

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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“And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl 4:12)

A study of the inter-relationship between the Word of God, the Leading of the Holy Spirit and Faith.

“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Heb 10:35,36).

Leaders have a great responsibility – they must effectively lead those whom they have been given the responsibility to lead. In a very true sense, the destinies of those they are leading are in the hands of those leaders. Therefore the leader’s responsibility should never be taken lightly.

As ministry leaders, we have a responsibility to those we lead. But we have an even greater responsibility to the One who has called us into the ministry. The One who has called us is God!

Think of your responsibility in this way. The Body of believers is often referred to as the “Bride of Christ.” You and I, as pastors and leaders, are given the stewardship or responsibility to care for the “Bride of Christ.” How great a responsibility we have! Jesus will one day return for His Bride, the Church; our hope is that in that day He will say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

How, then, shall we mature to become effective leaders to whom such a great trust is given? To be effective requires that we become confident in three areas, and in this order:

1. We must first have confidence in our relationship with God.
2. Then we must have confidence in our calling.
3. Finally we must have confidence in our ministry.

It must also be understood that each one of these areas is spiritual in nature. We are clothed in a shell of flesh and blood; yet we must learn how to see, hear and understand the spiritual realm in which God lives. For God is Spirit, and it is from His Spirit that enabling power flows.

HE WHO CALLS US IS FAITHFUL

There is a major difference between a spiritual leader, such as a pastor, and other types of leaders who are in business, education or politics. The difference is the **calling**. The pastor's calling is not of man, nor of personal ambition – **it is of God**. The ministry is not a profession or a job, but a calling. But how can we best define a “calling”? The calling is an invitation from God to an individual to co-labor with Him in the fulfillment of His purpose and plan.

Along with this call comes an enablement or equipping for the task. God never fails to equip those He calls. Paul the apostle tells us, “*And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry*” (1Tim 1:12).

The call from God is not based on our talents, abilities or gifts. It is based on a potential that God sees in us called **faithfulness**. The particular faithfulness described here is not to a denomination, an organization, or individual. It is **faithfulness to God** and His call upon your life. We can be faithful, because God is always faithful to us: “*He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it*” (1Thess 5:24).

OUR SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE

Confidence is the key to effective ministry. Confidence comes from an understanding of one important thing: *the heart of our heavenly Father*. Knowing what is in the heart of the Father toward us is what gives our life meaning and purpose.

God's purpose for you, once you understand it, may surprise you; but knowing His purpose is the only way to walk in *true confidence*:

- in your relationship with Jesus,
- in your calling, and
- in your life and ministry.

PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Knowing the heart of the Father requires that we understand, from the Scriptures:

1. The **purpose** of the Father: that which prompts Him to action (His motivation).
2. The **process** of the Father: how He performs that action (His outworking).

So there is both a *purpose* and a *process*. The purpose has to do with the motivation for action; the process has to do with how that motivation is fulfilled.

As Christian leaders, we often confuse purpose and process. We try to **do** instead of first learning how to simply **be**. The Bible teaches that we are not just servants – we are first sons (Rom 8:14-17) who are then called to serve!

Our purpose is not to be doing a lot of things *for* God; just doing things has to do with process, as we shall see. **Our purpose is to first walk in relationship with our Father** (through Jesus Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit) as His sons and daughters. *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...”* (Rom 8:16,17).

A simple question may help put things in perspective. When you lie down to sleep at night and talk to God, which of the following two statements is typically the one that you would make? Is it:

1. Father, I pray that I was pleasing to You today; OR
2. Father, I pray that You are pleased with what I did for You today.

If you would more likely make statement one, then you probably understand that you are first a son. If you would make statement two, you probably see yourself more as a servant or hireling. *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”* (Rom 8:14).

Even in a natural sense, we love our children because they are our children – not because of what they can do for us. Certainly there is a proper place for work, effort and accomplishment by our children. But those things do not change the value of our children to us.

In the same way, you will never have confidence in your relationship with God or in the ministry to which He has called you until you know the truth of God's purpose for you: **God's purpose is that you walk with Him as a son!** Sonship is not earned. Sonship is given freely from God through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Gal 3:26).

PURPOSE: CONFIDENCE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

It is clear, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, that the Father's motivation throughout human history has been to: **redeem** ("take back ownership of"); **restore** ("bring back to original condition"); and **reconcile** ("restore relationship") mankind to Himself.

Sin ("rebellion against God") separated us from God our Father. However, sin did not separate us from the unconditional and unchanging love of the Father. God's love set in motion a divine plan of redemption that finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

In one of the most-quoted scriptures of the Bible, we hear the words of Jesus, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"* (John 3:16,17).

In Jesus Christ we find the motivation of God the Father – His love. We also find the process or outworking of that love – His grace. The motivation of God is love, and the process of that love in action is God's grace, shown to us in Ephesians 2:8,9: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."* The Father so loved mankind that He gave His Son as a gift (grace) and anyone who would receive and believe in His Son would have eternal life.

Now that fact settles our eternal destiny; but what about our earthly destiny? How are we to live out our lives here on earth?

OUR EARTHLY PURPOSE

From the very beginning, we were created to worship God and have fellowship with Him (Gen 3:9,10; Ps 149:4; John 4:23; Rom 12:1). So, in

addition to our sonship through Christ, another primary purpose for mankind is worshipping God.

Worship is not only music and singing unto God. More importantly, worship is a **lifestyle of commitment** to the purposes of God. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service [or worship]”* (Rom 12:1, emphasis added). Normally something that is sacrificed is dead; but we are called to be *living* sacrifices. A living sacrifice is one whose self-will has been laid down – willingly replaced by the desire to do the will of God! Our life lived in sacrifice to God’s purposes is an act of worship to Him.

Not only are we called to live a life of worship unto the Lord; we are called to fellowship with Him. How amazing that is! Fellowship means that we walk in a close relationship with our Lord, in regular two-way communication with Him. The key to any successful relationship is not just communication, but *meaningful* two-way communication.

THE PURPOSE IS SPIRITUAL

The heart of the Father toward us is clearly demonstrated through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Jesus reflected the glory of the Father, we as ministers of the Gospel are called to do the same. Our motivation for ministry must be the same as Jesus’ was. His love was born out of a love for the Father and those whom the Father loves.

We are to be like Jesus in both character *and* motivation. This is an important point. It is not enough to walk in the character of Christ, as important as character is. We must also be motivated, from our hearts, by love.

The love of Christ in our hearts is not a mental or intellectual pursuit; rather, it comes as a result of a transformation of our human, sin-filled nature. We love Jesus and those He loves, because He first loved us.

The change that takes place in us is spiritual in nature. We are not talking about just a changed mind (*repentance*) or learning new ideas. When we are born again, our very **nature** is changed. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have*

become new” (2Cor 5:17; see also 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10). This change is a spiritual transformation. It begins at the moment of believing in Jesus Christ for salvation and continues on into eternity.

Many pastors and leaders are so driven by *process* (doing the work of ministry) that they forget their primary *purpose* and abandon their spiritual roots. As a result, they begin to lean more and more on their own understanding and strength. They begin to read books and listen to teaching tapes in order to imitate the success of others in the ministry. The goal of the minister gradually changes into one of personal “success”, rather than to serve Christ and follow His plan for them.

A pastor may begin to imitate methods to try and gain success, instead of walking with the Lord and getting fresh revelation from Him. “*Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*” (Gal 3:3). The Galatian church had fallen into the same trap as so many others: trying to fulfill a spiritual calling by relying on human plans and effort.

PROCESS: CONFIDENCE IN OUR CALLING

When we accept and embrace our highest purpose – to worship God and walk with Him as sons – we can then more effectively fulfill our assignment or calling from God.

As we look at the men and women of the Bible, we discover that whenever a person came into the presence of God, it was for their *assignment* to be revealed, repeated or reinforced – not the purpose. The *purpose* for which they were created is already clear: that is to be a son who worships and fellowships with the Father daily. The *process* (or the assignment) is what we are called specifically to do as sons of the Father.

To fulfill our assignment is to be obedient to what God the Father has called us to do. This we should do without complaining, resisting or desiring to do something else. We are to take our will and willingly submit it to God, allowing our will to be conformed to His will. It is to be as if *His* heartbeat is beating within *our* heart. “*For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Phil 2:13).

GOD ALONE CALLS

We can begin to have confidence in our calling only when we are sure that it is God who called us. Ordination does not produce confidence, because ordination does not produce the calling. Bible School does not produce confidence, because Bible School does not produce the calling. Your mentor does not produce confidence, because your mentor does not produce the calling. Only One can produce the confidence you need, and that is God – because only God calls one into the ministry. When you know (have confidence) that you are called, then you can truly and confidently know that God will equip you, by His Holy Spirit, for that which He has called you to do.

THE PROCESS IS SPIRITUAL

When we embrace:

- the *purpose* of God, that we are to be His sons (confidence in our relationship); and
 - the *call* of God in our lives (confidence in the call)
- ...THEN we will have a growing confidence in the ministry!

We must never lose sight of the fact that this life is a spiritual journey. As New Testament believers, we are spiritual beings. It may help to understand this concept about life: We are not human beings who are having a temporary spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings who are having a temporary human experience!

We are spirit, soul and body... but spirit first. We are not spirit only under certain circumstances or during certain times. We are called to “walk by the Spirit” **at all times** (Rom 8:1,5,6; Gal 5:16). That means we wake up “in the Spirit”, we eat “in the Spirit”, we work “in the Spirit”, we minister “in the Spirit”, we are husbands “in the Spirit”, and we are fathers “in the Spirit”. We are spiritual not only when we pray or read the Bible or preach. As believers we are always spiritual (1Cor 10:31; Col 3:17)! Therefore, let us walk in the Spirit as spiritual men and women, confident because of our solid foundation in God through Christ.

FOUNDATIONS

A building is no more secure than the foundation upon which it is built.

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones...” (1Cor 3:11,12).

Among Bible-believing Christians, there should be no debate about the spiritual foundation of our faith and belief: **That foundation is faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone.** The problems and disagreements in the Church, however, often arise concerning *how* we build upon that solid foundation.

By what process should we be building the new life in Christ? Is the new life built on a physical foundation, a series of do's and don'ts, a certain way of dressing and behaving? Is the new life built upon a foundation of intellectual understandings or, in other words, is knowledge the key? Or is the new life built upon a spiritual foundation directed by the Holy Spirit? These questions are what lead to so much confusion and even division in the Church. It is the “how's” that can be so confusing.

The truth is that we all would probably agree that the work of Christ in us is spiritual; yet, in truth, we tend to lean on the physical realm and the intellectual or knowledge realm to accomplish a spiritual goal.

We are encouraged by Scripture to build with gold, silver and precious stones (1Cor 3:12-14). What do these elements represent? How do we construct a life that cannot be shaken? How do we construct a life, in Christ, that is filled with joy, peace and victorious living, regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves?

SEEING THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH

Deuteronomy 29:29 states, *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*

This scripture verse indicates that there are some things that God has enabled us to understand, and other things that are too high or lofty for us to understand. *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isa 55:8,9).*

When we encounter things that are too high for us to understand, we must accept them by faith. Faith enables us to see the invisible, to accept those thoughts and ideas of God that are too high for us to understand with our natural minds (Prov 3:5-8).

