

Personal Spiritual Growth Lesson 3

The Obedient Spirit Filled Life

We will continue with Lesson 3 of Personal Spiritual Growth.

This lesson is entitled Obedience to Christ. Put in parentheses there, the Spirit-filled Life.

The key points from Lessons 1 and 2, remind us that the goal for every believer is to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. And this will take place over the course of our lives.

When we put our trust in Christ, we become a new creation. We are transformed. Then we begin a process of being transformed, becoming holy, being conformed to the likeness of Christ. This was the picture of the butterfly.

At the same time, this transformation takes place through spiritual training. In 1 Timothy 4, we are commanded to train ourselves for godliness. We are to work our spiritual life withal our heart. We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We read this in Philippians 2:12-13.

The grace of God is teaching us to say no to ungodliness and it is teaching us to say yes to the life that's honoring to God. We enter into a life of training. We are putting effort into it. We are not trying to earn anything from God.

We are not trying to earn his love when we obey. God does not love us more when we obey and, he does not love us less when we disobey. That would eliminate grace if we're trying to earn something. Grace is receiving something that we don't deserve.

But effort is not in conflict with grace. Spiritual training is investing effort as the Holy Spirit is working within us. We will talk more about the role of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual development in this lesson.

In Lesson 2, we also learned how Jesus is the True Vine and we are in him, we are true branches in him. We are commanded to abide in Christ. That was a picture of the cross with a grapevine wrapped around it. This reminds us that Jesus is the true vine, and we are branches in the true vine, and we are to be an intimate relationship with him, relying on him.

And as we abide in Christ, the Holy Spirit will produce fruit that will be glorifying to the Father. There's nothing we can do for the kingdom, for the name of Christ, apart from the in-working Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit working through our obedience empowered us to live a life that is honoring to God.

Also remember back to Lesson 2 and how important it is recognize and remember who we were before we knew Christ. We were dead in our sin. We were enemies of God. We were under the wrath of God. Yet because of God's great love for us, he made us alive by grace through faith. And he made us holy, he seated us with Christ, and he is beginning the process of conforming us to the likeness of his Son.

One day, when we see him face-to-face, we will have a glorified body. The promise that was made to us, and through the promise of the Holy Spirit who indwells us, is a guarantee of this full redemption, this full transformation that will take place when Jesus returns again. We also introduced the concept of the Navigator's wheel, where Jesus is the hub of the wheel, a life centered on Christ that is at the center of our lives.

The rim of the wheel is the obedient life, the obedient, Spirit-filled life. Through the Holy Spirit, we begin to demonstrate the evidence of saving faith in Christ through our lives. There are tools, spiritual disciplines that God gives us. Spiritual disciplines of grace through the Word of God and prayer that help us grow in our relationship with God, and the ministries of fellowship and witnessing, how we demonstrate love to those in the body of Christ and to those who don't know Jesus yet.

Lesson 3 will focus on obedience to Christ, the Spirit-filled life. This represented as the rim of the wheel. The evidence of the true saving faith is seen in the obedient life that we live through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. This lesson begins on page 15.

There are a few questions at the top of page 15.

Compare the difference between how the Holy Spirit was revealed in the Old Testament and how we see Him functioning in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was involved in creation. He was very present. He was present with the Father, Son, and Spirit in creating the universe out of nothing. He was involved in empowering and anointing people for specific works, typically in kings and prophets and priests, and He would come and go.

He would come, empower, and anoint people for what God had called them to do, and then He would leave. You can see some references in the handout. You can see references to the Spirit at work in the life of Joshua, and King Saul, and King David, even in Solomon's life, and even in a number of the judges through the book of Judges.

In the New Testament, we see a difference, and Jesus made this very clear in His teaching to the disciples in the upper room before He went to the cross. He said, it is good that I go to the cross. I will rise from the dead and I'm going to ascend into heaven. This will be good because when I leave, I will send the Holy Spirit to be with you and to be in you. The Holy Spirit will indwell every believer. The ministry of the Holy Spirit will allow you to live as if I've never left you. Even though Jesus is ascending to heaven, the Spirit of God will be in every believer to carry out the work that Jesus has called each of us to fulfill.

When we put our trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit seals us. He puts His mark on us. He says, you belong to God, and the Spirit of God is a guarantee of the future redemption, the fullness of redemption that will come when Jesus returns again.

The Spirit of God teaches us. He leads us into all truth. He gives gifts and empowers us to use those gifts for the building up of the body and bringing glory to God.

He convicts us of sin. He illuminates the Word of God so we can understand it. He guides us.

