is not one who is less dependent on God but one who depends more and more on Him. God is looking for a people who are more dependent.

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Our experience and understanding often stands in the way of doing the will and purpose of God. There are several examples of this in the Scripture. Permit me to share them with you.

The first example of this is found in Exodus 17:4-6. Here the people of God were traveling through the wilderness and in need of water. The Lord told Moses that he was to go to a certain rock and strike it with his rod. When Moses obeyed, and struck the rock, water came out and the people had all they needed to drink. Later in the book of Numbers a similar situation occurred. This time, the Lord told Moses to speak to the rock (Numbers 20:2-9). Instead of speaking to the rock, however, Moses did what he did the first time and struck the rock again. While the blessing of God still came, God held Moses accountable for his disobedience and refused him entrance into the Promised Land. Let's consider what is happening here?

Experience can be a very great hindrance to hearing God. As I look at this story, I see a man who had experience with getting water out of a rock. He had done it before and knew how it was done. Could it be that this was why he did not listen carefully to the words of the Lord? This time God wanted things to be done differently but Moses didn't listen. He went up to that rock and did exactly what he did the first time. He struck it instead of speaking to it. How many times have ministries failed because we have trusted our experience rather than the leading and direction of the Lord God? We don't hear God because we don't believe we need to hear Him. We've done it before. We feel we can do it again. Instead of trusting God, we trust our experience. We don't hear God because we have our mind made up. This is a sure way to fail. We are told by the writer to the Proverbs that we are not to trust in our

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own understanding but to acknowledge God. Moses refused to acknowledge God in this situation. Listen to what God told him in Numbers 20:

12 And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them." (Numbers 20)

God accused Moses of not honouring Him before the people. Do you realize that when you choose to listen to your experience before the Lord you are dishonouring the Lord? In this case, God told Moses that, after forty years of labour, He would not be able to see the children of Israel into the Promised Land. This would have been a serious blow to Moses and a reminder of just how important it was to acknowledge God and His way in all He did.

There is another example of this in the life of Moses. As you know, Moses grew up in the home of Pharaoh's daughter. He knew the language and culture of the Egyptians perfectly. He was a man of tremendous influence and wealth. One day, the Lord put it in his heart to rescue his own people (the Israelites) from the land. The opportunity came for Moses to make his move. He saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite slave and he struck the Egyptian, killing him. The writer of the book of Acts tells us why he struck the Egyptian:

25 He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. (Acts 7)

Moses believed that by killing an Egyptian, the people of Israel would put their trust in him as their deliverer. Moses

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was the perfect man for the job. He had the influence, wealth, language and skills necessary. He had a passion in his heart for his people. He even had a call from God to rescue the people. The problem was that the people did not stand behind him. His murder was discovered and he ended up fleeing Egypt to save his life. Why would the perfect man for the job be forced to leave? He was forced to leave because, at that time in his life, he was leaning on his own understanding and resources.

God took him into the desert for forty years. There in the desert he cared for sheep. He no longer had any influence in Egypt. He lost his fluency in the Egyptian language and even his sense of pride. Later when God asked him to return to Egypt to rescue His people, Moses told God that he needed to find someone else. He was stripped of all confidence in himself and his abilities. This was the man, however, that God would use to rescue His people from Egypt.

You see, the greatest obstacle for Moses at the age of forty was his pride. If he had delivered the people at that point, the people would have seen Moses as their deliverer. Now at the age of eighty there could be no doubt about who delivered the people. It wasn't Moses who delivered them but God.

It is vital that we understand this principle in our walk with God. God is not looking for experience and finely tuned human wisdom. He is looking for people who will listen carefully, acknowledge Him and obey.

This was the secret to the success of Paul's ministry. Listen to what he told the Corinthians:

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3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians)

Paul did not want people to see man's wisdom and understanding in his preaching but to see the power of God. There is a world of difference between a message preached in human wisdom and a message preached in the power and anointing of God's Spirit. Both may be messages of truth but one is filled with power to change lives. How often when witnessing and preaching, do we place our confidence in our ability to teach and reason? How often have we tried to persuade people by our careful logic as opposed to trusting God to move in power through His Word? I would dare to say that there are times when we trust our own reason more than we trust the power of the Word of God.

Throughout the ministry of the Lord Jesus we see this absolute dependence on the will and purpose of the Father for everything. Though He is the perfect Son of God, Jesus demonstrated to us what it meant not to trust in human wisdom and understanding. In John 10:37 He makes a bold statement by telling those present that they were not to believe Him unless he did what the Father did.

37 If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; 38 but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." (John 10)

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What is Jesus saying here? He is reminding us that He lived in total surrender to the will and purpose of the Father. He did only what the Father led him to do. This is why we can believe Him – He was one with the Father in all He did.

In John 5, Jesus went further and said that even as a Son, He could not do anything by Himself. In other words, he was totally dependent on the Father for everything. Nothing He did on this earth came from independent human wisdom or strength. He chose only to minister in the leading and empowering of the Father.

19 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. (John 5)

There was a deep connection between the Father and the Son. The Son was not independent of the Father. They were so intimately connected that the Son only did what the Father led Him to do. They were of one heart and mind. The Lord Jesus, chose to surrender so fully to the Father in everything He did that He could truly say: "the Son can do nothing of His own accord." It was not an option for Jesus to do anything of "His own accord." He lived in absolute surrender to the will and purpose of the Father.

This principle was not only true in the way the Lord Jesus lived but also in the words He spoke. The words Jesus spoke were not His own, but the words the Father gave Him to speak.

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10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. (John 14)

Jesus was led by the Father in what to say. He spoke in harmony with the Father. What is true of the Lord Jesus is also true of the Holy Spirit. Jesus clearly tells us that the Holy Spirit will not speak on His own. He will only speak what He hears.

13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16)

The Holy Spirit speaks the words of Christ. Christ speaks the words of the Father. All three members of the Trinity are of one voice. They do not speak of their own accord.

If this is true of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, how much more should it be true in our lives and ministries. We dare not trust our own wisdom. While our experience and understanding are important, we cannot allow them to take the place of the clear leading and direction of the Spirit and the Word in our lives.

This calls for a people who are in tune with the Lord Jesus. God does not leave us to face the world alone. He wants to work with us and through us. For that to take place, He asks us not to lean on our own understanding but to acknowledge Him. To acknowledge God is to seek Him in our plans and decisions. When you acknowledge God in a decision you bring him into that decision. When you

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acknowledge God in a ministry you invited Him to be Lord of that ministry and you submit yourself to His leading and direction.

When you acknowledge the Lordship of Christ in your life, you surrender to His leading and enabling. Notice that the writer to the Proverbs tells us that we are to acknowledge Him in "all our ways." That means that He needs to be Lord over every decision and every task. We will surrender even the smallest detail to Him.

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? It means surrendering to the Lordship of Christ. It means committing ourselves to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ over every aspect of my life —over what I do and what I say. This requires a conscious decision not to lean on my own understanding but to submit to God and His ways. This is the challenge of the writer to the Proverbs. It was the 40-year lesson Moses had to learn in the desert. It was the way the Lord Jesus Himself lived before us and the example that we are to follow.

For Prayer:

Father, I thank You for the many things you have taught me and the experiences you have brought me through in life. Teach me, however, to trust You and Your leading more than these experiences so that I do not fall into the error of Moses. Thank you for the example of the Lord Jesus, who declared that He did nothing of His own accord and spoke only what the Father gave Him to speak. Thank you for the heart of Paul to speak not in persuasive words but in demonstrations of the Spirit's power. Forgive me for trusting my education and human wisdom more than You.

Chapter 3 - Lean Not

Teach me to acknowledge your Lordship in all things. Help me to live like Jesus in true connection with the Father in all I do and say. Break my independent and proud spirit and teach me to live as one with you in all I do and say.

Chapter 4 - A Temple of the Holy Spirit

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6)

There is a real mystery in the verses quoted above. Paul tells us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God has chosen to take these frail and sinful human bodies and make them a place in which He dwells. More than this however, He has made them His temple. Let's take a moment to examine this truth and its implications.

What is a temple? The temple, in the Old Testament context, was the place where the Lord God chose to manifest His presence. While it was understood that the Lord, in all His fullness, could not be contained in any temple, He did choose to make His person known there in a special way.

The temple was also a place that was consecrated for the Lord's use. It was a holy place. It was not a place of worldly business. Jesus made that clear when He drove out the money changers telling them that the temple was a place

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of prayer and worship (see Matthew 11:15-17). It was separated from the ordinary and secular matters of life for the honour and glory of God.

When Jesus tells us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, He is telling us that they are the places where the Holy Spirit has chosen to make His presence known in a very special way. He is telling us that the Holy Spirit has set these bodies aside for His special purpose. It is in these bodies that the Lord will be worshiped and honoured.

It is important that we notice that Paul tells us that our bodies already are the temple of the Holy Spirit. This is not something we are striving for. It is already the case. If you are a child of God, then your body is already the temple of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul puts it this way:

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (Romans 8)

Do you see what the apostle is saying here? He is telling us that if we belong to Christ the Holy Spirit lives in us. If the Holy Spirit is not in you, you do not belong to the Lord Jesus. The body of every believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You may not understand it. You may not live in the reality of this fact but it is true nonetheless.

It is an amazing thing that these frail and temporary bodies should become the place the Holy Spirit has chosen to make His temple. It is in these bodies, however, that God has chosen to reveal His power. Listen to what Paul told the Corinthians:

Chapter 4 - A Temple of the Holy Spirit

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Corinthians 4)

The treasure of the Holy Spirit is contained in jars of clay. These jars are fragile and common, but they contain a treasure of infinite value and power. This is who you are as a believer.

It is for this reason that we are exhorted in the Scriptures not to lean on our own understanding. We have within us a wisdom worthy of greater confidence. The Spirit of God has chosen to live in us. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit comes to show the world that the power in us is not from us but from God. People look at these feeble jars of clay and they are amazed at the power and wisdom of God demonstrated through them.

How often have you looked at others and been amazed at how the Lord uses them? Remember, however, that the same Spirit dwells in you if you belong to the Lord Jesus. You are as much a temple of the Holy Spirit as any other believer. The same power and wisdom is available to you. How important it is for us to tap into that power.

What we need to understand is that if our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, they do not belong to us. Paul reminds us that we were bought with a price. In other words, we do not have any right or claim over our own bodies. If this is the case, we need to seek the Lord God for all that we do with these bodies. Because we belong to the Lord, He has the right to ask of us anything He desires. He holds the deed to our bodies. The Spirit of God does not come as a tenant but as the owner. We have been purchased through the death of Christ and we now belong to Him. We are His servants. Because our bodies are the

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temples of the Holy Spirit we need to be careful about what we put into them and how we use them.

It would be easy for us to assume that because the Holy Spirit resides in us, we can use Him in whatever way we like. There are people who try to control the Holy Spirit and tell Him what He is to do. The reality of the matter is that the Holy Spirit owns us and bought us for a price. He controls us. He did not come to dwell in our hearts to be bossed about by sinful creatures. He came to guide, empower and control. If we understand that we are servants of the Holy Spirit, we will listen to Him and obey His prompting and commands. We will let Him control us and do what He likes in and through us. We are merely the temple. He is the owner and manager.

The Spirit of God lives in us and uses us for the glory of God. He comes to empower and equip us in ministry. He comes to guide us into God's heart for our lives. What good would it be for the Holy Spirit to take up residence in us if He could not communicate with us and guide us into the will of the Father? In Matthew 13, Jesus reminds His disciples that they were truly blessed because they had been given ears to hear:

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. (Matthew 13)

Not only does the Spirit of God come to live in our heart but He also gives to believers the ability to know and hear His leading and promptings. The challenge for us is to learn to distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit from the voice of our own understanding.

