

## **5. In Step with The Spirit**

### **Be Filled with the Holy Spirit**

People often refer to Christian discipleship as “walking with Jesus.” What does it mean to walk or keep in step with the Holy Spirit? This keeping in step with the Spirit is the key to a victorious Christian life, a life in which we do not have to strive in our own strength but trust God as we walk with Christ through steps of obedience to the Spirit of God. How wonderful it is to know that we do not walk this road alone. Christ has promised to be with us. We can picture the Holy Spirit as the ultimate guide. He is a compass in our lives, pointing us in the right direction.

Jesus often referred to the Spirit as “the spirit of truth,” saying, **“When the Spirit of Truth comes, 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 declare to you the things that are to come”** (John 16:13). What better guide could we have?

### **Losing the Son of God**

Over the past few years, I have had the blessed opportunity to lead and teach a tour of Israel, going over many of the holy sites in that beautiful land. Several years ago, I took my twenty-year-old son along with the twenty-six of us in a tour group, so keeping them together was essential as we fought through the crowds in Jerusalem. It is easy to lose a person in the group when he wants to wander off to take a photo among thousands of other tourists.

While in the Old City of Jerusalem, we were preparing to go through the tunnels along the western side of the Temple Mount, but while we were getting the tickets for the group, without my knowledge, my son ran to put a written prayer into the cracks of the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, a place sacred to Jewish people. He told one of the members of our group what he was doing, but she did not relay the message to me. Consequently, when we got to the Northwest corner of the Temple Mount, the wall opened into a wider area where we looked at an ancient cistern. Then, the person at the end of the line came through, and I discovered that my son was missing.

To lose my son in a foreign city with a different language and culture is a terrifying experience. Thankfully, I had told the group that if they ever found themselves lost in the bustling crowds, they were to wait at that place so that I could come and find them. My tour guide continued while I dashed back through the tunnels, searching for my son. I saw him waiting at the entrance to the tunnel network. He was upset with himself that he had wandered away from the group. It was a precious time as we hugged and thanked God for finding one another. I can't think of anything more horrifying for a parent than losing a child.

[Have you ever had one of your children wander off, and you couldn't find them? Did you ever get lost as a child? Share what happened as well as your feelings about it.](#)

### **Joseph and Mary Lost the Son of God**

When Jesus was twelve, Mary and Joseph lost their own son, Jesus! What would it be like to lose the Son of God? What do you think were their thoughts for the three days He was separated from them?

<sup>41</sup>Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. <sup>43</sup>After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, **but they were unaware of it.** <sup>44</sup>Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." <sup>49</sup>"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup>But they did not understand what he was saying to them. <sup>51</sup>Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup>And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:41-52).

Now that Jesus was twelve, He wanted to get on with His Father's business while at the Passover in Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders did not settle on an official Bar Mitzvah celebration for a Jewish person of thirteen until many years later than the occasion we just read, so this Passover might very well have been a coming of age to be a man for Jesus. He was a highly relational young man, for it seems that His parents assumed that, after the Feast was over, He was with others of the large caravan of people as they began the three-to-four-day walk (eighty miles) back to Nazareth. The walking to and from Jerusalem was highly communal and bonded communities like those in Nazareth.

The passage says they went on a day's journey before Joseph and Mary began to wonder where Jesus was. When He didn't come to the tent that first night, I imagine Joseph and Mary were beside themselves with worry. They had lost Jesus, the Son of God! It took them another day to return to Jerusalem, but where would they look for Him? They spent the third day searching all over the city, wondering where He could be. Finally, they found Him in the Temple precincts with the intellectuals and teachers of Israel. He amazed these scholars by asking questions that provoked new conclusions about the Scriptures. Asking questions about Scripture is a powerful way to bring light and change habits and thought patterns.

### **What Causes Distance Between God and His People?**

Have you ever felt like you went in one direction and left the Lord behind? The truth is, He will never leave us, but we can wander from Him in disobedience. We can also go through times in our lives when we do not sense His presence and must persevere in our faith.

**If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! (Job 23:3).**

If you are a Christian, Scripture is clear that He is with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:28), but what we are talking about here is straying from the intimate presence of Christ, often referred to as the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Many Christians have experienced times when the presence of God has lifted from their lives. Sometimes, they lose God's presence due to a wrong turning in their lives. People may think the Lord was with them in their turn, but He had other things in mind. When that happens, it is good to stop and reflect on where we were when we last enjoyed walking with Him. What caused us to lose the sense of God's presence?

It is not always a result of sin that causes us to sense distance from God. At times, it can be a lesson that the Lord is teaching us. When I came to Christ, my joy flowed over at the closeness of the Holy Spirit. As time progressed, though, the feelings dissipated. My plans were not the Holy Spirit's plans.

