

The Source of Life

Chapters 1-8

A Success Story



A dark cloud of failure has settled over the Christian church. It is bad enough to have an oppressive culture aggressively suppressing the Christian's freedom to express his life and worship, but the commitment to moral living is eroding away. Pastors and believers alike are divorcing, being stained with pornography, gambling, and flirting with the world.

Even worse, the foundation of the family is cracking. Our children's love for the Lord is waning. Something is obviously drastically wrong in the church when statistics show a large majority of our teens that have grown up in our churches are leaving the Lord and the church.

Dangers lurk all about us. I doubt more is needed to be stated since the decay in the church is so evident.

A spirit of defeat is creeping across the land. When it comes upon us, we feel like giving up. At times, we even question whether the truths we have devoted ourselves to are actually true and best.

What can be done?

One of the best ways to combat this evil temptation of defeat is to return to scriptural basics. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?” (Romans 8:31). God really is for us.

The Old Testament has many success stories. They are not like the typical success story that displays the cleverness of man. They instead paint a picture of man at his darkest time facing horrible defeat. Only at that point does the Bible show how God intervenes and marvelously rescues those who call upon His Name.

These true stories remind us of unchanging truths. We likewise, even in this evil time, can rely on God’s extraordinary strength and see His delivery. We might not know what God is doing overall, but we do know how He wants to work in our lives at this present time. The Lord wants to strengthen us to complete the work He has committed to us.

The more we remember the power of the life within, the more we will sense God's strength within. We will not need to hunt after resources out there to cope. He wants to be the One we trust in. The Word of God reminds us that He is on our side. It would be a genuine boost to our spiritual life if we knew and believed that this is all that is really needed. God has made us to succeed, "and having done everything, to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:13). God's people can stand firm because God is not in the least worried about the enemy. Neither do we need to worry.



Our greatest danger

God, like a strong river, constantly draws us downstream into greater growth. Our greatest danger is to allow our raft to float to the river's edge and get out. Christians must stand attentive and engaged. We fight by constantly making ourselves aware of the truths of God so that he can safely guide us through life's turmoil even when temptations come to our backdoor with their devilish suggestions.

There is no power or force greater than God that can frustrate His good purposes. If we are with Him—or more rightly stated—if He is with us, then we can accomplish all that the Lord wants to do through our lives. We can make those decisions to

trust Him even in the worst conflicts by affirming what He says is true and then trusting Him.

As we increasingly become aware of God's constant, powerful and relevant activity in our lives, we will grow in our trust in Him and will find how His amazing peace keeps our hearts during tumultuous times. This awareness and assurance of God's presence becomes a powerful force in our lives.

Lesson

- The war is won. God won. We need to constantly remember God's power and put our trust in Him.
- The Lord desires to empower us—like Joseph, Daniel, Jesus—so that we can, like them, keep close to God so that He can accomplish His will through our lives.

Memorize & Meditate

Romans 8:31

Ephesians 6:13

Assignment

- ➡ Are you spiritually wounded? In what areas do you sense defeat? List the ones that come first to your mind.

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- ➡ If you have stepped out of your raft of Christian faith, tell the Lord you are sorry by confessing your doubts, claiming forgiveness, getting back in, and continuing on down the river.
- ➡ Pray aloud right now (or write it down) that no matter what it takes, you are going to stay in the fight—even when the fighting gets tough. Praise Him for being the victor and His willingness to accompany us even in the most desperate circumstances to bring glory to His Name.

Perspective Counts



Perspective shapes the way we think, approach life's difficulties and try to solve problems.

Our perspective can help or hurt us, depending on how biblical they are. For example, the world looks very different from space than it does from earth. It is the same world but a different vantage point.

Biblical perspectives

Biblical perspectives provide an accurate grid through which to view the world. The more our concepts embrace untruthful assumptions, they

hinder our spiritual development to be more like Christ and to carry out His good works.

It should be obvious to the church that it has clutched to false perspectives when it no longer lives out a godly, vivacious faith. A weak church and ungodly behaviors reveal our failing faith in Christ. At the same time it demonstrates that we possess a greater faith and trust in something else (i.e. idols).

The world is invading the heart and home through modern technology. This generation is, in many cases, unknowingly being persuaded by godless resources in all its forms, whether music, video, literature, etc. The world's immorality is threatening our welfare because we are unknowingly adopting the world's mindset. We can no longer keep our Christian home or church protected from evil if we invite it in.

