

**SAMPLE****THIRSTY**

A DEVOTIONAL ON LIVING A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

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Devotional Booklet  
Full Color, Illustrated  
68 pages

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*A devotional on living a*

*SPIRIT-FILLED life.*



# THIRSTY

14 self-study devotions

## *Thirsty*

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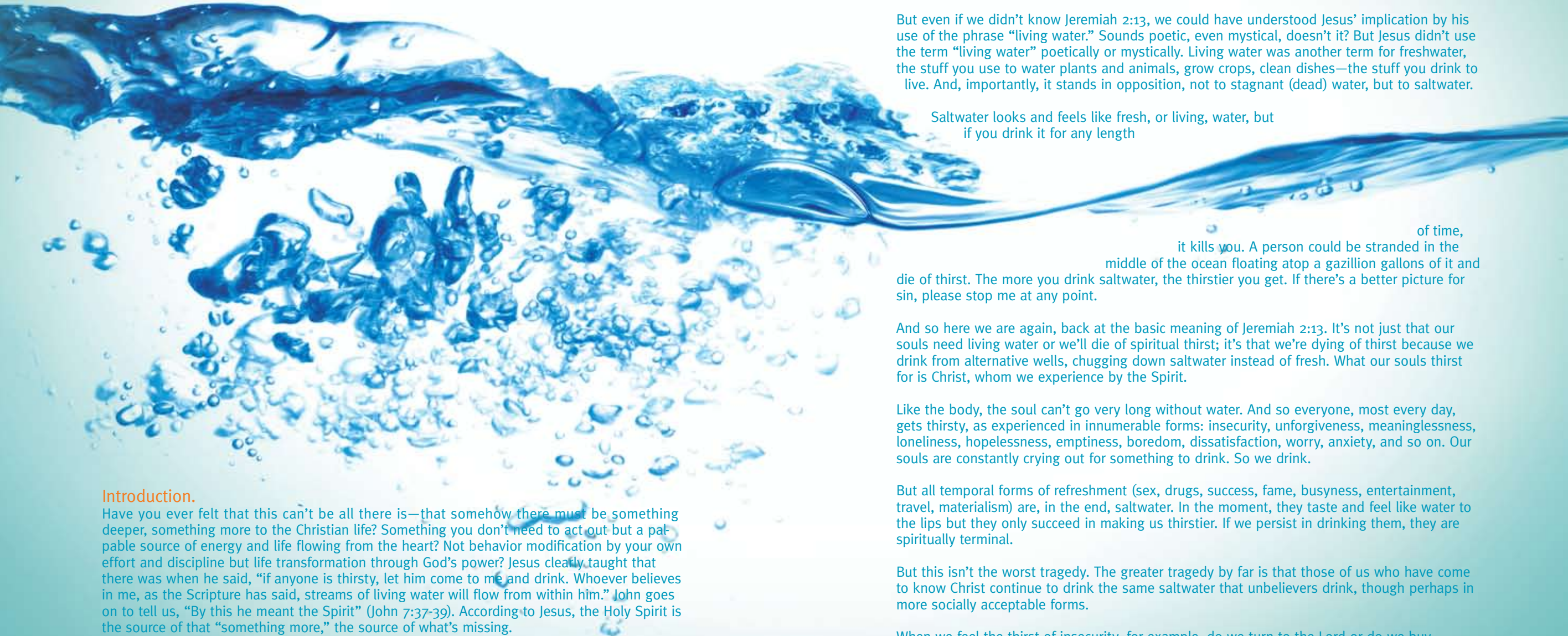
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*THIRSTY?*





The phrase Jesus used, “living water,” was meant to evoke, among other Scriptures, Jeremiah 2:13: “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

But even if we didn’t know Jeremiah 2:13, we could have understood Jesus’ implication by his use of the phrase “living water.” Sounds poetic, even mystical, doesn’t it? But Jesus didn’t use the term “living water” poetically or mystically. Living water was another term for freshwater, the stuff you use to water plants and animals, grow crops, clean dishes—the stuff you drink to live. And, importantly, it stands in opposition, not to stagnant (dead) water, but to saltwater.

Saltwater looks and feels like fresh, or living, water, but if you drink it for any length

of time, it kills you. A person could be stranded in the middle of the ocean floating atop a gazillion gallons of it and die of thirst. The more you drink saltwater, the thirstier you get. If there’s a better picture for sin, please stop me at any point.

And so here we are again, back at the basic meaning of Jeremiah 2:13. It’s not just that our souls need living water or we’ll die of spiritual thirst; it’s that we’re dying of thirst because we drink from alternative wells, chugging down saltwater instead of fresh. What our souls thirst for is Christ, whom we experience by the Spirit.