When we sign up to be a follower of the Lord Jesus, we are no longer the director of our lives. The Lord is the Shepherd, and we are the sheep. We are to follow Him, and He will lead us into good pastures. We don't invite Him to walk along with us; God has His own way of doing things. The fullness of life Christ offers is to walk with Him, but He doesn't always go in the direction we expect, as Jesus' parents found out. This kind of life will not always be easy, but it will be fulfilling, especially when we arrive at our true home. Then, we'll see what God has been building in us and through us. This life is not all there is. C.S. Lewis once said,

When I invited Jesus into my life, I thought He would put up some wallpaper and hang a few pictures. But He started *knocking out walls* and adding on rooms. I said, "I was expecting a nice cottage." But He said, "I'm making a palace in which to live."

Like Jesus with Joseph and Mary, the Lord had plans different from mine. He wanted to grow me in the faith and for me not to rely on the feelings of His closeness. Each of us reading these words is in the same position of learning to lean on Him—even if we don't feel His presence. After Jesus was resurrected and revealed Himself to the disciples in the Upper Room, the disciple Thomas wasn't there. When he found out that he had missed out on enjoying the Lord's presence, Thomas decided to stay in unbelief, saying, "**Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe**" (John 20:25). More than a week later, Jesus showed up in the room again: Christ told Thomas to see and feel for himself the evidence that He had, indeed, conquered the grave:

<sup>27</sup>Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? **Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed**" (John 20:27-29).

Faith in Christ must go beyond sense evidence. Mature disciples come to a place where they no longer need proof of their senses or feelings to trust God. This kind of faith is pleasing to God. The Lord often hides from us to show us where our hope rests.

## A God Who Hides Himself

On the evening of the first day of the resurrection, the two disciples on the Emmaus road had the Lord explain the Scriptures to them about how the Messiah would be the Suffering Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53. The Lord's identity was hidden from them until He broke bread in their presence. As soon as they realized it was Jesus, the Lord disappeared from their view (Luke 24:30-31).

Why didn't Jesus stay awhile and chat with the two disciples after they realized who the Stranger was?

They (and we) are to know Him not after the flesh but after the Spirit (Romans 8:1). The Spirit of God must lead us. **"Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior!" (Isaiah 45:15)**. We want the Lord to come with us on our plans, but He plans to grow us to rely on Him apart from our feelings or senses. Mary and Joseph did not realize that Jesus had gone in a different direction. We may assume that God is in our plans and actions when He is not.

Samson made a similar assumption that God was with him when He was not. He shared the secret of his supernatural strength with his girlfriend. Delilah called him on it by having the Philistines cut off the symbol of his consecration to God—his hair (Numbers 6:5). When Delilah woke him, he saw the Philistine enemy. He thought he could quickly gain the upper hand: **"I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him" (Judges 16:20)**. He assumed that God was still with him when, in actuality, God's intimate presence had withdrawn from him. Author and pastor Dr. A. W. Tozer said, "If the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on, and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."

I have found by experience that when God is far off (or rather, I am feeling far away from Him), all is not well with me. I am upset and easily irritated, and my patience and peace depart. Similar to what Sampson found, without God's presence in our lives, we are left to our own devices, our strengths! We need to walk with God to be effective in our Christian walk. To put it another way, we need to be abiding or remaining (John 15:5-8) with Him to experience fruit in our lives and be used by the Spirit of God.

## Continue In Him

**...But the anointing that you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie- just as it has taught you, abide in Him (1 John 2:27).**

To walk with Christ, we are the ones who must adjust our plans to align with His. Our happiness in this life is not His chief concern. He has so much more in store for us than just our happiness. There is a strength of character worth more than pure gold in our lives, eternal rewards, good fruit, and light amid the darkness in our lives. All this is worth more than day-to-day happiness, but it is sometimes hard to keep this perspective. That is why we need to stay in fellowship with God and abide in His love and grace.

I have walked with the Lord now since 1977. Over that time, I have felt that the Lord's chief concern is for those separated from God's love and grace. How do people manage without Jesus? By the grace of God, I have never walked away, but I have experienced times when I have lost the closeness of His presence. Again and again, when I reflect on how I lost the Lord's nearness and what it was that brought me back, I find that it was the grace of God. He wouldn't let me go. He has a plan for my life and yours, and He knows how to discipline those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). **"The way of the transgressor is hard" (Proverbs 13:15).**

We all have different jobs in the kingdom of God, but I came to a place where I no longer wanted to be a commercial fisherman for a living. I wanted to invest my life in people. I took plenty of wrong turns as I diligently learned the Scriptures. In those early days of my Christian walk, never in my dreams did I ever think that I would be a pastor. I just had to do whatever I could to change the lives of those around me. When I took wrong turns and found the Lord was on a different path to me, the conviction of the Holy Spirit came, and with it, mercy and grace from God melted my heart and restored me.