Making important choices

The church is much like a nation during a civil war. We are forced to train our children, though we detest it, to take sides and fight. We, the church, will either train our children to be spiritually strong, or they will succumb to the surrounding forces, much like Israel had to resist the surrounding nations.

The Christian church around the globe suffers the same problem. This revolution is invading every country and culture with online connectivity. I just returned from training pastors and Christian

leaders in a small city in southern Malawi. Guess what I discovered? The youth were surfing the web with smart phones. They are so poor, yet the world's influence is leaping over borders and poverty to shape their minds.

The invasion has come. The need to sharpen our biblical knowledge and commitment is urgent as the world with all its boasting, arrogance and false thinking encroaches on our minds.

Even if we awaken the church to the danger, does this solve the problem? No. Entrenched perspectives die hard. It is hard to admit the folly of our mistakes, but all along, the Lord has been providing what we needed to fight and win. Believers however, like a man who holds a sword for the first time, have been completely ineffective in proving His Word.

Change is coming

Change must come. It will come, but hopefully not by further enslavement to the ways of the world. We must discern God's truths and ride to victory by training others in righteousness.

Please do not be mistaken—we are not talking about new truths, but the trusted Word of God. “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him” (Proverbs 30:5). Nothing has changed.

Our vulnerabilities are being revealed. Darkness is encroaching upon the church. Now is the time to

return to a biblical mindset. Our perspective of Christian education has become, for the most part, too influenced by the world's methods. Those graduating from seminaries and Christian schools are not being rightly trained, and it shows in their compromised living and their ineffectual ministry in the churches.

God's perspectives

We need God's perspective on our circumstances. What do we see? God has given the church all she needs to grow strong and vibrant, whether in the West or East. He has made it so that His people can reflect Christ's likeness in character, faith and zeal to accomplish our Father's work.



"And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been

given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:16-17). God has promised to give us all that we need just as He gave the Israelites authority to conquer the Promised Land. Jesus Christ has the authority. Do we believe or doubt the Word of God?

Lesson

- The church around the world is in a perilous state due to the world's increasing influence on our minds and lives.
- The church stands in a land of opportunity to break out of its old skins and adopt the full glory of God's truth for themselves and those around the world.

Memorize & Meditate

Proverbs 30:5

Matthew 28:16-17

Assignment

- ➔ Do you think the church, having the truth of God along with His promises and presence, can overcome that which threatens the church? Or do you, like the disciples of old, have some doubt? If so, what do you doubt?
- ➔ Think specifically about your circumstances; mark the places you see victory as well as defeat.
 - Personal lives

The Life Core

- Work
- Family & home
- Ministry
- Other

Change Must Come



Changes make us uncomfortable so we tend to resist them. One Bible professor complained to me that his school is forcing all the professors to use computers! Such change is minor, however, compared to the genuine challenges facing the church; its very survival hangs in the balance.

The crisis looms

Grow or die. Be victorious or suffer defeat. These are our choices. All around us churches are waning. At one time it used to be that liberal churches were dying off, but now it's even the

evangelical churches. How can this be? The outside world wrongly assumes that the message is irrelevant and impotent, but can we blame them? Once the church lays aside its faith in Jesus, it becomes irrelevant. Its power is lost.

The information network has sped up the assault by throwing gigabytes of data at us, dazzling our eyes and minds. Has God opened up this flood of knowledge to accelerate the distribution of His truth? Of course He has, but at the same time the enemy is using these same tools for his diabolical plans.

We should not feel overwhelmed, however. God is there to help us battle the enemy no matter what arms the evil one chooses to fight with. Although Satan's means of tackling God's people might change, his tactics remain the same. God's ability to help His people stands firm.

God's hidden participation

Even though the early church was scattered about, running in every direction, much like ants dealing with a squashed anthill, God was still with each of them, never leaving their side. "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen..." (Acts 11:19).

Was God watching over the church? Certainly He was. He used this period of oppression to more quickly spread His Word through the church and

thus disseminate His truth. The persecution served His greater purposes.

What do we find in Acts 13? A church, partly comprised of those scattered disciples, which was shaped and ready for God's mission to the world. "Now there were at Antioch, in the church... While they were ministering..." (Acts 13:1-3).

