

“Live by the Spirit” (5:16–26)(10.11.20)

Galatians 5:16–26 (NIV84)

¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Live by the Spirit”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

One of our Christian challenges is that to those outside the Church and to a significant number inside the church, it seems that we are all about morality. People think about our faith as religion and ritual instead of our being followers of Jesus. We are accused of being all about rules. There is a long list of do and don'ts. That perspective is upside down. It is wrong.

When we live by the Spirit; when we are led by the Spirit; when we keep in step with the Spirit; then we are incarnating, manifesting Jesus within us. Surely you can see that there will be obvious outcomes from such a person. So, do not confuse outcomes, which are secondary, with the primary issue of a robust relationship with our God.

With Alexander Maclaren, I preach to you: “Would that so-called Christian people would more earnestly and searchingly ask themselves why it is that, with such possibilities offered to them, their actual attainments should be so small. They have a power which is able to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think, and its actual effects on them are well on this side of both their petitions and their conceptions. There need be no difficulty in answering the question why our Christian lives do not correspond more closely to the Spirit that inspires them. The plain answer is that we have not cultivated, used, and obeyed Him.”

BODY:

If you have been trying to live out the life of a Christ follower, or to put in another way, being a Christian, then you know that it is a battle. Too many people have the false impression that once they say yes to Jesus, then their problems just go away. Most definitely, walking with Jesus by keeping in step with the Holy Spirit will significantly change your life and equip you for facing life's challenges.

But now, with your spiritual vision, you see a whole new set of issues. You see the person that you should be and how significantly different that person is from who you actually are today. In your efforts to lead that life in the Spirit of God, the Enemy will try to discourage and deceive you. The world and the flesh, meaning the things not God oriented, will erect hurdles. Detour signs will be posted, which if followed, will lead you back to that broad way of destruction.

You are not alone. We are not alone. This has been going on since Pentecost. Even great Christians like the Apostle Paul confess the reality of this struggle: Romans 7:14–20 (The Voice)

This is what we know: the law comes from the spiritual realm. My problem is that I am of the fallen human realm, owned by sin, which tries to keep me in its service. Listen, I can't explain my actions.

Here's why: I am not able to do the things I want; and at the same time, I do the things I despise. If I am

doing the things I have already decided not to do, I am agreeing with the law regarding what is good. But now I am no longer the one acting—I've lost control—sin has taken up residence in me and is wreaking havoc.

I know that in me, that is, in my fallen human nature, there is nothing good. I can will myself to do something good, but that does not help me carry it out. I can determine that I am going to do good, but I don't do it; instead, I end up living out the evil that I decided not to do. If I end up doing the exact thing I pledged not to do, I am no longer doing it because sin has taken up residence in me.

But then, several verses later, Paul follows up with this assurance: Romans 8:1–4 (NIV84) (The Voice) Therefore, now no condemnation awaits those who are living in Jesus the Anointed, *the Liberating King*,² because when you live in the Anointed One, Jesus, *a new law takes effect*. The law of the Spirit of life *breathes into you and* liberates you from the law of sin and death.³ God did something the law could never do. *You see, human flesh took its toll on God's law. In and of itself, the law is not weak; but the flesh weakens it.*

So to condemn the sin that was *ruling* in the flesh, God sent His own Son, bearing the likeness of sinful flesh, as a sin offering.⁴ Now we are able to live up to the justice demanded by the law. But that ability has not come from living by our fallen human nature; it has come because we walk according to the movement of the Spirit in our lives.

Paul tells us, in today's scripture, to keep in step with the Holy Spirit. This is military language that equates to "march in the Spirit." If you have ever done any marching, you know that it isn't as easy as you would think. To keep the whole company in step, the drill instructor will sometimes sing a marching song. {Sometimes, they include a call and response.} I made up a very short verse: {sing it} "I don't know but I've been told, march with God and you'll be bold. Keep in step with the Spirit, keep on marching till you feel it."

In our list of the fruit of the Spirit, notice first that it is singular. Think about an orange that has nine sections: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are each pieces of the orange. They are all interconnected and grow together. Some people have argued that love makes all the others possible; and, all the others make self-control possible.

Let me share with you a real life illustration of self-control and we may find other connections to this internal battle. All pilots and aircrewmen on Coast Guard helicopters are required to regularly attend water survival training. This includes the 9D5 Dunker. If you work on Coast Guard helicopters, you are required to get qualified as an aircrewman too. Therefore all Coast Guard aviation enlisted personnel must go to the Dunker.