For example, the mystery of the Trinity is one of those truths that require thought that is higher than ours. This concept cannot be well understood in human terms because we have no point of reference to describe “three in one”.

It is clear from Scripture that God is One. Yet we are required to comprehend that God is also three. People use different terms to describe the essence of the three: three dimensions, personalities, out-workings. By this, we try to describe the truth that God exhibits Himself in three ways: as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. All three are co-equal; all three are One!

When we try to describe Him as three in one, however, we always fall short. We try examples such as: “God is like the plant with three leaves – three leaves yet one plant”; or, “God is like a man – a man can be a father, son and brother at the same time, three in one.” But these illustrations fall short of being able to completely explain this essential doctrine of the “three in one” God. Then what are we to do?

First, we must remind ourselves that God’s ways and God’s thoughts are much higher than, or superior to, our own thoughts. How can we as human beings understand how He spoke the Universe into existence? It is impossible to us, and **so we are called to accept this difficult concept by faith**. We are told that today we understand in part, but one day we will understand fully: *“For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away”* (1Cor 13:9,10). Some describe the doctrine of the Trinity as:

- God the Father as the One who wills it (The Source);
- God the Son as the One who speaks it (The Word);
- God the Holy Spirit as the One who accomplishes it (The Power).

Truly, it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can build a life as an “overcomer in Christ” (1John 4:4; 5:4). Our Christian life is not solely a physical or intellectual journey; it is primarily a spiritual journey led by the Holy Spirit!

UNDERSTANDING THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WAYS

Much has been written and taught on the subject of the Holy Spirit and His work over the last 100 years. Topics addressed concerning the Holy Spirit's work – in salvation, in sanctification, in transformation, in worship, in ministry, and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit – have unfortunately been made, at times, more cloudy rather than clear.

It is one thing to describe or be taught about the work of the Holy Spirit. It is quite another matter to understand the “how” of walking by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Added to that is the necessary cooperation with the Holy Spirit that is also required on our part.

We cannot “study” the work of the Holy Spirit as an *outsider looking in*. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures tell us that it is impossible to discern or understand the things of the Spirit unless we are spiritual. *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1Cor 2:14).

One cannot discern or see the things inside a living human cell without “special eyes” (a microscope). We cannot see the detail in distant stars and celestial bodies without “special eyes” (a telescope). In the same way, we cannot see the things of the Spirit with our *natural eyes*; we need “special eyes” – *spiritual eyes* to “see” (understand) the spiritual realm.

Most people are no closer to understanding how to be *filled* or *led* by the Holy Spirit, or how to operate in His power and authority, than they were when this once-hidden reality was revealed 2,000 years ago. The things of the Spirit were never intended to be hidden from the children of God. If they do seem obscure, it is because we are looking with the “wrong” set of eyes.

The things of the Spirit are spiritually appraised. We are not going to get understanding of the Spirit and His ways by leaning on our own ability to comprehend. We will become familiar with spiritual things as we learn to walk with the Holy Spirit of God.

THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER

In the Book of Genesis, Adam did not become a living being until God breathed life or spirit into Adam. *“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”* (Gen 2:7). This leads us to the first consideration: **We are spiritual, not natural.** This truth may require a major change in perspective or view; but once it is embraced, everything that is spiritual becomes more clear. As previously stated, “we are not human beings who are having a temporary spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings who are having a temporary human experience.”

When Jesus Christ was crucified, died, was buried and rose again, He ushered in a New Covenant, of which He was the Mediator. Jesus taught that this New Covenant was based on better promises than the old covenant it replaced. *“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.”* (Heb 8:6)

Jesus also fulfilled the requirement that released the “promise of the Father” – the Holy Spirit living or dwelling in the believer: *“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now”* (Acts 1:4,5).

One needs to understand, by faith, the awesome and powerful nature of this truth. The Holy Spirit is no longer just “with” or “on” a person, but now can dwell within the born-again believer! This is a truth that may not be fully understood in our minds. However, it *must be fully embraced by faith* if we are to truly walk by the Spirit!

JESUS CHRIST IS THE FOUNDATION

There is no question that Jesus Christ is to be the foundation of our faith and practice: *“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (1Cor 3:11).

Jesus is our Chief Cornerstone: *“This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone”* (Acts 4:11).

The question for us becomes: How does one grow or build upon that foundation which is Christ? We agree that the Bible, the Holy Spirit and faith are all essential – but our human tendency is to emphasize one over the others.

In the Church today, there tends to be an overemphasis on one doctrine or truth over another. This is simply normal human behavior. As human beings, we tend to overemphasize one area over another. It is difficult for most people to maintain a balance among several competing interests or areas.

For example, most people struggle with balancing their family life with their work life and their church life. Very often we have to take time to re-evaluate and re-set priorities. It is likely that we do not do this as often as we should. But as pastors and leaders, this is especially important, because it is far too easy to become overly busy in the activities of ministry. We often become imbalanced, giving far too little time to crucial areas vital to a healthy relationship with God and our family.

Establishing and maintaining priorities is very much like being the captain of a large ship. The captain's primary responsibility is to make sure that the ship stays on course. This is done by constantly checking where the ship *has been*, where the ship *is now* and where the ship *is going*. The captain uses the ship's navigation equipment, and by making small daily course corrections, he maintains the ship's course to its proper destination.

In the same way, a successful Christian life requires constant daily monitoring of the Word, of the leading of the Spirit and of faith, to maintain the course toward the destination of maturity in Jesus Christ.

GOD HAS GIVEN US:

- The gift of His Son who has settled the question of eternity for us: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).
- His help to become more than conquerors in this life: *“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (Rom 8:37).
- All that we need for life and godliness: *“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2 Peter 1:2,3).
- His Word through the Scriptures: *“And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures”* (Luke 24:45).

- Access to His Holy Spirit: *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you”* (John 14:16,17).
- A measure of faith: *“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith”* (Rom 12:3).

God has given us all of these precious powers, authority and abilities because He knew that we would need them. How can we then refuse any one of them as we build the Christian life?

BALANCED GROWTH

In the Church today, there are many different opinions as to what is important for spiritual growth. Some say, “All we need is the Bible!” Others say, “All we need is the Spirit!” Still others say, “All we need is more faith!”

All of these statements are true; but they *must be taken together* and integrated into a lifestyle that incorporates all three. **The Bible, the Holy Spirit and faith were all designed to work together.**

In order to have completeness, we need a beginning, a middle and an end. The balance of the three – the Bible, the Spirit and faith – produces completeness. The relationship between the Word (Bible), the Holy Spirit and faith, when out of balance, produces frustration, discouragement, ineffectiveness and division.

It has been said that if you focus only on the Word you will “dry up.” If you focus only on the Spirit you will “blow up”. And if you focus only on faith you will “give up”. But when you embrace all three of these important areas – the Bible, the Spirit and faith – you will “grow up.”

Being a Christian is about becoming mature in our relationship with God, and in our relationships with one another. This kind of maturity requires us to understand that we need three things:

1. **The Bible:** *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2Tim 2:15).
2. **The leading of the Holy Spirit:** *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”* (Rom 8:14).
3. **To learn to walk by faith:** *“For we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2Cor 5:7).

These three provisions of God are not to be taken separately. All have equal importance in our spiritual walk with Him. The Bible is a spiritual book; the Holy Spirit is, obviously, spiritual; and finally, faith operates in the spiritual realm.

SPIRITUAL ESSENTIALS

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:17,18).

In the New Testament alone, the word “spirit” is used 349 times; the word “faith” is used 243 times; and the term “word” is used 218 times. It is clear that these three elements are important to God and therefore should be important to us.

To understand and operate in only one or two of these doctrines is to be operating at one-third to two-thirds of our God-given power and authority! It would be like driving a car with six cylinders and only two or four of the cylinders are operating. Can you imagine how difficult and frustrating it would be to drive, especially going uphill?

That is how it is when we do not have all three – the Bible, the Holy Spirit and faith – operating in our lives. Having the balance between the Bible, the Holy Spirit and faith is critical when we face challenges or difficulties in life. There is nothing like the trials and tribulations of life to show us that we are inadequate to handle these events in our own strength and wisdom alone.

TAKE ALL THAT HE HAS PROVIDED!

The word “tripod” means a device, a stand or a piece of furniture with three legs. It provides a stable base or foundation for whatever is placed upon it. Two examples would be a three-legged stool or a stand for a camera.

The tripod legs must be of equal strength and equal length in order to provide stability. Try to imagine a two-legged stool, or even a three-legged stool where one leg is much shorter than the others. Under those conditions, the tripod is ineffective and at times even dangerous.

Imagine now that our “spiritual tripod” has three solid legs of equal length; one leg is the Bible, the second leg is the Holy Spirit, and the third leg is faith. Now that is a foundation that will support an individual with confidence and assurance!

God provided His Word, His Holy Spirit and a measure of faith so that we would walk this life in victory and success. Remember Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

God always equips and provides for His purposes and His assignments. Take *all* that He has provided you – the Bible, the Holy Spirit and a measure of faith. Stand securely on the “spiritual tripod” of the Bible, the Holy Spirit and Faith!

THE BIBLE IS A SPIRITUAL BOOK

There is no question about the importance of the Scriptures – the Word of God, the Bible. *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim 3:16,17).

Without God’s Word, there is no Gospel or “Good News”: *“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’”* (Mark 16:15,16).

Without the Gospel, there is no ability for faith to be built: *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17). Therefore it becomes impossible to please God: *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb 11:6).

It is clear that the Word of God is of infinite value. But what is of equal value is to understand the role of the Holy Spirit ~~plays~~ in our ability to

comprehending and live out the Scriptures by activating our faith. We need all three – the Bible, the Spirit and faith – to be maturing and growing together; and all three are to be integrated, or operating together as one.

ILLUMINATION BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

There is a natural tendency to depend upon or lean on our own understanding. We are creatures of experience. Almost everything we learn is by experience. From the time we are born, we are experiencing our environment through our five senses – touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing.

We draw conclusions about how life works based upon our experiences and how we interpret those experiences. That is why there are so many different points of view or opinions.

For example: All members of the same family are exposed to similar experiences; yet each family member is so different and unique in his/her personality or view of life. While each person may experience similar events, each one interprets those similar events differently and draws conclusions that can be totally different.

Now here is the important point: If everyone were to lean on their own natural understanding of the Bible, we would have as many opinions about the Bible as there are people! Therefore, God in His wisdom has given us the Spirit of Truth so that we would recognize the truth: *“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me”* (John 15:26).

In theology, there is the term, **illumination**. This term is used to describe spiritual enlightenment. When applied to the study of the Bible, it is a work of the Holy Spirit that produces understanding of the Word of God. The point here is that the Bible is spiritual because the illumination of the Holy Spirit is necessary in order to understand its truths.

Before I came to know Christ, I would read the Bible. As a matter of fact, when I was in college the Bible was part of a required course. When I read the Bible at that time, it made no sense to me. It seemed to be foolishness to my natural mind. You see, the Holy Spirit was not illuminating the Word because I was trying to understand with my natural mind only (1Cor 2:14). I was not spiritually born-again (John 3:5,6).

But when Christ came into my life as Lord and Savior, my “spiritual eyes” were opened (Acts 26:18; Eph 1:18); what was foolishness before became truth and life (1Cor 1:18-25)! The difference in understanding was due to the work of the Holy Spirit in my life (John 16:13,14).