Some of God's people are facing subtle or outright persecution like in Acts 13. One of my pastor friends in a South Asian country gets regular hints, couched in threats to his life, to stop distributing tracts.

Others, though, are facing threats of irrelevance. The church continues the same activities as before, but they do not carry the same influence. Even little league baseball games keep God's people away from worship!

Looking for solutions

There is a tendency to make our worship services shorter. We say it is for the seekers, but deep down God's people like it too. We get to go home earlier and do what we want. Few are the ones that spend even ten minutes of their many hours of free time to pray. The excitement of God's Word is gone because we no longer see how it helps us in our lives.

Nothing has really changed, however. God's Word can powerfully speak to any generation in any culture or religion in the world, including the post-

modern mind. Our old methods of feeding and maintaining the churches are inadequate for the invasion of worldly thought that has come on the people of God.

The question is, “How are we going to change things?” A new program? Advanced studies? All of this is too late and too slow. Already God’s people around the world are suffering from the lack of the power of truth shining in their compromised lives.

Just take a look at the average marriage. Do we see God’s love, care and harmony there? I train pastors around the world and even hold marriage training for them. Shepherds and sheep, same story. Many have horrible marriages and are facing serious problems.

Identify the underlying problem

I have seen God’s Spirit mightily save great groups of people in various cultures, but the following generations are more objective and reject the hatred and anger problems that are not properly eliminated by the love of God working in their parents. They end up despising what they have been taught. This is the generational rejection that is alive wherever Christ’s truth has gone but not fully adopted (Judges 1:2-3).

Though hardly against miracles and healing, seeking to have another wave of them will not bring us to where we need to be. I have witnessed how many strong leaders were wonderfully saved or helped by God through some special means,

but this does not, in many cases, help them properly relate to their wives. We need to go beyond finding help for one area of our lives to being a strong and pure people of God, that is, people in which each area of our lives are touched by the holy presence of God.

These problems have been perpetuated by the training taking place in churches and Christian schools. They have lacked an overall methodology to connect people to the simple, powerful gospel of Christ.

Unbelief is our underlying problem. Our personal experiences tend to shape our perspectives. Due to our failure to live out a fulfilling Christian life, we lose confidence and hope in God's Word. Unbelief grows. Toleration of lower standards and declining expectations ride piggyback on the shoulders of this unbelief.

Change is needed

We must change or be further absorbed into the world. New programs offer some change, but they are superficial, neglecting to deal with the fundamental problems. The same problems continue on.

We applaud those pastors, teachers and evangelists who work harder. They think if they only speak louder or generate more emotion of love, God's people will be helped. This does not work.

Others entertain alternatives such as switching churches, denominations, or will even try out Eastern religions, TM, yoga, etc. They are hoping that these things will offer what they are looking for. They don't because these things lead away from the source of life, Jesus the Christ.

The path back home

We must return to Him. Repentance is our pathway back to God. "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). But let's not make this another methodology—stirring people to make a gesture of change rather than provoking the needed inward change.



Awakenings are due to genuine repentance taking place in many hearts at the same time and place. It is these individual changes that are really needed to change the overall direction of our

culture. Don't think of a tame wave at the ocean held back by a slight grade at the shoreline, but a tsunami that breaks through our traditional approach of marking time in our 'Christian' lives.

Though the amount of sacrifices offered was impressive, the rededication of the temple only became an extraordinary celebration largely due to Solomon's prayer on the behalf of God's people. We need a heart that leads us back to the altar where we pray like Solomon, "If my people...humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:13-14).

There is no other way. We must always return to the altar where forgiveness can be found. No matter how bad things were, whether blight, famine, or even captivity, if Israel would turn toward the altar, God would hear and heal. Under the new covenant, our altar is Jesus Christ who can forgive and desires to restore us.

Returning to the Lord

The problems the church faces in this generation are not small. We are not trying to minimize them with Bible verses. Instead, we are using the little faith we have to begin opening our hearts to bring us to where we can again grasp God's perspective on what needs to be done.

God has no fear of this explosion of knowledge. He is utilizing it! His plan is not wavering under

Satan's attack. The Lord sits in heaven and laughs at His enemies (Psalm 2). We need to prepare our hearts for what God wants by humbling our hearts, coming to the Lord on our knees and confessing our unbelief—we just don't believe the gospel is relevant and powerful enough for today.

If we come to Him, then He will come and show us how the church can powerfully confront the darkness in the world with His light.