Chapter 4 - A Temple of the Holy Spirit

This is how the Lord Jesus ministered. This is how the apostles ministered. The apostles learned not to trust in their own wisdom and understanding. They had learned how to walk in the truth of the Word of God but also to hear the inner voice of the Holy Spirit who lived in them. They had learned how to be a channel through which the Spirit of God could flow freely in their lives.

Those who understand that they are temples of the Holy Spirit willingly surrender to the work of God's Spirit in their lives. They bow to His authority and wisdom. They step forward in obedience to His leading with confidence in what He can do in them and through them.

Those who know that they are temples of the Holy Spirit do not rely on their own strength and wisdom because they have a much more reliable source of wisdom and power in the Spirit of God who lives in them. They understand that because they have surrendered all rights to God, they are no longer in control. They understand that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in them for a reason. He wants to use them and empower them. They expect Him to move and communicate God's heart to them. They make room for Him to act. They turn from their own understanding and trust Him and His leading. They make it their priority to hear His voice because they understand that in so doing they will accomplish far more for the kingdom than they ever could in their own wisdom and strength.

This indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is something we need to understand if we are to walk the walk God calls us to walk. We will surely fail if we do not understand that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. We are mere jars of clay but God has put a wonderful treasure in us. The Spirit of God has come to live in you. If you belong to Jesus, this Spirit is already in you. He comes to empower

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and enable you. We must make it our number one priority to listen to Him and obey His voice.

Let me say in conclusion that there is a world of difference between accepting the truth of 1 Corinthians 6:19 as an intellectual fact and accepting it in reality. You can accept this as a truth and never live in its reality. You can believe that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and never understand the power of this in real life. Let me underline this and state it as clearly as possible: The Holy Spirit of God with all His power and wisdom, lives in you! He has come to live in you for a very particular purpose—to lead you into the purpose of God and to empower you in doing what God has called you to do. Will we ignore His presence and trust our own wisdom instead? Will we refuse His enabling and do things in our own way?

God forbid that we should ever live ignoring the presence of God's Spirit in our lives. May the reality of this wonderful truth cause us to renounce human strength and wisdom and cling to the greater strength and wisdom that is provided through the personal ministry of God's Spirit in our lives.

For Prayer:

Father, Paul speaks of the wonderful truth about our bodies being the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is a mystery to me that the Spirit of God would choose to take up residence in my life. I am unworthy of this but I am eternally grateful for this priceless treasure. Thank You that you have given to me, in the person of the Holy Spirit, all the wisdom and strength I need to live for You. Teach me to surrender to the Lordship of the Holy Spirit in my life. Forgive me, Holy

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Spirit, for the times I have sought to take control and make You a servant by demanding my way. Teach me always to bow to Your will and purpose and not my own. Tune my ears to hear You so that I can know the wise counsel You want to give. Teach me to depend less on me and more on Your strength in ministry. Forgive me, Spirit of God, for seeing You only as a doctrine to be believed and not as a real person living in me to empower and guide. Forgive the hypocrisy of saying I believe in You while living in my own wisdom and strength. I stand before You today, committing myself afresh to know You and walk with You in greater obedience. May I truly come to a point in my life where I can say with the apostle Paul that it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me (Galatians 2:20).

Chapter 5 - My Sheep Hear My Voice

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. (John 10)

In the last chapter, we saw how, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to live in each believer so they can be empowered to live the life God requires of them. Let's take a moment to develop this point further here in this chapter by examining what Jesus tells us in John 10:27.

Jesus makes a very important statement in John 10:27. He reminds us that His sheep hear His voice. To understand this verse, we need to see it in its cultural context. Jesus speaks about the practice of the shepherds to bring their sheep to a central fold where they would hire a man to watch them for the night while they rested. In that central fold were sheep from many different shepherds. In the morning, the shepherd would come to the fold to gather his sheep. He would stand at the gate and call out. The sheep would hear his voice and come to him. The sheep of other folds did not respond to the voice of another shepherd. They had learned to distinguish the voice of their own shepherd from the voice of other shepherds. The result was that when the shepherd called them, they would wind their way through the fold moving past other sheep in the direction of the voice of their shepherd. The shepherd did

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not have to separate his sheep from his neighbour's sheep. He simply had to call, and his sheep would hear and come to him. Jesus is telling us that we are like these sheep. As His sheep, we can hear and recognize His voice from all other voices.

What does the voice of the Lord sound like? How are we able to distinguish the voice of the Spirit from the voice of our own reason? How can we know the direction and leading of God in our lives? These are important questions that we need to examine in this context.

The first thing we need to understand is that the voice of God can be found in His written Word. The Bible is the Word of God. It was inspired by God through the prophets and given to us for direction and guidance. This is the teaching of the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3 when he says:

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3)

It is clear from what Paul says here that the Scriptures have been handed down to us for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. It is by these Scriptures that we are completely equipped for every work the Father gives us to do.

Notice the words Paul uses here. He tells us that we can be complete and equipped for every good work. In other words, these Scriptures will give you all the training you need to do "all" that God has called you to do. The focus of my writing ministry is to open the Scriptures. This is my focus because these Scriptures contain all that we need to

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know for life and godliness. There is nothing more that needs to be added to enable us to live the life God requires. The Scripture is a complete textbook on the Christian life. All you need to know to live for Christ is found in its pages.

If we want to hear God, we need to listen to the Word He has given us as found in the pages of Scripture. We need to master the content of those Scriptures. We need to spend time seeking His direction and leading through the pages of this inspired Word.

Having said this, we need to ask ourselves an important question. If God speaks to us through Scripture, why has He put His Holy Spirit in us? Why do we need the Holy Spirit if we have the Word of God? The answer to this is quite simple. The truth by itself is of no use to us if we cannot apply it to our lives.

Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God were constantly taught the truth of Scripture. They knew what God was calling them to do but for some reason they seemed to be powerless to apply that truth to their lives. They continued to fall into sin. The pull of the flesh was so overwhelming that they could not walk in the truth as God required. The same is true for us. It is one thing to know the truth and another to walk in that truth. If we are to walk in the truth God has given us, we need a power that is greater than our flesh. We need the very person of God's Spirit working in us to enable us to live out what God requires. More than this, however, we need the same power to convict us of the truth of this Word.

Maybe you have seen this in your own life. You heard the message of the Gospel for years and it did nothing for you. Maybe you have non-Christian friends who can repeat the

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Gospel to you but have never been changed by that Gospel. They know the truth but the truth has never changed them. Paul reminds us that when he preached he not only preached the truth but he did so under the power and anointing of the Spirit of God.

3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2)

The apostle understood that the truth would never change a sinful heart. Only the Holy Spirit could change that heart. It is for this reason that we need the Spirit of God. It is He who takes the truth of the Word of God and uses it to convict the sinner and the saint of their sinful ways. The Spirit and the truth must walk hand in hand.

This principle is true also in our quiet times with the Lord. When you read your Bible, you need the Spirit of God to be your guide. It is one thing to take the truth of the Scriptures and understand it in the flesh. It is another matter for us to allow the Spirit of God to teach us and use those Scriptures to convict us of sin and empower us to change what needs to be changed. Do we realize that we have within us a personal tutor? The Holy Spirit comes to lead us into the truth of the Word of God. If you will let Him, He will open our eyes and our minds like no other teacher can, to the truth that has been inspired from the days of the prophets. He will personalize those Scriptures and apply them specifically to your life. He will use them to guide and direct you in every step you take.

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be our teacher.

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26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14)

This is one of the roles of the Holy Spirit in our lives. How often, however, do we come to the Word of God with our own understanding and reasoning. We understand the truth and doctrine of the Scripture but it is not alive to us because we are not letting the Spirit of God breathe life into it and apply it personally to our hearts.

We also need to understand something else here in this context. A quick look at the Scriptures will show us that God not only directed His people through the Word but He also specifically led them through His promptings and inner guidance.

There are many examples of this. Take for example how God led the apostle Paul in Troas. As he and his companions travelled, Acts 16:6 tells us that they were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. Understanding this, they moved forward and tried to go to Bithynia but again we read in Acts 16:7 that “the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” to go there either. Finally, Paul and his companions arrived in Troas uncertain of what God was asking them to do. Here in the town of Troas the direction they needed came.

8 So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.
9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10
And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that

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God had called us to preach the gospel to them.
(Acts 16)

The direction the apostle needed came in the form of a vision. God had a purpose for Paul and his missionary team. Communication of that purpose did not come from the Word of God but by means of the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit hindered them from going to Asia and Bithynia and then showed them in a vision what it was that He had for them to do.

In Acts 13, we read how the Holy Spirit directed the church in Antioch while they were praying:

2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13)

Again, the guidance of the Holy Spirit was given in a very specific way. We are not told how they heard from the Holy Spirit that day, but when they rose from their knees in prayer, they knew very clearly that the Lord was asking them to do. They were to set apart Paul and Barnabas for a special work. They did not read this in the pages of Scripture, but it was nonetheless a very clear word from the Lord.

The rest of Scripture bears out this teaching as well. Philip, while ministering in the region of Samaria, was told to go to the desert where he met an Ethiopian eunuch traveling from Jerusalem. He heard the Holy Spirit tell him to go up to the chariot of this man and, when he obeyed, the Lord wonderfully opened a door to witness and win this official to Christ (see Acts 8:26-40).

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Peter was told to go to the home of Cornelius even though this would have been contrary to his Jewish traditions (see Acts 10:9-33). Abraham was called to leave his home and go to the land the Lord had prepared for him (see Genesis 12:1). He was also told to take his son and offer him on an altar as a sacrifice (see Genesis 22:1-8). Before facing their enemies, the kings of the Old Testament would seek the will of the Lord as to whether they were to go into battle against them or not (see 2 Samuel 2:1; 2 Samuel 5:19; 2 Chronicles 14:10). The Holy Spirit revealed to Peter that Ananias was lying to the Holy Spirit when he brought his gift to the church (see Acts 5:1-6). These men did not read these directions in the Scriptures –God led them directly.

In my life, I have experienced this direction of the Spirit many times. My call to missions was very clearly a word from the Spirit of God. While He did use Scripture to show me His missionary purpose for my life, what I heard was clearly from Him. He led me through circumstances, prepared my heart and opened my mind. When I was ready, He spoke directly to my heart and convinced me of God's purpose. When he had finished speaking, I knew what I was to do and felt a deep conviction to walk in that path, no matter the cost. I trust that every pastor, missionary, or Christian worker ministers because they have such a calling on their life.

Some time ago I received a letter from South Africa requesting books. The number of books they requested was significant and required a large investment. I wrestled with this for some time in prayer. I asked the Lord what I should do. I remember sitting in a coffee shop praying about this when the Lord spoke clearly to my heart these words: "Of all that I give you lose none." With those words came a very deep peace and assurance that I was to trust Him not only to provide for this specific project but for all contacts

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and projects He would give me in the future. The result of this is that tens of thousands of books have now been distributed around the world for the glory of God.

What I am trying to say is this. God has not left us in this world to figure it all out by ourselves. There are many people who live their lives as though God created the world, wrote the Bible as the instruction manual and said: "Here guys, figure it out yourselves." We need the Spirit of God to guide us into truth and His purpose. The fact of the matter is that there are times when we need clear and specific direction. Where do I minister? What do I say to this person? Do I move ahead with such and such a plan or not? For these questions, I need the specific guidance of God's Spirit as He show us how to apply the truth of God's word in our lives.

Some people don't worry about these matters. They believe that if we obey the Scriptures we can do whatever we want. This however, runs contrary to everything we have seen so far. This is not how the apostles ministered. They were led by the Spirit of God who not only showed them where He wanted them to minister but also the words he wanted them to speak. If we want to follow their example, we need to make a conscious decision not to trust in our own understanding and learn instead to listen to the voice of our Counsellor.

Having said these things, I understand that there are those who have gone to the extreme. While they claim to hear an inner prompting of the Spirit, the evidence seems to be that they are still listening to the flesh. It is important that we learn to distinguish the voice of flesh from the Spirit. This is what the Lord Jesus was speaking about when He said, "My sheep hear my voice." They have been given the ability to distinguish His voice from all other voices that

Chapter 5 - My Sheep Hear My Voice

seek their attention. Let me close with a few guidelines in this regard.