SEVEN TRUTHS ABOUT THE BIBLE

The following are seven important principles regarding the Bible, the Word of God:

1. **The Bible is the inspired word of God.** *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...”* (2Tim 3:16). This statement means that all of the Scriptures are true, as given in the original text. From Genesis to Revelation, it is all truth. We do not pick and choose what is true or not true; we embrace it all. This means that we accept by faith even those things that may not make sense to us.
2. **The Bible contains the message; God is the Source of the message.** This means that the message is not *more* important than the One who sent the message. Jesus, while speaking to the religious leaders of the day, makes a remarkable statement: *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life”* (John 5:39,40). We are supposed to fall in love with the Author of the Bible, not with the Bible itself. There are some who hold the Bible in such high esteem that they miss the desire of Father God for them to have a personal and intimate relationship with Him.
3. **The Bible is holy and sacred.** *“Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him”* (Prov 30:5). We honor the Bible by doing what the Bible instructs us to do. Jesus made it very clear that it is not just the hearer of the Word, but the one who is a hearer **and a doer** of the Word who honors God and builds a solid foundation in Christ (1Cor 3:11; Jas 1:22-25).
4. **The words of life are found in the Bible.** Jesus makes the following statement: *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”* (John 5:24). The Apostle Paul also proclaims: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’”* (Rom 1:16,17).

5. **The Bible is the complete revelation of God to man.** This means that all doctrine and statements of belief must come from one source, the Bible. There are no revelations from God that have not already been given in the Bible. *“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him”* (Eph 1:17).
6. **The Bible reveals who we truly are, what we can expect from God and what God expects from us.** *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Ps 119:105; Ps 19:7-11).
7. **The Bible is not primarily an intellectual book; the Bible is a spiritual book that must be spiritually discerned.** *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2Tim 2:15). *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1Cor 2:14).

FAITH IS A SPIRITUAL ISSUE

There are two words that have very similar meanings in most languages: **faith** and **confidence**. Because of their similarity, they are often used interchangeably. For our purpose of seeing that faith is a work of the Holy Spirit, it is important to make a critical distinction between these two words.

In the original New Testament Greek, the word for “faith” is ***pistis***; the word for “confidence” is ***parrhesia***. They are two entirely different words with different roots; therefore they have different meanings.

While faith and confidence may produce a similar emotion or feeling, faith is spiritual and confidence is of the soul. *Faith* is what moves God (Heb 11:6); *confidence* is what moves man. **True faith will produce true confidence.**

The scriptural type of faith is not an emotion or feeling, but a *spiritual decision*. Confidence, on the other hand, has connected to it a series of emotions – such as boldness, courage and assurance. Now it is wonderful when the emotion of confidence lines up with faith; yet confidence is *not* faith because it is possible to have “false confidence”.

Faith is believing what God has said, and acting on that belief. In other words, faith results in action or obedience, or doing the will of God.

BASED ON GOD'S PROMISES

The essential Scripture verse, when it comes to faith, is of course Hebrews 11:1: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

The first part of this scripture tells us that faith is the substance (or reality) of what is hoped for. The question we must ask ourselves is, “What is it that we can hope for?” Can I hope for anything I want? Can I hope for a new house, a new car, a million dollars?

Biblical hope is not based upon personal desire or whim. **Biblical hope is based on the promises of God.** That is because *“faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17). The more you hear (or study) the Word of God, the more you will be aware of God’s promises; the more aware you become of God’s promises, the greater your hope in God will be; and finally, the greater your hope in God, the greater your basis of faith will be! Anything that God has promised in His Word forms the basis of our hope. Therefore, what God has promised acts like a spark that ignites our faith to believe God for great things.

It has been estimated that there are more than 7,000 promises in the Bible. These promises represent the basis of our faith. This is one of the reasons that it is important to know the Word of God.

The second part of Hebrews 11:1 states that faith is *“the evidence of things not seen.”* The things not seen are spiritual; therefore faith is the evidence of the spiritual realm. We could explain it another way by saying that faith is the evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in you. Confidence is natural; but faith is when the Holy Spirit joins with the Word of God and you are stirred into obedience towards God.

EXERCISING OUR FAITH

The Bible tells us that it is impossible to please God without faith. *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb 11:6).

What we can glean from this scripture is this: **Faith is impossible unless the will of God is known!** In order to be an effective Christian leader, it is essential that each of us know the will of God for our life. We need to know and understand God's purpose, callings or assignments for our lives. When we know the will of God, we can put our faith into action!

How do we know the will of God? We have His Word and His Spirit (2Tim 3:16,17; John 14:16,17). We can pray and ask for God's wisdom (Prov 2:1-7; Jas 1:5). God has made every provision to make His will known to us so that we can walk by faith and not by sight.

Now, God has given each one of us a measure of faith: *“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith”* (Rom 12:3). Because faith is spiritual, it is a gift of God. We are, of course, responsible for that gift – to grow it to maturity through use. *“But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”* (Heb 5:14). Nothing builds faith more quickly than faith that has been exercised and fulfilled.

Because we are spiritual and learning to walk by faith and not by sight, we will be able to discern that which is true from that which is false. As pastors and leaders, we need to be led by the Spirit of God; we need to embrace the teachings of the Bible; and, by faith, we need to be obedient to what God has called us to. We live in a day and age when the wisdom of man is placed above the wisdom of God. Our spiritual calling demands that we not compromise our critical assignment: to bring the truth of God to bear upon the desperate needs of a confused and often deceived humanity.

THE TRIUNE NATURE OF MAN: SPIRIT, SOUL AND BODY

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow [or body], and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12),

THE NUMBER THREE

Numbers, combinations of numbers and multiple numbers have always held a fascination for Bible scholars and students of the Bible. Numbers such as 3, 7, 12, 40 and 666 are found throughout the Bible and have special symbolic significance. Many books have been written about the importance and symbolism of numbers in the Bible.

For example, the number seven has great significance in the Bible. It is used well over 600 times in a variety of ways and symbols. Seven is associated with the idea of completeness and the highest level of force or power; hence, 777 is often referred to as the number of God.

Similarly, the number 666, falling short of 777, is symbolic of imperfection; therefore, 666 is assigned to be the number of man and of the Beast: *“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666”* (Rev 13:18).

The number three also has obvious and great significance in the Bible. Three is symbolic of a beginning, middle and end; therefore it is regarded as representing a complete or ordered whole. Some practical examples are: morning, noon and night as a complete day; childhood, youth and old age as a complete life; heaven, earth and sea as a complete environment.

The number three is used more than 400 times in Scripture. For example, the number three is used to describe:

1. The number of people (*“And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth”* – Gen 6:10).
2. The number of places (*“three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west”* – Rev 21:13).
3. The number of things (*“So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes’”* – Gen 18:6).
4. A period of time (*“And Joseph said to him, ‘This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days’”* – Gen 40:12).

The number three has special significance for Christians because God is triune or “three in one”: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; yet all three are one God. This is the doctrine of the Trinity.

Other uses of the number three include the following: Jesus rose from the dead in three days. God is described as the one *“who is, who was and who is*

to come” (Rev 1:4). All of these examples show the symbolic importance of the number three as representing completeness in the Bible.

BASIS OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNICATION

We understand that man is made in the image of God: *“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’”* (Gen 1:26).

Therefore we should not be surprised to see that man is also *triune* or “three in one”. Man is spirit, soul and body in one person: *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1Thess 5:23; see also Hebrews 4:12).

This last fact, that we are spirit, soul and body, is so important to our understanding of how we grow and mature as Christians. Paul the apostle, in the conclusion of his letter to the church at Thessalonica, prays a blessing upon the whole spirit, soul and body of each believer (1Thess 5:23). Paul recognized that man is triune or made up of three parts. He did not refer to soul and body only, but to *spirit, soul and body*. Also notice that he placed the spirit first, then the soul, and finally the body. In other words, he was emphasizing that we are spirit first.

As God is three in one or triune – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – so are we triune – spirit, soul and body. Perhaps this is part of what God meant when He said, *“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...”* (Gen 1:26).

We are three-dimensional, not two-dimensional. The significance of seeing yourself as spirit, soul and body as opposed to seeing yourself only as body and soul is profound. It will change how you see yourself and your world – and, most importantly, how you see your relationship with God.

We need to recognize and accept the truth that we are spiritual beings. We need to recognize that as the Scriptures say, *“God is Spirit, and those that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth”* (John 4:24). Then we will

begin to see the possibility of communication with God in a new and vital way: **spiritual communication!**

Why is it that so many are resistant to the truth that we are spiritual? There are many reasons; probably the most common is the spread of so-called modern philosophies and teachings that promote a humanistic modern world view.

THE MODERN WORLD VIEW

Many people have opinions based on nothing more than feelings. These feelings are often a result of peer-group pressures, societal pressures, family pressures and even media pressures. We are influenced by the things we are taught, the things we read, the entertainment we participate in and even the friends we associate with.

This has been taking place since the day we were born and has helped shape what many call our “worldview”. Our worldview is the filter through which we see life; and in large part, it forms the opinions we have about virtually everything in life.

For example, as individuals we have opinions about issues such as: capital punishment, abortion, homosexuality, pornography, politics, the role of government, truth, sin, God, church – to name just a few.

The important question concerning your worldview is: How did you arrive at your opinion and why? Are the opinions you have formed based on whim, circumstances or reactions? Or are they carefully considered thought and illumination based upon a foundation of core beliefs?

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: WHAT WE WERE CREATED FOR

Worldly thinking assumes that the more modern or sophisticated we become, the less important the spiritual aspect of our lives becomes. This wrong kind of thinking has impacted every culture. To many modern thinkers, the concept of spiritual communication with God is childish and fanciful. This kind of thinking impacts our worldview or the overall perspective from which we see and interpret the world. It especially influences how we see God and our relationship with Him.

Today, many are presenting as truth their personal opinions, secular humanism and other forms of the “traditions of men”. Paul the apostle cautions us against taking a non-biblical worldview: *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ”*(Col 2:8). The common secular worldview wants to deny, diminish or ignore the importance of the spiritual. But throughout the Word of God is a very different message to us.

Remember the saying, *“we are not human beings who are having a temporary spiritual experience, but spiritual beings who are having a temporary human experience”*? The spiritual realm is not something that we experience in life only at certain times and seasons. The spiritual life relates to who we are; the spiritual life is what we were created for.

We were known by God even before we were born, and when we die it is our spirit-man that dwells with God forever. *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations”* (Jer 1:5). *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10).

COMMUNICATION

“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4,5).

I was raised in a family where my parents were both deaf-mutes (they could not speak or hear). They communicated with each other and other deaf-mutes by using their hands to indicate letters and words. This is known as American Sign Language, or ASL. Since I was the firstborn child, I naturally learned to communicate using this form of sign language before I even learned to speak.

In a sense, my vocal abilities and hearing abilities were useless in trying to communicate with my parents. In the same way, their signing abilities would have been useless in trying to communicate with a non-signing person. The

problem was not a lack of communication, but an inability to discern or understand the correct mode of communication.

In the same way, we often try to use the wrong senses to communicate with God. We try to use our natural senses to communicate with God who is Spirit (John 4:24). Yet He has given us supernatural or spiritual abilities to communicate with Him.

