

**Xenos Christian Fellowship  
Christian Growth  
Week 3 - Walking by the Spirit**

**Overview**

- Review Week 2: Indicative/Imperative
- Filing of the Holy Spirit
- Walking By the Spirit
  - Set Mind on Things of the Spirit
  - Keep In Step with Spirit
  - Sow to the Spirit

**Review Relationship 1 & 2 from last week**

**Relationship 1: Imperatives are based on indicatives. What God commands us to do (*imperative*) is based upon what he has done, is doing, or will do (*indicative*).**

Relationship 2: Healthy experience flows from active faith. In many cases, our experience of God's blessing follows our willingness to act on the imperatives by faith.

Help the students identify both relationships in the passage below. Put parentheses around the indicative portion, underline the imperatives, and bracket < > the experience promised by God. Have the students circle the words that identify the relationship between the portions. These notes italicize those words.

**(2 Peter 1:3-4) (seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises), in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.**

Teacher's note: Verse 4 is in the subjective mood, it's not an indicative. It is the mood of possibility – if they live out the indicatives by doing the imperatives – not a certainty.

**(2 Peter 1:5-7) Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.**

**(2 Peter 1:8-11) For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, <they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.> 9 For he who lacks these qualities <is blind or shortsighted,> having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, <you will never stumble>; 11 for in this way< the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.>**

## Introduction

Last week we looked at the identity and ministries of the Holy Spirit (the various ways he works in the believer's life). Yet, in spite of him indwelling us, his love for us, and his ability to empower our sanctification and ministry, many Christians continue to experience an absence of his power working in their lives. If he is all-loving and powerful, why don't we always see constant progress in our spiritual growth? The New Testament makes it clear that we have a choice and role to play in whether or not we allow the Holy Spirit to do what he so deeply desires. We must learn to walk by the Spirit.

Walking by the spirit is related to the filling of the spirit. In Paul's letters, the term "filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18) is synonymous with the terms "walking by/according to the Spirit" or "keeping in step with the Spirit" (see Rom. 8:4-11; Gal. 5:16,118,25). These terms emphasize the Christian's role in being filled with the Spirit. Let's take a closer look at what each term means.

## The Filling of the Holy Spirit

**(Eph. 5:18) And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,**

**Definition: The term "filled" (Greek: pleroo) means to be "characterized by." To be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be characterized by the Holy Spirit.**

1. **Whereas Christians receive the baptism by the Spirit only once (1 Cor 12:13), it is possible for us to receive repeated "in-fillings." This was the case with the early church, and Luke is careful to note that this was the key to their vitality and effectiveness in evangelism (see Acts 1:8; 2:4; 4:8,31; 6:3,5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9,52).**
2. **The "filling of the Spirit" is connected with our free will. An individual Christian can choose to be or not to be filled.**

**Therefore, it is helpful to consider the filling of the Holy Spirit as the result of a Christian's openness to the Spirit's influence. Note the qualities of being filled described in Eph. 5:19,20 and Col. 3:16.<sup>1</sup>**

3. **We can resist being filled.**

**"Grieving the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 4:30) and "quenching the Spirit" (1 Thes. 5:19) apparently refer to two different ways in which Christians resist the filling of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In a sense, then, they refer to the opposite of being filled with the Spirit.**

**Grieving the Spirit:** Although "grieving the Spirit" is not clearly defined, the context (Eph. 4:25-32) makes it clear that it involves *willfully disregarding the Holy Spirit's moral guidance*.

**(Eph. 4:29-31) Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it**

---

<sup>1</sup> "Be filled with" is present (continuous) tense, imperative mood, and passive voice.

**may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.**

This is not just whenever you sin, because the Holy Spirit works personally according to his priorities. But when he has put his finger on an area and you say "No, not now," you are hardening your heart and you may wind up wandering around in a spiritual wilderness.

**Quenching the Spirit** is also not clearly defined, but the context (1 Thes. 5:20-22) indicates that it involves *disregarding the Holy Spirit's efforts to direct and edify the church through various gifted members.*

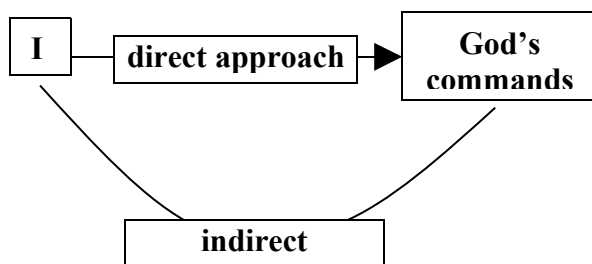
**(1 Thes. 5:19-21) Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good and abstain from every form of evil.**

In a healthy meeting, the Holy Spirit will prompt and empower everyone to contribute in a variety of ways (sharing, encouragement, prayer, teaching, etc.).

