

Aspects

AN UNNATURAL JOURNEY

Living by the Spirit

That's the problem, you see.

Living, for most people, is an essentially *physical* process consisting of eating, sleeping, working, playing, carrying on a conversation with another physical being, playing softball on a Saturday morning, getting heartburn after too many burritos and a longer belt after the Thanksgiving feast.

Living is part of being human. It is looking into the eyes of a loved one, feeling the touch of a friend, and the loud anger of an enemy. It is rising in the morning to go to work, and returning home at the end of the day to mow the lawn or prepare dinner. It is physical, it is *doing*. Living is something one can see and touch, hear and smell. It is something played out before all our senses. It is tangible.

The Spirit, on the other hand, represents an *intangible* process for most people. Spiritual things are mysterious and puzzling, associated with inexplicable dreams and queasy feelings of dread. They fall into the area of prayers and incantations, angel whispers, and small hairs rising on the back of the neck.

Even within the Christian community the Spirit is often referred to as "it." One's next door neighbor is a "she"; the delivery driver is a "he"; even the second member of the Trinity, who once walked the paths of this earth, is certainly a "He." But the Spirit — a mysterious, invisible being without what we would call a proper name — is called an "it." And that perfectly describes the detached manner in which some of us consider all things spiritual.

Even Christians may prefer to segregate these two components into their "spiritual life" and . . . well, all the rest. Spirituality is something exercised only at specified points on the calendar, say, every Sunday morning and every Wednesday night. The *really* religious, the fanatics in our midst, may even get spiritual more often than that — adding Sunday evening, or an occasional retreat or seminar, or Thursday morning Men's breakfast.

However it is organized, many Christians have drawn an imaginary, yet firm line between what is spiritual and what is daily living — which leaves us with the problem: How do we reconcile these two seemingly incompatible realms? How does one *live* by the *Spirit*? And given that, how does one *walk* by the Spirit?

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:25 NASB

Someone Real

A good starting point would be to become better acquainted with the Spirit — the *Holy* Spirit of God. And we *can* become acquainted with Him in a personal way, since He's not at all an "it," but a real, living being. Jesus described the Spirit to His disciples on the night He was arrested:

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come." *John 16:13*

The Spirit is a "he," just like Jesus and God the Father. In fact, the Father and the Spirit are of the same *type*, as it were. According to Jesus,

"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." *John 4:24*

Inside . . .

The Constant Connection

The work of the Holy Spirit is woven throughout the history of mankind. He was there before the beginning and He will be present after the end.

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We do not live by the Spirit by depending on our own power and abilities, but rather by giving up those gifts to a *higher* power. The key to living by the Spirit is *surrender*.

One With God

Worship of God and Spirit-living do not come naturally to a people preoccupied with self. If our own pleasure and convenience are our priorities, we will never walk by the Spirit.

Nurturing the Unnatural

When we give our lives over to His invasive yet comforting Spirit then, and only then, are we able to see the powerful hand and gentle grace of God even in our own efforts.



The word “spirit” that Jesus used is the same word used in the Bible for the Holy Spirit.¹ So, since God the Father and the Holy Spirit are of the same essence, if we can know and have a relationship with one, we certainly can with the other.

THE CONSTANT CONNECTION

The Holy Spirit is a living Person and should be treated as a person. We must never think of Him as a blind energy nor as an impersonal force. He hears and sees and feels as any person does. He speaks and hears us speak. We can please Him or grieve Him or silence Him as we can any other person. He will respond to our timid effort to know Him and will ever meet us over half the way. *A.W. Tozer²*

We first meet the Holy Spirit, as an individual, in the second verse of the Bible.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Genesis 1:2 KJV

He was there in the beginning, and somehow it’s reassuring to know that even then — as far away from us as the beginning of

... like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.
Deut. 32:11

time itself — the Comforter was familiar with the dust from which we would be created. He was the keeper of all the raw elements that made up the earth, hovering over them like a mother bird hovers over her chicks. In the beginning the earth was nothing more than an amorphous blob of dark, watery nothingness, presided over by the

third personality of the Godhead, the one who would one day become our great and compassionate counselor.

