

in a very real God who has given us his Spirit to help us in every situation and for every need.

If there is a formula, the closest thing I have found to one is that old hymn, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.” Life in the Spirit is one of faith and action. We believe that he will empower and lead us into truth, and then we yield, trust, and step out. We “sow to please the Spirit,” and he promises us the reaping of life.

YIELDING

OFTEN IN THE GROWTH process we do not know what to do, or we do not want to do what we know we should do. This is where the “control” of the Spirit comes into play, and we must yield. We must submit to what the Spirit is telling us to do and allow him to have the reins of control moment by moment. Paul tells us: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Rom. 8:9).

The moment-by-moment task is not only one of asking, but of being filled with his power and of yielding to his control. The Holy Spirit talks to us, brings to mind things God has said, shows us a way out, gives us answers, gives us things to say, and pushes us to take a risk. But when he nudges or reminds, *our job is to yield to him and allow him to have control. We are to submit and yield our will.* In that way, he takes us where we need to go, and we have taken another step of change.

Sometimes we might not even know what that next step is. That’s when we can ask God to show us.

“SHOW ME”

“BUT I DON’T KNOW why I feel this way. It just happened. There is no reason for it,” David replied when I asked him what had triggered his depression.

“I believe that you don’t know why you feel depressed or what happened to trigger your feelings. But I can promise you that there *is* a rea-

son for it. God made you in such a way that you don’t feel so bad for no reason.”

“Well, I don’t have any idea what it would be. It just hit me. I don’t have a clue.”

“Let’s think about it,” I said, knowing that when we talk honestly, more truth usually emerges. We talked, but nothing emerged. We talked more. Nothing. Then I felt that urge to pray that I have learned to trust over the years as being from the Spirit. So I said, “Let’s ask God to show us through his Spirit what was happening.” And we did.

As we began to talk again, David’s expression changed. His face quivered, and he began to shake. Some powerful emotions came to the surface as he realized what had triggered his depression. The day before he had had a conversation with someone who had attended a funeral. This conversation had put him in touch with his feelings over the loss of his mother at a young age. His depression made total, rational sense. We, in our limited awareness and knowledge, could not find the reason, but the Holy Spirit could. As Jesus said, he leads us into all truth.

One of the main ministries of the Holy Spirit is that he leads us to truth—the truth of God and Jesus, the illuminating truth of God’s Word, the truth about people through supernatural knowledge, and the truth of situations through wisdom and prophecy. This is what he does. In fact, he is called “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 16:13).

The Spirit also knows the truth of our own lives and souls, and he knows what needs to change and be revealed. I suggest that you ask the Holy Spirit specifically to show you what he wants to reveal to you about your growth, your soul, issues in your life, and so on.

Ask the Spirit to show you the truth about you as a person, and also about his answers and God’s ways. Truth is healing, and we need as much of it from him as he will give. And that is usually as much as we are ready, able, or strong enough to receive.

WHERE HE LEADS, FOLLOW

IT HAS BEEN SAID that spiritual and emotional growth is a path further and further into reality. I always try to remind people that as painful as it may be, *truth is always your friend.* No matter how difficult it is to

swallow, truth is reality and that is where ultimate safety, growth, and God are. We need to know the truth.

Sometimes the truth leads us to what is hurting us, as with my client David above. Sometimes it leads us to what we need to change. At other times it leads us to what we need to do next in a relationship. At still other times it leads us to what our weaknesses or limitations are, such as what we are *not* ready to deal with. But whatever the truth is, it is our friend. It is also where God lives.

So one of the most important things God does in the process of growth is to send us his Spirit of truth. He is always showing us the truth about ourselves, about life, about relationships, about God and his Word, and about our path. The Spirit convicts us when we are wrong, teaches us when we need it, guides us when we need to see the path, and shows us how to get there.

The flip side to the Spirit's work in this area is that we must follow his lead and do what he shows us to do. This is part of the "sowing to please the Spirit" Paul refers to. As he says in Galatians, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). When the Spirit leads us to truth, we need to follow.

Sometimes the Spirit's calling is internal; for example, he calls us to pray. The last few days or so, my parents were on my mind a lot. I thought about them and prayed for them, but the thought of them did not go away. God was telling me something about a need they had. I knew I needed to call, and I intended to do so the first break I got. But something happened yesterday.