We can quench activity of the Spirit in ourselves and in others in several ways: refusing to "amen" each others prayers, throwing a damper on the enthusiastic gratitude of younger believers, or by refusing to speak when we sense the Spirit has given us something to say.

### Walking by the Spirit

Most Christians want to be filled by the Spirit and depend on him (indirect approach), but we all have a built - in tendency to rely on own power (direct approach).



**Romans 7:6 – Two ways we can serve God and pursue our sanctification:**

**"In the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:7-25).**

**This refers to trying to keep God's commands** (imperatives) *by our own power.* This leads to failure and defeat—we will get into this in more detail in a later class as one of the key barriers to walking by Spirit. Trying to serve God in this way is the "direct approach"—simply looking to the Law and trying to keep it.

## "In the newness of the Spirit"

**This means that we can choose to follow God by the power of his Spirit.** Serving God in this way is the "indirect approach"—looking to God to enable us to follow his commands. This second way is what Paul goes on to explain in Rom. 8:2-14 and Gal. 5:16-25. These are parallel passages which cover this subject of how to walk – though with different emphases. Let's consider some similarities and differences in these passages.

### **Romans 8:1-14 and Galatians 5:16-25.**

Instructor's note: Refer students to the chart comparing Romans 8:1-14 to Galatians 5:16-25.

Gal. 5:17,18 *alludes to the failure* we experience if we try to follow God "under the Law." Paul explains this in much more detail in Rom. 7:7-25.

Rom. 8:6 *describes the results of walking* according to the flesh as "death" and walking according to the Spirit very briefly as "life and peace." Paul explains this in much more detail in Gal. 5:19-23.

By studying both passages together we get a more complete picture of how to walk according to the Spirit. Just as physical walking involves three elements (balance, direction, locomotion), **walking by the Spirit also involves three elements:**

1. **Setting your mind on the things of the Spirit.**
2. **Responding to the leading of the Spirit (keeping in step with the Spirit).**
3. **Sowing to the Spirit (regular investment in the means of growth).**

Christian authors usually focus on one of the elements involved in walking by the Spirit. Watchman Nee focuses on leadings, Miles Stanford on mental focus on our new identity, Andrew Murray on obedience, etc. The key here is balance. Let's look at each.

### **1. Set your mind on the things of the Spirit.**

This first aspect gets right to the root of the question, "What does it mean to 'walk by the Spirit?'"

Many think walking by the Spirit is primarily a subjective experience—trying to intuitively sense God's presence and guidance. Now, there is a subjective dimension involved in walking by the Spirit, and we will discuss this in a later class. But this is not what Paul focuses on here.

Others think this is primarily about behavioral change. It's true that walking according to the Spirit will produce behavioral change. But if we equate walking by the Spirit with behavioral change, we're back to serving God under the law (our own effort). So how *do* we go about

solving our character problems (anger, insensitivity, negativity, holding grudges, impatience, etc.)?

**(Rom. 8:5-7) For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, (7) because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so..**

According to Paul, we need to learn to set our mind on the things of the spirit.

**What are the “things of the Spirit” that we should be setting our minds on?**

**Read Romans 12:2(1 Cor. 2:12-14) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know *the things freely given to us by God*, (13) which *things we also speak*, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. (14) But a natural man does not accept *the things of the Spirit of God*, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.**

Some Christian preachers say the "things of the Spirit" refer to messages given to us through heavenly voices or visions or dreams. This is not what Paul means. He wants us to focus on truths that have been revealed through the apostles (“things we also speak”) and recorded in their writings. These truths are the many facets God’s grace (notice how Paul equates the "things of the Spirit" with the “things freely given to us by God”). God’s grace is his unmerited love toward us which he has expressed in many ways. In addition to forgiveness His grace provides many other freely offered blessings.

One way God has expressed his love is by putting us into Christ. When we became Christians, God adopted us as his children and gave us a new inheritance and a new future. Paul says this is what we should focus our minds on:

**(Col. 3:1-3) If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (3) you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

**Definition of setting your mind on the things of the Spirit: Choosing to look at every major area of your life in the light of God's grace.** The more we learn about what Christ has given us, and the more we consciously view every area of our lives from his perspective, the more God's Spirit will transform our lives.