Subsequent earthly events give cause to display other character traits of the Spirit. In the book of Nehemiah He is described as a teacher.

You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. *Neh. 9:20*

Isaiah describes the future Messiah by the wisdom He will receive from the Spirit.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD — and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. *Isaiah 11:1-3a*

And then when it became time for the Messiah to be born on earth, it was accomplished supernaturally by the Spirit.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1:18-20

What the Spirit does is exactly what the Lord does; the Spirit’s work is not an additional or special work *beyond* the Lord’s; the Spirit is the Lord at work. *F.D. Bruner*

More Than a Feeling

The work of the Holy Spirit is woven throughout the history of mankind. He was there before the beginning. He works and gives and ministers in the lives of men and women from the first Adam to the Last,³ and He will be present after the end.

Though they would be loathe to admit it, some in the body of Christ — even those claiming special knowledge of, and power through, the Spirit — think of the Holy Spirit more as a *feeling* than a person. They associate His ministry with ecstasies, religious exuberance, and special momentary glimpses into divine knowledge.

The Spirit certainly is mystical — associated in Scripture with wind and breath, fire, water, words, and a dove — but He is far more than a feeling. He is as vital to the ongoing process of our salvation as the other two members of the Trinity, for without the Spirit we would lose touch with God.

The moment at which we join the Father’s family through the blood of Christ something quite miraculous and supernatural occurs: We are instantly indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He comes in

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”
Rev. 22:17a

The Ministry of the Spirit

Neh. 9:20	Matthew 10:20	John 1:32-33	Acts 2:33	Romans 15:30	Galatians 5:16-25	Titus 3:5-6
Job 33:4	Matthew 12:28	John 3:5-6	Acts 2:38	1 Cor. 2:10-14	Galatians 6:8	Hebrews 2:4
Psalms 139:7	Matthew 28:19	John 3:34	Acts 4:8	1 Cor. 3:16	Ephes. 1:17	Hebrews 9:14
Isaiah 11:1-3	Luke 1:15	John 4:14	Acts 5:3-11	1 Cor. 6:11	Ephes. 2:18-22	1 Peter 1:11-12
Isaiah 44:3-4	Luke 1:35	John 6:45	Acts 5:32	1 Cor. 6:19	Ephes. 3:16	1 Peter 3:18
Isaiah 63:10	Luke 1:67	John 6:63	Acts 8:15-17	1 Cor. 12:3-11	Ephes. 4:3-4	1 Peter 4:14
Ezekiel 36:27	Luke 2:25-27	John 7:38-39	Acts 9:31	2 Cor. 1:22	Ephes. 4:30	1 John 2:20
Micah 2:7	Luke 3:22	John 14:16-26	Acts 10:19-20	2 Cor. 3:3	Ephes. 5:18	1 John 3:24
Haggai 2:5	Luke 11:13	John 15:26	Acts 16:6-7	2 Cor. 3:17	Ephes. 6:17-18	1 John 4:2-13
Matthew 1:18-20	Luke 12:12	John 16:7-14	Acts 19:2-6	2 Cor. 5:5	1 Thes. 1:6	1 John 5:6-8
Matthew 3:11-4:1	Luke 24:49	John 20:22	Romans 8:5-11	2 Cor. 13:14	1 Thes. 5:19	
		Acts 1:2	Romans 8:22-27	Galatians 3:2-3	2 Thes. 2:13	
		Acts 1:16	Romans 14:17	Galatians 4:6	1 Tim. 4:1	
		Acts 2:2-4	Romans 15:13-16	Galatians 5:5	2 Tim. 1:14	

to establish a permanent link between us and the Father. It is Jesus Christ's selfless act at Calvary that actually saves us, but it is this spiritual connection established at the moment of redemption that sustains our communion with heaven on a daily basis.

Let me remind you that when we talk about the Spirit of God, we are not talking about a small part of the whole. The Spirit of God is, in fact, God. And as a member of the Godhead, He is incomprehensible and infinite in nature.

