

Living in the Spirit's Power and Enjoying God's Presence

Lesson 6

GROW DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM

Engaging the Learner

Pink and blue nylon on a foundation of synthetic rubber struck the west Texas pavement and was gone. Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. Left, right, left, right. Quinn's muscles settled into the regular rhythms of long-distance running. As the sounds of his favorite mix bled into his ears from the tiny speakers inserted into each sonic cavity, his mind cleared. Gradually, the issues of life requested his attention. Normally, his thoughts would be on his son Grant. Thirteen and on probation at Stevie Ray Vaughn Middle School, Grant was a harrowing mixture of childish mischief, adolescent anger, and rebellion. Meanwhile, Quinn's wife Linda was demanding more time for both Grant and herself. Nevertheless, both remained secondary this morning.

Today, God dominated his mind. Well, not God solo so much as God and Quinn. Quinn and Linda decided to get back into church after a six-year hiatus two years ago. Never one to do anything halfway, Quinn quickly made a decision to follow Christ. He smiled wryly at the memory of his conversion. So gung-ho. The pressure had seemed to be cut by a machete from his chest and mind. In the afterglow, he quit drinking, swore to start tithing, decided he'd better cut out that swearing, and resolved to strike his occasional glance at a porn site—all on the first day! That first commitment had lasted about a week. He re-committed the following Sunday. And the Sunday after that. And the Sunday after that. Starting. Stopping. Commitment. Failure. "The problem", he thought, "is that I'm running a series of sprints, but my life is a marathon."

By mile five, perspiration and the southern humidity of Austin mixed to form a blanket of liquid covering his body. Perhaps the covering prompted the thought, or perhaps it was unrelated, but suddenly Quinn understood his need. Short bursts towards God were not the answer. He needed a covering, a blanket of God to live in and around him throughout the race. Breathing God during the marathon, not striving to find God at the end was Quinn's desire.

Exploring the Lesson

You may identify with Quinn's need to "breathe God" throughout life. Christians often begin the Christian voyage, looking to heaven as the goal. While heaven is our ultimate destination, it is the daily Christian walk empowered by the Holy Spirit that enables us to reach our destination—and enjoy the journey. In Galatians 15:13-26, God provides us with directions on how to live life in the Spirit. Take a moment to read this passage before continuing to the next section.

Focus on Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are important to God and necessary for life in the Spirit. So important are they, in fact, that focusing on relationships with other people serves to "book-end" this passage on life in the Spirit. The passage opens (vv. 13-15) with three different relational commands. First, verse 13 instructs Christians to serve one another. Verse 14 continues the theme by asserting that *the entire law* (the entire Old Testament instruction) is summed up in the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." Finally, verse 15 adds that Christians are not to quarrel (biting and devouring each other). Ending this passage on life in the Spirit is verse 26, which instructs

believers not to provoke or agitate each other. Loving each other and peaceful living in relationships is foundational to the Spirit-lived life.

Resist Sinful Desires and Attitudes

“ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desire of the sinful nature” (Galatians 5:16). If we are living in the Spirit, we will resist the desires that lead to sin. Verse 17 goes on to explain that the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit long for contrary or opposite ideals. Verses 19-21 contain a list of sinful attitudes and sinful acts. Notice that the sinful attitudes and the sinful acts are listed together, completely intertwined. The sinful attitudes named include hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy. The gross sinful actions listed are sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, drunkenness, and orgies. We often make a false dichotomy between attitudes and actions. One key to the Spirit-led life, however, is the realization that attitudes breed action. As verse 24 illustrates, the followers of Christ crush or crucify the urges that lead us to sin.

Holy Spirit as Commander

“ It’s one thing,” you may find yourself saying, “to declare that followers of Christ crush their sinful urges. It’s something else entirely to accomplish this.” An excellent point. How does one go about ending sinful urges? This passage illustrates a progression in the development of a life in the Spirit. We are first asked to walk with the Spirit (5:16). The picture here is accompanying the Spirit along a journey. Next, we are to allow the Spirit to lead us (5:18). Our job is to follow. Finally, we are to march in step with the Spirit, under His command (5:25). In this way, we gradually come under the Lordship of the Spirit.