Lesson

- God uses the attacks upon the church to press us into a corner so that we will break out of our old perspectives and again discover the power of His glorious truths.
- The real problem that the church faces is unbelief.
- Change begins by returning to God, humbling our hearts and confessing our sins.
- God's people must act or lose ground against our enemies.

Memorize & Meditate

2 Chronicles 7:14

2 Chronicles 6-7

Nehemiah 1 ([View video](#)).¹

¹ http://www.foundationsforfreedom.net/References/OT/Historical/Nehemiah/Nehemiah01_Prayers_Video.html

Assignment

- ➡ Are you broken by sin in and around you, or do you just accept it as the way things happen to be?
- ➡ Like Nehemiah, come to God's altar not just for your sins of a straying heart and eye, but also for how God's people have needlessly wallowed about in defeat and despair rather than living in the full power of the Lord.

Life's Glorious Expression



Life is a marvelous mystery that holds the world's greatest secrets. We all know what physical life is, but we only can define it by observation: it moves, breathes, reproduces, grows, eats, etc. Although we applaud humanity's accomplishment in mapping our DNA, we still are in the dark when it comes to explaining the nature of life.

Spiritual life is a topic that Christians often talk about, but the reality is that we are stifled by

ignorance. Fortunately, we have the scriptural clues we need to unlock its potential effect on our lives.

Analogy of life

Scriptural authors and John in particular were amazed by symbols such as light, love and life. The important spiritual truths that God wanted to communicate to us have analogies in the physical creation of this world.

Of these three, life is the most fundamental. John said, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). John was speaking, of course, about Jesus. Jesus had life and this life brought understanding and clarity to mankind.

This basic notion of life is critical to gaining a good understanding of discipleship. The more we grasp the concept of life, the easier we can clutch the meaning of other truths. Life is the frame on which all the other truths hang.

New life basics

New life describes the beginning of spiritual life. When we sought salvation, many of us, including me, sought eternal life as an escape from God's judgment. We had no clue to the implications of that salvation. Of course, if we thought about it, we would know that life must have a beginning. This is often taught by the need to be born again, but

rarely, are we taught how this spiritual life develops.

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the other truths can hang.***

Theology classes include teaching on holiness and sanctification (very important topics no doubt), but they are presented more in terms of concepts rather than the practical steps to spiritual living. So much so, that although many can describe what sanctification is, few can explain how spiritual life can be gained.

Our own ignorance and inability to grow in our relationship with God is only one side of the problem. These things are also being ignored or being improperly taught. What we do not know we can't teach others.

Hidden from sight

Church leaders have been content to wrap up these treasures of truth in such a way that only seminarians and theologians can understand. This is contrary to how Jesus Christ used our daily experiences to communicate life's important truths to us.

These vital truths, then, become unlearnable except to those who love theology books. This is interesting because it seems that theologians often become the most cold and hostile to these teachings. Maybe they are being kept hidden from their sight?

In any case, God's people sitting on their pews or mats, depending where they worship, though they have loved getting to know God, largely remain ignorant of how to practically grow in their special relationship with God. Some are oblivious even to the personal relationship they have with God. Precious truths are locked up, out of reach.

Finding life

Fortunately, there have been a few movements that have focused on spiritual growth, such as the Keswick Movement, but these are very limited. We might also think of the powerful revivals that have radically reshaped God's people where He opened their hearts and minds to His truths. I wonder, though, whether there was over emphasis on experience compared to instruction—they did not need to learn how to come into God's presence, He was there in His radiant glory. They easily sensed it.

There has been much discussion of gifts and healings. They are important to the church of God and for some are 'recovered' truths, but they are hardly the central focus of the church, at least they should not be. Though spiritual growth does come

through the growth of faith from miracles, this is for a minority number of God's people to establish a basic faith leading to spiritual growth, but they are not the typical means God uses for most of His people. They are meant to confirm Christ's work in us, not to become our all in all.

God has greater goals for miracles. They are only a beginning. For example, though one can be healed of a back injury and find Christ, he still needs to learn to control his anger by the power of the Holy Spirit. The healing made his heart open but that is not the same as the ability to control his tongue when he is angry (Ephesians 4:16-29). If he does not learn how the Spirit can help him with this, then he will berate his wife and possibly carry on with a domineering spirit at church.