Charles R. Swindoll⁴

Without the Spirit's ministry in our life we would be useless in God's service; anything we did for the Father would be accomplished under our own power and inspiration, and thereby useless to the Kingdom. Without the Spirit there would be no life-change in a believer; we would look and behave like every other soul on earth.

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.

Galatians 5:22-23

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,
Vouchsafe within our souls to rest;
Come with Thy grace and heav'nly aid,
And fill the hearts which Thou has made.

To Thee, the Comforter, we cry;
To Thee, the Gift of God most high;
The Fount of life, the Fire of love,
The soul's Anointing from above.

The sev'nfold gifts of grace are Thine,
O Finger of the Hand Divine;
True Promise of the Father Thou,
Who dost the tongue with speech endow.

Thy light to every sense impart,
And shed Thy love in every heart;
Thy own unfailing might supply
To strengthen our infirmity.

Latin, 9th Century

GIVING UP TO GAIN

The (Early) Church was not an organization merely, not a movement, but a walking incarnation of spiritual energy. The Church began in power, moved in power and moved just as long as she had power. When she no longer had power she dug in for safety and sought to conserve her gains. But her blessings were like the manna: when they tried to keep it overnight it bred worms and stank. So we have had monasticism, scholasticism, institutionalism; and they have all been indicative of the same thing: absence of spiritual power. In Church history every return to New Testament power has marked a new advance somewhere, and every diminution of power has seen the rise of some new mechanism for conservation and defence. If this analysis is reasonably correct, then we are today in a state of very low spiritual energy.

The only power God recognizes in His Church is the power of His Spirit; whereas the only power actually recognized today by the majority of evangelicals is the power of man. God does His work by the operation of the Spirit, while Christian leaders attempt to do theirs by the power of trained and devoted intellect. Bright personality has taken the place of the divine afflatus.⁵ Only what is done through the Eternal Spirit will abide eternally.

Tozer

Moving in Him

So just what does it mean to *live* by the Spirit?

Once we remove the artificial barrier erected between the spiritual and the corporeal — once we accept the fact that, as a disciple of Christ, we have become a spiritual being — it then becomes easier to take hold of the concept of living by the Spirit. He is kin; through the blood of Christ, we have become like Him.

Though he does not explicitly mention the Holy Spirit, Paul, in his speech to the Areopagus on Mars Hill in Athens, describes an essentially spiritual relationship between God and man.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'" *Acts 17:24-28*

Because we have been given the gift of free will (or might that be more a curse than a gift?) we are free to live outside of His Spirit. But therein lies only misery. The believer who refuses to live by the Spirit is swimming upstream, against the current. God is committed to pouring His blessings into our life, and He does this through the Spirit connection. When we determine to live outside of that connection, we short-circuit the life He wishes to have flow into our life.

The inhabitation of the Holy Spirit does not ensure that we will proceed under His power. Like the other members of the Godhead, the Spirit is a gracious, courteous dweller. Knowing His way is superior, He patiently waits for us to agree.

It's always a little dangerous to draw upon the peculiar wisdom of Hollywood for understanding the mysteries of God, but there is a moment in the first *Star Wars* film that perfectly illustrates how we are to live by the Spirit.

Our hero, Luke Skywalker, has just learned that he has in his genes the makings of a Jedi Knight. In their ship flying through space, Luke's mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi, is trying to teach him about the pervasive, mysterious Force. The young Skywalker is jousting with a small round remote which periodically fires a stinging blast at him, and he's doing a poor job of fending off the blasts with his light saber — a futuristic version of a swashbuckler's sword.

As Luke is once again stung by the remote's blast, Obi-Wan reminds him, "Remember, a Jedi can feel the Force flowing through him." To further prove the power of this mysterious, invisible Force, Obi-Wan places a helmet over Luke's head — a

helmet that completely covers his eyes. "Try it again, Luke. This time let go your conscious self."

Luke is incredulous. "With the blast shield down, I can't even see. How am I supposed to fight?"

Obi-Wan replies, "Your eyes can deceive you. Don't trust them."