King David was once in a dark place where he did not sense the Lord's presence. For him, it was a sin separating him from the presence of the Lord. He acted deceptively in an adulterous affair and tried to cover it up by murdering Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. However, God wouldn't let him get away with it. He wrote about his feelings and the effects of his sin upon his physical body in this way:

**<sup>3</sup>When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup>For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. <sup>5</sup>Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin (Psalm 32:3-5).**

His physical body experienced weakness and stress because he was not responding to the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin. God sent the prophet Nathan out of his mercy to confront King David about his sin (2 Samuel 12). When we have thoughts about something that brought dishonor to our Lord, we are to get things right with Him. Our adversary, Satan, tries to outwit us with his accusations, for he is called the accuser of the brothers (Revelation 12:10). When he accuses us, we are to go to the Lord and get our heart right before God as well as everyone else we have hurt.

If we desire to live a life of closeness to the Spirit of God, we must be quick to humble ourselves and not make excuses. Just like I taught my son on tour not to wander off if he got lost, we should go back to where we last saw evidence of God's presence and repent for going our way without Him. Mary and Joseph returned to the last place they saw Him—likely in the Temple courts. Our resistance to the Holy Spirit's conviction hinders His ability to lead and guide us. In contrast, our humility to receive the correction and convicting work of the Spirit will bring us more grace: **"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'" (James 4:6).** Whenever you catch yourself justifying something that the Spirit is showing you to be wrong, know that the enemy is at his work to put you on the road to Nazareth without the close presence of the Lord Jesus.

What warning signs does God give us that alert us to our ignoring the Holy Spirit's promptings?  
What things harden our hearts against being sensitive to the Spirit's voice?

### **How Does a Child of God Gain Victory over Self, Sin, and Satan?**

In his letter to the church in Rome, the Apostle Paul wanted to help the believers with similar difficulties that we face. He taught them that there is something we must know, something we must consider, and something we must present.

#### **1) Something We Must Know**

<sup>3</sup>Or **don't you know** that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?... <sup>6</sup>For **we know** that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin... <sup>9</sup>For **we know** that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him (Romans 6:3, 6, 9).

Hosea the prophet said that God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). I want to emphasize again that we cannot lose our salvation if we have, indeed, been born again; we are secure in His love (John 10:28). It is possible, though, to be completely ignorant as to how to draw on God's grace and power to overcome sin, self, and Satan. God's plan for His called-out ones, His Church, is to transform us into overcomers. In each letter to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, i.e., each church, the Lord said, "**To him who overcomes...**" (Revelation 2-3). We need the tools of God to overcome our enemy, with the Word of God being our chief weapon—the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).

Do you know and believe what Christ accomplished for you when He died and rose again? This belief is paramount to living a life in tune with the Spirit and empowered for ministry. If you are not firm in this knowledge, the enemy will quickly condemn you and rob you of your authority in Christ. Jesus tasted death for us and was raised to newness of life. When Scripture states that we are baptized into his death, this is a spiritual transformation that has taken place in the heavenly realms.

The word baptism comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, which speaks of identification, a term used for dying cloth. When the fabric was dipped into a bath of dye, there was a transformation of its nature. We, too, are changed by this baptism into Christ and His Body, the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13). Christ's victory over sin was our victory. You may not feel victorious, but by faith, regardless of your feelings, you need to understand what Christ accomplished for you and know that He obtained this victory for you to walk in, not just to comprehend mentally, but to live in the power of this truth.

If you are aware of sin in your life, confess your sins to God and to one another and seek to repair the damage if necessary. Sins such as unforgiveness, bitterness, jealousy, pride, doubt, unbelief, and damaged relationships are all things we need to confess and leave behind if we are to journey on in this life of abiding in Christ.

## 2) Something We Must Consider or Count on

<sup>11</sup>In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus <sup>12</sup>Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires (Romans 6:11-12).

The word "consider or count," depending on your English translation, is an accounting term, and it means to calculate or count on. I relied on knowing that my son would wait there for me when I found out that he wasn't with us. I didn't look anywhere else for him; I was confident in his obedience to what I had told him. To count yourself dead is a deliberate phrase used here, that we are dead to sin's mastery over us. We are enslaved to sin no longer since we have been bought with a price, the precious redeeming blood of Christ.

After people begin to walk with Christ and receive Him into their lives, they still experience a battle, an inner war between our lower nature, which the Bible calls the flesh, and between the renewed inner life of our spirit that now puts Christ and His Word first. The more we obey the dictates of the Holy Spirit, the more we will put to death our lower nature. The spiritual truth of the Scripture above is that God has called us to live an empowered life in step with the Spirit. **"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit"** (Galatians 5:25 NIV). The ESV translation puts the same Scripture in terms of keeping in step with the Spirit: **"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."** The picture is of an army marching or fighting in unison together.

