

God's Love and the Holy Spirit

~Lesson Four~

Romans 5:5 teaches us the beautiful principle - that God has poured His love within us and continues to flood our hearts with His love through His Spirit. God, in His great love for us, has been waiting to literally fill us with His love. He does this by causing His Spirit to indwell us when we become Christians.

...hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:5 (NASB)

This week we are going to study the mind-boggling fact that as Christians, the God of the universe lives inside us. We are also going to study what the Holy Spirit does living within us. We are also going to cover four principles that should help you understand how to let the Holy Spirit have control of your life. Sorry this week is so long - if you don't have the time to finish it in one week, give it two.

Day One What Does It Mean that God's Spirit Dwells within Us?

Ephesians 1:13-14 says,

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (NASB)

Ephesians 1:13 - tells us we are sealed in Jesus by the Holy Spirit at the moment we believe that Christ Jesus died on the cross for our sins. The word *sealed* in the Greek language means "to set a seal upon, mark with a seal." In scripture, a seal symbolizes a finished transaction, ownership, and security. When something is sealed, everything is in order. It is the final approval of that transaction. When the Holy Spirit seals us, it signifies that the eternal transaction of payment for our sins has been completely and perfectly finished in Jesus (John 19:30). We are now His, and are eternally secure in Him, because we have His seal upon us.

Ephesians 1:14 - teaches us the Holy Spirit is our pledge from God. The word *pledge* even today in Greece can mean engagement ring. God's Spirit is His symbol of love given to us so we can know without a shadow of a doubt, we are His forever. Instead of wearing the love symbol on our finger we wear Him in our hearts. Isn't this a beautiful illustration from God, showing you He loves you?

1. **Read Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:30, and 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 3:3.** What does it mean to you that because you have believed in Jesus, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit? Did God seal you with Himself because He loves you? What does it mean to you that God gave you His engagement ring?

Becoming God's people through the Holy Spirit

At the moment we believed in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit instantaneously came to indwell us. This allowed us to become God's people. I have often thought about how God might feel when we finally become His. Have you?

Let's reason out from scripture how God might have felt when we became His through His Spirit. In Genesis 1 and 2, it is clear that God was thinking of us when He created everything. We could say, creation is God's custom designed universe and world, made for the people He loves. But as you have studied, Adam and Eve didn't care that God loved them because they chose not to be His. Ephesians 1 also paints a beautiful picture of how God had wanted us to be His children even before time was time. However, Ephesians 2 clearly shows we choose not to be His too. Where does this leave God who created us to love us? I would say from reading the Old Testament, God is heartbroken about us not wanting to be His. So I think we could safely say that God is truly pleased, even what we would call excited, when we become His.

1. Think about this: How do you feel, as you wait to be with someone you truly love and want to be with? You can't wait, can you? There is an excitement in your heart, isn't there? God has always wanted to be with you and He now is, through the Holy Spirit living within you. **Read 2 Corinthians 6:16 also Exodus 40:33-38, 1 Peter 2:9-10, Isaiah 30:18 and Zephaniah 3:17.** What does it mean to you that God has always wanted you to be with Him? What do you think about God wanting you to be His, so much so that He has pursued you and has given His life for you? How do you feel about Him having waited for you to love Him? **Read John 14:1-3.** How excited does Jesus sound about you living forever with Him?

2. God had a plan! That plan was to have His Spirit come to live within us, so we would be His and be able to live for Him. Read **Ezekiel 36:25–28; John 14:16-17, 26 and Titus 3:4-7.**

The Holy Spirit is our Helper

The Holy Spirit, who is God, is sent forth from God. He also represents Jesus to us. The Spirit is called our Helper. This is because He is Jesus Christ's proxy in the world while Jesus isn't here in bodily form. Jesus' disciples were worried about Him leaving them, so Jesus tells them about His Helper. He assures them that this Helper will guide, empower, and teach them (and us too). This is because the Helper hears from God the Father and God the Son directly. The Holy Spirit being our Helper just makes a lot of sense to me, because Jesus has always wanted to be with us! Now He is, through the Spirit living inside us.

1. **Read John 16:7, 12-15 and 1 Corinthians 2:10-16.** What does it mean to you that the Holy Spirit is your Helper? Did you know you have a hotline to the God of the universe because His Spirit lives within you? At times, I think we forget He lives within us and wants to guide us, empower us and teach us. How aware are you of the Holy Spirit living within you? Do you try to listen for His voice?