Paul’s command to set our minds on the things of the Spirit is one reason we why emphasize the New Testament more than Old Testament. The New Testament teaches God's grace more clearly and fully.

## What is a “mind set on the flesh”?

Paul contrasts a “mind set on the Spirit” with a “mind set on the things of the flesh.” This refers to the perspective we adopt on things apart from and contradictory to God's revealed grace. This is our mental “default setting,” which is why we must choose to “set our minds on” God's perspective.

**(Eph. 4:17-25) This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, (18) being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; (19) and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be *renewed in the spirit of your mind*, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. 25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, **SPEAK TRUTH, EACH ONE of you, WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.****

We do this by exposing ourselves to biblical content: going to Bible studies, taking courses, discussing scripture with one another, evaluating our thoughts and the messages coming at us from the world in light of what God says (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Isaiah 55:8,9).

As we learn to set our mind on what God wants it set on, the power of the Holy Spirit is unleashed to gradually transform our characters and behavior (the requirement of the law is fulfilled) and also grant us increasing experience of God's peace (Rom. 8:7).

### Key mind-set areas

Let's get practical and examine what it looks like to think about the major areas of our lives with our mind set on the flesh versus our mind set on the Spirit. These are grids through which we view life. They will have a profound impact on whether we walk according to the flesh or the Spirit.

#### A. Your relationship with God

How you view God and how you think God views you are the most foundational and important spiritual things we can think about.

**Mind set on the flesh: We naturally assume that God's acceptance and approval of me is contingent on *my performance*.** We tend to view God primarily as a strict parent/principal/supervisor—ready to pounce on every

mistake we make. When we think this way, we will tend to avoid God or worse, become dishonest with ourselves and God.

**Mind set on the Spirit:** The New Testament indicates that this is a key feature of the Spirit-empowered life.

**(Rom. 8:1) There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

God will never condemn me.

**(Rom. 8:15-17) For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we may also be glorified with *Him*.**

God does not want me to relate to him as a slave in fear of his rejection, but as a son and heir who is confident of his love.

**(Rom 8:38,39) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Nothing (including my own sins) can separate me from God's love.

To the extent that we set our minds on these great truths, we will tend to relate to God more frequently and more honestly. And thanksgiving will become a big part of our communication with God (Eph. 5:18,20).

Our relationship with God (the way we view Him and He views us) is a critical area. God will challenge our perspective in order to bring it into conformity with His. Through this mental transformation, God wants to provide us with a foundation for living out His purpose in our life.

## **B. Your difficult circumstances**

It is inevitable and proper that we think about our circumstances – where we work, our state of health, our finances, etc. And because we live in a fallen world, sometimes these things are quite painful and negative.

**Mind set on the flesh:** We will tend to interpret bad circumstances as God's *punishment (or that he does not care)*. If we view our happiness and security as

contingent upon our circumstances, we will tend to spend an inordinate amount of time and energy worrying about them, or trying to change things we can't change, or blaming our unhappiness on them.

**Mind set on the Spirit: We will still feel the impact of negative circumstances, and we will often try to improve them when possible. But, MORE FUNDAMENTALLY, we will set our minds on two crucial biblical truths:**

1. **“My negative circumstances are only *temporary*, to be removed in the next life and replaced by glory. When we view our negative circumstances in this light, God grants us resilience and hope.”**

**(Rom. 8:18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.**

2. **God is sovereignly involved even through my negative circumstances for *his glory and my growth*.**

**(Rom. 8:28) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**

In other words, nothing can prevent God from advancing his purposes in our life if we choose to cooperate with him. This frees us from thinking of ourselves as victims and allows us to become grateful people who cooperate with God.

**A sign of spiritual maturity in this area is that our prayers will change** from “Get me out of this!” to “What do you want me to learn from this?”

### **C. Close relationships**

We spend a significant amount of time thinking about our relationships — especially close dating relationships, spouses, children, parents, friends, work associates, etc. But the mind set on the Spirit thinks very differently than one set on the flesh.

**Mind set on the flesh:** Left to our own perspective, **we tend to believe that we will be happy when *people treat us right***. In other words, we focus on how they are treating us. We look to other people to give us security, meaning, and identity. When people fail to treat us well, we often become disappointed or outraged.