To maintain rank, each person keeps in step with the man on the right, and each man on the right holds in step with the one in front. In that way, the whole regiment marches or fights in unison without breaking ranks. We are to be in unison with the Holy Spirit and say *yes* to the inner thoughts in line with the Word of God. The Holy Spirit will remind us and bring to our remembrance what the Lord Jesus has spoken. In this way, His power will flow through the body of Christ as we maintain the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). We no longer give obedience to our fleshly dictates.

## 3) Something We Must Present

<sup>13</sup>and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. <sup>14</sup>For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:13-14).

Paul speaks of a conscious effort when he says what we are to do and what we are not to do to live an empowered life in the Spirit. We are not to present our bodies as instruments of unrighteousness, but we are to present ourselves to God.

Consider these words in Romans 6:13: **"Present yourselves to God."** What does this mean in practical terms?

Our mind is the battlefield where the enemy meets us. It is there that he chooses first to wage his war, and it is there that we need to be ready for him. We present to God all we are, i.e., our minds, wills, emotions, and physical beings. However, it is in the mind that the battle is won or lost.

Everything else will be affected by what we allow our thoughts to dwell on and the choices that we make. That is why we are first to know, consider, and present. When we are obedient to the Spirit, God powerfully uses His people. One pastor tells the story of a young man's obedience to God and the result of a simple act of kindness.

A young man listened as his pastor spoke about hearing and obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit. The man wondered, "Does God really still speak to people like that today?" It was about ten o'clock pm when the young man was driving home. He prayed: "God, if you will speak to me, I will listen. I will do my best to obey." On his drive home, he had a thought come to him: stop and buy a gallon of milk. He was not sure if this impulse was from God, but just in case, he thought it would be best to stop and buy the milk. It didn't seem too hard for a test of obedience. On his way home, he felt a sudden urge to turn down a certain street. He ignored the urge and carried on to the intersection when he felt the urge again. He turned around and headed down that street as he felt prompted. Half-jokingly, he said out loud, "Okay God, I will."

He drove several blocks when suddenly he felt like stopping. He pulled over to the curb and looked around. He was in a semi-commercial area of town. It wasn't the best, but it wasn't the worst of neighborhoods either. The businesses were closed, and most of the houses looked dark. Again, he sensed something, a prompting to go and give the milk to someone in the house across the street. The man looked at the house, and it was dark. It appeared that they had either gone out for the night or they were already asleep. He was unsure what to do, so he prayed. "Lord, this is insane. Those people are asleep and if I wake them up, they are going to be mad, and I will look stupid."

Again, he felt a strong prompting to go and deliver the gallon of milk to that house. Finally, he opened the door of his car, saying, "Ok, God, if this is you, I will go and give them this milk. If you want me to look like a crazy person, okay. I want to be obedient. I guess that will count for something. But if they don't answer right away, I am out of here! He walked across the street and rang the bell. He could hear voices inside, and a man's voice called out, "who is it, and what do you want?" Then the door opened before the young man could get away. A man was standing at the door in his jeans and a T-shirt. He looked like he just got out of bed. He had a strange look on his face and he did not look happy about having a stranger on his doorstep. "What is it?" the man asked. The young man thrust out the gallon of milk. "Here, I brought you this," he said. The man took the milk and rushed down the hallway, speaking loudly in Spanish.

Then, from the hallway came a woman carrying the milk toward the kitchen. The man was following her, holding a baby. The baby was crying. The man had tears streaming down his face. The man began half-speaking and half-crying. He said, "We were just praying! We had some big bills to pay this month, and we ran out of money. We didn't have any milk for our baby. I was just praying and asking God to show me how to get some milk." His wife in the kitchen yelled out. "I asked him to send an angel. Are you an angel?"

The young man reached into his wallet, pulled out all the money he had on him, and put it in the man's hand. He turned and walked back to his car, tears streaming down his face. He knew that God answered prayers. Story from... (Comments to: Lan Shao [Ishao@rst.inri.com](mailto:Ishao@rst.inri.com))

I love this story for a few reasons. For one, it is a simple story of how one step of random kindness

fulfilled a pressing need but also taught all parties involved a deep lesson, one they will never forget. It gives us a glimpse into the Father heart of God, that He cares for the little ones, and that He cared enough to send His servant. One who simply opened his heart and asked God to speak to Him. Yes, God could have sent an angel since an angel is a heavenly messenger; but in a way, He did. I think it is so meaningful because everyone in that story was impacted. The love of God was demonstrated through a simple act of faith and obedience to the Spirit of God.

Prayer: Father, would you teach us to keep in step with Your Spirit and serve You humbly and faithfully? Thank You for what You are doing worldwide to reach those hungry for a relationship with You. Help us listen to you and obey. Teach us to walk with you daily. Amen.

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