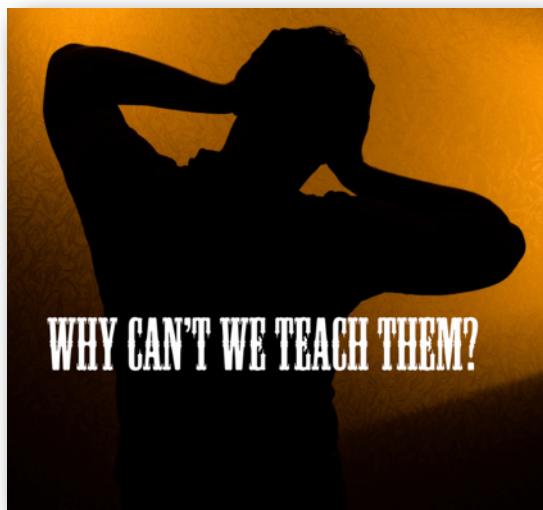
Spiritual disciplines

Christian development has done better when emphasizing the Christian disciplines associated with Christian growth, but sometimes the focus is too much on methodology, which though important, might cause us to miss out on their end purpose. Have you ever congratulated yourself that you prayed or read the Bible that day, but found it didn't bring much renewal to your life? In this case, ritual replaced the needed renewal.

Encouraging believers to grow is much like telling them that they will reach their destination if they just keep driving. At first, they are very excited about getting in the car and starting off on the

journey. But gradually, after driving on and on and not having reached their goal, they begin to lose focus and ask "Why am I doing this?"

Christian training and education has done very poorly in identifying where believers are going and how to get there (and I do not mean heaven). The Lord made these fundamental truths so simple and communicable. Why is the church so ineffectual in passing them on? The church is writhing in unnecessary ignorance and purposelessness, even though God's Word can be easily read and studied.



It is time we not only learn but pass on what is so important to having a full and abundant Christian life. Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." Peter said, "He Himself bore our sins in His body

on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

Lesson

- God wants us to understand these truths and therefore built them into His creation.
- Jesus and scripture writers used analogies including the term ‘life’ to help us grasp and understand important truths for our Christian lives.
- The church as a whole has never really grasped this concept of life and its purpose.
- Christian educational institutions have hidden the most important truths from their students, paralyzing not only their lives but consequentially much of the church.

Memorize & Meditate

John 1:4

John 10:10

Assignment

- ➡ Do your best to describe spiritual life and how one grows spiritually.
- ➡ What is the goal of Christian life? Be as specific as possible.
- ➡ Do you see people finding the abundance of Christian living in their lives? Explain your answer.
- ➡ What problems have been perpetuated because of unclear teaching about the development of spiritual life and its fullness? Explain why.

The Thrust of Life



Simple is best!

Again and again it has been proven that the simplest is best. This is true for training in spiritual growth too!

God has instilled the most important truths of life through principles that are easily seen in creation. This is the reason Jesus could use simple parables from creation to describe otherwise unclear spiritual truths. The creation, for example, provides a very clear picture of spiritual growth.

Although spiritual life is hard to describe due to its spiritual nature, we know many things about its start and development.

Think for a moment about how we actually live: Have you ever seen a parent that gets up early every morning, rushes to their child's side and says, "Grow, grow, grow!"? That would be ridiculous, but not because we do not want them to grow. Any parent is concerned if their child is not properly growing. The reason we don't do this is that we know growth comes naturally, that is, without our planning, encouragement or obsessive worry. Growth is part of life. Life knows how to develop and grow all on its own.

The same is true with spiritual life. Once present, one can easily see its self determination to grow. No one has to come along and say to the Christian, "Grow, grow, grow!" This would not help the believer to grow, but it could certainly confuse them.

Life's presence

The Spirit of God is connected to these images of life because the Spirit is life. "The Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). Spiritual life appears in the believer when the Holy Spirit begins that new life (Romans 5:5). Once the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the believer, he or she is set on a path of development and expression. Just like physical growth, the goal is not affirmation of its existence, but the development of maturity.

When believers realize this, fears about their spiritual growth can be set aside. The Holy Spirit's presence in the believers assure them that the power to bring spiritual life to maturity is there in its fullness. Instead of worrying whether they can grow due to past or even ongoing failures, they can delight in God's purpose to grow them and look for ways He will accomplish His goals.