He unifies us within the body. Jesus prays for oneness within His church. The Spirit of God is an empowering force of establishing unity, Through our obedience, we work to maintain this unity that Jesus is praying for today within His church.

There are two passages that I'd like to highlight. One from Ephesians 5 speaks about this command that God gives us to be filled with the Spirit. This begins in verse 15. You can follow along in your handout.

It says, "be very careful then how you live."

How you live is important.

"Live not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery, but instead be filled with the Spirit."

And as we're filled with the Spirit, the rest of this passage provides a few examples of what it looks to walk filled with the Spirit. We are to speak to one another with psalms and hymns and songs of the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord. Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a command that God gives us to be filled with the Spirit. We're indwelt with the Spirit of God at the moment of salvation. We are never commanded to be indwelt with the Holy Spirit. That happens in response to our faith in Christ.

When we're brought into the body of Christ, we're placed in Christ.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is different. It is a command. It is something that God's commanding us to do, to respond to, moment by moment in our lives.

The second passage on this page is 1 Corinthians 2:14 through 3:3.

In this passage, there are three different people illustrated. At the bottom of page 15, there's a picture that has three different circles. Each circle represents a different person that we'll see in this passage.

Each of them has a different relationship to Jesus Christ. And each of them has a different yielding of their lives to the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. So let me just read the passage and then we'll identify and discuss the difference between these three individuals that are depicted.

Beginning in 2:14, it says, "the person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

Here is the first person. The man without the Spirit.

We notice the second person two in 2:15. “The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgment. For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we, with the Spirit, have the mind of Christ.”

The second person is the man with the Spirit.

And then beginning in chapter 3, “brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit, but as people who are still worldly, mere infants in Christ.”

Again, these are people who are in Christ, but they look more like the world. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

“You are still worldly, for since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?”

Person A in chapter 2:14, is the person without the Spirit. In this picture below, the circle represents a person's life. The thing that looks like a chair, that is the throne of his life. The letter S represents you and me, ourself, and the cross represents Jesus.

For person A, the circle on the far left, is someone without the Spirit. Jesus is not in their life. They are not spiritual but natural. The person is sitting on the throne of their life. The Holy Spirit of God is not indwelling them. They are lost. They're separated from God. They are without God and without faith in this world.

The middle circle is represented by 2:15, the person with the Spirit. They are yielded to the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus is on the throne of their life and their self, the S, is surrendering, yielding to the leading of the Spirit. They're indwelt by the Spirit, yet they're also yielding to the Spirit's leadership and honoring Christ through the way that they live.

The circle on the far right represents the person described in 3:1-3. The person has the Spirit. They're an infant in Christ. Jesus, is not on the throne of their life, moment by moment. You can see that the cross is in their life, yet their self, at least in some area(s) of their life is on the throne.

We should ask ourselves who is the king over each area of our life at any specific moment? This diagram shows us that before we knew Christ, we were separated from God. There was no Spirit in our life.

As a believer, we can either be yielding to the Spirit of God, being filled with the Spirit where Jesus is on the throne of our life or we can have Jesus in our life, but our life looks more like the world, so may not be not yielding, surrendering, walking filled with the Spirit moment by moment.

Any time we choose to sin, at that moment in time, we are not filled with the Holy Spirit of God. And if you turn to the top of page 16, we can make this point. There is a difference between being indwelt by the Spirit of God and being filled with the Spirit of God.

Indwelling is a one-time event. It happens at the point of salvation. At that moment, we receive all the Holy Spirit, and He is a guarantee of this redemption that is to come. Ephesians 1:13 -14, and Ephesians 4:30 reveal this truth.

Compared with Indwelling, the filling of the Holy Spirit is a moment-by-moment decision, a moment-by-moment process. We're yielding to the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God. We're giving Him control. We're saying, you take control. Often we want to wear the crown and live as the king or queen over different aspects of our lives.

When we are filled with the Spirit, we are saying, Holy Spirit, you take the lead. You help me become less so that Jesus can become greater in my life.

Help me to put Jesus at the center of my life, to abide in Him. That's what's commanded in Ephesians 5:18.

A helpful real life illustration is to consider a room that is wired with electricity.

Electricity is running through the room. The power is in the room. Yet, unless we turn on the light switch, we don't have access to that power. It's a very similar example to our spiritual life.

As a believer, the Spirit of God indwells us. The resurrection power of Christ is within us. Just like the electrical wire in a room. Yet, if we choose not to yield to Him, not to appropriate the power that He has given us, it's like not turning on the switch.