Frustrated by his inability to master this more spiritual side of being a Jedi Knight, Luke still cannot fend off the remote's attacks.

"Stretch out with your feelings, Luke," Obi-Wan says.

Luke centers himself and calmly raises his weapon. We see that he is now relying less on himself than on the guiding Force. The remote turns and fires once, twice, three times — and each strike is effortlessly rebuffed by Luke's flashing light saber.

"You see," Obi-Wan says, "you *can* do it. You've taken your first step into a larger world."

Embracing Reality

A spiritual kingdom lies all about us, enclosing us, embracing us, altogether within reach of our inner selves, waiting for us to recognize it. God Himself is here waiting our response to His presence. This eternal world will come alive to us the moment we begin to reckon upon its reality. *Tozer*

God's Holy Spirit is certainly not identical to George Lucas' imaginative Force, but the method by which one taps into His power is similar. We do not live by the Spirit by depending on our own power and abilities, but rather by giving up those gifts to a *higher* power. The key to living by the Spirit is *surrender*.

Ah, and there's the rub. If there is anything that stands against the popular philosophy of today it is the concept of surrendering one's independence to a greater authority. It's simply not done. But our lives will not become spiritual until we let go of the physical. We will not tap into the power of God — who is a Spirit — until we become a part of the limitless spiritual world that surrounds us. As Tozer points out, it is within reach, but it waits.

From my desk I look out over a short slope that goes down to the pond behind our home. Beyond the pond is the woods — at this time of year a dense jungle of green-leaved trees, bushes, and tall weeds and grass. In the woods live myriad birds, deer, raccoon, possums, squirrels and chipmunks, wild turkeys, and other beasts of which I am not yet aware. From my desk I don't see them; I see only a heavy curtain of green. But I know they live in there because they emerge from time to time.

If one day I decide to pay the animals a visit, I could open the gate behind the barn and go crashing through the underbrush astride my tractor. The tractor would conveniently smash through the brush, making my progress easier. In fact, if it really becomes too dense even for it, I could take along my chain saw; it would make short work of the low branches that impede my progress.

All that might get me in to where the beasts live, but once I were there I would find myself very much alone. Entering the woods on my own, very physical terms would virtually guarantee a solitary vigil.

I could, however, choose to enter the woods on the terms of its inhabitants. I could climb over the gate and quietly enter the dense stand of trees on foot. I would carefully go around obstacles instead of crashing through them, and even step where my footfalls would make little noise. I would be silent and move cautiously, becoming one with the dense vitality of the forest.

Soon I would be serenaded by songbirds and the melodic croaking of frogs. Pheasants would screech from the neighboring field and turkeys would gobble and strut within a few yards of my position. Deer would browse the lower branches in my line of sight, and possums would waddle by dragging their naked, rat-like tails. Antic squirrels would leap from branch to branch overhead, complaining and scolding, but making me feel at home in their world. Quietly, a little at a time, I would become one with my surroundings.

We do not "live by the Spirit" by physical means. Jesus told the woman at the well that human beings do not choose the manner by which they acceptably worship the Lord God, but must, instead, offer their worship in a manner pleasing to its object.

"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." *John 4:24*

In the same way we cannot choose the manner by which we live by the Spirit; it is a spiritual world that must be entered on its own terms. This means that living by the Spirit is not accom-

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. *1 Cor. 3:12-15*

plished by attending church, serving on the Building and Grounds Committee, teaching Sunday School, or taking your favorite casserole to the potluck dinner. Living by the Spirit is not accomplished by forcing oneself to read through the Bible in a year, or by stopping work every day at ten o'clock to pray.

All of these activities may be associated with the Spiritual life, but they are not — in themselves — Spiritual. Spirit-living means that we are *energized* by the Holy Spirit; that is the *first* milestone of the journey, not the last. Church activities do not guarantee spirituality any more than driving a four-wheel drive vehicle into the woods guarantees a chance to listen to wildlife.

Busy-ness — even at church — more often drives *away* spirituality.