If we feel pain or hurt in a relationship, we often demand that the person change their behavior so the pain goes away. We feel justified in manipulating or rejecting them because these actions are consistent with the way they have caused us to feel.

Relating to people in this way will always disappoint us sooner or later, because people are finite and fallen—only God can meet our deepest needs in a satisfying way.

**Mind set on the Spirit:** **As we draw our lives from God and his love for us, we discover a reliable and inexhaustible source of security, meaning, and identity.** This mind focuses on how to be loving toward the other person (trusting His provisions). On this basis, we can approach relationships with others in a very different way.

**(Gal. 5:26-6:4) Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (6:1) Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (2) Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. (3) For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (4) But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.**

We are able to enjoy people and bear their burdens instead of measuring ourselves by comparison to other people. We are grateful to receive love from them—but we don't have to demand it because we know God will be there. In fact, we see their love ultimately as an expression of God's love for us.

When they hurt us, we can extend forgiveness--because we're so aware and appreciative of how much God has forgiven us. More importantly, we begin to be able to give love to others sacrificially and without strings--because we are secure in God's love, and because we experience the joy of God when we do so.

This other-centered perspective is both a result of spiritual growth and a cause of further growth.

**We need to have realistic expectations in this area.** When we become Christians, we have already built many, deep mental groves. It takes time to build some new mental groves,

deepen them, and spend more time in them. This is a process. Also, though we may feel like God can't change us until we spend at least 51% of our mental time on things of the Spirit, this is untrue. God's Spirit is unleashed in our lives to a disproportionate degree when we set our minds on the things of the Spirit.

## 2. Keep in step with the Spirit

**Gal. 5:18 and Rom. 8:14 speak of "being led by the Spirit" as part of walking according to the Spirit.**

**Paul says in Gal. 5:25 "If we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with [NASB - "walk by"] the Spirit."**

**The phrase "keep in step with" means to proceed under another's direction. It was sometimes used to describe soldiers who marched in response to the directions of their commanding officer.<sup>2</sup>**

**Definition:** *To be alert and responsive to the Spirit's personal guidance in your life.*

*The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force that we use to advance our own agendas. The Holy Spirit is a person who guides you into God's will. He also empowers us to accomplish God's will when we choose to respond to his guidance.*

*God does not provide us with rules that he expects us to carry out in an impersonal, mechanical way ("Work on rules 1-5 today, 6-10 tomorrow..."). Through his Spirit, God shows us his will for our lives in a very personal way (Illustration: Gettysburg Battlefield, there are two ways to tour it. You could either buy a map with audio tape or hire a personal guide. A knowledgeable personal guide is always better). When Jesus was with his disciples, he promised he would send "another counselor" to guide them (John 14:16).*

**Understanding the leading/guiding of the Holy Spirit is messy because it is personal and subjective. Because of this, Christians tend to polarize into two extreme camps. Avoid these two dangerous extremes:**

**Being led by the Spirit is ONLY a supernatural event,** a substitute for using the mind and common sense. People in this camp feel the need to find supernatural explanation for everything that happens. They claim that the Holy Spirit guides them about what clothes to wear, what route to take to work, what food to order from the menu, etc. They claim that God talks to them this way virtually all the time, that his voice is unmistakable, and that you are unspiritual unless you can claim the same thing.

This view of the guidance of the Holy Spirit can become an excuse for biblical laziness, anti-intellectualism, and even rebellion against God that soils his reputation ("The Holy Spirit is leading me to divorce my wife and marry my secretary." "God

---

<sup>2</sup> The verb (stochew) is different than the general verb "walk" (peripatew) in 5:16.

led me to spend two hours sharing Christ with my co-worker instead of doing my job.").

**Being led by the Spirit has no supernatural component at all.** This is a dangerous extreme because it rules out God working supernaturally in a natural world.

Thinking this way blinds our eyes to the power of God working in us and those around us, and renders us unwilling to be dependent on God. But dependence is the very engine that should drive our walk.

Those who are more cerebral by temperament feel uncomfortable with any subjective or unpredictable feature of Christianity. They want and sometimes demand irrefutable proof that a particular leading was from God—and since this is not possible, they view the whole subject as a waste of time. They use the excesses of others as an excuse to reject the whole area.