My sister called from across the country and told me that my dad had not been feeling well for a few days and that yesterday he had had a stroke. By the time they called me, everything was fine and he was doing well. There seems to be no serious damage, and he will go home from the hospital in a few days, so I stayed in California. Yet now I know why my parents were on my mind and heart more strongly than usual. I think that the Spirit was leading me into some truth I did not have access to by myself: that my parents needed prayer and support. Even though everything turned out okay, I wish now I had followed his leading earlier.

I have seen this in business, where I was led to call someone. I have seen it in ministry, when I was led to reach out to someone. I have seen it in my own personal growth, when I was led to face an issue or a sin in my heart. I am slowly learning to recognize the Spirit's leading; the hunches I feel are often his whispering to me to do something. I am slowly learning to hear and then to follow.

The Holy Spirit talks to us all in different ways, as everyone's relationship with God is personal. But even though he does it differently with everyone, he does it. He talks to us about our lives and about things we need to change. For me it usually happens in a few ways.

The most common way is when something stays in my mind without my trying to think about it. I have recognized the difference between my own obsessive worry about things and the Spirit's gently "camping out" in my brain. He just sits there constantly with an issue until I deal with it.

Another way is that the Spirit will bring up an issue from the outside. I will hear the same issue talked about in fifteen different contexts, from a sermon to a passage of Scripture, a friend telling me, a book, a radio or TV show, and so on. He will find many different ways to show me the same thing to the point where I cannot deny he is talking to me.

Then there is the one-time, immediate quickening of my own spirit when I hear or read or see something. The other day I was reading some contracts for one of my business deals, and I read something and felt my spirit jump inside. (And, for my interests, it jumped in the wrong direction!) I was convicted that the way this relationship was structured was not fair; it was too much in my favor. I think the Spirit was possibly telling me to give more to the other side. I had been wrong. It is not something I would have come up with, as I had negotiated for my position. But when I read the material I was reading, I felt he was speaking to me. It was immediate, and it was strong.

I don't know how you hear the Spirit. Probably you hear him in some similar ways that I do and some different ways as well. If you are a parent, you communicate differently with each of your children, because they hear and learn differently. We talk to our various friends differently. But our message should always be one of truth. And this is

how I think the Holy Spirit operates. He talks to us all in different ways, but always with the truth we need to hear for the moment. Even though it may seem to be “bad news” at the time, it is always good news for the long haul. So listen for how he speaks to you.

One thing is sure: The Holy Spirit can't lead past where he is leading if we don't take that first step of following him into the truth he is showing us. If he shows me an issue to deal with, I have to take the steps to deal with it. If he shows me a sin, I have to deal with it. And so on. He leads, we follow. That is “keeping in step with the Spirit.” It is a relationship we follow step by step.

The best illustration I know of this step-by-step relationship is one I told a man the other day who was thinking of going into the ministry. He was feeling as if God was leading him to drop out of business and attend Bible school. God's leading was very clear. But the man wanted to talk to me, since I am in the ministry myself, to “know how you know what you are going to do.” He knew God was leading him to Bible school, but he did not know what God wanted him to do later, so he did not know what courses to take.

I told him, basically, “Welcome to following God.” That is how he usually works. All God tells us is the next step. Take that one, and the one after that will appear, but not before. It is like wearing one of those miners' hats with the light on it, I said. You look down and only see enough light to take the very next step. As you take that one, the next one becomes clear, and so on. God rarely shows us the whole picture at once.

It is like that in a career move or in growth or in learning about him. He leads us one step at a time, but we have to “keep in step” with an active following. I told my friend that when God told me to go into the field of Christian counseling and study psychology and theology, I had no idea I would be doing the things I do now, like writing and teaching. For all I knew, God could have led me into research. He just told me to go into the field. He only shows the next step. And it is our job to be obedient and follow the little truth he gives us.

Jesus said God is looking for people to worship him in Spirit and in truth. He is looking for a real relationship with us from the depths of who we really are. In our limited capacities to know ourselves and to

see external reality, we must be dependent on the Spirit of truth to show us those realities. In that way, in the path of truth that he provides, growth happens. We become more of who we truly are and begin doing what we are truly made to do, with him as he truly is as well. The Spirit is ultimate reality.

MISCONCEPTIONS

OVER THE YEARS WE have found many misconceptions about Spirit-filled living in the Christian world of growth. While we can't go into these in great detail here, we want to list a few for you to watch out for.