Did you know the Holy Spirit inspired each of the many authors of the Bible as they wrote each paragraph, each sentence, and each and every word? That is why we can call God's Word, "God breathed" or inspired by Him. 2 Timothy 3:16 says,

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (NASB)

When Paul writes in God's Word, you have to take a deep breath before reading one of his sentences (just like me). King David tended to be poetic; Luke wrote like a historian, and so on. God through the Spirit allowed the writers of the Bible to write through their own personality and know how. That's why some books of the Bible seem so different in writing style from others. However when you take the Bible as a whole, it weaves a beautiful and passionate autobiography of God and His relentless love for us.

The Spirit Needs to Control You so You Can do God's Will (Days 2-5)

There is no way we can live the way God wants us to live in our own power and strength! This is one of the main reasons God gave us His Spirit. **We are going to cover four principles in the next four days.** These four principles should help you understand how to let the Holy Spirit have control of your life. All of these principles will work together in your life.

Day Two Get Sin Out of Your Life so the Spirit Can Control You

John 16:8 tells us one of the Spirit's jobs is to convince or convict you of sin. Sin is any disobedience of God and His Word. The Spirit miraculously begins showing you sins in your life even before you are a Christian and keeps on convicting you of your sins after you become a Christian.

Sin suppresses the Spirit

As you can imagine, sin isn't God's will for your life! In fact, sin in your life quenches (or suppresses) the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. It also grieves the Spirit. Look at it this way, when you are sinning the Spirit is still within you wanting to control you, but you are suppressing His power to do so. This leads you to be filled with yourself and doing your own will. Ouch!

1. **Read Isaiah 59:1-2, 63:10, Ephesians 4:20-32, 5:15-18, 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8, 5:19-22 and 1 John 1:5-6 (darkness = sin).** As Christians we have God's Spirit living within us, so what makes us ungodly at times? What stops us from being filled or controlled by the Spirit? Why does sin grieve the Holy Spirit?
2. **Read Deuteronomy 11:26-28.** The key to choosing what the Spirit wants is getting to know God and His Word (Commandments), so you can know His voice in your mind. This will enable you to truly listen to Him, and keep sin out of your life! We all struggle with hearing what the Spirit wants, because we are still sinners and want to listen to our own desires. However, He is patient and forgiving. So when you realize you haven't been listening to His voice, start listening and walk on with Him. You will be blessed!

Looking at it another way when you are sinning you are fighting the Spirit's control. (Sounds crazy fighting with the Creator of the universe, doesn't it?) **So how can we stop fighting with God?** Sin starts in the mind and if we don't stop it there, it turns to sinful actions. So we need to be familiar with God's Word so we can discern His small quiet voice in our minds. His voice will tell us whether something is sin or not, and then we need to agree with Him about that sin. If we *don't* agree with Him about that sin, we are fighting Him again. Resisting the Spirit's voice in regard to our sin can be a vicious cycle that makes our life with God unfruitful. It also makes us miserable because we are constantly fighting against Him. (Acts 7:51 calls us some pretty negative things if we are always resisting the Spirit's control. Ouch!) To allow the Spirit to get my attention more quickly about sin, I keep the same mindset John Newton, who wrote the hymn, "Amazing Grace", kept. That mindset is, "I am a sinner saved by grace!"

1. How do you get sin out of your mind and life as a Christian? Ask God through the Spirit to show you any sin in your life. Then confess your sin to God, which means that you agree with God about that specific sin. **Read 1 John 1:9** and ask yourself, "Am I fighting God's control by not agreeing with Him about a sin in my life?" When you agree with God about sin in your life, you are saying to Him, "I love You." This is because you are doing what you needed to do to be close to Him!

The Holy Spirit wants us to offer control of our entire life to Him. However, we all seem to have those, "only I know what is best for me areas" and we don't even want God to mess with them. Does this thought sound familiar? I believe because our sinful nature is still with us, we struggle greatly with giving the Spirit control of all areas of our life. However, the stark reality of life is, we can't keep control of our favorite areas and still be close to God!

As Christians, our past, present and future sins are fully and abundantly forgiven in Jesus, but we have a responsibility to listen to God's Spirit. If the Spirit is trying to get our attention about a sinful area and we *keep* resisting His voice, we are not in His will. This state greatly affects our relationship to God. However, if we truly want Him to control each and every area of our life, He will! (Luke 11:9-13). Don't get discouraged; this is a lifetime process (Philippians 1:6).

1. **Read Psalm 139:7, 23-24, Galatians 5:16-25 (walk, led = controlled by Spirit) (flesh = sinful nature) and Philippians 4:13** and ask God to reveal to you through the Holy Spirit which areas of your life you are keeping under your own control. And then ask Him to give you the strength and desire to entrust those areas to His control.