This is the danger of deism, affirming God's existence but denying that he is personally involved in our lives in ways that we can recognize and cooperate with. It also reduces spirituality to a recipe of Bible verses and safe formulae. This leads to a "Christianity" that is safe, predictable, boring, and (sometimes) autonomous from God (EXAMPLES: no room for spontaneity in meetings; no risk-taking in evangelism or speaking truth in love into a Christian's life, little patience for the Holy Spirit to work leading to pressuring people and pushing our timetable on decisions).

Since God wants us to "keep in step with the Spirit," there must be a way to recognize his guidance and avoid both of these extremes.

### **Recognizing the Spirit's guidance**

One principle that saturates His guidance is that **God's Spirit will never guide us in a direction that contradicts his Word.** This is because the same Spirit who guides us also authored God's Word. If you are certain the Spirit is personally leading you in a decision, it will always be in accord with His overarching will for your life as expressed in Scripture.

**He will always guide you consistently with two biblical priorities for your life: character transformation and serving love.** Gal 5 speaks of the Spirit's guidance in both of these areas.

- **Character Transformation (Read Gal. 5:26).**

If you keep in step with the Spirit, he will guide you away from attitudes and behaviors that are destructive to you and God's reputation—like boasting and envy.

He will speak to your conscience, sometimes through the Word sometimes through another Christian. He will sensitize your conscience

and arrest your attention on different issues at different times. We sometimes call this "the conviction of the Spirit."

Sinful attitudes and actions as a new Christian (lying; getting high).

Becoming more in-depth as we mature (critical spirit, being sold out to worldly rather than godly priorities, etc.).

This is why our class assignments are personal in nature.

A sign of spiritual maturity in this arena: **Maturing Christians become increasingly responsive to God's moral correction.** (Heb. 3:7,8; Eph. 4:30; Ps. 32:8-10) We don't have to wait until someone confronts us or until we go up on blocks spiritually. We become suspicious of our natural tendency to resist input from others.

**Warning: Be sure to view this activity of the Spirit from the perspective of God's grace.** Remember that God corrects you because he loves you, not in order to reject you. His correction is redemptive (to urge you to move forward with him) rather than retributive ("Look how horrible you are! You might as well give up walking with God."). Read Heb. 12:6,10.

- *Serving Love* (Read **Gal. 6:1,2**).

If you keep in step with the Spirit, he will guide you into attitudes and behaviors that serve other people--like restoring fallen Christians and bearing one another's burdens.

Sometimes, this can be very specific: Philip in Acts 8; leading us to witness, help, encourage, comfort.

Sometimes, this is a growing passion for a certain area of service or heightened sensitivity to opportunities to serve. This doesn't mean that we should only serve people when we get such guidance. We should adopt and cultivate a lifestyle of servanthood--and know that as we do so, God's Spirit will guide us personally into deeds and areas of service for which we are uniquely suited. "You can't steer a ship that's not moving."

### **Is it wrong for Christians to plan ahead without direct guidance from the Spirit?**

This also doesn't mean that thinking and planning ahead eliminates or quells the Spirit's leading (God planned salvation, Heb. 10:24; Eph. 5:15). Some of us would be wrongly "put off" to hear solid Christian workers and leaders think ahead on how best to help someone, how best to organize the structures of the church, how best to insure

the new person isn't forgotten. Somehow we wrongly equate being Spirit-led with no use of our God-given mind to plan.

### **What if I'm not experiencing the leading of the Spirit?**

We're not suggesting that you should experience dramatic guidance from the Spirit every day. Sometimes God just wants us to follow him in the ways we know and trust him. But it does not seem to be normal or healthy to chronically lack the Spirit's guidance. If you are experiencing a chronic lack of guidance from the Spirit, it is correctable. Prayerfully consider these possible reasons:

- *Do you ask for the Spirit's guidance?*

James says that many times we do not receive from God simply because we don't ask (Jas. 4:2). We tend to run on "auto-pilot," selecting the moral areas we want to work on and service we want to do, staying on familiar ground. It's much more spiritually productive and exciting to present ourselves to God each day in each situation and ask him for his guidance.

- **Will you *submit* to the Spirit's guidance?**

We may receive little guidance from the Spirit (even when we ask) because we are unwilling in a fundamental way to entrust our lives to God's agenda.

If we're honest, we often (even after understanding grace) want God to be a consultant rather than the ruler of our lives ("God, I'm wondering what I want to do in this area. Why don't you let me know your opinion—and I'll take that into consideration as I decide my course of action.") When we ask with this attitude, God is likely to reply, "Save your breath. Let me know when you're ready to obey my guidance even before you know what it is."