It's like never accessing all the benefits that are available to us. So, we are indwelt with the resurrection power of Christ. Are we yielding to the Holy Spirit? Are we surrendering ourselves? Are we allowing the Spirit to take control of our lives? Are we turning on the switch?

When we do, we choose to walk in a manner worthy of the calling?

Are we taking advantage of the power that the Spirit of God has given to us? God has given us the Holy Spirit so that we may experience intimacy with Him and enjoy all that He has for us? Walking in step with the Spirit moment by moment, is a daily lifestyle.

It's learning to depend on the Holy Spirit for His abundant resources as a way of life. It's a picture of Galatians 5. Are we going to walk in the way of the flesh, gratify the desires of the flesh? Or are we going to walk in the ways of the Spirit and see Him produce more and more of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. More love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control?

There are a few verses listed that really reveal the evidence of the Spirit-filled life. What is the greatest evidence that we are walking in step with the Spirit of God?

It's a life of obedience! It's highlighted there in the middle of the page.

Obedience doesn't save us.

Obedience doesn't add to the work that Jesus has done. Obedience is the evidence of true saving faith. In 1 John, the Apostle John says, you can know that you have eternal life.

What are the evidences of this new life?

Well, you can know based on what you believe about who Jesus really is, and you can see it in the evidence of how you're loving. Are you loving progressively more and more, loving like Jesus, and are you walking in obedience more and more?

Not perfectly, but growing in obedience? Those are the evidences that true saving faith. Not only does the Holy Spirit indwell you, but you are yielding to the leading of the Spirit of God in your life.

1 John 5:3. "For this is love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome." Obedience doesn't save us. Obedience is the evidence of love for God and of faith in God.

John 15:10. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Someone once told me that abiding in Christ could be defined as growing and obeying. The evidence that we're abiding is it's an obeying kind of faith. It's an active faith.

Someone also said to me, faith that saves is faith plus nothing. We don't add anything. It's faith in Christ alone, by the grace of God alone. Yet faith that grows is faith plus obedience. Again, obedience doesn't add to what Jesus did. Obedience is the evidence that we've put our trust in the Lord Jesus. Obedience is a form of worship back to God, saying, thank you for all you've done. I desire to place you on the throne of my life. You are my king.

We don't make Jesus king. He is the king. We desire every area of our lives to be progressively more and more reflective of Jesus as king over each area of our lives.

That's a picture of walking moment by moment filled with the Spirit of God. How can we live like this? What does that look like? It's not some magical or mystical kind of process. It could be as simple as breathing, exhaling and inhaling.

We could call it spiritual breathing. When we exhale, we're confessing, confessing our sin, agreeing with God, desiring to repent, to change our behavior, change our thoughts and change our behavior to go in a completely opposite direction. That would be the exhaling.

We say, God, I confess this sin. I desire to change my life, to walk in obedience to your commands. And the inhaling would be the surrendering control of our life back to the Holy Spirit of God and to ask Him to fill us as in Ephesians 5:18.

This is a command. Be filled with the Spirit of God. Each time we sin and we confess, we may say a prayer like this.

“Father, I need you. I acknowledge that I've sinned against you by directing my own life. I thank you that you have forgiven my sins through Christ's death on the cross for me. And now I invite Jesus to again take His place on the throne of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit as you commanded me to be filled. And as you promised in your Word that you would do the things that I ask in faith that are aligned with your Word. Thank you that I have all of you, Holy Spirit, at all times. And my desire is now that you'd have all of me. I desire to walk in step with you, Holy Spirit. Continue to fill me and guide me.”

Well, that's the simplicity of being filled with the Spirit. It starts with the recognition that I've sinned. I'm confessing that. I'm repenting. And I desire to get back in step with the Holy Spirit.

I'm asking the Spirit of God to fill me and to lead me and guide me in a new way that would honor God.

You can see a picture of that on the top of page 17. This is an illustration that might illustrate what our lives look like moment by moment.

Notice the word “Kairos”. This word is used in Mark 1:14-14.

Jesus said, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.”

Kairos means time. Kronos means chronological time. Kairos means a moment in time, like an important moment.

And what I'm trying to show through this picture is that every day there are moments in time, learning moments, moments that we can choose to honor God or disobey God. These are “Kairos” moments in time. This is where spiritual growth takes place. In these moments we can choose to obey God and continue growing. In these moments, we can also give in to temptation and choose to sin. Choose to put ourselves on the throne at that moment. In these moments we break off the path of walking in step with Spirit and we walk in the flesh.

We sin. God moves in us through the Spirit of God convicting us. We repent, we believe, and we get back walking and step with the Spirit.