The Word and Spirit Always Agree

The specific direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit will never be contrary to the clear teaching of the Scriptures. All specific guidance is subject to the authority of the Scriptures. If you want to know if the prompting you are feeling in your heart is from the Lord and not the flesh then the first thing you need to do is to place it under the microscope of the Scriptures. If you find that this prompting is to do something that is clearly contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures then you must question its legitimacy.

When I speak about this specific guidance being contrary to the teaching of the Scripture I am not speaking only of theology and doctrine. I am also speaking about the principles it teaches about relationships between believers as well. Is what I am sensing in tune with the teaching of the Scripture to honour and respect those in authority? Does it fall in line with my responsibilities as a father or as a husband or as a spiritual leader? We must take what we hear and subject it thoroughly to the inspection of the Word of God.

The Aroma of the Spirit

The Lord showed me some time ago that we can also recognize the voice of God by the aroma of the Spirit that accompanies it. There is a coffee shop not far from where I live that used to allow people to smoke inside the building. On occasion, I would go to that shop to write. When I came home, the smell of cigarettes lingered on my clothes. In the world of the Spirit there is also an aroma. I have been in situations where I very clearly sensed a real spirit of evil

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and confusion in what someone was saying. You can sense jealousy, anger and bitterness. This is the aroma of the flesh and the enemy. When you smell that aroma beware.

You can also sense the fruit of the Spirit. What aroma accompanies the inner prompting you are feeling? Does that voice move you to confidence and peace in your heart or does it bring confusion and disbelief? Does that voice lead you to deeper love and obedience or does it cause you to question the Lord and His purpose? Do you sense the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in what you are hearing (Ephesians 5:22-23)? It should not be difficult for us to discern the aroma that comes with the voice and the prompting. We can discern the leading of the Spirit because we know the character of God and can discern His character in what we are feeling in our heart.

In Tune with God's Greater Work

If you want to understand if the voice you are hearing is from God, you also need to understand that it will also be in tune with the greater work God is doing. The enemy will often seek to bring confusion and chaos. He will seek to bring disharmony and interrupt what God is trying to do. The Lord Jesus tells us that "if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (Mark 3:25). God will not fight against His own purpose. His will is to build up the body. Maybe you have seen individuals who stepped out in what they perceived to be the leading and prompting of the Lord but what they did seemed only to disrupt and destroy the unity of the body and the further advancing of the kingdom. We need to beware of any voice that will disrupt the purpose of God and what He is doing in our midst.

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The Confirmation of Other Sincere Believers

Just one final word on this matter. If you want to know if the voice you are hearing is from the Lord, you should be ready to put it to the test. Paul makes this clear when he gave guidelines for prophets in 1 Corinthians 14:

31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. (1 Corinthians 14)

Paul reminded those who heard from the Lord that they needed to be submissive to the rest of the body. If a prophet heard from God, he or she was to submit what they heard to the other prophets in the body. If you believe the Lord is speaking to you about a matter don't hesitate to bring that to other godly believers and share it with them. Let them confirm that voice to you. Some time ago I was seeking the Lord about His direction for a conference I was thinking of attending. There were two conferences going on at the same time. I prayed about it and felt that I was to go to one of these conferences and not the other. When I mentioned this to my wife she told me that she too had that same sense. This confirmed to me that this was the will of God. I could go with a greater confidence that what God seemed to be saying to me He was also saying to my wife as well.

What we need to understand is that as sheep we need to discern the voice of our shepherd not only in His written Word but also in His specific prompting in our lives as well. What a wonderful thing it is to know that God does direct and lead us into His purpose. It was that voice Philip heard when he went to the desert to minister to the Ethiopian. It

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was that voice Moses heard when he returned to Egypt to lead His people out of bondage. The question we need to ask ourselves is this: "Do we hear His voice? Do we recognize that still small voice? Will we respond to it and walk in obedience?"

For Prayer:

Father, I thank You that you are a God who communicates personally with Your people. You have written down Your purpose for us in the pages of the Scriptures. You have protected that Word from corruption and distortion down through the ages so that we have an accurate representation of Your purpose for our life and faith. Help me to appreciate what You have given to me in the pages of the Holy Scriptures –may I study and live in the truth you present in them. Thank You also that You have not left me to figure out the truth of these Scriptures on my own. Thank You for the person of the Holy Spirit who lives in me to guide me into the understanding and application of the truth of Scripture.

Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you also lead me into the specific application of the will of God for my life. Teach me to recognize your leading and prompting and be quick to obey. Teach me to wait for Your direction and trust Your enabling. Teach me what Jesus meant when He said: "My sheep hear my voice." Thank you for the incredible privilege it is to know this voice of God in my life. Thank you that You have a purpose for my life. Thank you that you are so willing to communicate that purpose to me in Your inspired Word and by Your Holy Spirit who lives in me. Teach me to walk in obedience.

Chapter 6 - As You Received Christ

2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? (Galatians 3)

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2)

One key distinctive that separates a child of God from an unbeliever is the presence of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. This is very clear from what Paul told the Romans:

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. (Romans 8)

It is the Spirit of God who brings the life of Christ to us. He seals the relationship between God and His children and is the guarantee of our inheritance as children of God.

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21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1)

Writing to the Galatians, in the passage quoted above, the apostle Paul asked the question: "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?" The context of this question came from the fact that there were teachers who had come into the region teaching that, to become a child of God, a person needed to be circumcised and observe the law of Moses. Paul reacted very strongly against this teaching. He challenged this teaching by asking the believers how they had received the Spirit.

The question Paul asks here is very important. We have already seen that for Paul, if a person did not have the Holy Spirit they were not a child of God. Paul is asking the question: How did you come to know Christ? For Paul, just as there could be no salvation apart from Christ so there could be no salvation apart from the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of God who gives us spiritual life through the forgiveness of Christ. The question of Paul here is very simple: How did you come to experience the new life of the Spirit in Christ?

Paul went on to question the Galatians: Did you receive the Holy Spirit because you were faithful in observing the law of Moses. Does salvation only come to those who measure up to the law? Does God only save those who prove their worth by obedience?

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It is very clear in the Scriptures that the Lord does not save us because of our good deeds. In fact, no amount of good deeds can save us. The Bible teaches that we are sinners and that nothing we can do or say will ever get us to heaven. You can attend church every day and still not go to heaven. You can help your neighbour and live a good life but never enter heaven's gate. Salvation has nothing to do with how good we are. None of us measure up to God's requirements. We all fall short of His standard. The prophet Jeremiah puts it this way:

23 Can an Ethiopian change his skin
or a leopard its spots?
Neither can you do good
who are accustomed to doing evil. (Jeremiah 13)

We owe our salvation entirely to the Lord Jesus and His work alone. We were saved because Jesus died and rose again. We received the Holy Spirit as a gift and guarantee of our adoption into the family of God. All we had to do was accept what was already done on our behalf.

From this background, Paul went on in Galatians 3 to show the believers the implication of what the Lord Jesus had done for them by asking them another question:

3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? (Galatians 3)

The apostle reminded the Galatians that they began their life in Christ by faith. The Holy Spirit came as a gift from the Father. Their forgiveness was a gift from God even when they did not deserve it. Their salvation had nothing to do with their human efforts to please God. In fact, they

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were all on a path of rebellion against God when the Spirit of God changed their lives.

Paul went on to ask the Galatians why, if they began the Christian life by faith in what Christ had done, were they now trying to live that life in their own effort and wisdom? Surely if the Christian life began as a work of God, it must continue by faith in what God will continue to do. We need the Holy Spirit as much to live the Christian life as we did to enter that life. This is why the Lord Jesus placed His Holy Spirit in us. He did so because He knew it was impossible to live the Christian life apart from the work of that Spirit in us.

One of the greatest reasons for our defeat in the Christian life is that we do not understand this principle. We understand that we must trust the Lord for our salvation but we fail to understand that we also need to trust Him to live the Christian life. Somehow, like the Galatians, we believe that we need the Spirit of God to get us started on this Christian life but we feel that we can take it from there. Paul tells us that this is pure foolishness. Writing to the Colossians he said:

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him (Colossians 2)

We received Christ by faith. We must walk in the same way. We received Christ as those who were unworthy and totally incapable of saving ourselves. We must learn to walk as those who depend on Christ because we are totally incapable of living the Christian life without Him. If we want to know how to live the Christian life, we need to go back to when we started and live in that way.

Chapter 6 - As You Received Christ

When we received the Lord Jesus we did so as those who could not possibly save ourselves. No one can come to the Lord Jesus unless he or she recognizes this fact. Some of the hardest people to reach are very religious. They believe they can merit a place in heaven by their religious activities. The Pharisees of the New Testament were clear examples of this. They trusted their efforts and did not see that they needed the Lord. For us to be saved from our sins, we need to understand our need of that salvation.

The same is true in our Christian walk. If we believe we can live the Christian life in our own strength, we will always fall short. We will never walk in victory if we believe we can do so in our own strength. Even as an unbeliever needs to be absolutely convinced that he is a sinner, totally incapable of saving himself, so we too need to be convinced that we cannot live the life God requires in our own effort. If we want to live the life that God requires of us, we must first be absolutely convinced of our own inability. We must come to the end of ourselves. God must break every ounce of confidence in ourselves and place our full weight on Christ and His Spirit.

The second detail we need to understand is that when we came to the Lord we received the Lord Jesus by faith. We couldn't explain how it all happened. We heard the voice of the Spirit speaking to our hearts and we responded by faith to that voice. Our salvation was not an intellectual choice. It was a step of faith. We cannot explain how we were changed. What happened that day was spiritual in nature. The apostle Paul reminds us that as believers we are to learn to live in the same way when he said: "We walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7)

What does it mean to walk by faith? When we walk by faith, we step out as God leads. When I accepted the Lord by

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faith I took what He said and stepped out in confidence in it. The opposite of living by faith is living by sight. To live by sight is to live by human reason and planning. It is to allow our own understanding and experience to determine how we live and minister or how we spend the day. This is not how the apostles lived. This is not how Jesus lived.

To live by faith is to live with the understanding that the way we see things as human beings is not necessarily the way things truly are. It is to see things from God's perspective. It is to listen to Him rather than our own reason. When I live by faith I chose to live in communion with God. I get up in the morning and seek His direction and guidance. I move as He directs. I understand that my own efforts and wisdom are insufficient for the task. Without His direction and leading I will surely fail. I step out trusting that as He leads, He will also strengthen and equip. I receive from Him the wisdom and enabling I need.

Even as I write this book I have been experiencing what I am speaking about here. I was working on another study when the Lord seemed to speak to me about putting that study aside and work on this one instead. I wrestled with this for some time. I like to carry things through to the end. I do not like to leave something incomplete. Yet this is what the Lord seemed to be calling me to do. Though I tried to continue with the other study, I did not have peace in my heart about it. By faith, therefore, I put it aside and began this book. To live by faith is to live under the direction and leading of the Holy Spirit.

We are challenged by Scripture to live in the same way we received the Lord Jesus. We are to do so with our eyes focused on Him alone for everything. We are to do so in obedience to His prompting and the teaching of His Word. We cannot save ourselves, nor can we live the Christian

Chapter 6 - As You Received Christ

life ourselves. We need the Spirit of God as much for living the Christian life as we do for entering that life. Now that we have come to faith in Christ do we dare trust ourselves and our own efforts. The reason God placed His Holy Spirit in us is because we need Him to live the life He requires. We believe in salvation by faith; we must also believe in living the Christian life by faith. We believe in the inability of the sinner to save himself or herself. We must also believe in the inability of the believer to live the Christian life by himself or herself. As we have received the Lord so we need to continue in Him. If we are to understand what it means to walk in the Spirit, we must come to see our need of God's Spirit both to enter the Christian life and to live it out every day.