1. IF YOU ARE “FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT,” YOU WILL ALWAYS BE HAPPY AND HAVE NO PAIN OR STRUGGLE. This common misconception is nowhere close to the experience of any human who has ever lived, even Jesus. We know that Jesus was always connected and yielded to God. We know his power came from the Spirit of God. Yet, he felt pain, and he struggled enormously. In the garden of Gethsemane he had immeasurable distress and agony. Certainly no one would say that he had “lost his victory” or “lost his walk.” Yet, sometimes struggling people are told that if they are hurting, they are not letting the Holy Spirit control them.

The truth is that yielding to the Spirit and being filled by him is something that we do *in* the pain and struggle, not *instead of* the pain and struggle. Jesus, the apostle Paul, and others all knew pain and struggle. This was not the issue. The issue was what they did in that pain and struggle. They took their pain and struggle to God and leaned on his Spirit, the Helper, for strength. Struggling does not denote failure of the Spirit-filled life.

2. IF YOU ARE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT, YOU WILL NOT SIN. This idea is similar to the first, but has to do with sin, not pain. The truth is that everyone sins, and if anyone says that he does not, he is “a liar” (1 John 1:8, 10). No one is ever without sin, for even if our behavior is okay for the moment, unconscious, sinful, dark parts of the soul are not yet cleansed. The Spirit-filled life is a progressive one of “cleaning up the inside of the cup” as well as the outside. No one has that totally finished. Sinless perfection is an ideal to strive for, but an unreality for any

human except Jesus. The Bible says, “There is not a *righteous* man on earth who does what is right and never sins” (Eccl. 7:20). But we do all know righteous men who walk in the Spirit. So walking and perfection do not mean the same thing.

3. IF YOU ARE WALKING IN THE SPIRIT, YOU WILL HAVE THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT INSTANTLY. Remember, sanctification is a process. Paul said he didn’t have it yet (Phil. 3:12–13). Peter said the qualities of good character are built over time in increasing measure (2 Peter 1:8). Fruit is the result of walking in the Spirit, as we sow to please the Spirit (Gal. 6:8–9). Growth takes time, and it takes time to sow to please the Spirit and to grow in the spiritual life. It is not just a switch that someone pulls—off with the old immature me and on with the new totally mature me. As we see in other chapters, the Bible says that all things have become “new,” but not “complete” (2 Cor. 5:17). It says that maturity is something we have to move toward (Heb. 6:1) and that we are “being made holy” (Heb. 10:14). This takes time.

So do not let anyone discourage you by making you feel that if you do not have it all together, you are not “in the Spirit.” If you are leaning on him to the best of your ability, asking him for all the help you know how to ask for, facing all that you know how to face, and obeying all that you know to do, just keep on trusting. The fruit will come.

A WARNING

ON THE ONE HAND, just because a person is not perfect does not mean that the Spirit is not in his life. On the other hand, if a person’s life has zero evidence of light, faith, change of direction, repentance, and love, then she must ask herself if the Spirit is in her life. Either he is being quenched and not followed, or he is not even there. As Peter says,

If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:8–10).

Or as Paul warns, not walking with the Spirit and following sin results in bad fruit:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:19–25).

So, while you need not worry if you do not have it all together, you should be concerned if you are not showing any fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. The good news is that, as we saw in the beginning of the chapter, if this concerns you and you want his help, this is a sign that he is with you already. No one should ever be concerned if she wishes for his help and forgiveness, as that wish itself is a fruit of the Spirit. But showing no fruit and no concern is a different story.

IT’S NOT JUST “LET GO AND LET GOD”

WHEN YOU PREACH the work of the Holy Spirit in peoples’ lives, there is a danger. Some want to bail out of their responsibility, and they want to “let go and let God.” I was doing a training workshop with some people who were in the ministry. As I talked about all the things we need to do to grow, such as face fears, take risks, and join a support group, one man asked, “Isn’t this just another way of saying you set your goals and just do them? That sounds like any other system of psychology and self-help.”

I told him that I very much disagreed and that what I had been saying all along was the exact opposite: We *cannot* do the things we need to do on our own. We are *unable to make choices* on our own. We have to face our inability and depend on God. We have to depend on others. We have to reach out and be empowered. I emphasized we could not do it on our own. There is no “self-help.”