Once you grant Lordship to the Spirit, you will find He leads by a variety of avenues. One such avenue through which He directs is the inspiration of His Word. Prayerful reading and meditating on Scripture allows the Spirit to speak to you through the Bible. The Spirit also directs through the instruction of Christian teachers. These may be preachers, Sunday School teachers, or a spiritual advisor. Finally, the Spirit directs through impressions on our minds. The source of impressions is sometimes difficult to determine. If you feel God is speaking to you regarding a particular area, check scripture or ask a spiritual advisor. The Spirit never directs in contradiction to Scripture, and a teacher can often help you sort through your impressions. As you become more comfortable following the Spirit, you will learn to recognize His “voice” more quickly and easily.

Results of Life in the Spirit

Life in the Spirit produces tangible results. Known as the fruit of the Spirit, these include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Like all good things, they come through hard work and perseverance. In the same way physical fruit grows and matures over a period of time, so do these attributes of the spiritual person. Of these, love, joy, and peace seem to develop quickly, while gentleness and self-control are usually the last to mature. Chances are others will see these changes in you before you recognize them in yourself.

Enhancing Our Lives

Think back to the opening story of Quinn, the long-distance runner. Quinn came to the conclusion that his Christian life was a series of sprints. Can you relate to short bursts of intense, passionate spiritual activity and exercise followed by times of inactivity and failure? Does “roller coaster” sum-up your Christian walk? While most mature Christians speak of cycles in their prayer and devotional life, consistency and regularity are hallmarks of a life lived in the Spirit. The following exercises are aimed at transforming your mind from a “sprint” paradigm to a “marathon” paradigm.

I. Interpersonal Check-Up

- A. Make a list of people who generally disagree with your viewpoints.

B. Now, make a list of your enemies. Resist the temptation to list traditional enemies of your nation or nameless caricatures, such as “murderers” or “thieves”. Instead, list acquaintances, co-workers, or family members who have expressed ill will towards you or make your life difficult.

C. Do something good for each person listed above. For example, you may write a letter of appreciation, send them a complimentary card, take them out to eat, telephone a congratulatory message, or simply establish communication with them. Write what you determine to do beside each name before you move on to exercise D.

D. Recall the last three quarrels you’ve been involved in. List these here.

E. Are there any amends you need to make?

1. From whom do you need to ask forgiveness?

2. What can you do to make things right? (Write these down. Our best intentions rarely come to fruition unless we take some immediate steps.)

2. Journal of Human Nature. Keep a record for one week of every conscious expression (either positive or negative) of the following desires of your human nature.

- A. Temper
- B. Belonging
- C. Security
- D. Success

3. New Truth Diary. In the same notebook as your journal, record every new truth the Holy Spirit gives you from the Bible, from a Christian friend, or from an impression He places on your mind. Keep this diary for at least two weeks.

Outline for Small Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

All questions and exercises are useful for either personal or small group reflection. While exercises marked with an asterisk (*) are written specifically for a small group leader, individual learners can easily modify the exercise for their personal study.

Engaging the Learner

* Distribute paper and a pen or pencil to each member of the class. Make markers or crayons available, if desired. Challenge the class members to draw timelines of their spiritual life from before they were converted to the present moment, noting key moments. If some class members are not comfortable drawing this, ask them to write a brief analogy of their journey (For example, “My journey has been like a roller coaster.” Or, “My journey has been like a vacation cruise.”)

Exploring the Lesson/Enhancing Your Life

*Ask someone to read Galatians 15:13-26 to the class.

Focus on Relationships

*Write the books of the Old Testament on individual slips of paper. Hand them all out. Now, instruct the person with Genesis to read that slip of paper, explaining that whoever has Exodus will need to be ready to read next, and so forth. State your goal as “to take a look at the entire Old Testament Law.” Then, having each person open the Bible to his or her assigned book, note that the scripture says that one commandment sums up all the writings of the Old Testament. Ask, “What is that commandment?” How important is that commandment?

How are your relationships with those closest to you? How do you think your family members or closest friends would describe relationships with you?

Resist Sinful Desires and Attitudes

What sinful attitudes do you overlook as “only human” in your life? The passage places these in the same category as orgies, idolatry, witchcraft, and drunkenness. How do you respond to that?

Holy Spirit as Commander

What is the progression of traveling with the Spirit in Galatians 5:13-25?

What are the primary ways that the Spirit leads us?

*Ask, “Have any of you felt like the Holy Spirit has impressed something on your mind? How do you know it was the Spirit? Was it consistent with Scripture? Have you talked to a spiritual mentor about this experience?”

Result of Life in the Spirit

What are the tangible results of life in the Spirit?

What fruits of the Spirit can you see in your life? Which fruits are you lacking?