For Prayer:

Lord God, I recognize that when I was a sinner living in rebellion against You, You reached out to me and forgave my sin. You changed my life and made me Your child. I thank You that You placed Your Holy Spirit in me not only as a guarantee of my relationship with You but also to be my guide and wisdom for the life You have called me to live. Forgive me for ignoring You Holy Spirit. Forgive me for believing that somehow, I can live the life God requires without Your wisdom and enabling. Forgive me for trusting my human wisdom and strength more than You. Teach me to understand my need of Your guidance. Teach me to walk in submission to You and your leading. Teach me the truth of the Word and how to apply this to my life. Teach me the purpose of the Father. Teach me to know You and Your leading so that I can live the life God requires.

Chapter 7 - Waiting on the Lord

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their
strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40)

Those who seek the Lord and His purpose understand that His timing is not the same as ours. There are times when the Lord is silent. In those times, we have no sense of direction. We don't know where to turn. We are like a person lost in the wilderness without a compass, uncertain of where to go.

In the Old Testament, Job was a man who experienced these periods of silence. As he sat on an ash heap with his physical and emotional strength fading away, he longed to hear the Lord speak and make sense of his situation. He did not understand why he was facing the difficulties and pain he was experiencing. He asked the Lord but the Lord remained silent. These times of silence are very difficult. Personally, I have gone through many such times. Job didn't understand why the blessing of the Lord seemed to be withdrawn. He was left confused and bewildered by the silence of God in his pain.

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The Psalmist also experienced such times. In Psalm 22 he writes:

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the
words of my groaning?

2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest. (Psalm 22)

You can sense the agony in the voice of the Psalmist as he cried out to the Lord day and night. There is nothing worse for the believer than that silence of God. I can face terrible difficulty and trials if I know the presence of God. Many people have gladly laid down their lives as they heard from God. In the book of Acts, we read of how when Stephen was being stoned to death the Lord was speaking to him in a vision. He saw the Lord in heaven calling him to His side. The agony and pain of the stones seemed to fade as he heard the Lord. Those who saw him described how his face glowed like that of an angel (see Acts 6:15). There was delight and joy in his heart. He was hearing from God.

We do not always hear from God when we want to hear from Him. There are times when He simply doesn't seem to speak. What do we do in those times of silence? While it is important that we seek the Lord about any possible barrier to hearing from Him, it is also important to remember that silence is not necessarily an indication of sin in our lives. Job was described as a "perfect man" and yet he went through a very difficult period of silence.

When we face these periods of silence there are several things we need to keep in mind. When God seems to be silent the first thing we need to do is wait. I am reminded of the story of Saul in 1 Samuel 13:7-13. In this story, Saul

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faced a powerful Philistine army. The Philistines put fear in the hearts and minds of Saul's soldiers. Many deserted their posts and abandoned the fight. Saul was waiting for the prophet Samuel to offer a sacrifice before they went into battle. Samuel did not arrive in the time Saul expected and so he asked his men to bring the sacrifice to him. Though he was not a priest, Saul offered that sacrifice to the Lord. He did so because he saw how his men were abandoning the battle. He dared not go into battle without the blessing of the Lord so he took matters into his own hands.

What is important for us to note here is what happens in the silence. For many, silence is a terrible enemy. The silence that came from the absence of Samuel, caused the brave men in Saul's army to fear and abandon their posts. As for Saul, it caused him to take matters into his own hands. He decided to ignore the law of God and offer the sacrifice himself. In these periods of silence the hardest thing for us to do is wait. We feel like we must do something. Sometimes it doesn't matter what we do, so long as we no longer remain in the silence. We need to be aware that silence can sometimes lead us to sin by abandoning God and His purpose like Saul and his army.

There are many promises given to those who wait for the Lord, His direction and intervention. Isaiah the prophet tells us that these blessings are beyond imagination:

4 From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides
who acts for those who wait for him. (Isaiah 64)

Renewed strength and vitality is promised for those who wait on the Lord:

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30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their
strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40)

Notice that the promise is for those who wait. If you take matters in your own hands like Saul, you are not waiting on God.

In Acts 1:4 the Lord Jesus told His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit came to them. They were not to venture out until they knew the presence and leading of the Spirit He had promised them.

We are told that during the world war the enemy would sometimes deploy smoke screens to confuse the enemy and cause them to change their course. This would often lead them into trouble. It was discovered that the only way to avoid getting into trouble was either to remain where they were or continue on the same course until the smoke cleared. There is a spiritual truth for us in this. Very often in times of silence, the enemy will try to confuse us. His attempt is to get us to change our course. If he can get us to change or reverse direction, he can cause us to fall into his trap. We need to be careful in times of silence and confusion. We need to remain on the course the Lord has set for us until He redirects us onto another course.

The prophet Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 26:

8 In the path of your judgments,
O Lord, we wait for you;

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your name and remembrance
are the desire of our soul. (Isaiah 26)

Notice here that Isaiah tells us that as we wait for the Lord we are to continue to walk in the path of His judgments. In times of silence we need to cling to the Word of God. This was the downfall of Saul. In his waiting, he did not obey the law of God. He chose to take matters into his own hands. As we wait, the enemy can very easily cause us to turn our backs on the Word of God and His purpose for our lives. In these times of silence our faith is often tested. Do we trust what God says or do we let our unbelief lead us to do things on our own?

As deadlines approach and the pressure continues to mount, the promises of God are often put to the test. It is in these moments that we begin to if God will do as He says. Isaiah challenges us in these times to make it our priority and commitment to walk in the path of the Lord's judgement, refusing to be distracted.

The Psalmist tells us that in times of silence, he put his hope and confidence in the Word of the Lord:

5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope; (Psalm 130)

The enemy will use silence to cause us to doubt what God is saying. Isn't this what he did to Eve in the garden when he asked her if God really told them that they were not to eat of the tree? Sometimes all we have is the Word of God. It is the only compass and guide we have that will take us through the silence. In the silence, we need to look to the Word and put our confidence in it. Circumstances will change. We will not be able to see ahead of us at times. The smoke and clouds will hide the next step as we wait

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for the Lord's leading but God's Word will always be a faithful guide. When you don't know where to turn and the specific guidance of the Lord has not yet been revealed, we must make it our priority to cling to the truth of His Word. Find your comfort, hope and direction in its pages. Trust its words and let it direct and guide you through the silence.

There is one final principle I want to share here. When God is silent we need to take heed to what the prophet tells us in Isaiah 8:

17 I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face
from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.
(Isaiah 8)

Isaiah challenges us here to put our trust in God when He hides His face from us. Micah the prophet puts it this way:

5 Put no trust in a neighbor;
have no confidence in a friend;
guard the doors of your mouth
from her who lies in your arms;
6 for the son treats the father with contempt,
the daughter rises up against her mother,
the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
a man's enemies are the men of his own house.
7 But as for me, I will look to the Lord;
I will wait for the God of my salvation;
my God will hear me. (Micah 7)

Micah, made it his commitment not to trust anyone but the Lord. This is not to say that he would not listen to their advice, but everything they said would be filtered through the truth of God's Word and the direction of His Spirit. He

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would wait on the Lord for salvation. He would wait on the Lord for direction.

Micah understood that God would not remain silent. In time, He would hear his cry and come to his aid. As he waited, he would do so with trust in the Lord. He would not trust in other people or even his own understanding. God's timing was not the same as his. His ways were different from the ideas of those around him. Micah determined that until God showed him the path he was to tread, he would continue to wait on Him.

The silence of the Lord is confusing for us. It is confusing because we don't know what the Lord is doing. We can't see what is ahead. None of us likes to be in this state. In these times, our faith is tested. Can we trust God when we can't see the next step? Can we believe when everything seems to cave in around us and we aren't hearing from Him?

If we knew why God was doing what He was doing, things would be easier. God does not always tell us why He does what He does. In these times, we can only trust and wait for the revelation of His purpose.

As we seek to live under the direction and guidance of the Lord, there will be times of silence. In those times of silence, we are to learn how to wait with confidence in the Lord. We will not always understand what God is doing. We may find ourselves confused by His ways. In all this, however, the believer is to learn to wait on the Lord and trust Him.

When we were serving on the island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean, the Lord drove this point home to me in a fresh way. We were preparing to move to the island of Mauritius

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to a ministry that the Lord had waiting for us but certain details needed to be worked out before we could make that move.

I did not have a ministry on Reunion and as I waited, I often felt that my time could have been best used in serving in some capacity. God did not open any ministry, however. I began to feel guilty about being on the mission field and not doing anything. I thought about the supporters who were standing behind us and sacrificially giving so I could be there. I remember going to the Lord in frustration and saying: "Lord I will do anything you ask me to do, just don't ask me to do nothing."

The Lord convicted me of this and told me that if I was not willing to do "nothing" when He called me to do nothing than I really wasn't willing to do "anything." He also told me at that time that He hadn't called me to the mission field to be busy, He had called me to be obedient. Those words have remained with me to this day. You may be busy as a believer but are you obedient. You can fill your schedule but are you doing what God is asking you to do? The lesson God was teaching me on the island of Reunion was a very important lesson. If I was to become all He wanted me to be I needed to learn how to make obedience more than busyness my greatest priority.

To wait, for those of us who like to work and serve, is a very difficult thing. Sometimes we fear silence and waiting more than anything else in ministry. If we are busy we are happy. God often calls His servants to wait. Moses waited for forty years in the desert before God broke the silence and spoke to Him in the burning bush. Jesus waited thirty years before beginning His ministry. Paul spent a period of years in silence before he was invited by Barnabas to help in the work in Antioch.

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As believers, we live with the understanding that there are times when the Lord will ask us to wait for Him. If we want to learn how to walk in the Spirit, we will need to learn to wait and trust God in the times of silence.

For Prayer:

Father God, I recognize that You are a sovereign God who is in control of all things. I confess that I have not always lived in this reality. I accept that there are times when you are silent. I ask that you help me in those moments of silence to trust You when I cannot hear you or see my way. Help me not to be distracted or wander in those times when You seem distant. Keep me focused on Your Word as found in the Scriptures. May I continue to walk faithfully in that truth when I cannot feel Your presence. I am confident that You will not abandon me in these periods of silence. I know that some of the best lessons are learned in these wilderness moments. I ask that you open my mind and spirit to learn these lessons. Thank you for the wonderful promises of Your Word that reassure me that as I wait on You, I will know Your direction and renewal in my life.

Chapter 8 - The Vine and the Branches

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15)

John 15 is probably one of the most powerful passages on the Christian life yet one of the most ignored. It is not that we don't preach on the passage but rather that we have failed all too often to apply its truth to our daily life and ministry.

In this parable, Jesus speaks of Himself as a vine. He compares believers to the branches on that vine. The key to understanding what Jesus is saying here, is the relationship between the vine and the branch. There are several details we need to understand in this parable.

There is an Intimate Connection Between the Vine and the Branches.

First, it is important that we see that there is an intimate connection between the vine and the branches. There is a constant exchange between the two. Let me focus on this for a moment.

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Many of us have been living our lives without a clear understanding of this connection between Jesus as the vine and us as the branches. This is what this book is all about. We wonder why we are not experiencing victory and the fruit of God's Spirit in our lives. Could it be that we have not understood the reality of this intimacy between God and His children?

For a good part of my life, I lived with the understanding that God was distant. I was a sinner who deserved to be separated eternally from Him but He forgave my sin and saved me from an eternal separation from His presence. Though I was saved from my sin, I did not understand the level of intimacy God wanted with me as His child. I felt unworthy of His attention. I could not approach Him boldly with my requests because I wondered why He would be interested in answering my prayers anyway. I understood in my mind the theology that Jesus loved me. I often sung about it but I could not accept it as a reality.

This parable is very powerful. Jesus tells us that He is the vine and we are the branches. In saying this, He is telling us the type of relationship He wants with His children. He could have used another illustration. He could have said I am the boss and you are the employees. He could have said I am the king and you are my subjects. While these illustrations are also true, this is not what the Lord chose to use in this case. He chose to use the illustration of the vine and the branch. There is a very powerful and intimate connection between these two objects. This is what Jesus wants to emphasize.