Works do not lead to a Spirit-filled life, but are, instead, its result.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until my will is one with Thine,
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
 So shall I never die,
 But live with Thee the perfect life
 Of Thine eternity.
Edwin Hatch

ONE WITH GOD

There is a close relationship between worship of God and the Spirit-energized life. Both are spiritual pursuits, and both have the same enemy: Self.

Worship of God and Spirit-living do not come naturally to a people preoccupied with self. Like the disciples waiting for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, our spirit may want to worship, but our natural body — and natural inclination — will not be in that direction. So when our own pleasure and convenience are our priorities, we will never walk by the Spirit.

Worship and walking by the Spirit are developed, practiced skills. They do not happen accidentally; they happen because we have set our minds on them as something worthwhile and profitable — first for God, then for ourselves. Both pursuits are centered on God.

Unfortunately we have devalued Spiritual living to the point that any illustration of it sounds like a vignette out of the Sixties, told to the accompaniment of finger cymbals and the wafting of incense. Spiritual living has become synonymous in our day with empty-headedness. To live by the Spirit denotes laziness, a lack of common sense and gumption — or it denotes Eastern mysticism lived under a crystal pyramid somewhere in the arid vastness of Arizona.

Even in the church, living by the Spirit is often associated more with ecstasies than day-to-day Christian living. For many it is the antithesis of such things as evangelism, sound Biblical instruction, witnessing, and “traditional” doctrine. What those who hold to this position fail to realize is that none of those other activities are even possible without the ministry of the Spirit in a life. The true Spirit-quickened life is not one of lazy self-indulgence, but one packed with vitality, intelligence, and supernatural wisdom.

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.”
John 16:13a

The world in which we live, and, sadly, many in the body of Christ, are uncomfortable with things of the Spirit because they are uncomfortable with the knowledge brought by the Spirit. In our world, the truth is multiple choice. Anything that declares any one truth — to the exclusion of all the rest — is either dismissed or ridiculed. We live in a society

in which all the sharp edges have been rounded off. The Spirit has sharp edges, and that is why He is so unpopular. That is why a life lived in Him can be so inconvenient.

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

Mark 14:37-38

So the main mark of a life “walking by the Spirit” is that it is conducted according to the truth of God’s word. The Spirit wrote the words, and it is the Spirit who dispenses their truth to the one in whom He dwells.

The Holy Spirit has no agenda of His own; He speaks only the truth from the Father and Jesus Christ. Seeking no glory for Himself, He always, unselfishly, points us toward the Father and the Son. So a life filled and motivated by the Holy Spirit will always be a life that points to God. Any spirit that does not point us to God the Father and Jesus Christ will not be the one, true Holy Spirit.

Living a life that is moved by the Spirit of God is, essentially, a deep and powerful joining of our spirit to His. Tozer writes that

the highest love of God is not intellectual, it is spiritual. God is spirit and only the spirit of man can know Him really. In the deep spirit of a man the fire must glow or his love is not the true love of God.

We shouldn’t make the mistake, however, of assigning the Spirit world to the fragile, fleeting land of our emotions. C.S. Lewis writes that our emotions are valid, but that we should

accept these sensations with thankfulness as birthday cards from God, but remember that they are only greetings, not the real gift . . . The real thing is the gift of the Holy Spirit which can’t usually be — perhaps not ever — experienced as a sensation or emotion. The sensations are merely the response of your nervous system. Don’t depend on them. Otherwise when they go and you are once more emotionally flat (as you certainly will be quite soon), you might think that the real thing had gone too. But it won’t. It will be there when you can’t feel it. May even be most operative when you can feel it least.

Spirit living is no more complicated, and no less grand, than simply taking God at His word and living as close to Him on a regular basis as is humanly possible. It is not the product of cold

reason, but it is brokenness, it is humility and dependency, it is bowing before Him in utter honesty and openness to declare our love and devotion.

But it is also not the result of riding the precipice of high emotions, where the bottomless pit is so near at hand, one false step away. It is thanksgiving for the beauty that surrounds us, it is reminding ourselves of His hand in everything that comes our way, it is considering Him to be our highest and best teacher of everything there is to know.