TIPS FOR GROWERS:

- Seek and understand your security in God and how he is seeking you through his Spirit.
- Learn how he is to work and what he promises so you can expect and find it. Learn the list of things the Holy Spirit will do.
- Seek him as a person in a relationship. Depend on him as a person moment by moment for all that you need.
- Ask for help in every situation.
- Follow him.
- Yield to him.
- Ask him to show you and reveal to you what you do not know about everything in life.
- Follow him in whatever he reveals to you, one step at a time.
- Don't confuse pain and suffering with a lack of his presence. Ask him to be with you in the pain and suffering and do all of the above in the midst of it.
- Examine yourself always to make sure you are in the faith and his life is in you.
- Pray for his supernatural healing and deliverance when needed.
- Remain in the paradox of both you and God living your life.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- Clear up any misconceptions about the Holy Spirit.
- Teach people how the Spirit works and what the Bible promises about what he will do.
- Make sure you focus always on the moment by moment dependency and relationship with him.
- Provide ways and contexts of seeking the Spirit and asking for him from God.
- Give encouragement to depend on him, and don't judge struggle as a lack of his presence in someone's life.
- Give the warnings that the Bible gives regarding a lack of the fruit of the Spirit.
- Provide teaching and experiences and contexts for the supernatural healing and deliverance the Spirit offers.

I thought we were not by saying: "Oh, I see. We can't do it so we just depend on the Holy Spirit to do it. We give it all to him." "No," I said. "We don't just give it all to him. We can't do it, and we don't just give it all to him. We must 'work out our salvation,' but we also have to be asking him to help us to do all of it. It is both, not one or the other."

Humans tend to be unable to hold opposite ideas in dynamic tension. But this is a tension we will always need to hold: God has a part, and we have a part. Beware of dichotomizing between your tasks and God's.

SUPERNATURAL

IN ADDITION TO THE moment-by-moment work and dependency on the Holy Spirit, we can ask him to heal. I strongly believe we can ask God to heal our own souls and can ask him to break other kinds of bondage in people's souls, such as deliverance from demonic influence or possession. This is not a treatise on how to do that, so we will not go into it here. There are many good books on healing and deliverance. But since this is a chapter on the Holy Spirit, I would like to remind us all that he does heal and deliver.

Throughout the Bible, God is spoken of as healer and deliverer. And I have seen him heal and deliver. Sometimes he heals instantly and miraculously. But in the emotional arena with issues like depression, anxiety, and overeating, when people are prayed for, we often see that God begins to heal them by helping them work out their issues. The depressed person, for example, finds the strength and courage to come out of isolation. Just because a healing was not instantaneous does not mean that the prayer was ineffectual. God did answer it, but he answered it in a deeper way by helping the person to change. Prayer changes things, either instantly or through time, as shown in both Scripture and real life.

I have also observed a lot of deliverance from demonic oppression. Sometimes that needs to be done by a skilled person who has done it before and knows the difference between spiritual strongholds and

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emotional and psychiatric problems. If you are dealing with someone who has this sort of demonic issue, make sure you get him to a person with good diagnostic backgrounds. There is a lot of strange stuff floating around the church.

But the bottom line is that we are to pray for people's healing. I love it when anyone I am working with has a regular prayer group or team praying specifically for the healing of the issues we are dealing with.

Ask God to give you the gifts you need for the moment when you are praying for someone. He may give you supernatural wisdom or knowledge, for example. He may visit you with a gift or manifestation of his Spirit for that person. He may show the person or you what issue should be addressed. Or he may just work a direct miracle—we never know. What we do know is that the “prayer of a righteous man [and woman] is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). It is as important a part of all of growth as anything else.

So whether you are growing yourself or are in the process of helping others, make prayer a part of what is happening. Send your growers to a prayer group. Or start one. Or suggest that they get a prayer partner to pray together for the issues they are dealing with. However it is done, prayer must be in the picture for you to have a complete picture of growth that includes God and his Holy Spirit.

NEVER TOO LATE TO BEGIN

I HAVE TALKED TO many people who have been Christians for a long time and have adhered to God's principles and taught others, but have had no real life “in the Holy Spirit.” For them, Christianity is in some ways not supernatural. If this is you, don't be dismayed, for it is never too late to begin. And the “formula” is a simple one: Just ask.

As Paul told us, “Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him” (Col. 2:6). We receive Jesus by faith, and we walk the same way. Just ask the Holy Spirit to do all the things we talked about here, or whatever else you need him to do. As Jesus promised, God will give him to you (Luke 11:13). You received him in the beginning by trusting and asking. Now, in the arena of growth for yourself and others, do the same thing. Ask and trust. He will show up, just as he promised.