The Lord Jesus wants to show us that this is the type of relationship He wants with us. He is not interested in a distant association. He wants a relationship of absolute dependence and closeness. There are many believers who

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do not live their lives in this way. For them, the Lord God gives us His Word and leaves us to live our lives the best we can. When we get in trouble, He shows up to bail us out. For the branch to survive however, it needs much more than to be bailed out of trouble from time to time. It needs to be in constant communion with the vine. From this parable, we see that it is the desire of the Lord Jesus that we be in this kind of relationship with Him.

The Vine Gives Life to the Branches

Having seen the desire of the Lord Jesus for us in this parable, we need to look more deeply at the implication of this truth. We need to see here that the branch is totally dependent on the vine for life. If there is not a constant supply of life-giving sap from the vine, the branch will wither and die. It is important that we note here that there are two levels of connection to the vine.

The first level of connection is the level of life and breath. We are all dependent on the Lord for life and breath. Where would we be without the Lord? On a very basic level we depend on God to survive. We depend on God for every beat of our heart and every breath we breathe. We are connected to Him for life and breath. If He were to turn His back on us even for an instant, we would cease to exist. All we do in life is because of the strength He provides. We owe all we have ever accomplished to Him.

What we need to understand here is that even the unbeliever is dependent on the Lord in this way. You may not be in a saving relationship with the Lord God but you are still dependent on Him for life and breath. When Jesus uses the illustration of the vine and the branches to speak about our relationship with Him as believers, He is not

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speaking about this basic level of life and breath. He is speaking here about a connection that is much deeper.

The second level of connection is at the level of communion. This is what Jesus speaks about in this parable. This connection of communion is something that only the believer can experience because he or she has been given new life. The barrier of sin has been broken and the believer is now able to commune with God in a very special way. When we speak here about a connection of communion we are speaking about much more than life and breath. We are speaking about God sharing His heart with us. We are speaking about God's power for service flowing through us. We are speaking about the fruit and the gifts of God's Spirit being demonstrated in us. This is what I was having a hard time accepting in my personal life. I found it hard to imagine that God would not only want to give me life but that he would also want to connect with me at this level of communion. It was hard to understand how God would want to share His heart and mind with me. It was hard to imagine the God wanted to flow through me and pour His power and love into me. This however, is what Jesus is speaking about in this passage. There is a world of difference between being connected at the level of life and breath and being connected at the level of communion. You can know how dependent you are on God for life and breath and still never experience forgiveness of sin and intimate communion with Him.

When we speak of the vine giving life to the branch we are not so much speaking about physical life but rather about spiritual life and intimate communion. If we want grow in our walk with the Lord Jesus, we need to get connected at this deeper level. We need to open our hearts and minds to the Lord so that He can communicate with us. We need to accept that He wants to speak to our hearts. We need

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to understand that He wants to use us as instruments of His power in this world. We are vessels through which the Holy Spirit wants to flow. He wants His life to be in us. Not just physical life but spiritual life.

The Branch Needs to Receive from the Vine

If the branch is to benefit from the life of the vine it must receive that life from the vine. We have all seen branches connected to a vine or tree that are dead and fruitless. In this parable, the Lord tells us that the branches that are dead and do not produce fruit are cut off and thrown away. In other words, it is possible to be connected to the vine and yet not receive the life of the vine. There are many Christians like this. They have not come to realize that the Lord Jesus wants His life to flow through them. They have been living their Christian life in their own strength and wisdom. They have not come to understand the life God wants to give them. They have not opened their heart to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit in their lives. They are connected to the vine but they are lifeless. They do not demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Their lives are indistinguishable from that of the unbeliever. They respond to trouble just like the unbeliever. They worry and fret like the unbeliever about the problems they have in life. They have no more joy or peace in their heart than the unbeliever. They wrestle with the same temptations and do not seem to have victory. Their ministries are barren and spiritually lifeless. If we are to live a victorious Christian life, it will not be in our own strength. It will only be through the power and life of God's Spirit in us.

The Branch Produces Fruit as it Remains in the Vine

Notice that Jesus tells us that the branch that remains or abides on the vine will produce fruit. The natural result of

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being a branch on a vine is that you produce fruit. The branch does not have to do anything but remain on the vine and open to the work of the vine pumping life-giving energy through it and it will produce fruit. The vine does the work. The branch simply bears the fruit. The life does not come from the branch but from the vine. This is evident when you remove the branch from the vine. A branch that is removed from the vine will die, for it has no life in itself.

How often have we wearied ourselves with effort? How often have we disciplined ourselves trying to produce fruit but nothing happens? The whole point of the parable is to show us that it is not about us doing more and disciplining ourselves more but about us remaining on the vine and letting the life of the vine do its work in us. The Spirit of God will produce fruit in you if you are willing and open to Him and His work. If you will be the branch, He will produce the fruit in you. It is up to us to "remain." If we "remain" He will produce the fruit. What an awesome thing it is to know that the power of the vine can flow through us if we simply open our hearts and lives to Him today. This is why the apostle Paul tells us:

13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4)

Paul understood that with the power of God flowing through him, like the sap of the vine in the branch, there was nothing He could not do. Notice however that he knows the source of his power is not himself but Christ who strengthened him.

The ministry the Lord has given me is one that is beyond my ability. This is something that has become evident more and more as it grows. As I look back at what has happened through this ministry, I realize that it was not me

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but Him. He has provided the resources and gifts necessary. I do not naturally have in me what is required to do what He has called me to do. He has gone before me. He has given me strength and ability that I do not have naturally. Do not be afraid that the Lord throws you into a ministry that is beyond you. It is not beyond Him. He can do more than we could ever ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). Just remain faithful to Him and let Him do what He wants to do through you.

It is important, as we conclude, to take a moment to consider what it means to "remain" or "abide." The Greek word has a variety of meanings. One such meaning is found in the English word "dwell." When we talk about remaining we are talking about "dwelling." One thing you can be sure of is that the enemy will try to get you to move away from the Lord and "dwelling" in Him. Those of us who are Christians know what it is like to "dwell" in the peace and security of the Lord. There in that dwelling place we are strong. It seems that whatever the enemy throws at us we can overcome. The only way the enemy can get at us is to take us away from that secure dwelling place. He attempts to do so through many different means. First, he will attack us at the level of our minds. He will attempt to take our focus off the Lord and onto our circumstances. How often has he succeeded in my life? I have found myself lured by the enemy from the security and comfort of the promises of God, to worry and fret about what was going to happen to me. I leave that place and step out for a moment. The moment I step away from the security of God's promises I am a target of the enemy. I am overwhelmed by worry and concern. I no longer experience the peace and confidence I had in the Lord. I block the peace of God by my anxiety and worry. To remain is to dwell in the protection of God's promises.

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The word used here for remain can also have the sense of "wait." We have seen the danger of not waiting in another chapter. How often have we been lured away from that place of intimacy with the Lord? Like Saul, we can't wait and so we take matters into our own hands and step out on our own. We let our impatience lure us out of our dwelling place. Again, the moment we step out we are the target of the enemy.

There are countless ways in which the enemy can lure us outside of our dwelling place on the vine. Some have been lured by temptations. Some have been lured by a desire to be recognized. Some have been lured by human reason. What the Lord is telling us here is that we are not to let ourselves be lured by the enemy or by our own flesh to step outside of that place of communion with the Lord. We are protected and kept as we remain on that vine. Anything that will take us from that place must be avoided. To remain is to resist the temptations of the enemy to distract us and move us from our centre. We must never leave that place. Instead we must open ourselves more and more to the vine. We must learn to hear God more. We must learn to depend on His enabling and wisdom. We must deal with sin and any attitude that keeps us from that place of communion and intimacy. Our life depends entirely on the vine. We dare not let anything separate us from Him and his power. For only in Him can we experience the life and ministry He has for us.

For Prayer:

Father, the lesson of Jesus in the parable of the vine and the branches is a powerful one but one that I confess, I have not completely mastered. I thank You for the desire

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of Christ, as seen in this passage, to be close to us and to pour His life through us. Forgive me for not receiving all that He wants to give. Forgive me for believing that I can live the Christian life on my own. Teach me what it means to know Your power and wisdom. Teach me to depend on You more. Open my heart to receive from You all that life, strength and wisdom You want to give, for apart from what You give, I cannot live the life You require. I ask that You remove all false notions of my own ability. Remove any distraction or sin that would keep me from experiencing the fullness of life You want to give. I recognize and confess right now that it is only as I receive from You that I can live as You require.

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4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15)

I want to continue our examination of the parable of the vine and the branches as found in John 15. There is a phrase in this parable that has always troubled me. Here Jesus tells us that apart from Him we can do nothing.

This statement is in the context of remaining on the vine and bearing fruit. Jesus tells us in John 15:4 that if we do not abide in Him we cannot bear fruit. We understand this in the physical world. Some time ago I was walking through a field and noticed a branch laying on the ground by itself. As I looked at this branch I realized that that branch was very quickly going to die. There was no connection between the branch and the tree from which it had been taken. There was no chance of that branch ever producing leaves or fruit of any kind. Its life was over. I thought about what Jesus tells us here in this parable—apart from Him, we are like that branch.

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In the last chapter, we saw that there are two levels of connection to the vine. The first level of connection is the level of life and breath. All of us need to be connected to God for life and breath. Not one of us can boast of ever accomplishing anything apart from the life and breath God gives. It is true that we can develop our minds and skills by discipline and practice but even the ability to do this comes from our Heavenly Father –whether we accept Him or not.

Throughout the history of this world, human beings have taken the good things God has given them and used them for various purposes. We have taken the ability God has given us to reason and used it to devise all manner of inventions and technology. We have taken the physical abilities God has given us and used them to accomplish great athletic achievements. We have also seen those who have these great skills and abilities perish. Disease and death strip us of all our achievements. We are not in control. We are completely dependent on Him.

When Jesus tells us that apart from Him we can do nothing, we need to see it firstly in the sense that all life and breath comes from Him and without His breath we could not exist or do anything at all. We are dependent on Him at this very basic level of existence.

We need to move beyond this understanding however, to the second level of connection with the Heavenly Vine. It is possible for a branch to be connected to the vine and yet not produce fruit. The branch may be alive but it is not productive. We mentioned in the last chapter that the second level of connection is the level of communion. At this level, our connection with the vine is not just at a life and breath level. It is at this level that we are understanding and walking in the purpose of God. Here the Lord communicates to our spirit His will and heart for our lives.

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There are many people who understand that every breath they receive is from God. These individuals then proceed to use the strength God provides to do whatever their heart desires. They do not particularly care about God's purpose. They do what they feel is best in their own minds with no regard for hearing God and walking in His way. In fact, because some of them do not belong to God, they do not have the ears to hear Him. They are not being led by the Spirit of God but by their own human wisdom and reason.

Many things have been accomplished in human strength. Successful businesses have been built that make great economic profit. Great nations have been formed and governed in human wisdom. Even large churches have been established in human wisdom. These churches even appear to be successful. We need to consider these efforts, however, in light of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7)

Notice what Jesus is saying here. He speaks to those who have prophesied and cast out demons in His name and tells them that He never knew them. He also tells them that they were workers of lawlessness. These are powerful insights we cannot ignore. In the eyes of God, these individuals were not connected to Him and what they did apart from communion with Him was lawless. The result was

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that they were to leave His presence. In the language of John 15, they were to be cut off from the vine as unproductive branches.

Yes, it is possible to use wisdom and strength that comes from God in a way that is contrary to the purpose of God. What does this accomplish in the end? If we are using what God has given us for anything outside of His purpose, we are guilty of sin. It may be that we are making these efforts for God but they are still not in God's plan for our lives and the use of our gifts. We stand before him, as unfaithful servants, not because we did not achieve great things in the eyes of the world but because we have not been obedient to His purpose.