In one sense, “living by the Spirit” is coming to grips with the fact that God, through the Holy Spirit, is the root source of and sustaining power behind our very existence; “walking by the Spirit” is how that knowledge is played out in our daily life.

And in both, God is preeminent.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. *1 John 4:1*

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Psalms 51:16-17

NURTURING THE UNNATURAL

The easiest description of living and walking by the Spirit is a human life so absorbed into the life of God that His presence pervades every component, every nook and cranny of that life. It doesn't guarantee — or even suggest — sinless perfection, but rather a supernatural perspective on the natural. It means living every day, seeing every object and event, interacting with every person from an unnatural, Spiritual perspective.

Walking by the Spirit means seeing even ourselves as something set apart from the natural. It means seeing not only those things that happen around us from the Spirit's perspective, but even our own thoughts, actions, and desires as somehow detached from earthly considerations. This is not to say that we robe ourselves in sackcloth and ashes, and check out from all responsibilities and earthly experience, but that we understand that everything we are and accomplish — from the exalted to the mundane — are now part of someone higher than ourselves.

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. *1 Cor. 6:11*

Seeing God in It

There are aspects of Kingdom living that are nearly impossible to explain to those without. Indeed, they can be difficult enough to explain to some within.

This week, save for a few remaining trim boards, we finished the construction of our new barn. The doors and windows are in place, the wiring done; the power saws and heavy ladders have been removed; and the floor has been swept clean and the two tree frogs who had taken up residence removed. Yesterday, as a reward, I began moving in all the garden tools and machines.

For a barn it is, admittedly, a small barn, measuring only 16x24 feet (roughly the floor space of a 1½ car garage), but by design and use it is and will be, clearly, a barn.

In a human, physical sense we did it all ourselves. After professionals poured the slab, my father-in-law and I cut every board and nailed it into place. We built each rafter and lifted it over our heads to drop it onto the two outside walls. We were the ones clinging to the tops of the tall ladders to lay every shingle in place. We hammered and measured and sawed; we groaned and grunted and sweat away more than a few pounds; and when something failed to fit as planned, we were the ones who had to do it over. Linda and her mom painted all the trim boards with primer and two coats of Barcelona Brown, then Linda and I painted all the outside panels with two coats of Berber Ivory. Likewise, in a human, financial sense, the money to pay for it all came from our own pocket — specifically, from Linda's long hours at the office.

So why is it, when I stand outside and lift my gaze to this new building, that my heart fills with thanksgiving to God? Why is it, when I consider this barn built by human effort from beginning to end, that I rejoice that the Lord has been so generous as to give us this thing?

I have no answer to the paradox, save this:

The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

Psalm 24:1

When we become a son or daughter of the living God through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ; when we begin and sustain the never-completed process of conforming to His image; when we ingest His mind, and strive for His vision; when we tune our hearing to His voice, tuning out the clamor of the world; when we give our lives over to His invasive yet comforting Spirit — then, and only then, are we able to see the powerful hand and gentle grace of God even in our own efforts.

You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. *1 Cor. 6:19b-20⁶*

The Battle is the Lord's

There are lives scattered throughout Scripture that afford us glimpses of what it means to walk by the Spirit, but there is surely no finer example of a life conducted from beginning to end by the Spirit of God than that of King David.

While still a teenager, this remarkable boy was confronted with a situation that was making grown men cower in fear.

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him. Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." On hearing the Philistine's words,

Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

1 Samuel 17:4-11

David hadn't come to fight, but had been sent to the front lines to deliver food to his brothers, who were among the rest of the Israelites quaking with fear at the sight of the giant Goliath. Young David, however, wasn't at all impressed with the Philistine blowhard.

"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" *1 Samuel 17:26b*

All those around him, from the lowliest recruit to King Saul himself, were only thinking in natural, physical terms. They sized up the enemy, compared it to themselves, and decided that cowardice was the better part of valor. But David thought in Spiritual terms. He was more embarrassed by the cowardice of his own people than he was afraid of the enemy. Israel was God's chosen people; He had promised to protect them. So why be afraid of this lowly Philistine? How could his size and strength ever compare to the limitless power of Almighty God?