And out of these cycles of sin, confession, repentance and belief, spiritual growth takes place. The call to be a disciple involves a daily process of laying down our lives to follow Jesus. We often look at our lives as a linear process, starting with salvation and ending in heaven.

Our relationships with God are much more dynamic and fluid, with ups and downs and starts and stops along the way. In the picture above, the believer is walking along with the Lord. Then a Kairos moment takes place. These moments can be positive or negative. They're meant to be opportunities for growth, for spiritual growth.

And these cycles of repenting, of changing our minds and then believing, putting our faith into action in a new direction, brings us back to walking in step with the Spirit of God. It results in spiritual growth. We all have these ups and downs, starts and stops. And the goal over time is that there will be fewer of them.

There will be shorter periods of turning away from God before we confess and repent and get back walking in step with Him. This diagram is very similar to a diagram that summarizes what we see in the book of Judges.

In the Old Testament book of Judges, in chapter 2, there's a summary of this cycle of sin, this cycle of turning away from God.

The people are serving the Lord. They fall into sin and idolatry. God brings judgment.

Sometimes it was through another nation. Sometimes it was through a famine. The people would cry out to God in repentance.

God would send a judge, a deliverer. People would respond, and then there'd be peace for 40 years. And then after a period of time, they would turn away again into sin and idolatry.

Those cycles were repeated seven times throughout the book of Judges, with Deborah and Gideon and Jephthah and Samson as examples of some of the judges. That's a picture of our daily walk, even as believers. We're not perfect.

As we walk along, there are times that we wander away. The Spirit of God is there convicting, nudging. When we choose to sin, we're grieving the Holy Spirit.

We're quenching His work in our lives. Yet as grow and yield more and more control to the Spirit of God, fewer times we start to wander away. When we do wander away, it's not for as long a period of time.

We begin to live out who God has called us to be, to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That comes through the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God. This requires intentional effort on our part. Prayer. Time in the Word. Community. The grace of God.

We thank God for the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thank you, Jesus, that you ascended into heaven so that you would send the Holy Spirit, not just to be with us but to be in us. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your convicting work in our lives, for your teaching work, your unifying work, your empowering work.

Thank you that as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, Holy Spirit, it's you who's working in us to will and to act and to honor God and to be a testimony, to be a light to the world around us. So we don't continue living like infants in Christ.

That our lives as believers don't look more like the world, but more and more, we would reflect the glory of Christ. We would look more and more like Jesus. Our lives will become a powerful testimony to the world where our lives are matching the truth of the gospel.

We speak the words from mouths, but it's seen in our life!

On page 18, you can see we're back to this one-page chart that we're continuing to fill out.

Again, just to reorient ourselves to it, you can see at the top, the butterfly represents transformation. God has called us and he has justified us. He has sanctified us. He is going to glorify us. He called us to be conformed to the likeness of his Christ. Day by day, we're being transformed from glory to glory, and that is a work of the grace of God in our lives.

This transformation is coupled with spiritual training illustrated by the runner on the top right. We go into spiritual training. We train ourselves for godliness.

We look at the wheel in the center of the page. Each lesson will reinforce a different aspect of this Navigator's wheel.

At the bottom left, we see the cross with the grapevine wrapped around the cross. That's a reminder of the abiding life in Christ. He is the True Vine, and we are the branches. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he will produce fruit in us as we walk in close fellowship and intimacy with Christ.

We're saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ, and he will never leave us or forsake us. We can know our identity. We can know we are secure in Christ. As we yield ourselves to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the picture for this lesson is there's the chair or throne of our lives. The cross on the chair, which represents us yielding ourselves to the leadership of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in our lives.

These first three lessons are critical to understand our identity in Christ.

Before we start looking at the things that we can do, the spiritual disciplines that God has given us through the Word and prayer and serving and fellowship and witnessing and caring for people who don't know Jesus yet. The activities that we do for Christ.

If we focus on activities for Jesus without first being grounded in our identity in Christ, these activities could just become a checklist. They could become a legalistic approach to living the Christian life.

When we start with these first three lessons, we realize we're grounded in the grace of God, the love of God, who we are in Christ. That empowers us. That gives us a firm foundation to begin living out our faith. We then value these disciplines as disciplines of grace to grow spiritually.

They are tools that God's given us to grow in our relationship with him and to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.

So, I encourage you to go back through the first three lessons, look at the verses, and then we'll pick up with Lesson 4 as we look at the Word of God and prayer as we grow in our relationship with God the Father and the Son and the Spirit. God bless you all.