COMMUNICATION AND FELLOWSHIP

In order to understand the operation of the Holy Spirit, it is essential to understand how communication takes place between the Holy Spirit and an individual. But before we can effectively study that topic, we need to agree that God can and does communicate with us and that we are able to communicate with God.

The Bible gives us many accounts of communication between God and mankind. In the Garden of Eden, God communed with Adam and Eve directly (Gen 2:16,17). Their communication was personal and open. Tragically, as a result of their disobedience and rebellion, that open personal communication was broken (Gen 3:8-24).

Now which of us has not experienced in our personal life a break in relationship that also produced a corresponding break in communication? Have you ever been so upset with someone that you then found it difficult to communicate with them, especially in a loving manner?

The consequence of Adam and Eve eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was death (Gen 2:16,17). The death was more than just eventually a physical death; the death was also a spiritual death, where the open communication and fellowship with God was broken.

From that time until the time of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, the Holy Spirit communicated with man through messengers. These were messengers such as angels and prophets; but also, at times, the Holy Spirit communicated directly. The Holy Spirit would be "upon" or "with" an individual for a season of time (Num 11:16-29; Judges 3:10, 6:34; 1Sam 16:13; 2Chron 24:20).

As New Testament believers, we understand that the Holy Spirit now lives within the individual. (As a side note, this may explain the infrequency of angels and the use of the office of the prophet in New Testament writings.)

It is clear, from Genesis to Revelation, that God both speaks to and guides His people, and that the communication with Him is indeed a dialogue or a two-way conversation (cf. Num 12:6-8; Isa 1:18; Acts 11:28; Rom 8:26; 1Cor 14:2).

GOD IS SPIRIT

The clearest statement of the truth that God is Spirit is found in John 4:24: “*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” If we accept the fact that we also are spiritual, then a logical extension of these two thoughts is that:

- spiritual communication with God is possible, and
- communication between God and man is available.

Let us take a look at how communication takes place in general. The dictionary defines communication as, “the exchange of information between individuals or the study of the different means people use to communicate with each other; for example, speech, telecommunications, writing or using a common system of signs or behavior.”

Based on our definition of communication, it is clear that communication is the transfer of information. This transfer can take place on several levels. Since we are spirit, soul and body, communication can take place on each of these three levels.

Let me repeat the foundational belief that God is spirit and He looks for those who will worship Him in *spirit* and in truth (John 4:23,24). If we accept this truth, then two pivotal questions arise: (1) Is “spiritual communication” possible? And, if so, (2) What is “spiritual communication” like? The answer to the first question, “Is spiritual communication possible?”, is a resounding, yes!

Now it is true that the natural (“natural” meaning our **unredeemed** eyes, ears and mind) cannot comprehend spiritual things. Yet God has given us an ability to “see”, “hear” and “understand” spiritual things because He has given new life to our spirit (2Cor 2).

Now, this is a spiritual fact that must be accepted and acted upon by faith. It does not have to make logical sense or “feel right” to us. **If God’s Word has spoken it, then that settles it!** There are reasons that so many have a hard

time grasping this truth, such as: it is unfamiliar; it goes against tradition; it does not conform to conventional wisdom that is often portrayed in popular books and media.

UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL ISSUES

Before we can address the second question, “What is spiritual communication like?”, we need to examine thoroughly what we mean by “spiritual”.

Part of the misunderstanding of the word “spiritual” has been in the use of mysterious words such as “anointing”, “glory”, “presence” and “impartation”. There are those with spiritual maturity or experience who use these words and understand their meaning. However, they do not always instruct us how to do the same! It is like saying to someone, “You need to be more loving!” but not showing them how to be more genuinely loving.

The words in any given language paint a picture, in the mind, for the usage of that word. However, words alone are sometimes inadequate to **describe** and define spiritual issues fully. That is why actually seeing an example can help us to better understand instruction.

But these spiritual issues cannot always be “shown” to us completely by example; therefore, **faith is often required on our part**. Remember, God’s ways are higher than our ways.

But these spiritual issues cannot always be “shown” to us completely by example; therefore, **faith is often required on our part**. Remember, God’s ways are higher than our ways.

We need to apply our efforts to try and understand how God intended spiritual things to operate. We do the best we can with the words, images and word-pictures that we have available. But if we rely solely upon the normal usage of language, we may miss important *functional* aspects of the power inherent and available to us as believers.

For instance, we use the terms to be “filled” or even “refilled” to describe the activation or re-activation of the Holy Spirit within our lives. But what do those words mean? What is really happening? The essence of what is happening is this: We make the effort to recognize afresh the work of the Holy Spirit within

us; we focus our *spiritual eyes*, tune in our *spiritual ears* and renew a hunger in our hearts for Him, welcoming anew His work in our lives.

LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

Let us now examine the various God-given levels of communication of which we are capable.

THE BODY

Our physical body communicates with the physical realm, or the physical world we live in. The body uses the five senses: hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling and touching. Through these senses, we communicate with the physical realm.

Our hearing responds to sound waves that fall within specific frequencies. We hear loud sounds, soft sounds, low- and high-pitched sounds. With our vision we are able to discern shapes, shades, colors and movement. Our taste buds are able to detect sweet, sour and bitter. With our nose we can distinguish odors, from the pleasant scent of flowers to the smell of rotting eggs. And finally, with our sense of touch we are able to distinguish cold, heat, pain and pleasure.

Now the body itself does not evaluate the source, danger or pleasure of the stimuli. The body simply alerts the brain, which is part of the soul, to be aware of the stimuli; then the brain reacts. Since we live in the world, God has given us the ability to detect and react to the world we live in.

THE SOUL

Notice that the body is not responsible for interpreting or evaluating the meaning of all the stimuli. All the body knows is, “That hurts!” or “It is sweet!” or “That is loud!”

The soul is where all of the stimuli that the body experiences are put into context. That is, the soul assigns meaning to the stimuli. For instance, the soul “learns” that the sound of a gunshot means danger and reacts accordingly by telling the body to run or hide. It is this learning process in life that shapes our emotions (feelings), our will (the ability to choose) and our intellect (intelligence).

Our personality is shaped by our soul. Just as the soul interacts with the physical world through the body, the soul also interacts with other souls or people through the body as well.

To sum up so far: The body interacts or communicates with the physical world. The soul also interacts with the physical world. More importantly, the soul is able to interact with the souls of others. In other words, the soul of one person “communicates” with the soul of another person with the words and responses of each individual. Relationships are built on this type of “soul” communication.

It is worth noting that when the Bible uses the word “flesh” in reference to a person, it can refer to one of two things. It may refer to the body alone, or it may refer to the union of the body and soul. *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matt 26:41). The Scriptures often use the term *flesh* to distinguish between the carnal person and the spiritual person. A carnal person is one who is immature and/or influenced more by the things of the world than by the things of Spirit (1Cor 3:1-4).

THE SPIRIT

If the body communicates with the physical world, and the soul communicates with the “soul” world, with what or with whom does the spirit communicate?

The answer is obvious, isn't it? The spirit of man has the potential to communicate with the spiritual realm.

If we carefully study 1 Corinthians 2:9-16, it should become evident that God has given us, as believers, the ability to do what was not possible before Jesus Christ and the Cross of Calvary: to see, hear and comprehend spiritual things on an individual level. We have been given the “*mind of Christ*” (v.16). Verse 12 states, *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”*

Let us examine more closely this passage in 1 Corinthians 2. *“But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’”* (1Cor 2:9). *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard”* obviously speaks about the physical senses, the domain of the body. *“Nor have entered into the heart of man”*: The

heart in this case refers to the mind or emotions and these are in the realm of the soul.

This verse clearly states that we are limited in our own physical and intellectual ability to comprehend the things of God. But, hallelujah! God has given us His Spirit: *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God”* (1Cor 2:12). God has made **everything we need** available to us, His children, as it pertains *“to life and godliness”* (2Pet 1:3).

We are reminded again in 1 Corinthians 2:13 that communication with God is not about human intellect or man’s wisdom, but His Spirit teaching our spirit: *“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”*

The Bible then reveals that a non-spiritual (natural, unsaved) man cannot discern the things of the Spirit: *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1Cor 2:14).

Finally, we are assured that we have the mind of Christ! *“But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ”* (1Cor 2:15,16). Hallelujah, can you understand what is being said? We – you and I as believers – have the mind of Christ!

As with any gift of God, we must learn how to exercise and use our spiritual senses. Jesus states, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”* (John 10:27). We naturally know how to communicate physically and intellectually from childhood. Learning to communicate spiritually, however, requires that we become like children (Matt 11:25; 18:1-5) and trust what God has said in His Word. If God has said it, then that settles it! He has said that those who walk by the Spirit are sons of God (Rom 8:12-17). Since we are His sons, the avenue of communication with God our Father has been opened to us.

THE SPIRITUAL MAN

When we were born again – accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – it was our spirit man that was made alive and enabled to communicate with God (Rom 6:11,13; 1Cor 15:22; Eph 2:1,5; 1Pet 3:18).

Our minds (souls) are in the process of being transformed and renewed: *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Rom 12:2).

Our bodies will be replaced with supernatural bodies when we go to be with Jesus in Heaven: *“So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body”* (1Cor 15:42-44).

Our mind is being renewed, and our body will one day be replaced; but it is our spirit that is born again, once dead in sin but now alive in Christ (Eph 2:1-9)!

Clearly the Scriptures state that the lines of communication with God are now open. This communication is a two-way dialogue, in that we speak and He hears. More importantly, a promise is made that when He speaks, we will have the ability to hear: *“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual”* (1Cor 2:11-13). Be reminded that Jesus said we will be able to hear Him so that we may follow Him (John 10:27).

THE NATURAL MAN

The individual who rejects the gift of God in Christ and is not born again is referred to as a natural man: *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1Cor 2:14). The natural man can understand only with his mind (soul). Therefore, it is impossible for him to understand the spiritual things of God.

What a great joy, privilege and benefit it is to be able to communicate with our Father in Heaven, even as children communicate with their earthly fathers. All of this is available because we are born-again and now have the “mind of Christ”. Through the wisdom of God, great and precious gifts and promises are made available to every believer who would choose, by faith, to walk in the provisions He has made through His Son, Jesus Christ!

SPIRITUAL COMMUNICATION

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2,3).

Confidence in God comes out of relationship with God. The relationship between God and man is spiritual in nature.

One of the great questions of Christian faith is whether we are “working *for* God” or “working *with* God”. A hireling or employee can work for someone or even work *for* God. They blindly do what they are instructed to do for a wage or reward. In a negative sense, this is nothing more than outward religion or legalism.

But we are not called to be hirelings or employees. We are called to be friends of God and even sons of God! *“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14,15). “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom 8:14).* Friendship – and especially “sonship” – demands a relationship. Relationship implies two-way communication or dialogue. By dialogue, we mean that we can speak to God and know that He hears us. It also means that God can speak to us and we can know that we have heard from God.

Even in the natural sense, can there be a genuine relationship or friendship without communication?

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments we see example after example of communication between God and man. Yet we still struggle with the idea that God wants to communicate with us today.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8). What was available to believers in the past, through the Scriptures, is also available to us today. Jesus encourages us in this truth: *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”* (John 10:27).

The Scriptures tell us that it is impossible to please God without faith: *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb 11:6). We have to be diligently seeking, knocking and asking (Matt 7:7,8), believing that He will reward our efforts to communicate with Him.