Like the body, the soul can’t go very long without water. And so everyone, most every day, gets thirsty, as experienced in innumerable forms: insecurity, unforgiveness, meaninglessness, loneliness, hopelessness, emptiness, boredom, dissatisfaction, worry, anxiety, and so on. Our souls are constantly crying out for something to drink. So we drink.

But all temporal forms of refreshment (sex, drugs, success, fame, busyness, entertainment, travel, materialism) are, in the end, saltwater. In the moment, they taste and feel like water to the lips but they only succeed in making us thirstier. If we persist in drinking them, they are spiritually terminal.

But this isn’t the worst tragedy. The greater tragedy by far is that those of us who have come to know Christ continue to drink the same saltwater that unbelievers drink, though perhaps in more socially acceptable forms.

When we feel the thirst of insecurity, for example, do we turn to the Lord or do we buy

### Introduction.

Have you ever felt that this can’t be all there is—that somehow there must be something deeper, something more to the Christian life? Something you don’t need to act out but a palpable source of energy and life flowing from the heart? Not behavior modification by your own effort and discipline but life transformation through God’s power? Jesus clearly taught that there was when he said, “if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” John goes on to tell us, “By this he meant the Spirit” (John 7:37-39). According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the source of that “something more,” the source of what’s missing.



clothes, lift weights, clamor for attention, flirt, judge others or put others down, or get jealous? When we feel the thirst of loneliness or dissatisfaction, do we turn to the Lord or do we eat, watch TV, play on the computer, fantasize, sleep?

When we need confidence, do we rely upon God or jack ourselves up with music, coffee, nicotine, Red Bull, new clothes, self-talk, cool speech? To what are we turning to satisfy those thirsts?

Though we have

living water (the Holy Spirit) within us, we satisfy our thirst in much the same ways unbelievers do. Maybe we've stopped having premarital sex or taking illicit drugs—maybe—but that doesn't mean we're not turning to saltwater. In truth, we're often consuming it daily . . . by the gallon.

And this, when you clear everything else away, is at the core of our dissatisfaction and thirst: we are not filled and do not walk with, or drink from, the Spirit in the way we could or should.

Now, it could be that we just don't know any better. Maybe we never even knew the source of living water was within us. Or maybe we thought we were supposed to gut out a godly life in our own strength through discipline and abstinence. Maybe this is all we've ever seen modeled. Whatever the reason, it doesn't matter, because we are going to change all that.

For the next two weeks, we are going to learn what it is to be filled, directed, and empowered by the Spirit. We are going to learn how to drink and satisfy our thirst the way God intended.

This devotional contains three sections. The first focuses on the scriptural and doctrinal foundations of the Spirit-filled life: what the Bible says concerning God's Spirit indwelling us. The second section will look at how we walk in, and experience, the Spirit's empowerment. And the last section explores the practical ways this empowerment overflows in love and service. If you fully engage for the next fourteen days, I guarantee your relationship with Jesus will never be the same.

#### **SECTION ONE:**

*Indwelt by the Spirit*

PERSON  
PRESENT  
SECURE  
EMPOWERED

#### **SECTION TWO:**

*Influence of the Spirit*

WALKING  
RELIANCE  
LED  
ATMOSPHERE  
AWAKE  
NAKED

#### **SECTION THREE:**

*Overflow of the Spirit*

POWER TO WITNESS  
POWER FOR HOLINESS  
POWER TO SERVE  
FATHER, SON, & HOLY SPIRIT  
STEPS



I AM WHO I AM ADONAI JEHOVA ROPHE GOD AL-  
MIGHTY FATHER LORD ELOHIM EL SHADDAI EL  
ELYON YESHUA FIRST AND LAST ALPHA AND  
OMEGA LIVING GOD EL ROI HOLY ONE GREAT  
SHEPHERD LORD OF HOSTS GOD MOST HIGH  
EVERLASTING GOD KURIOS WORD MAKER GOD  
ONLY WISE REDEEMER ADONAI AVINU CREATOR  
HOLY GLORY ETERNAL IMMANUEL

# PRESENT

And in him you too are being built together to become  
a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

EPHESIANS 2:22

OKAY, SO YOU ENTER A ROOM AND THERE YOU FIND THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE:  
TWO POWERFUL POLITICAL FIGURES (BARACK OBAMA AND MAYBE HILLARY  
CLINTON), A COUPLE OF SPORTS ICONS (LIKE TOM BRADY AND TIGER WOODS),  
YOUR TWO FAVORITE MUSICIANS (LET'S SAY DAVE MATTHEWS AND BEYONCE),  
AND TWO ACTORS WHO DEFINE BEAUTY (SUCH AS BRAD PITT AND ANGELINA  
JOLIE). THAT'S THE SCENARIO. NOW . . .