Faith replaces worry. Anticipation supplants lack of direction. The excitement begins as we focus on God's work that He started in our lives when we were saved. This is where renewal begins—at the initiation of our faith. This is not only true for the individual believer but those training God's people. The teachers also must acknowledge God's supernatural power and seek God's supernatural work in the believers.

What God has begun, He will continue. If He has given us new life, then it is meant to grow and develop during our time on earth. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

Insights on spiritual life

We must draw some simple but powerful conclusions from this. Some wonder why believers often are not growing spiritually. The problem with spiritual growth is not usually its quality. Just like in physical life, we are either alive or not. A person

never says “I’m not alive enough”, though health problems could certainly affect one’s quality of life.

When one has been genuinely born again, his or her spiritual life is present and full of potential, prepared for growth.

Spiritual life is the same for all. We need only to make sure that life is present, and then we should have confidence that life will seek its full development, step by step. There are not different qualities or grades of spiritual life. We should not conclude that the pastor has an intrinsically better quality of spiritual life than us.

Christians may grow at different paces, but this is not due to the power or source of life. There are other reasons for this.

Lesson

- Believers do not need to ‘make’ themselves grow as if it were unnatural or uncommon. Spiritual life inherently seeks to grow and develop in the lives of all genuine believers.
- There are not different degrees or qualities of God’s life; God lives equally in each believer.
- Renewal begins as our hearts express their appreciation to God for His desire to live, grow and work in and through our physical and spiritual lives.

Memorize & Meditate

Philippians 1:6

2 Corinthians 3:6

Assignment

- Only genuine believers are born again (same as “born from above”). Are you sure you are born again, i.e., know God through forgiveness of sin found in Jesus Christ’s death on the cross? Explain.
- Draw a dot and write the date and time, to the best of recollection, of when you became a believer—when spiritual life began in you. Then form a ray by drawing an arrow to the right. This arrow signifies God’s specially designated growth He is planning to bring



about in in your life.

- Read Ephesians 1:13-14. Note how the Holy Spirit indwells each genuine believer. Thank the Lord for His work in you.

Signs of New Life



Spiritual life, then, much like physical life is a subtle but powerful force inherent in every Christian believer. We need to make sure we have that spiritual life. Remember that Jesus warns us that there is a fundamental difference between the tares and the wheat, or those that have no real genuine life from God and those who do (Matthew 13:24-30).

New life signs

Early on, that difference is nearly impossible to detect. I suppose that is true with physical life too, hidden away in the womb. But there are signs we can look for that affirm the presence of life. A sonograph can show an unborn child's features and movement within the womb, assuring an expecting mother of her child's health. If this is true in the womb, it certainly is true outside it too.

Soon after the birth of our children, our midwife would give an Apgar test to the child, measuring its health by examining the infant's color, breathing, pulse rate, reflex and muscle tone. All these depict the presence of life.

In the physical world we describe movements of large masses, such as water or the atmosphere, as currents or winds—they are large enough that one can readily feel and see them. We can see the clouds move along high above or a leaf drifting along with the current of the river.

Jesus compares the movement of the Spirit of God to both the wind and water. John 3 refers to the wind, “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). In John 4 Jesus uses flowing water to help us better understand spiritual life, “But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a

well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

These analogies capture certain insights about the inherent force within life, each speaking of life’s majestic power along with its direction. Jesus described the Spirit in John 3 to be similar to the wind blowing this or that way. The force is focused rather than dispersed, and so it is with spiritual life—abounding and free, yet very purposeful.

Expressions of the Spirit’s work

John 3:8 states clearly that the believer is ‘born of the Spirit.’ His spiritual life is identified with the presence of the Spirit of God. Spiritual life, then, will have its own ‘signs of life’ that are fully connected to the Holy Spirit’s presence. Here are a few signs of this new life generated by the Spirit.

- A desire for God’s Word
- A longing to be with other Christian believers
- A desire to talk to God (prayer)
- An awareness of one’s sins
- A need for forgiveness through Jesus Christ
- A growing affection for God and His ways
- An awareness of others and care for their needs

This list could go on, but we have enumerated these to emphasize that the new life in Christ expresses itself through some basic desires and

knowledge, as a baby just born breathes, moves, cries and hungers.