I don't remember how many times I went through the Dunker, but it was never easy. The first time, having never experienced it before, was pretty scary – terrified might be too strong a word.

It starts with a swim test, but no ordinary swim test. It is only 150 yards, which really isn't very far. But there are some obstacles to weigh you down, literally. Over your bathing suit you wore a flight suit and flight gloves. You put on water soaked steel toed flight boots and a survival vest with weights to simulate the equipment we carried in the vests. Oh yes, and a bulky flight helmet.

You jump off a high dive platform into the water and then swim the 150 yards. Make sure you pace you yourself, but you can't go too slowly because all that weight is acting like an anchor. I have never been a strong swimmer and I usually did some swim training prior to this test, but I was never so glad to climb out of a pool as when I was finishing that swim test.

Now that they have your attention and you are tired, you dry off and get dressed. There is classroom training to explain exactly what is going to happen and how you are supposed to navigate the Dunker training. The trainers are experts and highly professional. I watched a couple of videos this week to remind me of the particulars and nowadays the Dunker is more high-tech than when I experienced it. You paid attention to the training because it was important. You had to pass to keep your flight qualifications and to stay in aviation. The training was mandatory for a reason. Helicopters do crash in

the water and turn over and sink. People do get hurt during the training. They put divers in the water to monitor what was happening and to help panicked or trapped trainees. Over decades of training, there have only been a couple fatalities.

The Dunker is a giant barrel held aloft over a swimming pool. Six people at a time would enter the barrel and find a seat. You had to successfully egress from several different positions over several rides to simulate flying in different positions. You strapped into a five-point harness, just like the helicopter.

When everyone was ready, the barrel dropped (not lowered) into the water. It began to roll over into the water as the water rushed into the barrel through the doors and windows. You make sure you take a big breath right before you entered the water, but make sure you don't swallow water and start choking. Because you are rolling over, everyone takes their breath at a different time.

Do not release your harness early. You must wait until the motion has stopped. If you release early, the water movement will throw you about. You may get hurt or lose your orientation. When does the motion stop? When you are completely upside down.

You are hearing multiple voices in your head. One voice is that of the classroom instructor. Another voice is your self-talk: "Don't panic. Keep your wits about you. You can do this." Maybe another voice is your prayers. "Stay calm. There are divers watching you."

Okay, you can release your harness now, but make sure you have a handhold on something. Remember where your nearest exit opening is and the handhold plan you had to pull yourself to it. The water was cold when you entered, but you feel pretty warm now. You reach the opening. You pull on the emergency exit levers to release the window. You pull yourself through it. Now it is safe to activate your flotation as you rise to the surface.

The greatest threat to your safety is actually the other trainees. Inevitably, someone panics, but hopefully not in your group. Often, someone forgets the training and releases the harness early so they are swimming around disoriented. Or they go out the wrong exit and get in your way. Occasionally, someone gets kicked in the face.

The ride where everyone has to go out the same door is the hardest. It makes me think of the Three Stooges comedy routine where all three try to go through the door at the same time. You have to be patient and wait your turn.

Did I mention, that after the first ride, you are blindfolded? They put blacked out goggles on you to simulate a night crash. So, you are not exiting by sight but by faith. Your faith is in the training you received; in those expert divers watching over you; and, in your superiors who have mandated this for your own good.

Yes, you have to maintain self-control to safely navigate this training. There is doubt, fear, and anxiety battling against you. You are physically tired and the water is cold. The whirling water can toss you to and fro. In the darkness you are literally blind. Your instincts tells you to get out as fast as you can. During that Dunker training, I never thought about the fruit of Spirit. But today, I can see application beyond self-control. Love for others allows you be patient and follow the procedures so that all survive. Afterwards, everyone is a little giddy and glad that it is over. You might even call it joy. There is a satisfaction and peace that you have come through the trial.

The word faithfulness here in the fruit of the Spirit means that you have been faithful in your duties.

One commentator says it means "fidelity, the quality of being true, trustworthy, and reliable in all one's dealings with others." Yes teamwork in a flight crew is crucial.

The Spirit opposes the sinful nature and sinful nature opposes the Spirit. Because you are a follower of Jesus, having made Him Lord of your life, God the Holy Spirit is in you; guiding, counseling, comforting. You should be seeing an ever increasing blessing of the fruit of the Spirit in your daily living. At the same time, the sinful nature should be diminishing day by day as you starve the old you and nurture the new you.