Whose presence would you find most intimidating?

How would you feel in his or her presence? Why?

Which inspires a greater sense of awe in you: being in the presence of beauty, power,  
genius, or talent? Why?

Now imagine what it would be like to stand in the presence of God. Write down the first  
five words that come to your mind ("Terrifying"? "Blinding"?).

Were your initial thoughts physical (the appearance), emotional (exciting, terrifying), or  
spiritual (unworthy, guilty)? Why, do you think?

How do these thoughts or feelings differ from those that come from being in the pres-  
ence of celebrities?

## Old Testament encounters.

Look up the following verses and make notes of three things: What  
does God communicate about himself? What does he use to commu-  
nicate it? What emotions might be evoked by that particular demon-  
stration of his character?

The Israelites' experience: Exodus 19:9-20

Moses' experience: Exodus 33:14—34:8

Elijah's experience: 1 Kings 19:9-13

## The story of God's presence and the temple.

From the time Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, God's presence had dwelled with them in a unique way. A portable tent, or tabernacle, was erected for God's residence among them. And yet it wasn't until some 450 years after their Red Sea crossing that King David's son Solomon built a permanent structure in Jerusalem, a temple, to be the earthly focal point of God's dwelling among his people. Upon the completion of the temple, there was an inauguration ceremony that concluded with Solomon praying as follows:



**NOW ARISE, O LORD GOD, AND COME TO YOUR RESTING PLACE, YOU AND THE ARK OF YOUR MIGHT. MAY YOUR PRIESTS, O LORD GOD, BE CLOTHED WITH SALVATION, MAY YOUR SAINTS REJOICE IN YOUR GOODNESS. O LORD GOD, DO NOT REJECT YOUR ANOINTED ONE. REMEMBER THE GREAT LOVE PROMISED TO DAVID YOUR SERVANT.**

**WHEN SOLOMON FINISHED HIS PRAYER, FIRE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND CONSUMED THE BURNT OFFERING AND THE SACRIFICES, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD FILLED THE TEMPLE.**

**THE PRIESTS COULD NOT ENTER THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD BECAUSE THE GLORY OF THE LORD FILLED IT. WHEN ALL THE ISRAELITES SAW THE FIRE COMING DOWN AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD ABOVE THE TEMPLE, THEY KNELT ON THE PAVEMENT WITH THEIR FACES TO THE GROUND, AND THEY WORSHIPED AND GAVE THANKS TO THE LORD, SAYING, "HE IS GOOD; HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER."** 2 CHRONICLES 6:41—7:3

All in all, a pretty wild demonstration of God's power as his presence filled the temple. And, by the way, this was a one-time performance. While God's presence continued to dwell in the temple throughout Israel's history, it was only at the inauguration (the grand opening so-to-speak) that we witness such a dramatic scene—God visibly demonstrating that his presence now dwelled in the temple among his people. Another event wouldn't occur like this until after Jesus had been raised. And it's that event that we want to look at next.

## The new temple.

Read Acts 2.

Pentecost was a Jewish harvest festival celebrating the firstfruits of the coming harvest. How does this backdrop aid our understanding of the event?

Why do you think God chose speaking in different languages as a sign of his presence among the church?

What other tangible results or outworkings of the Spirit's presence do you see in this chapter?

How were the disciples different as a result of the Spirit's presence?

In light of the fear and awe associated with God's presence throughout Israel's history, how do you think the disciples felt when they realized that **they** were the new temple? (Excited? Paranoid?)

According to God's Word, the moment you trusted Christ, the Holy Spirit was given to you and indwells you. You are now God's temple. "You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13).

Like the filling of the Jerusalem temple, the Pentecost event in Acts 2 was a unique display of God's empowering presence. Typically, our experience of God's indwelling lacks this supernatural commotion. Rather, this is something we are to take by faith in what Scripture has promised, and what it's promised is that God lives in you and will never leave.

As best you can remember, when did you place your faith in Christ? What were the circumstances surrounding your decision?

As you let your mind mull over this fact—that through the Holy Spirit, God actually indwells you—what are some of the immediate implications that come to mind?

Tracing the word "filled" in a single chapter of Acts sheds light on the way in which we feel and experience the Spirit's presence:

**Saul, who was also called Paul, FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT . . .**

**When the Jews saw the crowds, THEY WERE FILLED WITH JEALOUSY. . . .**

**The disciples WERE FILLED WITH JOY AND WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** ACT 13:9, 45, 52, EMPHASIS ADDED

How is being filled with the Spirit similar to be filled with joy or jealousy? How is it different?

Why do you think God makes his influence and presence so subtle in our lives, working in concert with our own thoughts and emotions rather than overriding them?

