

HOW TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT

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Jesus promised His followers a life of abundance. Paul told believers they were more than conquerors. But many Christians are living far below this ideal. Mired in debt, controlled by addictions, dogged by broken relationships, depression and sin, it is hard to distinguish the church from the world. Why? Perhaps it is because too many Christians are living "according to their sinful natures" as Paul describes it in Romans 8:5 (NIV). The Contemporary English Version says they are "ruled by their desires."

Jesus had a different existence in mind when He declared that the world would know we are His. So what is it that bridges the gap between believing in Jesus and experiencing life at the level He promised? As with salvation it involves a choice and an invitation.

Walking in the Spirit is a choice we make to live life as Jesus lived it: surrendered and empowered. We will look at three aspects of a life lived in the Spirit, 1) The Indwelling Spirit, 2) The Work of the Spirit and 3) How to Walk (maintain connection) in the Spirit.

The Indwelling Spirit

Romans 10:9 says that if you believe that Jesus rose from the dead and say that He is Lord then you will be saved. But Revelations 3:20 goes deeper. It says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him..." (NKJV) Why do you have to let Him in? Firstly because it is your choice if you want to let Him in, and secondly because it is hard to have a relationship with someone when you are not permitted entry into their presence.

Jesus stands at the door and knocks and calls to you. It is His desire to have a relationship in which He comes in to your daily life. He wants to help guide you and keep you blessed, and He does it through the Holy Spirit. Think how hard it would be to drive your car if you never opened the door and got inside. This is the concept of Jesus entering your heart and filling you with His Holy Spirit.

This is the same Spirit given to Jesus (John 1:32-34) and the same Spirit who raised Him from the dead. The Spirit was sent to Jesus from God, and Jesus sends Him to believers (John 16:7).

1Corinthians 2:10-16 (NIV) asks the question, who "knows the thoughts of a man" and answers that it is his own spirit. God has given us access to His thoughts by giving us His Spirit. "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." (1Cor. 2:10 NIV) Verse 16 in the same translation inquires, "... who has known the mind of the Lord?..." The obvious answer is ,uh, no one;

it is impossible. *He is God.*

But there is a but—a turn in the verse, a correction—but we, *because we have God's Spirit in us, and His Spirit knows what He is thinking*, we have the mind, *the thoughts,* of Christ.

If we are not under the control of the Spirit, then our minds are hostile to the things of God. We operate from a sin nature where it is impossible to please God (Romans 8:5-8).

But if we have allowed Jesus entry into our heart, if we desire to be in that relationship with Him and filled and influenced by His Spirit, then you belong to Christ (Romans 8:9-11). You have His Spirit, access to His thoughts; you have the mind of Christ.

This is why Paul could say to Timothy that he did not have a spirit of fear. Timothy had Jesus'/God's Spirit and it was "of power, of love and of self discipline." (2Timothy 1:7)

If we can know what Jesus is thinking about our school, our job, our marriage, our kids, how to solve a problem, how to manage our day, we need to shut off the noise in our heads and listen to Him. It is our job to ask Him. It is our job to wait for His answer. It is our job to gather out thoughts like dirty laundry and dump them at His feet to sort, wash, fold, mend or pitch. It is necessary to do this daily, maybe hourly, until we train ourselves to let His thoughts reign in our mind.

The Work of the Spirit

John 16:7-15 records Jesus' description of what the Holy Spirit would do. He states that the Spirit will reveal sin, that He will only speak what He hears—this by the way of God's thoughts— will tell us what He hears, tell us what will happen in the future and help us to know all that belongs to Jesus and "announce it to [us]." (MKJV) In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells His disciples that the Spirit would give them power.

It is the Spirit's work that we not remain ignorant or uninformed. It is His job to convict us of guilt and remind us what is pleasing to God. it is His work to give us counsel. It is His job to give us power, to witness, to resist temptation, to live life pleasing to God.

The Holy Spirit could only come and begin His work when Jesus had finished His. Jesus called the Spirit's coming into the life of a believer baptism (Acts1:5). John the Baptist had done what He could. He baptized with water. We do what we can. But Jesus comes knocking and calling because He can do so much more in us than we could ever do ourselves. He sends the Holy Spirit to us when we ask, when we are ready to surrender.

He has the power to break addictions, heal relationships, bodies, minds and bank accounts.

How to Walk (or maintain a life lived) In the Spirit

In Galatians 5:16-25 Paul advises the Galatians to live by the Spirit. Why? Because if they were led by the inner compass of God, the thoughts and desires of God, they would "never follow through on what your corrupt nature wants." (GOD'S WORD) In other words all the problems they created in their lives could be avoided.

But this "corrupt nature" is the nature we are born with. It is in a war Paul says against the divine nature of God. They are total opposites in their desires, and whichever one we allow to influence our thoughts, words and decisions is in control—with opposite results.

Paul listed what could be expected if the corrupt sinful nature ruled and countered it with the list the Holy Spirit would produce if one submitted to His influence. A quick review of which items are more numerous in your life and you will know which one has the keys and is in the driver's seat.

The works, the results, were obvious Paul said. It is not possible to hide the level of your commitment or surrender to the Holy Spirit and lordship of Jesus. By ourselves we have no choice but to follow our sin-filled, selfish desires because that is who we are. It is only when we lay our authority down and put Jesus' authority to work that we will live lives that are abundant in grace and love.

Jesus said that He only spoke what He heard His Father saying (John 12:49). He also said the Spirit only speaks what He hears. If we can know the thoughts of God, then it follows that we should speak what we "hear" or know to be God's thoughts. Thoughts become words and words become actions in either nature. It is important then to stay centered in the Spirit if you desire its list of results in your life.

Like a small child in a toy store, we wander, constantly tempted by what lures us, enticed by our natural senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. We are distracted by everything shouting at us from the shelves until our parent's voice calls us back, takes our hand and bids us to stay close.

Paul instructs the Galatians to "keep in step with the Spirit." (Gal. 5:525) Be the obedient child that stays close to the Spirit by choice. "Keep" is a word of ongoing action. We make the choice minute by minute. "Step" is also a word of action; as you are going *keep*. It isn't a pause, a hesitation to look, to ponder, to investigate. It is listening to the inner compass, the thoughts of God, walking with and in the control of the Holy Spirit. It is the abundant life of a conqueror.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Have I invited Jesus into my life?
Have I asked Him to fill me with the Holy Spirit?

A Sample Prayer:

Jesus I believe that You are God, that You died on the cross and rose again to save me from my corrupt nature. I invite You into my heart and ask You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Forgive me and help me to live for You.

In Your Name, Jesus, I pray. Amen