FAITH AND THE WILL OF GOD

What is also important is that **faith is impossible unless the will of God is known**. So, on the one hand, faith is essential to pleasing God. On the other hand, we must know the will of God before faith can be activated in us. When we take an action of faith based upon God’s will, we can be confident that He will move on our behalf. The will of God is the hope or basis of our faith: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb 11:1). What we do **not** mean by hope is, “I hope that it will turn out alright”. Biblical hope is not chance or luck, or wishful thinking. **Scriptural hope is based on the promises of the One who never breaks a promise!**

An example will help clarify this truth: When you bring an action to the legal court systems, the court will only listen to the case if you have a *basis* for your argument in the law. That means that the law gives you a legitimate right to bring the legal action. For instance, you cannot bring someone into court for breaking a contract with you unless you are one of the contract signers. The basis in the law then recognizes your right to pursue legal action.

As believers, we have a **basis for faith** when the issue of faith is based upon a promise of God:

- Awareness of the promise of God brings hope (basis);
- Trusting in God to bring about that hope for your sake is faith.

Remember: Faith pleases God!

THE BIBLE: THE MEASURING ROD

Some will say, “Of course God speaks to us. He speaks to us through His Word, the Bible!” That is an absolutely true statement. But is the Bible the only way in which God speaks? The answer to that pivotal question is a resounding, “No!” God is Spirit and He is able to communicate with us in a direct manner by His Spirit.

But let me place a caution here: God will never violate (or change) His Word as already given in the Bible. This means that the Bible becomes the “plumb-line” or the “measuring rod” by which we can discern the accuracy and source of any spiritual communication. In other words, if someone says God spoke to them, and what they heard does not agree with what is already in the Bible, then what they heard was **not** from God.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT?

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). The word “filled” in this case means just that: completely filled up or supplied. But the word “filled” is derived from the Greek root word *pletho*, which means to be influenced by. This requires our submitted will to cooperate with the Spirit’s influence.

In other words, **we are to be influenced by the Holy Spirit** and not controlled or influenced by other things in the natural or spiritual world. This is what Christians commonly refer to as being *Spirit-filled* or *Spirit-led*.

When we examine this concept of being influenced or led by the Spirit of God, we see more clearly the need to learn how to hear, recognize and follow the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”* (John 10:27).

At this point we should agree and be assured by the Word of God that **we have the ability to hear the Lord’s voice.** The purpose of hearing His voice is so that we can follow Him.

Walking in faithful obedience to both the Bible and the Holy Spirit will lead to an overcoming life –regardless of the circumstances of the past, the present or the future.

Scripture states that Jesus is seated at the right hand of Father God, making intercession for us: *“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us”* (Rom 8:34).

Jesus is within each believer, through the Holy Spirit – since the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are One. *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper [like Me], that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you, and will be in you”* (John 14:16,17).

The Holy Spirit reminds us of what Jesus says (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus the Christ to us (Eph 1:17). The Holy Spirit points us to Jesus with all honor, glory and power: *“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you”* (John 16:13,14).

The essential work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Christ to us and transform us into the image of Christ (2Cor 3:18). This is so that we would know what Jesus would do in every situation or circumstance, and so that we would act and respond as He would!

Now let us look at some of the specific areas where the leading and the working of the Holy Spirit are involved. Let us keep in mind the principle that the Holy Spirit of God is the agent of guidance, empowerment and enablement.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK IN SALVATION

Even the primary work of salvation is a work that is initiated by the Spirit of God. *“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”* (Eph 1:13).

The Holy Spirit is at work even in the life of an unbeliever, drawing him to the truth of the Gospel message (John 16:8-11). A person who does not know Christ may not fully understand what is taking place. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is cultivating in the unbelieving heart a ground for the reception of the seed, the Gospel message. *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...”* (John 6:44).

Ultimately, the choice to receive or reject the Gospel (and its promises) resides with each individual. But God, through His Holy Spirit, is faithfully at work, drawing the unbelievers to Himself. *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2Pet 3:9).

The work of the Holy Spirit in salvation can be described in three tenses: past, present and future.

1. PAST

When a person believes in Christ, he is saved to eternity. *“So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household’”* (Acts 16:31; see also John 10:28; Acts 2:38; Rom 1:16,17). Salvation through Jesus Christ is a one-time event for a person. You were born again when you believed and accepted Christ. It becomes a past event that carries with it a future, eternal reward.

A backslidden Christian cannot be born again... again. He simply must repent from his sins and be restored back into relationship with God (John 15:1-8; Acts 8:22-24; 1John 1:9). Remember, God has promised to never leave you nor forsake you (Matt 28:20; Heb 13:5). If God seems distant from you, it is because **you** moved away, not because **He** moved away: *“Return, O backsliding children,’ says the Lord; ‘for I am married to you’”* (Jer 3:14).

2. PRESENT

We are also in the process of being saved from the *power* of sin. Your nature has been changed; you are being transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom 12:1,2). The power of sin, which separated you from a Holy God, has been broken (Rom 6:1-14, 22; 8:2-4). The old habits must be replaced by new godly habits. *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* (Rom 8:13).

3. FUTURE

Finally, we shall be saved from the very presence of sin. The day is coming when Jesus will return and we will be “caught up” in the air (1Thess 4:16,17; also 1Cor 15:51,52). If the Lord should not return until after our physical death, then we also have the promise of being present with Him, forever: *“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also”* (John 14:2,3).

In each case – past, present and future – faith is required on our part. Faith is simply the Word of God combined with the Spirit of God, with our will working in cooperation. Faith is initiated by the Word of God and activated by our decision to follow the leading or prompting of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God and the Spirit of God will always be in agreement.

God releases into our lives today, through His Spirit, the power of Christ’s resurrection: *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”* (Rom 8:10,11).

God has also given us a “down payment” or “deposit” of the Spirit. God has given us the Spirit as proof of our new life in Christ: *“...who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee”* (2Cor 1:22; also Eph 1:13,14).

Of course, our experience of salvation will be complete when Christ returns: *“So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation”* (Heb 9:28). When that day comes, the Kingdom of God will be fully revealed: *“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*(Matt 13:41-43).

Past, present and future – the work of the Holy Spirit is complete in salvation!

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK IN ASSURANCE

We can have assurance or confidence in the Gospel message of love, forgiveness and acceptance because of the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. *“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake”* (1Thess 1:5).

Since The Holy Spirit is the power of God. Therefore, we can be assured that God is “for us and not against us” when the Holy Spirit does His extraordinary work in ordinary individuals.

Although Paul the apostle was not exactly an ordinary man even in his day, Paul recognized the awesome power made available by the Holy Spirit. A study of who God will use and empower is given to us in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31: *“God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise...”* (v.27).

Here is a key principle to understand: **The more ordinary and common the vessel, the greater the glory God gets when He uses that ordinary vessel in extraordinary ways.**

The Apostle Paul’s own testimony was that he leaned not on his own strength or understanding, but relied on the demonstration of the Spirit and power of God. *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”* (1Cor 2:1-5).

You can have the assurance of God and His call upon your life through His Holy Spirit – as the Spirit enables and empowers you to accomplish His purpose, callings and assignments.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK IN DISCIPLESHIP

A disciple (or pupil) of Christ may be described as one who believes the truths or doctrines of Christ; puts their complete faith and trust upon the finished work of Calvary; walks by the Spirit of God; and imitates Jesus’ example.

As disciples, we are also instructed to make disciples of others. The Great Commission, as described in each of the four Gospels and the Book of Acts, is the instruction from Jesus Christ to make disciples of all people from all nations.

- *“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’”* (Matt 28:18-20).
- *“Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover’”* (Mark 16:14-18).
- *“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high’”* (Luke 24:46-49).
- *“So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”*(John 20:21,22).
- *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

Discipleship is **not** simply about making a convert, becoming a member of the church, conforming to traditions, and recognizing others in the church organization.

Discipleship **is**:

- helping others to become more like Jesus
- learning the Bible

- learning how to be led by the Holy Spirit
- learning how to walk by faith and not by sight.

In other words, discipleship has to do with learning how to walk with Jesus every day and be transformed into His image (Rom 8:29) by the work of His Spirit.

As leaders, when we disciple someone we should have two primary goals clearly in mind. The first is to help the disciple be individually strong in Christ; the second is to ensure that the disciple is motivated to serve others through the Church.

INWARD TRANSFORMATION

True discipleship is an “inside job”. It is a **transforming** process from within the individual, rather than an outwardly **conforming** process. The difference between conforming and transforming is **critical** to understand if we are to make true disciples. Romans 12:2 states, *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

“Conforming” implies that we are shaping someone to look and behave a certain way. Conforming is a work on the outside of the individual. Changing the clothing, language and outward behavior does not produce a true disciple.

A true disciple is one who is being changed from the inside out.

Transformation is a work of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit: *“for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). God is at work, through His Holy Spirit, to produce in you – and in those you are discipling – the desire and the ability to accomplish His purpose and the assignment He has for you. His purpose is to transform you into the image of His Son; His assignment for you is to fulfill the ministry for which He has called you.

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees regarding this very issue: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also...”* (Matt 23:25,26; see also verses 27,28).

Jesus knew that man's best religious efforts can only conform the outward appearance. Man has no real power within himself to change or cleanse his sinful nature (Jer 13:23; 17:9; Heb 2:14-17).

But Jesus came to break the power of sin! It is only by Christ's power and through His Holy Spirit that man can change inwardly and be truly transformed. The power that man needs to live a life that overcomes sin is through the Holy Spirit. Jesus knows that if the inner man is transformed, the outward changes will naturally follow.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK IN AN OVERCOMING LIFE

The Bible teaches that we are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. *"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"* (Rom 8:37).

Now what does it mean to be more than a conqueror? Let me explain.

There is a wonderful story about a fighter, a boxer who is scheduled to fight the biggest match he has ever had. At stake is the largest prize money he has ever been offered. On the night of the match, there is a sold-out crowd, and he is facing the most experienced and toughest opponent he has ever fought. The fight begins and 15 grueling rounds later he emerges victorious. He is bruised, battered and bleeding – yet he is the conqueror! The crowd is cheering as he leaves the ring. He goes to the locker room to bathe and changes his clothes. Then he goes to pick up his winnings. He travels home to his wife. Upon reaching home, he greets his wife with a kiss. She holds out her hands, and in it he places the winnings, all the prize money!

Here is the point of the story: The man may be the conqueror, but the wife is "more than a conqueror!" You see, she received the prize without having to fight the battle.

In the same way, Jesus has fought the battle for your salvation and the right to be Lord of your life (Heb 2:9-18). From that perspective you are ***more than a conqueror!*** Not only has God fought the battle, but He has placed His Spirit within you.

As a result of the Spirit of God dwelling within you, there is nothing you cannot do as you align yourself with the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit in you. *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”* (1John 4:4); *“The things which are impossible with men are possible with God”* (Luke 18:27).

It is true that there will be times of doubt, discouragement and even fear as we press on to fulfill our purpose and the calling of God. It is in those times that we must reflect upon the truth of His Word: **You are more than a conqueror** because Jesus has fought the greatest battle for you! After assuring yourself with the Word of God, then assure yourself further in the realm of the Spirit... you are more than a conqueror!

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK IN HOLINESS

In Acts Chapter 9, we discover the Pharisee Saul (Paul) and his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. In this encounter, Paul comes to the realization that Jesus Christ is in fact the risen Christ, the Messiah.