How have you experienced or felt the Spirit's presence or influence in your life since becoming a Christian?

What variables might affect how much you feel or experience the Spirit's influence? Put another way, are there things you can do to increase or decrease the Spirit's influence upon your thoughts and actions?

As the Lord indwells you, your life is now his home. What about your life right now do you think Jesus would want to change to make his new temple more of a "holy dwelling"?





# EMPOWERED

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. EPHESIANS 5:18

And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. EZEKIEL 36:27

## The tyranny of $F=ma$ .

$F=ma$  is why skateboarding is painful, why faces (and other things) sag, and why airlines stay in business. It's the equation that describes the law of gravity. There are also moral laws, and just like their physical counterparts, they are binding on all of us. Which of the following moral laws do you find most difficult to keep?

*Do Not Lie; Do Not Lust; Do Not Hate; Do Not Gossip; Do Not Worry; Do Not Covet; Love the Lord Your God with All Your Heart, Soul, and Mind.*

If you could be exempt from any one of these moral laws, which would you choose?

Do you think people who have never read the Bible know these moral laws exist? (Look at Romans 1.)

A plane flies due to the ingenious shape of its wings. Higher air pressure under the wing actually lifts the plane and cancels out the law of gravity. This principle is famously known as Bernoulli's principle. In an interesting parallel, Romans 7 and 8 describe the inescapable gravity of the law of sin, which is binding on all of us—all of us, that is, except those living by the law of the Spirit. The law of the Spirit is able to cancel out sin's gravity.



## The Law of Gravity.

Read Romans 7:7-25

What does Paul mean when he says, "**I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT I DO, FOR WHAT I WANT TO DO I DO NOT DO, BUT WHAT I HATE I DO**" ROMANS 7:15

In speaking of the Old Testament commandments, Paul seems to indicate that they actually increased the desire to sin. How have you experienced this effect with laws and rules?

What, then, was the point of God giving us the commandments (the law)?



In what ways have you experienced, or are you experiencing, this “law of sin” in your life?

### Power outage.

*When a hurricane hit South Florida, Norena’s home was one of many severely damaged. The elderly woman received an insurance settlement for repairs. However the contractor took her money and skipped town leaving an unfinished home with no electricity. Norena has been living without power ever since.*

*The astounding part of this story is that the hurricane was Hurricane Andrew. Norena has been living in the dark since 1992: no heat, no air conditioning, not one hot shower. Without money to finish the repairs, Norena just got by with a small lamp and a single burner. Acting on a tip, the mayor of Miami-Dade got involved. It only took a few hours of work by an electrical contractor to return power to the house. “It’s hard to describe having [the electricity] . . . to switch on,” she said. “It’s overwhelming.”<sup>3</sup>*

### The principle of flight.

Though the Spirit indwells us the moment we trust Christ, most believers live out their Christian life under their own strength and self-effort. That’s not the Christian life. Not even close. To use the airplane metaphor, our best efforts cannot prevail against the gravity of sin and our sinful nature. In fact, the harder we try, the stronger the pull of gravity. What happens, for example, when I say, “Whatever you do, do not look at the paper airplane”? It made you want to look more, didn’t it? Moral laws make us aware of our sin problem, but they are powerless to fix it, powerless to transform us. They are an x-ray machine alerting us to our moral problem, not a doctor able to fix it.

The only way to overcome the law of sin is by a new principle: the law of the Spirit.

**“THROUGH CHRIST JESUS THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE SET ME FREE FROM THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH.” ROMANS 8:2**

### Roman law.

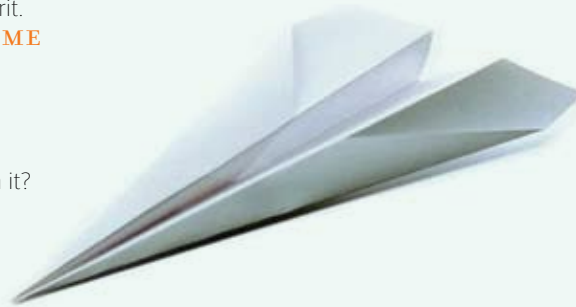
Carefully read Romans 7:24—8:18. What is condemnation? Why are we free from it?

What difference does this make, or should this make, to us?

In this passage we find living by the law and living by the Spirit contrasted. Write out those contrasts.

As referenced in Romans 8:18, we won’t have a sin nature in heaven. Currently, however, we are indwelt by both the Spirit and our sinful nature, and therein lies our struggle. In what area of your life are you most experiencing this struggle?

What might be some of God’s purposes in allowing this struggle and not removing our sin nature here and now?