The test of life

Jesus said, “Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance! (Matthew 3:8). What did He mean? Jesus was simply saying that if they professed to live before God, then there should be signs of life evident in them. In this case, they would be aware of their sins and be humbled by them, and instead of treating people wrongly, they would care for them. There are many signs of new life, some are more apparent than others, depending on our circumstances. These desires stem from the new life birthed by the Holy Spirit deep in our hearts. They will shape our thinking and behavior as time goes on and thus will make our spiritual growth evident to others.

Lessons

- Wind and rivers teach us about the presence, purpose and power of the Holy Spirit.
- New life comes from the Spirit’s presence in our soul.
- Spiritual life, like physical life, reveals its genuineness through certain expected signs.
- These signs of spiritual life will always be present in a genuine believer, though they can be repressed or damaged by continuing in sin.

Memorize & Meditate

Matthew 3:8

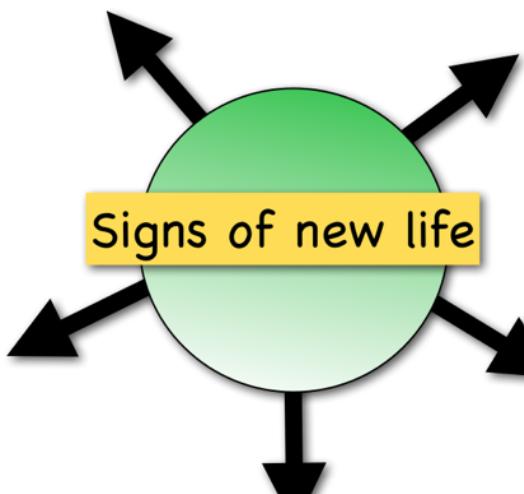
1 John 3:10, 23-24

Assignment

→ Think about when you first came to know Jesus. Review the signs of life listed above. Can you observe them in your own life? Write down the most significant ones.

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→ What about today? These signs should still be there. Yes, temptations and drifting from the Lord will suppress them, but what is most important to you? If any of these signs of life mentioned above are true of you, write them next to the diagram below.



- ➡ After writing them down, state each one aloud in a prayer such as, “I love your Word, Lord.” These are deep desires that are now true of you, whether you have perfectly expressed them or not. (Praying them is very important!)
- ➡ If these desires are not true of you, then more than likely you still do not have the Spirit of life in you. You need to come to know the Lord. Call on the Lord to save you through Jesus Christ.
- ➡ Study John 3:1-8 and John 4:10-14 as time permits. Find the key phrases that connect the Spirit with wind or water, reminding us that the Holy Spirit is the source of eternal life.

Life's Source



Spiritual life, then, much like physical life is a powerful force inherent in every Christian believer. Once acknowledged, the new life begins to express itself through many different means.

Born of the Spirit

This life, like a powerful flowing current, is focused and guided. This life force does not, for example, bring us to think wrong of others. This is because

the source of this force is the Holy Spirit, God Himself born in us.²

Jesus says that we are born again or born from above. “Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’” (John 3:5-6). Our new life’s powerful force is sourced in God Himself. This new life then is the same as the Holy Spirit living His life through our lives. This is the reason the scriptures commonly refer to the believer as having a ‘new life in the spirit’ or Spirit (from the same Greek word in the Bible).

The Spirit of God working in us

This understanding is important because through it we can see the ways the Spirit of God always helps us. He wants to make us more like the Father, so He exerts his power pursuant of this goal (He is not just an impersonal force but is God Himself). Similarly, the Spirit will not use His power to cause us to do wrong, evil or anything contrary to His good and holy purpose.

Most of our Christian life will be characterized by identifying what the Holy Spirit wants to do in and

² Not wanting to get too technical here, but the contrast is interesting. John 3 mentions being born of the Spirit while 1 John uses the phrase, “born of God” seven times, illustrating John’s understanding that the Spirit is co-equal with God.

through our lives and then by faith carrying them out.



The Spirit's power is mighty. We can never tame it (i.e. Him) nor successfully counter it, though we can grieve Him (Ephesians 4:30). Our best hope, like the white water rafters, is to put all our efforts at staying on course along the mighty Spirit's course.

Lesson

- The Holy Spirit is the source of our new life force, inspiring us and providing strength to do all that God wants.
- We do not need to be strong on our own. We are like those manning the rafts and need to focus on carrying out what God the Spirit wants for our lives.

Memorize & Meditate

John 3:5-6

1 John 5:1,4

Assignment

- ➡ Name three things the Holy Spirit wants you to do.
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- ➡ Say a prayer to God. Thank Him for giving you the desire to please Him and carry out these things. Ask God for special wisdom, strength and help so that through the Spirit's aid you will rightly carry these actions out for God's glory.