Later, in Acts Chapter 26, Paul gives his testimony to King Agrippa. There we discover the assignment Jesus gave to Paul on the road to Damascus: *“But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you”* (Acts 26:16).

Note first that Jesus is instructing Paul in the principle that **you cannot give away that which you do not possess**. In others words, Paul would be enabled to teach, preach and lead in those areas where he could testify and witness to the truth of Jesus’ working in his own life.

Paul never ministered out of *theory*. He ministered out of his personal experience of the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus went on to tell Paul, *“I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me”* (Acts 26:17,18).

Notice how complete the work of God is:

1. Deliverance – from those who oppose you and God’s call on your life

2. Opened eyes – to see the truth that will set you free
3. Being moved from darkness to light – being led by the Spirit of God
4. Being transferred from the power of Satan to the power of God – transferred lordship
5. Receiving forgiveness of sins – restored relationship with God
6. Receiving an inheritance – present power and future glory
7. Being sanctified by faith in Jesus – empowered to walk the life of holiness through faith in Jesus Christ

What a powerful series of statements which sums up the victorious life to which Christ has called us! It is the power of God in our lives that enables us, by His Holy Spirit, to live a life uncorrupted by the world and its system. We have entered the light and now can see, just as the blind man who encountered Jesus declared: *“One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see”* (John 9:25).

THE MOTIVATION OF LOVE

There is still an ongoing struggle or process of change that takes place. The Apostle Paul makes this very clear as he presents his personal struggle in Romans 7 and 8.

Going from hopelessness under the Law to victory in Christ, Paul teaches that victory comes to those who learn to **walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh** (see Romans 8:1-7). In Romans 7, Paul testifies of the futility of trying to live by the Law: Knowing what to do, but powerless to do it; or knowing what not to do and yet doing the very thing he hated.

How many of us have struggled with that very same kind of experience? When you are trying to live by an external standard through your own effort and self-discipline alone, you are destined to fail.

There are two issues revealed here that must be dealt with: One is the *motivation*; the other is the *enablement* or power to accomplish the motivation. If the motivation is simply to do good in order to outweigh the evil done in life, as if we were trying to balance a scale, then we are lost. The motivation must come out of a changed heart, a new nature.

In other words, there must be found in me a desire to be pleasing to my Father in Heaven. This can truly happen only through relationship with Him, not by a religion of rules and regulations. There is only one motivation that God is looking for and pleased by: that is the motivation of love. We are to be motivated by love for God and love for those whom God loves.

God's love is not for institutions, ministries or organizations. God loves His creation, people. One way to define love is: "Love is living your life for someone else's good." Jesus lived His life for your good and the good of all mankind (John 3:16-18; Phil 2:1-11; Rom 5:5-11). We are called to do the same. As you live your life for the good of others, you are demonstrating God's love for mankind. *"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"* (1John 3:16).

EMPOWERED BY OUR INHERITANCE

Just having the proper motivation for serving God is not sufficient. We need to be *empowered* to live and serve according to God's standard of holiness. God has provided that empowerment through His Holy Spirit, in that He has called us to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"* (Rom 8:1). Then again in verse 4: *"...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*

Paul goes on to talk about the carnal mind. Remember that the carnal mind is a spiritually immature mind that is set upon the flesh or the things of the world. *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God"*(Rom 8:5-8).

We are then exhorted to remember, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God"* (Rom 8:14). Finally, Christ encourages us, through Paul, to recall that sons are entitled to the inheritance: *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together"* (Rom 8:16,17).

Not only is there the inheritance of Heaven and everlasting life in the future; there is also the inheritance of His Word, His Spirit and faith to help us live as “more than conquerors” in this life. *“As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”* (2Pet 1:3,4).

But Christ’s enablement does not stop at power to live a godly life. He has even **more** to give us!

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK IN ENABLING FOR MINISTRY

Paul was a man who showed great faith in all that he did because of the great confidence he had in the call of God upon his life. Paul did not choose to be a minister of the Gospel. He was *called by God* and he was *obedient* to that call. Paul was able to say: *“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry”* (1Tim 1:12). There is much that we can learn about ministry from this one statement.

1. Paul was thankful at all times. The circumstances may have been difficult, heart-wrenching and desperate. The circumstances may have been sweet and pleasant. Regardless of the circumstances, he was thankful. Paul affirms in Philippians 4:13, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* This is not a statement of great human ability or accomplishment. It is a statement of the supernatural ability to endure all kinds of circumstances – good and bad – and still be thankful. (Read Paul’s full thoughts in Philippians 4:6-13; see also Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 1:12).
2. Paul knew who it was who called him, enabled him and put him in the ministry. Paul had confidence in his calling; and therefore he put his full faith and trust in *“Jesus Christ and Him crucified”* (1Cor 2:2). Paul’s trust was not in his training, his background, his denomination or his friends. His trust was in God! *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”* (2Cor 3:5,6).

3. Paul knew how to be faithful (1Cor 4:2). Paul was faithful to obey the Word of God and the prompting of the Holy Spirit in all situations. The word “faithful” means to be full of faith. It takes faith to walk with God and to please God. When we are learning to be led by the Spirit of God, we may feel there is an element of risk. We are often still learning how to hear His voice or recognize His guidance. We may feel fearful to trust that we are truly hearing His desires for us. However, as we grow in our relationship with God, and cultivate daily sensitivity and obedience to Him, we will become more and more confident in our ability to recognize His direction.

HOLY SPIRIT GUIDANCE

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor 2:12).

Let us review what we have learned before we take the next step. When we communicate with the physical world, we use our senses and interpret them with our mind. It is a body-and-soul experience. If we read something, we use our sight (body) and perceive the meaning of what is read (mind or soul). When someone speaks to us, we hear with our ears (body) and understand with our mind (soul.)

Now in the spiritual realm, a similar operation takes place. The spiritual can operate through the body (the five senses), through the mind (impressions, thoughts, images), or directly through our spirit. The fact that God may use our body or soul to communicate with us from His Spirit makes the communication no less spiritual (1Cor 14:2).

Sometimes we try to mystify or “spiritualize” the ability to communicate in the spirit. Spiritual communication was never meant to be unique or special to only certain individuals. Spiritual communication with God was meant to be normal Christianity!

An unfortunate mistake that many individuals make is to associate “how one feels” with spirituality. How you feel is a reaction of the body or mind, but not necessarily of the spirit. For example: Jesus desired to have his disciples keep watch while He was in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples kept falling asleep. Jesus says, *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into*

temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41). Notice that Jesus says that the spirit is willing but the flesh (mind and body) is weak or tired. You see, your spirit never tires or becomes weary. Your spirit never is distracted, or unwilling to do those things it was designed to do. It was designed to communicate with the spiritual realm.

THE WORD OF GOD IS SPIRITUAL

Most of us would not like to admit that sometimes we find ourselves bored, distracted, disinterested or too tired to read or study the Word of God. We might go through the motions, but often feel guilty and condemned for not being more eager in seeking the Lord in the Word.

The truth is that while we may not seem to be benefiting in our minds and intellect, our spirit is never tired, bored or distracted. When we study the Bible, we are feeding our minds, yes – but more importantly, we are feeding our spirits. Remember, the spirit does not depend upon the emotions or clarity of the mind.

For example, have you ever had the experience of having the knowledge of a Scripture verse while at the same time being unaware of where or how you learned it? It could have been while reading the Bible or hearing a sermon or message when the mind was not paying attention, but our spirit was hungry for the Word!

The discipline of spending time reading the Word of God cannot be over emphasized and should not be connected to how you feel. The Bible is food to the spirit! The study and devotional time we spend in the Word of God should be a time we eagerly seek, for the sake of our spirit as well as for the mind. The spirit is always willing; it is the flesh that may be weak. Therefore, the spirit always benefits from the Word of God, even when the flesh seems unwilling.

That is not to say that there is no benefit to the mind when we read the Scriptures. For it is clear from the Word that our minds must be renewed. *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2; see also Ephesians 5:26).*

We must be careful at this point. Many fall into the error of thinking that through the intellectual knowledge of the Word they are able to change. Many

try to live by the standards of the Bible through self-discipline and a change of only outward behavior. However, the change that God seeks is *a change of heart*, a change of our inner nature. That can be accomplished only by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible has power to show us God's expectations or standards. At the same time, it shows us how helpless we are in our own strength alone to fulfill the standards of the Word of God. We are unable in our natural strength to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus. Yet we have **supernatural ability**, through the Holy Spirit, to accomplish what is impossible in our own strength! On the one hand, the Bible reveals everything about us. We may hide our secret thoughts and motives from other people. But nothing is hidden before God. His Word reveals that truth to us: *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account"* (Heb 4:12,13).

But the Bible also reveals God's expectation that we would be conformed to the image of His Son – in other words, that we would be like Jesus. *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren"* (Rom 8:28,29).

Finally, the Bible reveals how God will do this work. *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"* (Phil 2:12,13).

It is the Lord Himself who wills or gives you both the **desire** and **the ability** to do, or the empowerment to fulfill, His good pleasure. His "good pleasure" consists of the plans and purposes for your life. This is God's grace or favor.

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDE US?

As we have established earlier, it is God's intent that we be **led** by the Holy Spirit. That means that He is directing our paths. I have heard it said that,

“When you walk with God, you get to where He is going.” That rather obvious statement is true, isn’t it?

Just as we have an assurance that God has plans, purposes and pursuits for us to walk in, we can also be sure that God speaks to or communicates with us. One reason that God speaks to us is to guide us. There are **six key ways** in which we often receive guidance from God. We will look at those in just a moment.

CLEAR DIRECTION

There are times when God may use several ways to communicate with us in order to assure us that it is the Holy Spirit directing our paths. I have heard it described in this way:

“A certain harbor can be reached only by sailing up a narrow channel between dangerous rocks and shoals. Over the years, many ships have been wrecked, and navigation is hazardous. To guide the ships safely into port, three lights have been mounted on three huge poles in the harbor. When the three lights are perfectly lined up and seen as one, the ship can safely proceed up the narrow channel. If the pilot can see two or three lights, he knows he has gotten off course and is in danger.

“God has also provided three beacons to guide us. The same rules of navigation apply... the three lights often must be lined up before it is safe for us to proceed. The three harbor lights of guidance are:

1. The Word of God (objective standard);
2. The Holy Spirit (subjective witness);
3. Circumstances (divine providence).

“Together they assure us that the directions we have received are from God and will lead us safely along His way.”

Of course, it is also important to note that circumstances are not always a reliable indicator of God’s will. They can, at times, cause us to doubt. God may require us to move in faith, even when natural circumstances seem to oppose His direction. If this seems to be the case, then we must have an even clearer and stronger sense of the accuracy of both the Word of God and the

Holy Spirit's leading in spite of the circumstances (e.g., Moses, Ex 3; Paul, Acts 20:22-24; Acts 28).

CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD

Now let us examine the **six key ways** that God uses to speak to us and guide us.

1. HOLY SPIRIT GUIDANCE THROUGH CONVICTION

Holy Spirit *conviction* means that our conscience is being provoked into judging the rightness or wrongness of an action. The dictionary defines conscience as having “an internal sense of what is right and wrong that governs somebody’s thoughts and actions, urging him or her to do right rather than wrong”.