When referring to our sin nature, Paul often uses the word “flesh”—a great word that connotes our deeply engrained habits of sin. (Some Bible translations leave the word “flesh,” but others replace it with “sin nature” for clarity.) Our flesh is strongest in those areas where we cultivated its influence and gave ourselves over to its indulgence. In what ways or areas of your life did you do this? Where is your flesh strongest?

While the Scriptures elsewhere answer, “How are we to live by the Spirit?” they do not do so here. What is highlighted is the reality of both indwelling influences and the choice we have to live according to one or the other. In the devotions that follow we’ll look closely at how to live by the Spirit. But before we do, it’s important to reflect on this question: how are you currently attempting to “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (Romans 8:13) and grow in holiness? Describe:

How, as they say, is that working out for you?

Write a note to God, giving voice to any questions or frustrations you’ve had in your struggle with sin:

God often allows us to struggle in our self-effort because we need to come to the end of ourselves before we are ready to begin walking in reliance upon his Spirit. Walking in the Spirit and being filled and empowered is a lifestyle, and learning is a lifelong process. For now, we just want to take the first step to which Romans 8 calls us, and that is to decide to walk in step with God’s Spirit. There are three important questions you need to ask yourself, which in fact comprise this decision:

*Are you willing to surrender control of your life to the Lord Jesus Christ?*

*Are you willing to confess sin and turn from it as God reveals it to you?*

*Do you sincerely desire to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit?*

If you can say yes to these questions, then you can pray right now. Ask God—from this point forward—to lead, direct, and empower your life through his indwelling Spirit. Also ask him to show you, step by step, what it means to walk in the power of the Spirit.

*Dear Father . . .*

If “asking” was the first step of walking in the Spirit, then the second step is to trust and believe. By faith, trust God to lead and empower you as you seek daily to walk in step with him.

So, how do we daily walk in step with the Spirit? Let’s press on to section two . . .

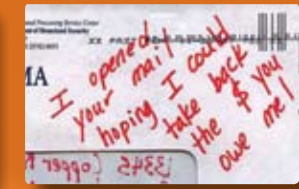
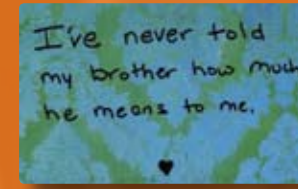
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EFTRIGHTLEFTTRIGHTLEFTTR  
ICHTLEFTTRIGHTLEFTTRIGHT  
LEFTRIGHTLEFTTRIGHTLIGH

# WALKING

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep  
in step with the Spirit. GALATIANS 5:25


### Can't seem to get clean.

Researchers at the University of Toronto published experiment results suggesting that people experience a powerful urge to wash themselves when suffering from a guilty conscience. Researchers asked a portion of the volunteers to think about immoral acts they had committed, then all of the volunteers were offered an opportunity to clean their hands. Results showed that those mulling over their sins were twice as likely to jump at the offer to clean their hands.



### Postsecrets.

Each year, thousands find solace in mailing their deepest secrets to Postsecret.com, and in so doing, confess their deepest secrets and most shameful sins. If you could write a postcard to God and confess the thing or things that cause you the most guilt and remorse, what would you write? Here, have a postcard . . .

From: 

POST CARD

To:





In 1951 the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ was launched on the campus of UCLA. Today it is a missionary enterprise reaching into 190 countries with 27,000 full-time staff.

The late founder, Dr. Bill Bright, grounded the ministry on a handful of basic biblical concepts. Their simplicity makes them timeless. Here is one of Dr. Bright's simple Transferable Concepts, and it's what you need to know about confession:

### Spiritual Breathing by Bill Bright.

*For the nonbeliever, sin stands as barrier to a relationship with God; for the Christian, it stands as a barrier to fellowship and to the unimpeded influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.*

*To receive God's forgiveness, simply confess your sin and accept his forgiveness by faith. We call this process "spiritual breathing." Just as you exhale and inhale physically, so you must also breathe spiritually. You exhale spiritually when you confess your sins. The Bible promises that if you confess your sins to him, God is faithful and just to forgive you and to purify you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). To confess your sins means to agree with God about your sins. Your agreement is threefold:*

*First, you agree that your sins are wrong and grieve God. Second, you agree that God has already forgiven your sins through Christ's death and the shedding of his blood on the cross. Third, you repent. You change your attitude, which results in a change of action. Through confessing your sins, you begin the process of "spiritual breathing":*

*Exhale: Confess your sin the moment you become aware of it. Agree with God concerning it and thank him for his forgiveness.*

*Inhale: Surrender back control of your life to Christ and—by faith—rely upon his Holy Spirit to lead and empower you with his presence.*

Confession, then, is an expression of faith, which results in our experiencing what God has already done for us through the death of his Son. Christ died for each and every one of your sins; confession is the vehicle through which you experience the cleansing, mercy and forgiveness of that sacrifice.