Catch the Spirit



A large river's current is one way to picture the flowing force in a believer's life. Another is strong wind currents. Although storms may have gusty winds, they are comprised of huge flowing currents that are part of a larger system. The winds have direction and operate within certain parameters.

Strong currents

These strong currents help us think more clearly about the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. First, we

must, as communicated in the last chapter, remember that God is carrying out His purposes. In the middle of a storm, we might feel confused as to the direction the wind is blowing. We need not worry, however. God is in control, even when wicked forces arise. Our duty is to affirm God's greater purposes and play our small but important part. Affirm that you want to be used for God's purposes no matter how difficult circumstances appear. Remember too that we have all the strength we need to carry out God's purposes. We need to both affirm our desire to please God but also to rely on His strength.

The uplift of the wind provides a picture of how we need God's Spirit to help us. Eagles have powerful wings but need rising air currents or "thermals" to go under those wings and lift them up.

"Yet those who wait for the LORD
Will gain new strength; They will
mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become
weary" (Isaiah 40:31).

I have a friend who hangs glide high in the sky (see his picture above). I wouldn't want to do that. We have a choice of whether to hang glide or not, but not with living along with the Spirit of God. The

question is, “How conscious are we of God’s purposeful work in our lives?” Many believers’ faith at this point blur into a, “I don’t know what God is doing.”

Impossible steps of life

The Spirit will always lead us to do God’s will. Sometimes this will lead us into paths that will seem impossible. Why might they seem impossible?

- Physically beyond our abilities
- Insufficient time
- Financially beyond our means
- Opposition by family and friends
- Inadequate abilities or giftings
- Lack of self-confidence

The list could go on! The Spirit, however, will at times lead us into such difficult circumstances. Have you experienced a difficult person? Sure. You can be sure that He will also give patience or whatever is needed to love him. This is an earmark of God’s way—asking us to go beyond our natural abilities so that we will need to rely on Him.

We often tend to go along with our natural tendencies, depending on our personalities and instincts. Some people will brave anything—much like Peter. They don’t always come out

successfully, however. Others are much more timid, like Thomas. They will give up due to doubt.

Our point is not to show you here how to work with the Spirit of God but to highlight the way He works, and that we need to learn how to rely on His help. (See our book on the second level of discipleship to better understand the dynamics of spiritual growth and warfare, *Reaching Beyond Mediocrity*). Only God has the strength, wisdom and insight to know how to accomplish His will, especially with a clever enemy like the devil seeking our demise.

Keep focused and alert

Jesus said, “Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). The genuine believer has the desire to please God, but somehow we tend to fall to temptations when we do not see how God can clearly help us handle a particular situation. We not only need to focus on the Lord in prayer to discern what He wants but also to learn how to gain faith, strength and wisdom from Him. When we start praying we may not have any of these needed items, but when we come to Him in prayer He will give them to us.

The love for the things of God and the willingness to embrace the things of God are all from the Holy Spirit; they are implanted in us when we initially trust Christ for salvation and are born again. We don’t need to contrive or produce these feelings on our own. The new believer can worship God as

deeply as the experienced Christian. We don't need to struggle to develop those desires, but confusion may come upon us when we question what we love, who we are and what we should be doing. Acquiring the truth of God clarifies our true selves in Christ, while the evil one seeks to strip us of our true identity.

God is our strength! That powerful wind is carrying us along as we abide by His principles and call on Him for help.

Lesson

- God wants us to rely on Him for wisdom, time, opportunities, and other things to get His work done.
- The Lord eagerly seeks to give us what we need to carry out His will, but we tend to rely on our own resources that will eventually fail us.
- Sometimes we confront impossible people and situations but the Lord is still there with us to help us succeed, even if a miracle is needed.

Memorize & Meditate

Matthew 26:41

Psalm 5:3, Isaiah 40:31

Assignment

- ➡ In what ways do you tend to rely on your own resources to carry out God's work, but get frustrated and fail?
 -
 -
- ➡ What kind of personality do you have? How might that shape how you try to get through difficult circumstances?
- ➡ Keeping Matthew 26:41 in mind, do you 'watch and pray' only when facing what you think are difficult situations or as a daily spiritual discipline? Explain.