I think of King Saul as he battled the Philistines in 1 Samuel 13. His men were greatly outnumbered and began to fear. Before leaving for battle, it was customary for the king to ask the blessing of God on the battle. An offering would be made by a priest as the soldiers readied themselves spiritually to face the enemy.

Saul waited for Samuel to arrive to make this sacrifice. When Samuel delayed in coming, Saul decided to make the sacrifice himself. Because he was not a priest, he had no right to offer this sacrifice. The result was an immediate condemnation of God and a rebuke from the prophet/priest Samuel when he arrived:

11 Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, 12 I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought

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the favour of the Lord.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.” 13 And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.” (1 Samuel 13)

Saul sought the favour of God by offering a sacrifice. He did so, however, in his own wisdom and not in the purpose of God. It was not the desire of God that Saul offer this sacrifice –these sacrifices were only to made by the priest. Because he disobeyed, Saul would lose his position as king.

What I am trying to say here is that only when we are connected to the vine at this level of communion can we understand and walk in the purpose of God. Saul’s sacrifice to God was sinful because it was not done in God’s way. You can be serving God and not be in His purpose for your life.

What a difference it makes, however, when we are so connected to God and His purpose that we are instruments of His power in the world. With His life flowing in us we become productive branches on the vine, producing the fruit He intended for us to produce. If you want to produce the fruit God intends, you need to be connected to the vine at this deeper level. You need to be not only connected in such a way that you know His strength but also in such a way that you know His purpose and leading. This requires communion with God.

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We need to understand that there is spiritual fruit and there is also fruit of the flesh. It is quite possible for us to take the strength and abilities the Lord has given and use it for evil. It is also quite possible to take the abilities God has given us and use them for good that is not in the purpose of God for you personally.

As a Christian worker, I understand that it is quite possible to build a church in human wisdom and understanding. Courses in church leadership and administration are very common. While many of these principles can be helpful, we need to understand that there are times when these techniques have replaced the Spirit of God in our churches. We don't see the need of this moment by moment communion with God, because we feel we have the skills and wisdom to handle matter in our own reason and experience. It is quite possible to do God's work in the flesh. When we take the abilities God gives us and produce fruit according to our own ideas and design that fruit is not spiritual fruit but fleshly fruit.

Spiritual fruit is fruit that is in tune with God's character and specific purpose. It is the result of communion with God and His leading. Spiritual fruit is fruit that is empowered by the Spirit and is the direct result of the life-giving sap of the vine flowing through us. Fleshly fruit is the produce of human effort and wisdom. Those who produce spiritual fruit take their directions from the Spirit. This filter makes all the difference.

The apostle Paul speaks of this when he gives the Corinthians an illustration of a building that is constructed on a solid foundation.

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11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3)

Here Paul tells us that we are to build on the foundation of Christ and His work. Notice, however, that there are those who build with wood, hay and stubble. Their work is burned up on the fire of God's judgement and they stand naked before God in the day of His wrath. It is not that these individuals did nothing with their lives. They did build on the foundation. They did not build, however, with precious stones, gold and silver.

We sometimes have the idea that the reference to wood, hay and stubble refers to unimportant or weak efforts. This is not the case. There are many who put great effort into building with wood, hay and stubble. Some of these structures of wood, hay and stubble are very impressive in the eyes of the world. There are large churches build of wood, hay and stubble. There are many impressive ministries of stubble in this world. These ministries are very appealing to the human eye but God looks beyond what we see. These ministries were not the result of His leading and empowering. They were the result of human effort and a monument to human ability.

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The ministries of gold, silver and precious stone are sometimes overlooked because what God considers to be precious is not always considered thus by human eyes. The precious Lord Jesus came in the form of a baby to a poor family in Israel. He was rejected by the people of his day yet we read in 1 Peter 4:

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious ... (1 Peter 4)

The Lord Jesus was a precious stone that we failed to see as precious. In fact, we rejected Him.

The call of God on our lives is be so connected to the vine, that we are walking in communion with God. As we minister, we seek His direction and leading. We walk in His purpose and build with the precious material He has given. We resist human wisdom in favour of the leading and direction of God's Spirit in our lives.

Jesus tells us that, if we want to produce spiritual fruit that will last, we need to be connected to the vine. Apart from Him and His leading our efforts are futile. If we are not in communion with Him we cannot produce the fruit He desires to produce in us.

Jesus warns us about those who come to us as wolves in sheep's clothing.

15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy

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tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. (Matthew 7)

These false prophets come in the name of Jesus but they are not connected to Him at this level of communion. The Spirit of God is not their guide. They are led by human motivation and desires. They may have many followers but their ministries do not spring from deep communion with God. They build not with precious stones but with wood, hay and straw.

If you are connected to a thornbush you will produce the fruit of that bush. If you are connected to a fig tree you will produce the fruit of the fig tree. If you draw from the flesh, then the fruit you produce will be of the same nature as the flesh. Only as you draw from the Spirit of God can you produce fruit that is spiritual in nature and pleasing to God. All other efforts are unacceptable and unworthy of the name of our God. Are you producing spiritual fruit that is the result of a deep communion and intimate connection to the vine? You can only produce the fruit that will last by means of this intimate connection with him. Apart from Him you cannot produce spiritual fruit that pleases Him.

For Prayer:

Father, thank You for the wisdom and strength You have given us. Forgive me, however, for making that wisdom and strength my god. Help me to realize that I can be busy in service but not serving You. I can be building my ministry outside of Your purpose. Teach me not only to draw my

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strength and wisdom from You but also to commune with You so that I know Your heart for the use of this wisdom and strength. Teach me to walk in obedience and not in human wisdom alone. Forgive me for being deceived by the glorious structures of wood, hay and straw while failing to see the hidden beauty of the precious stones in my midst. Help me to realize that Your ways are not the same as mine. Teach me to walk in deeper communion with You so that the fruit I produce in my life is not the fruit of human imagination and achievement but the fruit of Your Spirit who lives in me.

Chapter 10 - The Weapons of our Warfare

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10)

As we live the life the Lord God has called us to live, we will face the enemy head on. It will not take long for the new believer to realize that there is indeed an enemy that seeks to keep us from the Lord and His purposes. Scripture teaches that there are at least three enemies we must deal with in this life as believers.

The Philosophy of this World

In Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul speaks about this dark world as an enemy of Christ:

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6)

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He spoke to the believers in Romans 12 about the dangers of conforming to the standards of this world:

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12)

In speaking about this world, the apostle spoke of the godless philosophies of this age. The world, as we know it, does not submit to the principles of God's Word. Its priorities are very different from the priorities of God's Word. Take a moment to look at what this world promotes. Examine the priorities and philosophies of those who do not know the Lord. What does this show us about their concept of life and its meaning?

As believers, we battle the godless philosophy of our age. Its influence is all around us. It bombards our children at school. It fills our television screen. It is in the conversations we hear each day at the workplace or coffee shop. It can even impact how we do the business of the church.

The Flesh

The second enemy we must face is the flesh. When we speak of the flesh, we speak about the appetites and desires of the sinful nature with which we were born. The flesh is never far below the surface. We see it explode in anger, jealousy and bitterness. We feel the pull of its lusts. Imagine for a moment where you would be today if you allowed those evil desires of the flesh to be released in you unhindered. The thoughts of the flesh are evil in nature. Jeremiah, speaking of the heart of man, said this:

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9 The heart is deceitful above all things
and desperately sick;
who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17)

The human heart and mind has been the source of every evil imaginable. Wars, crimes, immorality, corruption and deceit all come out of this evil heart. We must fight the impulses of this sinful flesh. We hear its cry daily. While the influences of this world are outside, this enemy comes from within. If we are going to live the life God expects us to live, we must do battle with our own sinful nature.

The Devil

The third enemy we need to add to this list is the devil. The Bible teaches that Satan and his angels have rallied against us as believers in the Lord Jesus. Peter knew the reality of this enemy when he told his readers:

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Peter 5)

Peter paints a picture of Satan as a roaring lion prowling about seeking someone to devour. We understand from the Scriptures that Satan has a whole army of demons that serve him in his evil plans. As believers, we are his preferred prey. With the world and the flesh as his allies many have fallen.

The question we need to examine here is this: How can we possibly overcome the enemies that surround us? The philosophy of this world bombards us from the time of our

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birth. It surrounds us at work and in our daily conversations. Our sinful flesh cries out from inside with its powerful desires and passions. Our adversary the devil with his legions of evil angels fling their arrows at us at every opportunity. We are literally surrounded by an enemy that is more powerful than we are.

Human reason is insufficient against these enemies. God's ways are not our ways. What seems reasonable to us is not always the heart of God. Our human wisdom is tainted with the flesh and we cannot trust it.

We can discipline ourselves with all our might to overcome the flesh. We can hide ourselves from the world but will this really give us victory? I remember hearing a message preached on Jesus' comments in the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5:

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. (Matthew 5)

The speaker asked his listeners how many body parts they would have to cut off before their thoughts and attitudes were holy. The reality of the matter is that you could gouge out your eyes, cut off your ears, sew up your mouth, cut off your legs and arms and still be far from holy. We can cut off our eyes and still lust. We can cut off our hands and still covet.

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Do we really think that we can take on our enemies in our own wisdom and strength? How do we deal with an enemy we cannot see? How can we possibly deal with a force that is greater than us?

This is what the apostle Paul seeks to address in 2 Corinthians 10 when he says:

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10)

Paul reminds us that we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. No military force will ever be able to cleanse the human heart and make it right with God. No amount of medication can heal the soul or make a sinful person right with God. No amount of scientific research will be able to solve the problem of the evil heart of man. No amount of human discipline or religion will ever make us perfect and righteous before a holy God.

Our problem is bigger than this. This is why Paul tells us that if we are going to overcome the enemy, we will not be able to do so with worldly weapons. To overcome the enemy, we need spiritual weapons and spiritual armour.

We need a protection that is greater than us. The only way we can stand in the day of temptation and evil is by putting on the armour of God. This armour alone will protect us from the attacks of the enemy from within and without. Without this armour, we will fall. We need the protection of God if we are going to overcome the forces of evil around us. Only He can keep us. We must learn to trust Him and not our own ability.

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How often have we tried to overcome the enemy with worldly weapons? Somehow, we still believe that if we could discipline ourselves just a little more we could overcome. If we separate ourselves just a little more from these influences, we could handle them. We battle with our lusts and desires and through discipline we seem to control them for a time but we know they are still raging just below the surface.

The battle is not so much about human discipline and effort as it is about a miraculous work of God in our hearts. In Canada where I currently live, at certain seasons of the year there is a very strong risk of forest fires. These fires can rage completely out of control destroying hundreds of kilometres of woodland. One of the ways of dealing with a fire that is too big to put out, is to do a controlled burn of a section of the forest just ahead of the raging fire so that when fire reaches that section there is nothing left for it to burn so it goes out. This is how it is in our lives as well. If we want to overcome the enemy, we need to burn out of us what the enemy feeds on. For that to happen we need to let the Spirit of God change us from within. We need to let him cut out those attitudes and sins that the world, the flesh and the devil feed on.

Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 that we have divine power to fight the enemy. This divine power, in the person of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, is constantly working in our lives as we surrender to Him. He is changing the heart of the believer. He is making us more like Christ. He is stripping us of all the fuel the enemy feeds on so that when the enemy comes to attack he will have no foothold in our lives.

A quick look at the armour that God calls us to wear shows us that this armour is the armour of truth, righteousness,

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faith and salvation. It is these characteristics that will give us victory over the attacks of the enemy. These are qualities the Lord wants to build into us by His Holy Spirit daily. By His power, He transforms us in the inner being.