[Goliath] said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh

to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!" David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give all of you into our hands." *1 Samuel 17:43-47*

Perspective

Later in his life, after he had succeeded Saul as the King of Israel, and had enjoyed success in battle, David reached the conclusion that since the Lord had been good to him, he would like to do something good for the Lord. The King thought it wasn't right that he should live in a palace built of cedar while the ark of God was still housed in a tent. In fact, as David's son Solomon said later, the Lord was pleased that the king would have such noble intentions.

"My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to my father David, 'Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart.'" *2 Chron. 6:7-8*

David was to be disappointed, however, for God had chosen Solomon to be the builder of His temple — not David.

"Nevertheless, you are not the one to build the temple, but your son, who is your own flesh and blood — he is the one who will build the temple for my Name." *2 Chron. 6:9*

To put this moment in contemporary terms, say a grown son scrimped and saved to buy his elderly father an expensive gift out of gratitude for the fine way he had been raised. Now more mature, the son realizes that he enjoys a good life because of the splendid job his father did in bringing him up, so he wants to do something really nice for him. So the son writes a check large enough to cover the cost of a brand new car, places it in an envelope and hands it to his dad.

The father opens the gift and is suitably surprised, but instead of thanking his generous son and heading for the nearest showroom, he says, "Well, that's very nice, but no thank you." He hands the check back to his stupefied son. "I'd rather have *your* son buy me a new car. Thanks anyway."

We can well imagine the hurt feelings, even anger that this would create in the heart of the son. How dare his father be so ungrateful! After all, the old man's present car is getting ready to die; he really does need a new one. Why not just be gracious and accept the gift. And what's this nonsense about waiting for the next generation?

No one would have found fault with King David if he had had a similar response to God's rejection of his gift. It would have been perfectly natural from an earthly, human perspective. But David was someone who lived and walked by the Spirit. His perspective was *unnatural*.

David's response was remarkable. Instead of pouting, or stomping off in angry disgust, he went in and sat before the Lord. In quiet humility he expressed his gratitude for the good life God had given him.

"Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?"

"What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign LORD. For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant.

"How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears." *2 Samuel 7:18-22*

Then, with his heart filled with praise and adoration for his God, he finished,

"O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer. O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever." *2 Samuel 7:27-29*

That's what it is to live by the Spirit. That's what it is to walk through life empowered by God through His Holy Spirit. Good and positive events are not clutched too tightly, and painful, disappointing events are not spurned. Through the power of the Spirit, we happily release from our grasp the Father's pleasant blessings, and take hold of any unpleasantness that will draw us closer to Him.

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;
Wean it from earth, through all its pulses move;
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as Thou art,
And make me love Thee as I ought to love.

I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies,
No sudden rending of the veil of clay,
No angel visitant, no opening skies;
But take the dimness of my soul away.

Teach me to feel that Thou art always nigh;
Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear,
To check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;
Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer.

Teach me to love Thee as Thine angels love,
One holy passion filling all my frame;
The baptism of the heaven-descended Dove,
My heart an altar, and Thy love the flame.

George Croly

Notes:

1. pneuma, pnyoo'-mah, Greek Stg 4151; from Greek 4154 (pneo); a current of air, i.e. breath (blast) or a breeze; by analogy or figurative a spirit, i.e. (human) the rational soul, (by implication) vital principle, mental disposition, etc., or (superhuman) an angel, d'mon, or (divine) God, Christ's spirit, the Holy Spirit :- ghost, life, spirit (-ual, -ually), mind. Compare Greek 5590 (psuche).
2. *The Divine Conquest* (Christian Publications, 1978), p126f.
3. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 1 Cor. 15:45
4. *Flying Closer to the Flame* (WORD, 1993), p248.
5. af-fla-tus: (Latin pp. of afflare, to blow on); inspiration or powerful impulse, as of an artist or poet.
6. August 27, 1997 *Reflections by the Pond*, a weekly Internet column by David S. Lampel. To subscribe, send your e-mail request to DLAMPEL@AOL.COM.

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