### Walking in the light.

In 1 John 1:7-9, the apostle states:

**IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT, AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT, WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND THE BLOOD OF JESUS, HIS SON, PURIFIES US FROM ALL SIN. IF WE CLAIM TO BE WITHOUT SIN, WE DECEIVE OURSELVES AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US. IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST AND WILL FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND PURIFY US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Why does John use light as a metaphor? What does light do, and (biblically) what does it represent?

What does it mean to walk in darkness? What does it mean to walk in light?

John states that when we "walk in the light we have fellowship with one another." How does unconfessed sin affect our fellowship with other Christians?

In addressing confession, the passage underscores that God is "faithful and just." Why emphasize this?

John does not comment on the frequency of confession, though immediacy seems implied. Just thinking back to the last couple of days, how many times do you remember confessing your sin to God?

Does your answer suggest a sensitivity to sin, an insensitivity, or something in between? What would you say if "something in between" wasn't an option?

What role does faith play in confession? That is, what are the things you must choose to believe about God, about your sin, about his Word, and about your relationship with him?

### Feeling forgiven.

Our relationship with God is not affected by sin. By virtue of our new birth, we will forever be his children and he will always be our Father. But as with any relationship, sin does hinder fellowship. If you've confessed your sin, then your guilt has been forgiven and your fellowship with God has been completely restored. Yet for some sins—those ground-in, tough-to-get-out stains—you may find that feelings of guilt linger. To help in *feeling* forgiven, try the following two exercises:

*1. Write out on a piece of paper every sin you've committed that comes to mind. Next, write out across the list the words of 1 John 1:9. Then thank God, rip up the list, and throw it away—preferably where it cannot be found and posted on the Internet.*

*2. Although we can't see God, sometimes others can model his forgiveness to us. This is why Scripture tells us, "Confess your sins to each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Who could you connect with on a weekly basis to share your struggles, prayer requests, and sin?*



*Just do it: What will you do this week to establish this believer-to-believer accountability?*

The critical things to remember about confession are: You should confess sin throughout the day as soon as God makes you aware of it. Confession restores *fellowship*, not your *relationship* (that never changes). The three components of confession are *agreeing* with God that you sinned (don't justify it), *agreeing* that Christ's death paid for that sin, and *agreeing* to turn away from that sin and ask God to empower you to do so.



Because those who are led by the Spirit of God  
are sons of God. ROMANS 8:14

LEAD

START OUT GOING SOUTH ON  
INTERSTATE CROSS OVER TOLL  
ROAD TURN LEFT TOWARD OWEN  
ROAD 0.1 MILES TURN LEFT ONTO  
RT. 78 UNDER EMPASS UNTIL AVE  
STREET TURN LEFT ONTO MAP  
HILL DRIVE GO 7.6 MILES THEN  
ONTO DUMAR TO 3RD AVENUE  
COMES TO STOP GO 4.3 MILES ON  
HARRISON PARKWAY TO 280 EAST  
STROUDSVILLE TURN LEFT ONTO  
COSHEN AVENUE 2.1 MILES  
RAMP ONTO PARKDALE TURNPIKE  
CROSS OVER TOLL ROAD FOLLOW  
US 81 INTERSECTION OF CHADS  
FORD AND MUNDTH STRAIGHT FOR  
4.5 MILES EXIT 27 TOWARD EASTON  
LEFT ON CONNOLLY ROAD .06 MILES  
THEN COME TO A STOP.

*COUNCIL: "A flood. This has been the hottest, driest summer on record, and you say we're going to have a flood. When might we expect this?"*

*EVAN: "September 22nd at midday. That's what I was told."*

*COUNCIL: "Might I ask who told you?"*

*EVAN: "God."*

*COUNCIL: "God? You talk to God?"*

*EVAN: "Yes."*

*COUNCIL: "And God is talking back?"*

*EVAN: "Yeah. We've hung out a little."*

*Evan Almighty, UNIVERSAL PICTURES 2007*

Do you think you would do whatever God asked, no matter what it was? How do you know?

If you could know the future, would you really want to know it? Even if it was extremely bleak?

If you could clearly know God's will for your life in any one area, what would it be?

Do you see God's will for your future as a set plan (like a blueprint) or as something more flexible (like a map with alternate routes and destinations)?

What causes you the most anxiety about the future? Where do you struggle to believe that God's plans for you are good?

### **God leads.**

At the end of Acts 1, as the disciples seek a twelfth disciple to replace Judas, we read, "Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles" (v. 26). Though casting lots was a common way of determining God's will in Old Testament days, it's hard to imagine the disciples of Jesus looking for God's leading by rolling a pair of rocks (lots). But there's a message implicit in this story's placement, for recorded in Acts 2 (right after this story) is the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church, from which time onward following God's will and leading would never be the same.