Deep down, a refusal to submit to the Spirit's guidance is an admission that we don't trust God or that his will is best for us.

### **3. Sow to the Spirit**

Paul began using an agricultural metaphor toward the end of Galatians 5, describing the results of walking by the Spirit as the "fruit of the Spirit." After explaining how to "keep in step with the Spirit" in Gal. 5:25-6:5, he returns to the agricultural metaphor in **6:7-9** (read). His point is obvious--you reap what you sow. This is not Paul's version of karmic law (what goes around comes around), but rather a basic principle of cause and effect in spiritual growth.

If you sow to your own fallen nature, you will reap "corruption"—which is not damnation, but the lifestyle described in Gal. 5:19-21a as the "deeds of the flesh" (read).

If you sow to the Spirit, you will reap "eternal life"—which refers not to heaven, but to the "fruit of the Spirit" as described in Gal. 5:22,23 (read). If you want to reap a good spiritual harvest in your life, you must sow consistently to the Spirit.

**The agricultural metaphor indicates that the results *aren't immediate but they will show up later.***

You may choose to get involved in a porn habit because it provides immediate pleasure and escape—but you will reap an eventual harvest of corruption (dissatisfaction with marital sex; bondage to sexual lust; arrested relational development).

Or you may choose to get involved in a spiritual habit like Bible memorization. It will not be immediately pleasurable—but you will reap an eventual harvest of spiritual health (Ps. 1).

The Bible provides direction on the "sowing" that leads to spiritual growth.

**Definition:** *Regularly participate in the means of growth.*

What does it look like to "sow to the Spirit?" It means to consistently participate in those activities that the Bible says will eventually result in spiritual growth. Theologians often call these activities the "means of grace." We like to call them the means of growth. Here's what John Stott, one of the greatest Bible teachers of the 20th century, says about this passage:

**(John Stott) "(If Paul) speaks in Galatians 5:22 of the harvest of the Spirit, he writes in 6:8 that we are to sow to the Spirit, and then we reap what we sow. Whether we reap the fruit of the Spirit depends on whether we sow to the Spirit. The seeds we sow to the Spirit that produce this harvest are . . . a disciplined use of the means of grace. That is, daily prayer and meditation on the Scriptures, reading Christian books, making Christian friends, and getting engaged in Christian service.**

**It is by a disciplined use of these means of grace that we grow in grace, and the Holy Spirit within us is able to produce the beauty of holiness."<sup>3</sup>**

If you want a passage that captures most of these means of growth, look at Acts 2:42. 3,000 people have just begun a relationship with God by receiving Christ and being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:43-47, Luke describes the dynamic spiritual vitality and fruitfulness of these people. In 2:42, he describes how they "sowed to the Spirit" (read).

**(Acts 2:42\*) And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**

**What did they sow?**

---

<sup>3</sup> John R.W. Stott, "The Unforbidden Fruit", *Christianity Today*, Aug 17, 1992, p. 36.

**The word (or “the apostles' teaching”).** This refers to learning the Bible, especially the New Testament's teaching about God's grace.

**Fellowship.** This refers to sharing God's truth and love with one another in the context of Christian community and personal relationships. Remember, a key element of "fellowship" includes serving love. Love is not only a fruit of the Spirit; it is also a dynamic that produces fruit.

**(Gal. 6:10) So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.**

**Prayer.** This refers to individual, private communication with God, corporate prayer (see Acts 4,12), and ongoing prayer (1 Thes. 5:17).

**Note:** "The breaking of bread" is a little ambiguous. It may refer to the Lord's Supper, which then connects it to prayer and emphasizes thanksgiving. Or it may refer to having meals together (Acts 2:46), which then connects it with fellowship.

God can use suffering and the discipline of the Holy Spirit (Heb 12) as another means of growth (not mentioned in this verse). God initiates this but our response is critical. We will spend an entire week on this later in the course.

### **How did they sow?**

"They were continually devoting themselves." Luke goes out of his way to emphasize that they initiated this sowing ("devoted themselves to") and they did this consistently ("continually"). This is the open secret to their vitality and fruitfulness.

**"Sowing to the Spirit" means building a *lifestyle* centered around these means of growth.** This is also the context in which you will get more personal guidance from the Spirit. In our experience, the most common cause of spiritual stagnation and sickness is neglect of the means of growth. We like to think our spiritual problems have obscure, exotic causes—but this is always the first place to look.