As Christians, we understand the “internal sense” to go beyond just our conscience. We have within us the work of the Holy Spirit. *“For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God”* (1John 3:20,21).

THE NEED FOR CONVICTION

In John 16:8-11, God reveals the primary work of the Holy Spirit. (The Holy Spirit is not limited to the three actions described in this passage, as we learn when reading beyond verse 11.) The three primary works of the Holy Spirit are to reveal sin, righteousness and judgment. *“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”* (John 16:8).

Then John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, goes on to explain in greater detail these three primary functions: *“of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged”* (vs.9-11). The Holy Spirit always convicts of sin because He is holy (Rom 1:4)! God never tempts us with evil. He does not perpetrate evil or sin as a means of fulfilling His purpose (Jas 1:13). While it is true that God is able to take that which was meant for evil by others and turn it into good (Rom 8:28), He Himself does not perpetrate evil or sin. As pastors, leaders and

representatives of Jesus Christ, this means that we must also not perpetrate evil motivations or actions, but instead live ~~be~~ above reproach in every area of life (1Tim 3:1-13).

When Jesus says in John 16:9 that the Holy Spirit convicts “*of sin, because they do not believe in Me*”, we need to make one thing very clear: **It is not just belief in the Person of Jesus, but also belief in what Jesus has said and done for us at the Cross.** There are many who would say they believe that Jesus is God, and yet they do not obey Him (Matt 21:28-32; Jas 1:21-25, 2:14-26). Well, if one does not obey Jesus, one really does not believe that Jesus is God!

It is possible to “harden your heart” to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and become insensitive to sin. “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*” (Eph 4:30). Those who fall to the place where they become insensitive to the Holy Spirit are no longer convicted of their sin (Eph 4:17-24; 1Tim 4:2).

SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES OF THE CONVICTING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:

1. Peter makes an arrogant statement that he is willing to die for Jesus (Matt 26:31-35). Jesus prophesies that Peter will deny Him three times before the rooster crows that day. The prophecy comes to pass. After the third denial of Christ by Peter, the Scripture states, “*Then he began to curse and swear, saying, ‘I do not know the Man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So he went out and wept bitterly*” (Matt 26:74,75).
2. Jesus appears to His disciples after the resurrection, but Thomas is not present. Because Thomas has not seen with his own eyes, he does not believe that Jesus has appeared to the other disciples. Later, Jesus appears to Thomas. Under conviction Thomas proclaims, “*...My Lord and my God!*” (John 20:28).
3. Peter preaches the Gospel message, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, to the Jews in Jerusalem. This produces such conviction that about 3,000 come to know the Lord Jesus. “*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’*” (Acts 2:37).
4. Saul (Paul) of Tarsas is on his way to Damascus to continue his persecution of Christians. During that trip, he has an encounter with the

risen Jesus Christ that turns his world upside down. *“And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads’. So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’”* (Acts 9:5,6).

2. HOLY SPIRIT GUIDANCE THROUGH THE BIBLE

The Bible is truly the Word of God and all of it is given by the inspiration of God (2Tim 3:16,17; 2Pet 1:19-21). It is like no other book. It is a spiritual book designed by God to be a source of life, inspiration, instruction, encouragement, correction, direction and guidance for His children. Someone once described the Bible as a personal love letter from God to us. God, and His heart for mankind, are both revealed throughout the Scriptures. For those who do not know God, through Jesus Christ, it is an invitation to know Him. For those who walk with Jesus, the Word of God is our strength and assurance that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

RHEMA AND LOGOS

It is of interest to note that the Bible refers to itself as the Word. “Word” in the New Testament is derived from two Greek words, **logos** and **rhema**. The word **logos** is the *written* word or an expression of thought. The word **rhema** is the *spoken* word, or a word uttered in speech or writing. Both words are used throughout the New Testament.

The significance of the word **rhema** is that it applies to a single scripture or scriptural principle that is brought to the mind by the Holy Spirit in our time of need. It is as if the Scripture passage is “speaking” to us to answer a question or provide direction or guidance.

Hence, Scripture itself tells us that it is alive and sharper than any two-edged sword, able to discern thoughts of the mind and motives of the heart. *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”*(Heb 4:12).

God is able to speak to us so clearly through the Bible. God speaks in general principles for life (**logos**) as well as to specific circumstances in life (**rhema**). It is important to remember that we must daily be engaged in reading the **logos** (written) word. It is from this daily reading of the **logos** that God will give to us His **rhema** (spoken) word.

THE BIBLE AS LIGHT

The Word of God is light. Illumination of the Word, as we have discussed earlier, is by the Holy Spirit. *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Ps 119:105). *Illumination* means that the truth of Scripture becomes personal and real to us. *“...that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2Pet 1:20,21).

THE BIBLE AS A MIRROR INTO YOUR SOUL

The Bible reveals the truth about us. We may be able to deceive others. We may even be able to deceive ourselves. Yet there is power in the Word of God to reveal the truth about our lives. The Word of God is compared to a mirror, which reflects back to us where our lives need to be changed (Jas 1:23-25).

This revelation is a work of the Holy Spirit – not to discourage us or condemn us, but to bring us into the light that transforms. **God cannot bless what He does not approve.** He is a Holy God! His desire for us, when He reveals painful truths about our lives, is to bring us into paths of righteousness so that we might receive the full blessing of God.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Cor 3:18).

Of course, just knowing the truth is not the same as knowing *and doing* the truth. We are called to be doers of the Word. By doing the Word of God, we build a solid foundation for our lives. *“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does”* (Jas 1:23-25).

3. HOLY SPIRIT GUIDANCE THROUGH RECALLING SCRIPTURES

There is another way we receive guidance from God, especially when we are at a crossroad of decision. The Holy Spirit will cause us to remember a Scripture story or verse. There are many cases where the disciples of Christ

would recall statements that Jesus had made. The recalling of Christ's words would encourage or give direction to the disciples.

Today, Jesus is doing the very same thing through the Holy Spirit and Scripture. *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come"* (John 16:13).

Listed below are some scriptural examples of statements remembered (**emphases** added):

1. *"And Peter **remembered** the word of Jesus who had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' So he went out and wept bitterly"* (Matt 26:75).
2. *"He is not here, but is risen! **Remember** how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.' And they remembered His words"* (Luke 24:6-8).
3. *"And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!' Then His disciples **remembered** that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up'"* (John 2:16,17).
4. *"Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples **remembered** that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said"* (John 2:22).
5. *"His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they **remembered** that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him"* (John 12:16).
6. *"Then I **remembered** the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit'"* (Acts 11:16).

4. HOLY SPIRIT GUIDANCE THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES

In Acts Chapter 16, we read about a set of circumstances orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. First, Timothy joins Paul and Silas on one of Paul's missionary journeys. They are traveling to the churches with a message from the apostolic leadership in Jerusalem. Paul had a plan to preach the Gospel in an area referred to as Asia. (This is not the Asia we think of today. This region was part of the Roman province of Asia, usually termed Proconsular Asia. We know it today as Asia Minor, where the nation of Turkey is located.)

Just as they are prepared to go into Proconsular Asia, they are forbidden by the Holy Spirit to continue their travel plans. It is not clear exactly how they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go into Asia. It is very likely that circumstances were such that they were unable to travel as planned. *“Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia”* (Acts 16:6).

Now, there are the plans of man and the plans of God. It is normal and natural to make our own plans. But we need to be ready to abandon our plan when God’s plan is revealed (Prov 16:9). There are times when our plans align with God’s plan. It is wonderful when that happens. There will also be times when we have to give up our beautifully worked out, well thought out plans and replace them with His plan. Our plans may occasionally be successful, but His plan is *always* successful!

Notice that instead of waiting for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the ministry team continued with a plan of their own. *“And after they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them”* (Acts 16:7). Again they were prevented from fulfilling their own plans.

Why wouldn’t the Holy Spirit allow them to preach the Gospel in these areas? Apparently, in God’s strategic timing, the Gospel was not ready to be preached in this area of Asia. But the time had come for the Gospel to be preached in what is now known as Europe! *“So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them”* (Acts 16:8-10).

BE KINGDOM MINDED

But why, it may be asked, did the Holy Spirit forbid Paul’s apostolic team to preach the Gospel in Proconsular Asia? We cannot fully know all of God’s reasons for redirecting Paul and his team. God’s ways are often higher than our own (Isa 55:9). We can, however, understand after the fact that the Holy Spirit knew that the people of Europe were ready to receive the preaching of the Gospel – and that Paul was well fitted for that assignment. We also see that the Holy Spirit was preparing another servant, Peter, for the assignment in Proconsular Asia (1Pet 1:1).

In the final analysis, **we must see our efforts as benefiting the Kingdom of God** – rather than an individual church or a ministry plan. To be *Kingdom-minded* is to have the mind of Christ. To be Kingdom-minded means to recognize that we are all co-laborers in the harvest field of God. To be Kingdom-minded means we serve God as our King, not our own plans. Our obedience and loyalty are to Him! *“So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor”* (1Cor 3:7,8).

God has a plan and strategy that has been designed for you as a minister of the Gospel. You are an important part of His larger Kingdom purposes. You are called to *rest in* (trust in, be faithful and diligent in) that to which you have been called. Do not make the mistake of looking at what others are doing in ministry and comparing yourself to them. **Seek God’s perfect plan for you and your ministry!**

5. HOLY SPIRIT GUIDANCE THROUGH MESSNEGERS

At times, God the Holy Spirit uses messengers to convey guidance and direction to our path. God’s purposes and plans are not always clear to us. His strategies are often beyond our ability to comprehend. Therefore, God uses the Holy Spirit to send messages to us through His messengers. Some of the messengers He uses are angels and prophets.

ANGELS

The world has portrayed angels in very strange and fanciful ways. Nevertheless, angels are real beings, *created* by God with great power and authority. We are **never** to worship angels, as is the practice of some. God has used angels in many ways throughout biblical history. He continues to use them today. Angels have been used by God to safeguard us, defend us, direct us, and at times protect us from evil that may befall us.

God has created the angels to minister to Himself, as well as to minister to those of us who have inherited salvation through Jesus Christ. *“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”* (Heb 1:14).

Here are a few examples of angels that have been sent to minister to believers:

1. An angel releases Peter from prison. *“But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out...”* (Acts 5:19).
2. An angel directs Phillip to the Ethiopian eunuch. *“Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza...’”* (Acts 8:26).
3. An angel directs Cornelius to get Peter. *“About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius!...’”* (Acts 10:3).
4. Peter is released from prison again by an angel. *“Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, ‘Arise quickly!’ And his chains fell off his hands”* (Acts 12:7).
5. Paul, about to be shipwrecked, is assured by an angel. *“For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve”* (Acts 27:23).

From these few examples of the many in Scripture, we see that God will frequently use angels to accomplish His purposes.

PROPHETS

In the simplest terms, the role of the prophet is to hear from God and speak for God. The prophet was also required to speak what was on the heart of God to the government and community leaders.

In the Old Testament, prophets were the ones who anointed kings. Accounts of Old Testament prophets such as Eli, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah and Elisha are well known. Many of the Old Testament books were written by minor and major prophets. The New Testament references many Old Testament prophets. However, New Testament prophets seem less common than in Old Testament times. Only three individuals are recognized as prophets in New Testament times:

1. Jesus: *“So the multitudes said, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee’”* (Matt 21:11).
2. John the Baptist: *“For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he”* (Luke 7:28).
3. The prophet Agabus: *“And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea”* (Acts 21:10).