To overcome the enemy, we need the mighty power of God renewing us from within. Defeating the enemy has to do with allowing God to produce the fruit of His Spirit within us. It is the character of Christ that the Spirit is building in us that protects us and forms the armour we need to face the enemy and his attacks. Our weapons are not military, medical, or technical. They are not found in programmes, human reason, discipline or religious activity. You can yell all you want at the devil and tell him that you have authority over him, but you will not threaten him if the qualities of Christ's truth, righteousness, faith and salvation are not abounding in you.

What we need to understand here is that the weapons of our warfare against the enemy are not human or worldly weapons. You can go to church every Sunday and still not overcome the enemy. Churches are filled with defeated Christians. You can go to Bible School and understand all there is to know about theology and Bible and still live a defeated Christian life. Countless examples abound of trained pastors and Christian workers falling into sin. You can cut off every body part and still wrestle with sin in your heart and mind. Ultimately, winning the battle has to do with allowing the Spirit of God to build in us the character of Jesus. Ultimately it is not so much what we do as it is about what we let the Holy Spirit do in us.

When King Jehoshaphat became king, he immediately began a process of reform in the nation. His desire was to restore the nation to God. This was not without its problems. 2 Chronicles 20 tells us that he came under attack

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by the Moabites and the Ammonites. Jehoshaphat was afraid because of the number of soldiers that stood against him. He saw that the enemy was more powerful than his army and that militarily he was no match for them. He went to the Lord in prayer and sought His advice. The Lord answered his prayer through a prophet by the name of Jahaziel. Listen to the words of Jahaziel:

14 And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly. 15 And he said, "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the Lord to you, 'Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's. 16 Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz. You will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeruel. 17 You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you." (2 Chronicles 20)

Notice several details here in these important words of Jahaziel. First, the Lord told His people that the battle was not theirs, but His (verse 15). Second, they would not need to fight this battle (verse 17). Finally, they were to simply hold their position and the Lord would fight for them and give them victory (verse 17).

The truth of this passage is vital if we are going to overcome the enemy that surrounds us today. Like Jehoshaphat, the forces against us are bigger and stronger than

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us. We dare not trust in our own strength. The Lord God, however, promises to come to our aid. He will fight this battle for us. He alone can overcome. He calls us to stand firm and watch what He is willing to do. He will cast down the evil thoughts and attitudes of the flesh. He will repel the evil influences of this world. He will crush Satan under your feet (Romans 16:20). The battle is the Lord's. He will fight it. He will protect you with His armour. He will fill you with His Spirit. He will give you the victory you need. The battle before us cannot be won with human weapons and skill. It must be fought in the strength of the Lord and in the power of His Spirit. All other efforts are bound to fail.

For Prayer:

Lord, I confess that I am surrounded by an enemy that is bigger than me. Help me never to underestimate the nature of this great spiritual battle. I confess that I have often overestimated my ability to resist and overcome this enemy. I recognize that, I have been influenced by the ungodly philosophies of my age. I confess that I battle also with my own sinful nature. I come to You today and recognize that the enemy within and around me is bigger than I am. I need You to fight for me.

Thank You that You want to supply me with the armour I need to resist the enemy. Thank You, Holy Spirit, that You are producing this armour from within as You transform my life and make me more like Christ. I surrender to Your work in me. Forgive me for trusting my own effort to overcome. Give me grace to look to You more and more for the victory I need. Thank you that in You, and in You alone, I am more than an overcomer.

Chapter 11 - More than Conquerors

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8)

Many godly individuals filled and walking in the Spirit have suffered much for the Gospel. The apostle Paul is one such example. He faced tremendous obstacles in life. He knew what it was like to be stoned and rejected for preaching the truth God put on his heart. He was beaten and left for dead. He was shipwrecked and ridiculed. All of this happened while he was walking with God and following the leading and prompting of the Spirit. The Lord Jesus also understood difficulty and suffering. He too was mocked, ridiculed and eventually crucified for our sake.

Many come to the Lord thinking that they are going to get away from struggle and pain. They find it difficult when the reality of the Christian life strikes them. The apostle Paul tells us that all who live a godly life will suffer:

12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3)

This is a reality that not all believers are prepared for in their lives. As believers, we are the object of the enemy's focus. Why should it surprise us that the enemy would shoot at soldiers in the heat of battle? Imagine a soldier

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going into battle thinking that things were going to be easy. As in any battle, we need to understand that the enemy's intent is to shoot us down and destroy us.

Paul was very much aware that the believer would face great opposition in this life. He speaks in Romans 8:35 about trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword. Paul personally experienced the reality of these things in his own life. He quotes a passage from Psalm 44:22:

36 As it is written,
"For your sake we are being killed all the day
long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."
(Romans 8)

The Psalmist, long ago, experienced the reality of suffering. "We are being killed all the day long," he said. This is not a very inviting reality.

It is in this context, however, that the apostle Paul spoke in verse 37 of Roman 8. In this verse, he has some very important things to say to those of us who have enlisted in the army of the Lord. Let's examine them in some detail here.

"In all these things"

Notice the phrase "in all these things." Paul has just spoken about troubles, hardships, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword. It is in all these things that we are conquerors. The word "in" is significant. By using this word "in" Paul is telling us that we will go through these trials. Our victory, however, is "in" these problems. The en-

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emy comes rushing at us. He overwhelms us with his arrows and spears. We face the battle head on. The victory does not come if we run from the battle. We need to be "in" the battle to win. We will be opposed and oppressed but we are called upon to boldly face these obstacles. We do not need to fear the battle. God promises that as we are "in" it we will be victorious. Sometimes we don't experience the victory because we are not "in" the fight. You must fight to win the battle. God calls us to step forward boldly. He calls us to take our stand and step out in faith. If you are willing to face the battle, He can give you victory. "In all these things," says Paul, we are more than conquerors. This ought to challenge us to step up and take our place. There will be temporary pain and difficulty but we are promised victory.

"More than conquerors"

Notice secondly, that Paul tells us that we are "more than conquerors." The New American Standard Bible translates this phrase "we overwhelmingly conquer." The enemy is indeed very powerful. We do face tremendous obstacles and pain in the path to victory. The power of God, however, is so much greater that we are overwhelming overcomers. Much more than winning the battle, we humiliate our opponents. Try as they might they are not able to inflict the damage they want. The power of God at work in and through us is far beyond anything the enemy can endure. He cannot possibly win the battle.

"Through Him who loved us"

We need to see something else in this verse. Notice that the victory is through Him who loved us. This is a very significant point. If we want to have victory it will only be "through" the Lord Jesus and His strength. You will not

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have the victory in your own human wisdom and ability. If you attempt to do battle in your own strength you will fail. If you trust in your own wisdom you cannot possibly succeed. Your victory is "through" Christ alone.

If our victory is "through" Christ we must trust him and rely on Him no matter what happens. This may take us through raging waters. We will not always understand what the Lord is doing in us and through us.

If there is one thing the enemy wants to do it is to take you away from the place of confidence, trust and obedience. He knows that if he can take you from that place, he will have succeeded. Job was taken through difficult times as a servant of God. He lost his children, his wealth and the support of his wife. He sat in an ash pile scraping the sores on his body with a piece of pottery. Listen to what he said:

15 Though he slay me, I will hope in him; (Job 13)

Job did not know what the Lord was doing. He did not understand why God was stripping these things from his life. He knew however, that no matter what happened to him, he needed to trust in his Saviour. He could not leave that place of confidence in God. Our overcoming is through Christ. It is only as we wait on Him and trust His strength and wisdom that victory is possible.

The surgeon needs to cut us open to heal us. Hard soil needs to be broken if it is to be ready to produce fruit. This process of being cut open by the surgeon's knife or being broken up by the gardener's hoe is not a pleasant one. Many times, we run away and don't let the Lord break us. You may not understand what the surgeon is doing but you can be sure that if you don't trust him enough to let him cut you open, you will never experience the healing you need.

Chapter 11 - More than Conquerors

This is how it is with the Lord. Job understood what it was like for the Lord to slay him. He sat under the Lord's knife as his family and his possessions were cut off. While this was indeed difficult, Job understood that his victory would only be in surrendering to that knife. He yielded himself to God and what He was doing in his life.

The enemy will try to get us to pull away from the Lord's operating knife. He will do his best to cause us to fear. He will place doubt and confusion in our lives so that our confidence is shaken. As we wait and surrender to the Lord's discipline, however, we experience the healing and victory we need. If our victory is through the Lord, we must be careful to surrender to Him no matter how painful the process may be. We need to place our absolute confidence in what He is doing and what He is sending our way.

Paul goes on to tell us in this passage that despite the difficulties and trials that will come our way, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God (see Romans 8:38). Satan can throw all he wishes at us but he will never be able to separate us from the love of God. There is something we need to understand here. When Paul speaks about the love of God, is he speaking about the truth of this love only or is he speaking also about the experience of that love as well? It is true that God will always love us no matter what happens. This is a wonderful truth. What we need to understand here, however, is that Paul is also telling us that Satan cannot separate us from the experience of that love either. No matter how hard the persecution is, you can not only know that God loves you but you can also experience the reality of that love as you face your trials.

What an incredible picture is painted for us here. The enemy lashes out with vengeance and cruelty but no matter

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what he does, the child of God continues to bathe himself or herself in the reality of God's love. The tempest rages on the outside but inside we rest in the warmth and comfort of the love of God. His love for us is demonstrated in His peace and assurance. It is demonstrated in His comfort and provision.

When Stephen was being stoned in the book of Acts he looked up and saw the Lord calling him to His side. Yes, the enemy destroyed his body but while the storm raged outside Stephen bathed in the love of God. Satan was powerfully defeated despite the death of Stephen. The church grew as the persecution increased. Nothing could stop what God was doing. Satan lashed out but God continued to bathe His church in power and love.

The fact of the matter is that the enemy cannot overcome. It is true that we will suffer much for the cause of the Gospel but victory is promised to those who are in Christ Jesus. God will defeat Satan. As we step out into the battle we may suffer or even lose our lives but we will not lose the fight if we remain in him.

For Prayer:

Lord, I recognize that walking in Your Spirit does not mean a trouble-free existence for me. In fact, walking in Your Spirit may mean greater suffering and trouble. Help me to understand the nature of the battle before me. Prepare me to face that battle. Thank You for Your promise that victory comes when I am "in" the midst of the battle. Teach me to be willing to step out into this battle trusting You for that victory.

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I thank You Lord, that the victory is through You and Your work. Thank You that the enemy cannot overcome You. I confess that I cannot be victorious in my own strength. I ask that you teach me to look to You. Teach me to trust You more. Teach me to surrender more to the Surgeon's knife, knowing that all You do is for my good. Give me humility to allow You to work in me and on my behalf. Teach me to obey no matter the consequences, knowing that victory can only be mine in You and in obedience to Your purpose.

Chapter 12 - Filled with the Holy Spirit

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit... (Ephesians 5)

As we conclude this study it is important that we examine Ephesians 5:18. In this passage, the apostle Paul tells us that we are to be filled with the Spirit. This subject has been the source of a lot of theological debate over the years. It is not in our interest to enter this debate. It is, however, essential that we examine this teaching of Paul and walk in obedience. Let me examine this subject by means of a series of questions.

What is the filling of the Spirit?

What is the filling of the Spirit? As we attempt to answer this question, I would like to begin by considering the teaching of Paul in Romans 8:

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (Romans 8)

Paul tells us here that the mark of a true Christian is the presence of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. In other words,

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the spiritual life we have is the life of the Holy Spirit in us. Without the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of the Lord Jesus, we would be dead in our sin. It is the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes to the reality of God and His promises. It is the Holy Spirit who breaks down our resistance and opens our hearts to the things of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in us that transforms us into the image of Christ and empowers us in service for Him. Without Him, there would be no salvation or spiritual life. Paul makes it clear from Romans 8 that if you don't have the Holy Spirit, you do not belong to Christ. All who are Christ's have been sealed by the Holy Spirit.

13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1)

It is possible, however, for the believer to have the Holy Spirit in his or her life and not be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is why Paul challenges the believers in Ephesus to be filled. The Greek word used by Paul in this verse communicates something that is not clear in the English translation. The idea in the Greek is that we are to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, every day I need to seek a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit to face the day.