After the story of the Spirit descending upon the church in Acts 2, there is a distinct change in the narrative of Acts as we witness firsthand God's Spirit leading and directing his people. Consider these examples:

**"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD SUDDENLY TOOK PHILIP AWAY" 8:39. "THE SPIRIT SAID TO HIM, 'SIMON, THREE MEN ARE LOOKING FOR YOU' " 10:19. "THE TWO OF THEM, SENT ON THEIR WAY BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, WENT DOWN TO SELEUCIA" ACTS 13:4.**

In what ways have you been experiencing God's leading in your life?

How have you experienced God's leading today? How do you know?

God doesn't always give immediate or initially clear answers concerning the future. Why do you think he doesn't?

The rather dramatic leading of the Spirit in the book of Acts is all in the context of ministry. Do you think being engaged in ministry and in serving others affords us a greater opportunity to see the Spirit leading?

### Recognizing God's leading.

In Scripture we observe a variety of ways through which God leads us in determining his will: through wisdom, through reasoning, through the counsel of other believers, through his Word, through circumstances, in dreams and impressions, as well as through emotions and desires. These are our spiritual senses, and God uses the discovery or discerning process to draw us closer to himself. Through which of your spiritual senses have you typically experienced God's leading?

What are some of the potential dangers in relying too much on emotions, circumstances, or impressions? How have you seen or experienced this?

As a critical and cautionary step, it's important to utilize as many of our spiritual senses as possible and to look for each to confirm the other. How are you most prone to be hasty, premature, or imbalanced in your following of God's leading?

What is Scripture's role in the process of discerning God's will?

### Gathering clues.

Think of a major issue in which you are trying to detect God's leading. Write down the clues you've uncovered so far through circumstances, Scripture, godly counsel, feelings, impressions, desires, and reasoning.

Wisdom is our acquired knowledge and experience of walking with God. When you think of how God has led you and worked in your life in the past, what insight does this provide as to how he may be leading you now?

### Finding the key.

In discovering God's will, there is one principle that's more important than any other, being foundational to all the others. It's found here in Romans 12:1-2.

**I URGE YOU, BROTHERS, IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY, TO OFFER YOUR BODIES AS LIVING SACRIFICES, HOLY AND PLEASING TO GOD—THIS IS YOUR SPIRITUAL ACT OF WORSHIP. DO NOT CONFORM ANY LONGER TO THE PATTERN OF THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND. THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TEST AND APPROVE WHAT GOD'S WILL IS—HIS GOOD, PLEASING AND PERFECT WILL. ROMANS 12:1-2**

What are the prerequisites in the passage to knowing God's "good, pleasing and perfect will"?



Why is it important to recognize and believe God's will is "good, pleasing and perfect"? Do you? Why might you doubt it?

What does living your life completely yielded, like a sacrifice, have to do with experiencing God's leading?

This passage cuts to the heart of discovering God's will. There's an awful lot of data to process when discerning God's will, and it's easy to twist the facts if you don't desire his will above all things, including above your own things. In fact, you will twist the facts. Only a heart totally yielded to God, willing to do whatever he asks, desiring his will more than one's own, can process the clues with honesty and objectivity.

In what areas are you, or would you, be most prone to manipulating the facts in order to make them conform to your will?

The decision to yield every aspect of one's life to the Lord is sometimes referred to as a "lordship decision." What do you think would be entailed in such a decision or commitment?

Is there any area of your life—future, dating, career, or something else—where you are not completely open to God's alternative leading? Are you completely willing to be led by God, sitting in the passenger seat and allowing him to drive?

If this is your desire, express to God your willingness to yield your entire life to his will. It may be most meaningful to affirm each specific area: "Lord, I give to you my career (my dating and so on)."

*Lord, I give you . . .*

# AWAKE

When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ACTS 16:7

The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” ACTS 8:29

## Perception and awareness.

*In 1998, Daniel Simons conducted a visual memory experiment in which the experimenter approached participants on a university campus asking them for directions to a nearby building. While conversing, two assistants carrying a wooden door would step between the participant and the experimenter, momentarily obscuring the participants' view. During the interruption, one of the assistants carrying the door stayed behind to continue the conversation while the original experimenter grabbed the door and walked away behind it. A shocking 50% of participants failed to detect the switch and continued with the conversation as if nothing had happened—talking to an entirely different person.<sup>10</sup>*

Let's do our own experiment on awareness and perception. Which of the following was the visual in a previous devotion?