Satan and sinning

Let me warn you, our sinful nature and Satan work together if we let them through our sinning. They can give us a case of blindness in certain areas of our life. Before you were a Christian you were on Satan's team, we could say. However, as a Christian the only way Satan can have *any* control over you is through your sin. Ephesians 4: 26-27 says,

Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. (NASB)

Just to tell you, "opportunity" in the Greek language means opportunity, a place in. So when we refuse to listen to the Spirit's voice and deal with sin, we are opening up a place in our life for Satan's influence. Remember sin is disobeying God and that's all that Satan does.

How do we stop this cycle of sin that allows demonic influence in our lives? Get to know God and His Word so you can *know* when the Holy Spirit is speaking to you about sin! Beware, Satan is the father of lies and counterfeits God's words if he can. In reality he doesn't wear a red union suit so you can't easily tell it's him speaking to your mind unless you know God and His Word. (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

1. **Read Genesis 3:1-6, Matthew 4:1-11, John 8:44 , 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Revelation 12:10** and quickly list what Satan does. Also recognize the power you have over Satan because of God. **Read Acts 26:18, Ephesians 6:11-18, Revelation 12:11.**

Let's review a few things that would be good for you to follow to keep as much sin as possible out of your life: 1) Realize you are a sinner (even as a Christian) and take responsibility for your sins. Do not blame God and everyone else like Adam and Eve did. 2) Ask the Spirit to give you the desire and power to deal with your sin. 3) Know God's Word and listen to the Spirit as He is speaking to your mind about whether something is sin or not. 4) Don't make excuses. Just agree with God about that sin and desire Him to get it out of your life. (Remember God wants sin out of your life, so if you ask Him to get it out of your life He will!)

He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. Psalm 103:10-13 (NASB) (The word fear in these verses means reverence or respect.)

Day Three Know God's Word so the Spirit Can Control You

God's Word is God speaking to us. The Holy Spirit teaches us what God's will is through His Word, and He empowers us to do it!

Ephesians and Colossians were written when the Apostle Paul was in prison. Their emphasis is on Jesus Christ, what He has done for us, and how to walk with Him. They both are similar in content so we can easily compare the two. Ephesians 5:18 talks about being filled (or controlled) by the Spirit. Colossians 3:16 talks about letting the Word of Christ dwell within you. If you take both verses together, we could say that to be controlled by the Holy Spirit is to be controlled by His Word.

1. I have found that one verse from His Word can change my whole thought pattern and life if I let the Holy Spirit truly control me through it. **Read Psalm 119:1-16.** (Psalm 119 is all about God's Word. When you have time, read the whole Psalm.) Prayerfully ask the Spirit to lead you to several reasons why you should read and study God's Word.

If someone is telling you they have heard from God to be doing this or that, but the thing they feel so led to do isn't in God's Word, then I would be very cautious. I know there are gray areas that God doesn't completely enlighten us on, but for the most part, everything God wants us to know about Him and His will is revealed to us through His Word. Yes, God does use other things to show us who He is, or to give us clarity about His will, but these other things should *never* contradict His Word. If you remember, creation can reveal much about God to us, but even looking at His work of creation still requires the filter of the truth of His Word. (Just to warn you, Satan's trademark is to claim his words are more authoritative than God's Word. Remember poor Eve.)

Take note, we can try to do God's Word without His Spirit, but we won't have His power to truly do it and we won't be in His will. God's Word is His wisdom, so it will guide us to a better life with or without the Spirit if we follow it. Many people know God's Word and quote it; people like Hitler did. Nevertheless, it certainly doesn't save or control them. They have hardened their hearts to the Spirit's control through God's Word. Jesus teaches us that the only way we can do His will (which is His Word) is by His Spirit giving us His power through controlling us.

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you... I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come..." John 16:7, 12-13 (NASB)

"...but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." Acts 1:8 (NASB)

1. God's will becomes evident to you when you ask the Holy Spirit to help you sense God's leading and His heart's desire for you as you prayerfully and thoughtfully read His Word. Actually the Spirit makes God's Word come alive to us. This is why I constantly ask you to seek the Spirit's leading and to listen to Him as you read and study God's Word. This enables the Spirit to supernaturally speak to you, so He can control you. **Read Psalm 119:105, Ephesians 5:17-20 also Colossians 3:16-17, and Hebrews 4:12-13.** Be honest. When the Holy Spirit tells you what to do through His Word, do you trust in His leading and follow it? Or do you think your own advice is better so you listen to yourself instead?