Why are there fewer references to the office of the prophet in the New Testament? Perhaps the reason is because the Holy Spirit operates differently today than in Old Testament times.

As stated previously, in Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit was “on” or “with” a person. Today, the Holy Spirit lives “within” the believer! God’s Spirit now speaks directly to the spirit of a believer. This new and living way has been opened up to us by Jesus Christ and His completed work at the cross of Calvary (Heb 10:20).

THE PROPHETIC TODAY

While the role of the *office* of prophet may be limited today, the *role* of the prophetic has not been limited in any way. There are nine gifts of the Holy Spirit, as described in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. Three of those gifts have to do with the prophetic. In verse 10, the gift of prophecy is listed. The gift of tongues, when combined with interpretation of tongues, is considered to be prophecy also. *“I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, **unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification**”* (1Cor 14:5 emphasis added).

The prophetic (what God is saying) is such an important part of the life of the Church today. Therefore, it is essential that we learn as pastors how to be good stewards of the gift of the prophetic in general.

The prophetic has both a *Holy Spirit component* and a *human component*. The Holy Spirit is never wrong or inaccurate. However, the human part or component is subject to error.

Let us examine the three parts of the gift of the prophetic word:

1. **Revelation.** The prophetic begins when God speaks revelation and a person receives that revelation. The revelation is spiritually discerned – heard or seen.
2. **Interpretation.** The second phase of the prophetic is the interpretation of what is spiritually seen or heard. Often this is a human interpretation of the revelation – our understanding of what is heard or seen. It is obvious that human error may occur at this point. This is because our interpretation is often subject to human limitations of understanding.
3. **Application.** The final step is the application – what we are to do in response to what is heard or seen. This is the action that one takes based

upon the interpretation of the revelation. Since this is limited to a human understanding of what should be done in response to the word, the application can also be subject to error.

Since two of the steps of prophecy – the interpretation and the application – are subject to human error, you might wonder: Is prophecy safe? **The answer is yes** – when you apply a very important principle: Prophecy should confirm what you already know to be truth. In other words, a valid prophetic word today will act as a confirmation of what God has already revealed to you. Prophecy should build you up in your faith concerning what has already been revealed. *“But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men”* (1Cor 14:3).

Of course, a valid prophetic word will also **never** disagree with what has already been revealed in the Bible, the written Word of God.

A LESSON IN APPLICATION

A clear example of the three steps or parts in a prophetic word – revelation, interpretation and application – is found in Acts 21:10-14. A prophet by the name of Agabus comes to meet with the Apostle Paul. Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Agabus brings forth a prophetic word by demonstration in verse 11: *“When he [Agabus] had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.””*

Agabus had a genuine revelation from the Holy Spirit. Agabus interprets the revelation correctly, describing with actions what will happen to Paul. In verse 12, we read that those who are present try to discourage Paul from going to Jerusalem. Their *application* of the prophecy is to discourage Paul from going to Jerusalem, but Paul with confidence and assurance states, *“What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus”* (v.13). The *revelation* was correct. The *interpretation* was correct. But the *application* by those who heard the word was not correct. Paul knew this, because the Holy Spirit had already revealed what was ahead for him. Paul says, *“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race*

with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:22-24).

The prophecy confirmed what the Holy Spirit had revealed to Paul prior to Paul’s encounter with Agabus. When the emotions of the application of the prophecy were causing others to possibly miss the plan of God, Paul was steadfast in his decision to go to Jerusalem. He already knew what God had told him to do.

6. HOLY SPIRIT GUIDANCE THROUGH HIS PEACE

“For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace...” (Isa 55:12).

Of all the ways in which the Holy Spirit guides us, there is one aspect that should always be present: **the peace of God**. God is not the author of confusion, fear, anxiety or desperation (1Cor 14:33). He is the God of peace; nothing is impossible with Him. *“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful” (Col 3:15).* In other words, let the peace of God be a primary influence that tells you when to take action or not to take action.

It is God’s desire for us to grow in sensitivity to His peace and presence within our lives. As we grow in our relationship with Him, we do not necessarily need to put out a fleece (Judges 6:36-40) or have a sign (Matt 12:38-42) in order to follow His leading. We can rely on Christ’s abiding presence and God’s peace to guide us.

It is important to realize that **Satan cannot counterfeit the peace of God or the love of God**. When we learn to trust and be directed by God’s love and peace, we will not be so easily led astray.

POWERFUL ASSURANCE

How can we walk in the peace of God? It begins with seeing and believing that you serve a big God. Remember, there is nothing that is impossible with God! Absolutely nothing! (See Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37; Philippians 4:13.)

God has also made a promise that He will never leave you nor forsake you! God sees you as a son!

Finally, in the light of who God is to us, we must take all anxiety and fear and make a conscious decision to lay them at the cross of Calvary. *“Be anxious for*

nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6,7; see also Isaiah 26:3, 1 Peter 5:6,7).

The peace of God – together with the Holy Spirit’s conviction, the Bible, Holy Spirit recall of scriptures, Holy Spirit orchestration of circumstances and Holy Spirit messengers – provides us with a powerful assurance that we are **working with God and not just for God**. This allows us to walk with a greater confidence in our relationship with God, our calling and our ministry.

THE GOAL OF BEING SPIRIT-LED

Let me encourage you that you are to be a **voice for God and not an echo**. This means that you must be able to discern His voice. You must have the confidence in your call and ministry to proclaim what He says and to carry out His instruction and direction. You have a spiritual ministry and calling.

SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Now most of us start out in ministry as echos! That means that when we start out, we often copy or imitate those who are our mentors or examples to us in ministry.

When I started out in ministry, I would imitate the way other pastors dressed, walked and spoke. I would rehearse the messages I had heard from others and try to preach or teach those messages as if they were my own. I was an echo! It seemed easier to be an echo than to develop my relationship with God and learn to hear from Him.

Herein lies the problem. If we develop the habit of seeking the direction of man (books, tapes, TV, radio, friends), then we will not be asking, seeking and knocking for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Jesus makes a statement relating to the promise of the Father: *“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know*

how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:9-13).

If you desire more of the Holy Spirit, you will have to look to and rely upon God, not man; you will have to seek the Kingdom of God, not the kingdom of men and this world (Matt 6:33).

After His resurrection, Jesus appears to His followers and restates the promise: *“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me’” (Acts 1:4)*

Finally, Jesus says, *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).*

“WITNESSES TO ME...”

When we apply this scripture, we most often apply it in an evangelistic sense: We will be empowered for “witnessing.” While that is a true statement, it is also very limiting.

If I am to truly be a witness to Jesus, that means I will testify of what He says and does. That is not limited to boldness in evangelism. It also implies that the witness is active, personal and now!

I am a witness to Jesus because I daily talk to Him and He talks to me, through His Holy Spirit.

If you want to be a voice for God – and be assured that is God’s plan for you – then you must also expect the Holy Spirit to do what He has promised that He will do in His Word!

That means you will not resort to your own strength or plans to accomplish God’s will. It is as if you were to say, “God, unless You show me what to do, I will not move. Unless You give me what to say, I will not speak. Unless Your presence goes with me, I will not go on” (see Exodus 33:15).

Being a voice for God is what you were called and created for. Seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened; ask and it will be given to you!

CONCLUSION TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE PRIZE!

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all” (Eccl 12:13).

The goal of this article has been to exhort us all to believe for more in our relationship with God, in our calling, and in our ministry. For this to happen, we must be able to discern God’s voice and have the confidence of knowing that He hears our voice. Only the Holy Spirit can give us that kind of **spiritual confidence**.

This spiritual confidence is essential to the fulfilling of our purpose, call and ministry. That ministry is to proclaim what God says to us and carry out His instruction and direction. **We have a spiritual ministry!**

As pastors and leaders, we have accepted the challenge of *going beyond the cross of Christ* in order to fulfill the call of God on our lives. In other words, we are not content to be saved only; we desire to be tools in the mighty hand of God, to also see others saved, and to be more than conquerors in this life!

FOUNDATION OF LIFE AND MINISTRY

It is important to visit, often, the foundation of our faith and life. In the busyness and pressures of ministry, it is easy to lose our way and forget Whom we serve and to Whom we belong.

When we feel we have lost our way – or lost sight of our first love – we should not just continue to push ahead as many do. No, we must instead back up and return to the right place, starting again from that point in a new direction. That right place is the Cross of Christ, the Cross of Calvary. It is from this point – remembering Jesus Christ, what He has done for us, and what He means to us – that we regain our perspective. At the Cross, we gain a fresh view of God’s purpose and plan for our lives through relationship with Him.

At the core of our relationship with God is the fact that **we are His sons and daughters**. This is far more important than the fact that we are ministers and

leaders. It is the truth of our sonship – that He is our Father – which should keep us in the center of His will and purpose.

Our purpose is to walk with our Father, as children of our God. It is only after we are secure in our relationship with Him as our Father that we then have the basis for the assignment that He has given us as ministers and leaders.

When we understand the heart of the Father to glorify His Son, Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, we will then develop a sound foundation of spiritual confidence. It is this confidence that allows us to understand how and why Jesus Christ must be the foundation of our life and ministry.

Because we have trusted in Jesus, **that alone** qualifies us to be sons of God. Serving, or ministry, is simply what sons do – because they love their Father and have been empowered by the Holy Spirit for that very purpose.

SPIRITUAL COMMUNICATION IS VITAL

Our relationship with God is spiritual; therefore, we must begin to see ourselves as spiritual beings. The essential elements of our ministry – the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and faith that comes from God – are all spiritual in nature and operation. We have clearly seen that the Word of God teaches that we are spiritual in nature.

However, we are also body and soul. We tend to be more familiar and comfortable functioning in these two areas. Because of this, we have a natural tendency to trust and lean upon our own strength and understanding.

Nevertheless, God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24). The Bible reveals that we are severely limited if we rely only upon our physical strength and our soul (mind, emotions and will) to perform God's will or hear from Him. He has made us spiritual beings, so that we might live with Him in Heaven one day; but also that we would have spiritual fellowship with Him now.

Remember, spiritual fellowship simply means that we have a two-way communication between God, who is spirit, and man. This is accomplished as His Holy Spirit communicates with our spirit and as our spirit communicates with the Holy Spirit. This spiritual communication is vital in receiving the work of the Holy Spirit in discipleship, holiness and the enablement for ministry.

We must cultivate the ability to hear and follow the Holy Spirit as He leads, guides and directs us – both in ministry and in everyday life.

How amazing it is that God desires fellowship with us. Assuredly, He is there in the crises of ministry and life; but His great joy is that we walk with Him daily through this life.

As we develop our awareness of God within us, we will be able to commune with Him during the everyday occurrences of life. This brings into focus a clearer understanding of the scripture, “*pray without ceasing*” (1Thess 5:17), which implies a continuous communication with our Father in Heaven.

The spiritual life is truly an exciting life – filled with the joy and inner peace that can come only when communing daily with God. He has not sent you on a mission by yourself. His promise is that he will never leave you nor forsake you. He has given you everything you need to accomplish His will and purpose for you. Therefore, take full advantage of all that God has provided for you through His Word and by His Spirit. This is the great privilege – and the great requirement – of a truly spiritual life!