Or how about this? Close your eyes and see how many details you can remember of a friend's room or a favorite restaurant. Or try picturing what a friend was wearing yesterday or what you wore yesterday. For the memory challenged, how about what you have on now; do you remember what you're wearing?



## Spiritually awake.

Many factors determine whether you notice something, but at the top of the list is whether you're paying attention or, better yet, looking for something specific. Odds are you'll find someone wearing a red jacket if you're looking for someone wearing a red jacket.

But let's shift our thinking from visual perception to spiritual perception—our awareness of the spiritual world. Any activity can be done being spiritually aware (awake) or asleep: by asleep, meaning that you do the activity cognizant only of the physical world: where you need to go next, what you need to do, what a person's wearing, etc. Being spiritually awake means attending to those same things while also being aware of the spiritual dimension: having one eye on the situation and one eye on God. This is sometimes called living with "expectancy," because you are expecting God to show up to lead and direct and are trusting that he's going to use you.

## Wakie, wakie.

**[ISRAEL SPEAKING] AWAKE, AWAKE! CLOTHE YOURSELF WITH STRENGTH, O ARM OF THE LORD. ISAIAH 51:9**

**[GOD SPEAKING] AWAKE, AWAKE, O ZION, CLOTHE YOURSELF WITH STRENGTH. ISAIAH 52:1**

In the book of Isaiah there is an interesting exchange between the prophet and God. Isaiah, speaking for Israel, tells the Lord to wake up and come to help them. God, in return, basically says, "You wake up! You are the ones who are spiritually asleep."

This scripture is actually the Old Testament background to Mark 4:36-41:

**LEAVING THE CROWD BEHIND, THEY TOOK HIM [JESUS] ALONG, JUST AS HE WAS, IN THE BOAT. THERE WERE ALSO OTHER BOATS WITH HIM. A FURIOUS SQUALL CAME UP, AND THE WAVES BROKE OVER THE BOAT, SO THAT IT WAS NEARLY SWAMPED. JESUS WAS IN THE STERN, SLEEPING ON A CUSHION. THE DISCIPLES WOKE HIM AND SAID TO HIM, "TEACHER, DON'T YOU CARE IF WE DROWN?" HE GOT UP, REBUKED THE WIND AND SAID TO THE WAVES, "QUIET! BE STILL!" THEN THE WIND DIED DOWN AND IT WAS COMPLETELY CALM.**

**HE SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, "WHY ARE YOU SO AFRAID? DO YOU STILL HAVE NO FAITH?" THEY WERE TERRIFIED AND ASKED EACH OTHER, "WHO IS THIS? EVEN THE WIND AND THE WAVES OBEY HIM!"**

While a storm threatens to sink the disciples' boat, Jesus remains asleep. The disciples tell him to awake. But as in the exchange in Isaiah, it turns out that they are the ones who are "asleep"—they are too spiritually groggy to recognize who Jesus is. The story in Mark 4 is not about Jesus waking up but about his disciples waking up.

What caused the alarm clock to go off for the disciples?

In a state of spiritual alertness, what do the disciples see that they haven't seen before?

Why do you think they had been asleep to the reality of Jesus' identity?



In what ways do you live unaware of Jesus—unaware of his power, unaware of his mercy, unaware of his presence?

For the disciples, it was a threatening storm. What trials has God used in your life to rouse you to awake and turn to him?

## Alert, open, expectant.

Faith and spiritual alertness are connected. What are we trusting God to do when we go about our day spiritually alert and expectant?

If you were spiritually awake throughout the day, what sorts of things might God show you or lead you to do?

When you've been spiritually aware in your conversations, what kinds of things has God brought to your mind?

What activities are you most prone to attend to in a state of spiritual slumber, oblivious to spiritual reality?

"If you went through today prayerfully and spiritually alert, it is almost guaranteed that the God of the universe would in some way communicate with you." What are your reactions to that thought? Agree or disagree?

It's doubtful that anyone spends the entire day wide awake to God and the spiritual world. But a goal of each day is to pursue spending as much time in a state of alertness and expectancy as possible. If you had to assign a number to it, what percentage of the day would you say you spend spiritually awake?

God's using us is contingent upon our availability and preparedness. Obviously, there would be little point in God bringing someone across your path who needs to hear the gospel if you were unwilling or unable to share it with that person. Using the scale below, how would you rate your openness to break from your own schedule and agenda to serve and minister to others?

**1. Closed 2. Usually Busy 3. Depends 4. Willing 5. Open 6. Available**

What, if anything, will you be doing differently?

**TRY THIS: As you go through the day, seek to be as open and connected to God as you can. Ask often, "Lord, what do you want me to see here? Do here? Say here? Learn here? Who do you want me to pray for? Encourage? Forgive? Share with?"**