It is only God's Word that are really His words. No matter how lovely, encouraging, exciting, and even spiritual other people's words sound, they aren't God's words. There are many Christian books out there that are really great. However, I feel what is happening in Christian society in America today is that we get caught up reading and studying these books and not particularly God's Book! We need to remember that it is His Word and only His Word that promises to accomplish what He wants! No other book is "God breathed".

So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11 (NASB)

We would be stronger Christians (and be showing our love for God), if we would make God's Word our foremost instruction book. We do this by spending time reading and studying it, so our minds will be full of God's words instead of someone else's, and running to it before anything or anyone else.

1. **Read 2 Samuel 23:1-3 and 2 Peter 1:20-21.** Since the Spirit of the God of the universe is your teacher and wrote the Bible, shouldn't it be the most important book to read, study, and apply to your life? (I know I am probably preaching to the choir here because you wouldn't be doing a study like this if you didn't esteem God's Word highly.) **Read Matthew 7:24-29 and James 1:22-25.** How do *you* read, study and apply God's Word? What methods or creative ideas do you have in regard to truly hearing and doing God's Word? **Read Romans 12:2.** Growth and change in our lives always starts in our minds, so how do you transform your mind with God's Word?

Day Four Put Your Faith in God so the Spirit Can Control You

Faith in God defined

When we are trusting in God, the Holy Spirit is controlling us, so we are doing His will. Just a reminder from lesson 3 - faith means being firmly convinced or completely sure about someone or something, which leads you to rely on or trust in that person or thing! When we have strong faith in God we are convinced He is who He says He is, so we rely on or trust in Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

True faith is not a word that gives us power, or some vague thought or an intense feeling. But faith is knowledge and understanding you have confidence in, which makes you firmly convinced of something. When you have faith in something you are saying, "This is my reality that affects my life."

Faith is made true by what or who your faith is in! Consider the numerous chairs you sit in everyday. Most the time we have so much trust in those chairs, we just sit

down without thinking, "will that chair hold me". I can be convinced, or have faith I can fly. Yet, unless I am superwoman you would have every reason to think of me as crazy, because my belief is false. We can say with certainty, it is what we have faith in that makes a belief true instead of false.

As Christians the only faith that saves us, and allows the Spirit to control us, is faith in God and His Word. You might be wondering why I said it is necessary to have faith in God's Word. It is because His Word, as Romans 10:17 explains, is our guidebook to the Christian faith. It permits us to get to know the One we should have faith in, and provides us with tangible examples and instructions of how to live out that faith in our life.

Our life with God must be a life of faith in Him! Why? Because He tells us without faith we can not please Him. Do you want to please God? Do you want a vibrant relationship with Him? Then you must have faith in Him! Hebrews 11:6a says,

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him."(NASB)

What faith does is allows our relationship with God to go from being one of separation to one of great intimacy. Do you remember, the first time you had faith in God? This was when you believed what God's Word said about you being a sinner, and that Jesus is your Savior from those sins. Just like having faith in God for the first time, you need to continue trusting in Him and His Word as you live the Christian life. God so strongly tells us that we must have a life of faith in Him, and if we don't, we are disobeying Him! Romans 14:23b says,

"...whatever is not from faith is sin." (NASB)

Trusting God

Trust is very important in any relationship, isn't it? Think of someone you can't trust - in all probability that relationship will be very frustrating, maybe even hurtful or harmful. A person that is untrustworthy is certainly a person you hope you don't have to depend on, much less obey! I know some of you have had some very unsettling things happen in relationships, so you naturally tend to not trust. Now think of someone you do trust. You will be more likely to depend on and even obey that person, because you have confidence in that person. I guarantee if you will truly give God a chance and get to know Him (I don't mean know Him on the level of an acquaintance, but like a best friend or husband), then you will be able to have faith in God - to have confidence or trust in Him more easily.

I think it is important to talk now about how all of us struggle with trusting God. Trusting in God at times is easier said than done, isn't it? This is because some things in our life tend to be so hard to handle and understand. God is sovereign over everything, including what happens to us, so this makes us think and feel God's decisions are scary and hurtful. During these times we can doubt whether He really cares for us.

I feel it is important for me not to glibly give all of you a so-called simple recipe to follow for trusting in Him. Trusting God can be quite impossible and very unreasonable from a *human perspective* at times. A friend of mine had a teenage daughter die in a car accident. She struggled and still does at times concerning trusting God. She had faithfully asked God to protect her kids ever since they were born. I know God understands her struggle with trusting Him because He knows all things. I know He isn't thinking, "how dare she does not trust Me." God is patient and kind. We are more demanding towards people who are suffering than God is. Remember, He died for us when we were His enemies.