What is the difference between having the Holy Spirit in my life and being filled with the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit lives in every believer but He does not always have full possession of every believer. There are believers who have not surrendered to the ministry and leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. There are believers living in rebellion against the prompting and conviction of the Holy Spirit. There are believers who have not accepted the fact that

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they need the Holy Spirit in their lives and ministries. Instead, they are attempting to do the work of the Holy Spirit themselves. They are attempting to minister in human strength and wisdom. They are seeking to manipulate and convince people to come to Christ but they are not depending on the Spirit to do this work through them.

Paul, speaking to the Ephesians says:

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
(Ephesians 4)

Notice here in Ephesians 4 that although these believers were sealed by the Holy Spirit, they were also grieving him in their lives. The apostle would also remind the Thessalonian believers:

19 Do not quench the Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 5)

We understand from these two verses that it is quite possible to have the Holy Spirit in your life and grieve Him or quench His fire. We quench this fire by our sin and rebellion. We quench this fire by our disobedience to His leading. By our pride, will push the Holy Spirit aside.

The fact of the matter is that the Spirit of God wants to lead and direct us. He wants to direct us into all truth. He will not always force Himself on us. If you open yourself to Him and His leading, however, He will fill your thoughts. He will take up residence in your attitudes. He will move into your speech and season it with the character of Christ. He will fill up the emptiness and the loneliness you feel. He will come and spread His holy balm over the hurts you have felt. He will break down the hardness in your heart and bring His grace and compassion. You can have the Holy

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Spirit in your life and restrain Him to the cellar or you can invite him into every corner and closet.

Can I lose this infilling?

When we speak about losing our infilling, we are not speaking about the Holy Spirit leaving us. That is a completely different question. When we see the warnings of Scripture not to grieve the Holy Spirit or to put out His fire, however, we must admit that it is indeed possible to resist elements of the work of God's Spirit and push Him aside in our lives. There are many believers who are not walking as close to the Lord as they once did. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is something we need to constantly seek in our lives. That is why the apostle Paul tells us to keep on being filled.

Imagine a marriage where the husband and wife did not take the time to communicate. Imagine that they each have enclosed themselves in their own little worlds. He goes one way and she goes the other. They hardly see each other and when they do they rarely speak about anything other than surface matters. What will happen to that marriage? If this couple does not work on their marriage it will soon fall into disrepair. A garden that is not tended will quickly grow weeds. Those weeds will choke the good plants and soon there will be no garden left.

The same is true in our walk with God. If you do not cultivate your walk with God, you will soon find that your relationship with Him is slipping. If you are not obedient to the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit, you will soon see the result in your life. He will seem distant. You will become powerless. You will not see the character of Christ being demonstrated in your life. While the Holy Spirit does not

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leave us, we can certainly lose the intimacy, closeness and empowering we once experienced.

Can we ever truly be filled?

This leads us to another important question. Can I ever truly be filled with the Holy Spirit? The word "fill" can be misleading. Let me answer this by sharing with you a picture the Lord gave me some time ago. In this picture, I saw in a cup. I noticed that the cup was filled with coffee. As I watched, I could see some hands coming down. These hands reached inside the cup and stretched out the sides so that the cup became larger. I remember seeing the level of coffee in the cup drop because the cup now had a larger capacity. I felt a certain emptiness. As I looked at the cup the Lord reminded me that not a drop of coffee had left the cup. It only felt empty because the capacity of the cup had become greater. The Lord reminded me at that time that this is how it is in the Christian life. There are times when the Lord will stretch our capacity for Him. We feel empty because we have come to understand that there is so much more to God than we thought before.

Is it possible to ever truly be completely filled with the Holy Spirit? As long as God is able to stretch our capacity for Him there will always be room for more. You will never exhaust God's supply. You will never be able to say the you have come to experience all there is to Him. You will never be able to say that you are completely filled because even if you are, God will soon stretch your capacity and you will discover that there is far more to Him than you ever thought possible. Maybe that is the reason why we are called upon to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. You can be filled afresh every day for the rest of your life and only begin to tap into the power and wisdom of God. Keep

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on being filled. You will never come to an end of His supply.

Why do I need to be filled?

Why do I need to be filled with the Holy Spirit? I am assuming that we have already answered this question in the course of this study. We need to be filled because we cannot do the work of the kingdom without the ministry of the Spirit of God. We need to be filled because our human wisdom is faulty and cannot carry us through the difficulties and trials that come our way. The kingdom of God cannot be built on human strength. The character of Christ cannot be produced by religion and human effort. We need the Holy Spirit to do this work.

What is the result of this filling?

What happens when the Holy Spirit fills us? The result of this filling will be obvious. There are two things that happen when we allow the Spirit of God to fill us and have full control of our lives.

First, we will begin to see a very clear demonstration of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 5:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5)

The first evidence of the filling of the Spirit will be a change in our character. The fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-

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control will become evident in us. This is not something natural to our flesh. It is the character of the Lord Jesus being produced in us. When the Holy Spirit fills our thought lives, He will change our thoughts. When He fills our moral life, He will renew it. As we surrender to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, He comes to produce the character of Jesus in us. Wherever He moves He leaves behind the perfume of Christ's character. As we surrender and invite the Spirit of God to fill every part of our lives, He produces the fruit of His character in us. The first result of the filling of the Spirit will be seen in the change that is happening in you and your life. The old things will begin to disappear. God will do a new thing in your life. You will become more like Jesus.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has past away; behold the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5)

The second result of this filling is a growing evidence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Not only does the Holy Spirit come to produce the character of Christ in us, He also comes to empower the believer for service in the kingdom of God. There are various passages in Scripture that speak of the gifts the Spirit of God gives to the church. Paul speaks of these gifts, for example, in Romans 12:

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12)

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The Spirit of God comes to give us the ability to serve in the expansion of the kingdom of God in this world. As we surrender to Him and open ourselves up to His leading and direction, He will empower us for the sake of the kingdom. He will equip us with special gifts and calling to do the work of ministry.

Only as we surrender to the Spirit of God and move in His empowering can we truly overcome. As we die to our own efforts and start to depend on the work of the Holy Spirit, we will see God working in ways we never thought possible. Lives will be changed because the Spirit of God is using us. The kingdom of God will be expanded because we are not trusting in fleshly weapons to overcome.

Some time ago the Lord spoke to me very powerfully about this matter of being filled. As I prayed, He showed me a picture of a pottery jar on top of a cliff. The jar was on its side with the contents spilling out over the cliff, forming a waterfall. I understood that God was calling me to be this jar.

Some months later, however, the Lord again spoke again. I saw the same pottery jar. This time, however, instead of being on its side, the jar was standing upright. I watched as, this time, the water in the jar overflowed and poured down the sides of the jar and down the cliff. I felt the Lord speaking to me and say: "Wayne, you have been giving out of emptiness. It is now time for you to give out of fullness."

At that time in my life, I was suffering from burn-out in ministry. I had been giving for eight years and not receiving. I was like that overturned pottery jar on its side. As long as the jar was on its side it would not be filled. It was time for me to be stood upright so that I could receive from God

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and give out of my overflow. We need to be filled if we are going to minister. We need to learn to give out of our overflow and not from our emptiness. Maybe you have met the joyless Christian who continues to serve the Lord. He gives and keeps giving but the joy is gone. Then you have met believers who powerfully demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in their life. They radiate the character of Christ and when they speak the power and presence of God is evident. They are filled and give out of their overflow. This is what God is calling us to do.

How can I be filled?

Let me conclude with some final thoughts on how we can be filled with the Holy Spirit. First, we need to understand that it is the will and desire of the Holy Spirit to fill us. Let me compare the Holy Spirit to a river. Sometimes as the river flows there are obstacles in its path. Imagine a big branch falling into that river. That branch hinders the flow of the river. The river wants to flow but the branch blocks its path. This is how it is with the Holy Spirit. He always wants to fill your life. Like the river, He will naturally flow into every corner and closet of your life. You hardly need to ask Him. All you need to do is remove the obstacles that grieve and quench His fire. When you remove the branch in the river the river flows freely again.

If you want to know how to be filled with the Spirit, the answer is very simple. Surrender to His work in your life. Stop resisting Him. Realize that you need him. Recognize that He wants to fill you and let Him remove all the obstacles that keep Him from doing so. Confess your sin of pride. Tell Him that you have been holding on to certain areas in your life. Surrender these areas to Him and ask Him to fill those areas of your life. Live in obedience to the clear

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teaching of the Word and open your heart to His direction and leading.

One of the biggest enemies to the filling of the Holy Spirit is the flesh. We grieve the Spirit because we listen to and trust the flesh. We push the Holy Spirit aside and listen to our own wisdom. By our actions, we tell Him we don't need Him. If you want to be filled with the Spirit, you must die to the flesh. Remove the branch of flesh from the river and the river will flow unhindered.

Oswald J. Smith, in his book, *The Enduement of Power*, says the following:

I often think of the Holy Spirit as a mighty river, but a river dammed and held back by obstacles of one kind or another. Fancy a man standing on the dam and pleading in prayer with the river to flow on. How absurd! "Why," the river would answer, "that is just what I do. Don't waste your energy in such vain repetitions. It is my nature to flow. I'm more anxious to flow than you are to see me flow."

Ah, yes, that's the secret. There's a dam in your life, a dam of sin. There are obstacles in the way, obstacles of unyieldedness. You deal with sin. Do you hear me—sin! Get the bed of the river cleared and the river will flow all right. You will not even have to ask the Holy Spirit to fill you. In fact, you will not be able to keep Him out. He will come and fill of His own accord. Oh, how eager He is to enter! How anxious He is to get control! (Smith, Oswald, *The Enduement of Power*: Basingstoke, UK, Marshall Morgan & Scott: 1983, pg. 43.)

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If we are going to live life as God intended, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a simple matter of surrendering to Him and His leading in our life. We need to cultivate a sense of His presence. We need to recognize that He wants to fill us and empower us. We need to learn to trust His leading more than our own understanding. We need to recognize that without the presence of the Holy Spirit we cannot possibly live and minister as God requires. He must become our life source and strength.

Paul tells us that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is something that needs to happen each day. You can have the Holy Spirit in you and not be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is possible for the believer to hinder and block this filling of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. Only as we surrender to the Holy Spirit can we be moulded into the character of Christ. Only as we are filled can we be empowered in service for the kingdom. If we want to live as God intends, we need to be filled. If we want to be filled, we need to surrender to the teaching of God's Word and ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We must stop resisting Him and quenching His fire in our life.

If there is one thing that this study has impressed on me, it is that my fleshly wisdom and strength is insufficient to do what God has called me to do. I need a wisdom and power that is bigger than me to accomplish what God has called me to do. He has given me His Holy Spirit. I must recognize my need of this member of the Trinity if I am going to be what God has called me to be.

Before you close this book, take a moment to ask the Lord to reveal to you any hindrances to a deeper filling of His Spirit today. Confess anything He may reveal to you and

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invite the Spirit to fill you afresh and have control of every part. He must be Lord of our lives.

For Prayer:

Father, thank You for placing Your Holy Spirit in me to seal my relationship with You. Teach me to allow Your Spirit to do His work in me. Give me discernment to recognize His presence and leading in my life. Forgive me for the times that I have quenched His fire and resisted His leading. Thank You, Holy Spirit for the way You have been changing me from the inside. Thank You for the spiritual gifts you have given. Thank You that you do not give these gifts and leave me on my own. Thank You that you promise to lead me and empower me in the use of these gifts. Stretch my capacity to know You and experience You. Show me any hindrances to Your work in my life. Give me grace to remove those hindrances of sin so that You have more of me. I thank You, Holy Spirit that you are a real person living in me. I surrender to You and ask that You would fill every part of me. Have control over my thought life, my attitudes and my actions. Lead me and teach me to walk in obedience and surrender. Teach me the difference between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit.

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