There a cost to enjoying a vital spiritual life. It involves making room in your life, displacing other priorities when necessary, to consistently participate in each of the areas above.

### **Practical tips concerning the means of growth:**

#### **A. Be sure you approach the means of growth *under grace*.**

It is possible to be a true Christian and still approach the means of growth apart from grace.

When you participate in them simply out of mindless habit, or to be accepted by your Christian friends, the means of growth will become dry and lifeless.

When you participate in them to be blessed by God or to get what you want, you are bound to be disappointed. One clear sign that we've fallen into this way of thinking is complaining, "But God, I've been praying, studying the Word, serving...why would you let this bad thing happen?"

Note: There will be times when sowing to the spirit feels boring and lifeless. That doesn't always mean we are not under grace. During times like this, we must trust in faith that as we sow to the Spirit we will reap the fruit that God promises. As we draw near to God, he WILL draw near to us. (James 4:8).

**B. You will probably need to cultivate a taste for some (or all) of the means of growth.**

e.g. People who enjoy jogging will tell you that at first, running was not enjoyable. They weren't in shape, their stride was poor, and while they ran, all they could think about was their aching muscles and how much further they had to go. But after a while, as they reaped the benefits of reduced stress, better sleep, and more vigor, they come to enjoy running more and more. Some even increased their mileage. Many will tell you jogging has become one of the most enjoyable activities in their life.

If you understand what I am saying about physical exercise, the same principle applies to the means of growth—only with much greater benefits.

**(1 Tim. 4:7,8) On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; (8) for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.**

For a variety of reasons (newness, fleshly aversion), it is normal to initially find these activities uncomfortable and intimidating. But as you stick with them by faith, you experience the good results and develop increasing enjoyment of them. Studying the Bible on your own can be confusing at first. This is why preparing teaching helps so much. When you're trying to explain a passage to someone else, it becomes clearer to you and more exciting.

Prayer with other believers may feel strange to begin with, but it will help you to learn more quickly how to pray well and it can become a wonderful way to relate to God and your to Christians friends simultaneously.

### **C. Remember that you need *ALL* of the means of growth.**

Because of the previous point, the temptation is to specialize in those means of growth that you find easiest and most enjoyable, while neglecting the ones that are more difficult for you. You may be tempted to believe that your specialization in some will compensate for neglect of others. This is a serious error.

The means of growth are interconnected, so that genuine progress in any one requires involvement in all (EXAMPLES).

### **Conclusion**

Learning to walk by the Spirit is an art that takes practice. It's a lot like learning to ride a bike which is difficult because you have to simultaneously do three things: balance, steer, and pedal. Similarly, walking by the Spirit involves the three things described above. With practice, this becomes easier and more natural—though never as natural as riding a bike because there is the consistent opposition of the flesh and Satan.

From this point on, if you are thinking about “how is my walk?” you should be evaluating it through this biblical depiction of walking by the Spirit, not just a vague sense of closeness to the Lord or a tally of your involvement in the body of Christ. Those are both certainly important, but not the complete picture of what it means to walk.

If you want to help a young Christian follow Christ, what should you direct them toward? The components of walking by the Spirit are the first place to start.

### **Memory Verses**

**Romans 8:4-14\*\* - extended passage on walking according to the Spirit**

**Galatians 5:16-25\*\* - extended passage on walking according to the Spirit**

**Acts 2:42\* - consistent participation in the Word, prayer and fellowship were keys to their spiritual vitality**

### **Assignment**

**Read *Walking in Victory*, chapters 1-5.**

**Read Ephesians 1: 3-14, underlining the phrases “in Him”, or “through Him.”**

**Read the following hypothetical situation and answer both questions.**

**You have been repeatedly showing up early at Home Group to pray and help get the house ready for the meeting. No one has said anything about your efforts although it is inconvenient for you to get there after work. A fairly new person shows up once to help set up for Home Group and your leader publicly praises her for her effort. How do you feel? Appreciated? Valued? Used?**

- **Briefly describe the wrong way to respond to this situation?**
- **Name two correct ways to respond as you draw from your position in Christ in this situation?**

### **Week 3 Exam Review Guide**

- 1. Be able to explain the three different elements involved in walking by the Spirit (Set your mind on the things of the Spirit; Keep in step with the Spirit; Sow to the Spirit).**
- 2. Be able to identify each of the means of growth.**