Puritan preacher John Gibbon's gives 9 Rules for combatting sin:

Rule 1 – *“Before the trial comes, prepare an antidote for your soul against the lusts of the flesh. Develop your soul’s love for God.”* When you are spending time with God, the Tempter cannot reach you. If you are thirsting for the Lord, you will not be lusting after the flesh.

Rule 2 – *“Study thoroughly the unchangeable natures, the eternal laws and differences, of moral good and evil. All the reason in the world takes the part [or side] of holiness.”*

In our postmodern age, we are actually post postmodern, everything is relative and nothing is really right or wrong. But there is in fact absolute truth; absolute right & absolute wrong. Just as the rules of gravity are fixed and the speed of light is a constant. When you see good and evil as they truly are, resisting the bad and pursuing the good is much easier.

Rule 3 – *“Understand thyself; be no stranger to thy own breast; know the frame, and temper, and constitution of thy mind.—“The wise man’s eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness.”* (Eccles. 2:14.) You owe this duty to yourself: take an exact account of the posture and order of your inner self.”

Know thyself. What are your weaknesses? Because the Devil knows them and will use them as avenues of attack.

Rule 4 – *“Get and keep a tender conscience. Be sensible of the least sin. The most tender-hearted Christian,—they are the stoutest and most valiant Christian.”*

Proverbs 28:14 (ESV) Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Rule 5 – *“Keep an exact guard upon thy heart.”* Proverbs 4:23 (ESV) Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. This is a self-awareness. Recognize the signs that your thoughts & desires are headed in the wrong direction.

Rule 6 – *“Be daily training and exercising all thy graces.—Have them always in battle-array. Be in a military posture, both defensive and offensive. Stand constantly to thine arms; for thou hast to do with two enemies that will never give thee any truce or respite.”* They are the world and the Devil. Your daily prayer time, devotion time, should be guarded. Your Bible reading will equip you in the language of the Holy Spirit who stands guard over your soul. Worship time and the celebration of the Sacraments are means of God’s grace.

Rule 7 – *“Be well-skilled in detecting the deception of temptation.— I mean, in unmasking the sophistry and mystery of iniquity, in defeating the wiles and stratagems of the tempter, and in detecting and frustrating the cheats and finesses of the flesh with its deceitful lusts. (Eph. 4:22; 2 Cor. 2:11.) No small part of spiritual wisdom lies in the blessed art of discovering and refuting sin’s fallacies and impostures.”*

Rule 8 – *“Withdraw thyself, if possible, from the occasions of sin.”* Why don’t we allow our teenagers to stay out after 12 o’clock at unsupervised parties? Seems pretty obvious doesn’t it? One mother said, “Nothing good happens after midnight.”

In Recovery programs, a common topic is to avoid all the old people, places, and things connected with your addiction.

Rule 9 – *“Bind thyself beforehand, with the severest of thy resolutions, not to trust thy own judgment, when the temptation begins to get within thee.—“A man in passion is not himself.”*

When those dealing with alcohol abuse have the thought, “Maybe just one drink won’t hurt.” Bells, whistles, and red flags should go off.

“Who but a madman, that sees the stable or barn next to his dwelling-house just beginning to catch fire, would stand still, and say, “Let it alone a little, I would see what will come of it?”

CONCLUSION:

My friends, if you have had or are having sin struggles, you are not alone. Every one of us experiences similar challenges at different stages. That is why we need to be active in the Body of Christ, the Church. We are to pray for each other. We are to encourage each other. We are to love one another. A cord of

three strands is not easily broken. There is the individual Christian. There is the brother and sister in Christ. And, there is the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells us that if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. What an amazing truth. Our motivations have completely flipped. It is our love for the Lord that controls us not a fear of breaking rules. At the same time, if we belong to Christ we are to have crucified the sinful nature. Is your sinful nature suffocating on the cross?

Pastor and author Maxie Dunham wrote: "For Paul, the Spirit is more than the manifestation of a supernatural power, more than the giver of dramatic gifts, more than an explosive force erupting in the believer now and then. The Spirit is the daily sustaining, inspiring, and guiding power of the Christian's life. The Spirit is the domain of power, the sphere of influence which replaces *the flesh* as the energy force of our lives."

Brother and sisters, make sure you are keeping in step with God the Holy Spirit. {sing it} "I don't know but I've been told, march with God and you'll be bold. Keep in step with the Spirit, keep on marching till you feel it."

Amen and amen. Let us pray.