So why does God allow us to suffer? Let me share some ideas that might help you to understand God and suffering:

- We need to remember His decisions *aren't* made by some wild man but are made through the understanding and wisdom that created us and loves us. His decisions are made from an eternal perspective, not from a human perspective.
- Remember, He did not create us for pain and suffering! In Genesis 2 and 3, it is obvious that sin brought suffering into the world! Adam's and Eve's free will choose the existence of suffering. The fact is - God doesn't like it when we are suffering. This is seen clearly in John 11, where Jesus wept when He saw and felt firsthand what the agony of death did to us. It can also be seen throughout the Bible - God mourns over our suffering, even the suffering our personal sin brings.
- God has also set up the laws of Physics to govern our world. Unfortunately, when the law of cause and effect was burdened with sin, awful effects started happening such as hurricanes, blizzards, floods, earthquakes, etc. Can He stop any law He chose to create? Yes! However our survival depends on the law of cause and effect functioning. Just think of the law of gravity.
- Everyone's free will affects our suffering. We don't sin in a vacuum. Every sin, either ours or someone else's, affects us and everyone. So we could say, the effects of sin have just kept mushrooming since Genesis 3. Quite a bit of our suffering is caused by others sinning against us. Yes, God could stop that

person from hurting you, but where would He draw the line in stopping people's free will? If He had not given Adam and Eve a free will, you would not have a free will either.

- I want to remind you, God very much did something about our suffering! He stepped out of eternity to suffer for us, so that the cause and effect of sin would be completely taken care of. God suffered so that you and I don't have to die and suffer throughout eternity.
- God uses suffering for good (Romans 8:28). Not just our good but other's good too. A situation that is so awful for us may have a wonderful result for many others, such as a Marine dying for a country's freedom. A good example of this in the Bible is: The evil Joseph's brothers did to him God used for the good of many people. Joseph said in Genesis 50:20

"And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. (NASB)

Life is harsh, confusing, frightening and hard to understand at times. It isn't easy to get past why God didn't stop something that hurts so much, that you find it hard to trust Him. Yet, if you will take the Apostle Paul's attitudes towards suffering, you might be able to more easily trust God. One of his attitudes is that all suffering needs to be looked at from an eternal perspective. In 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, Paul who suffered a lot says,

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (NASB)

Paul also knew God loves us and He would never allow us to suffer for the heck of it or just to be mean to us! In fact God's love for us caused Him to allow His Son Jesus to suffer for us, so our suffering could bring great blessing in our present life (which is a vapor compared to eternity) and in heaven.

... If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. Romans 8:31-32, 35, 37 (NASB)

What we need to do as we suffer is remember, Jesus Christ took the suffering we deserved (in Hell) when He died on the cross for us. We also need to appreciate the fact, Jesus as God could have stopped any of His suffering immediately. Yet, He patiently endured His suffering for us. He has also never asked us to go through anything He hasn't! (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16). So when we suffer, let's follow Jesus' example and trust ourselves to God the Father just as He did.

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. 1 Peter 2:21-25 (NASB)

1. Take some time now and ask yourself, "Why and how do I struggle with trusting God?" Be honest. He knows what's in your mind. He knows if you trust Him or not, in any way, shape or form. Write down what the Spirit shows you. Then ask God to do whatever He needs to do, to reassure you, so you can trust in Him. Remember He wants you to trust in Him. **Read Proverbs 3:5-6.**

Abraham is our great example of faith in both the Old and New Testaments, so it is a must we talk about him here. This humorous but true biography of Abraham covers Genesis 11 through 22. Abraham lived in the grandest city in his time, Ur. Ur was in the land we now call Iraq. Things were going as well as possible for him in Ur. Then God called to Abraham and told him to pack the family wagon and move to this wild country called Canaan. This country had some pretty unruly people in it. These people, I would dare say, used outhouses, not indoor plumbing like Abraham was accustomed too. If that wasn't bad enough, they did some pretty monstrous things. Abraham didn't whine to God and ask, "Why that awful place?" Instead, he obeyed God, demonstrating his trust in God and packed up and moved his clan.

As the years went on, Abraham got to know God better and better. This led him to trust in Him more. God and Abraham became buddies, so much so, that God's Word calls him the friend of God. When God told him that he would have a son by his beloved wife, Sarah, he believed God. Even after her childbearing years were over, Abraham still believed and waited for God's promise to come about. Now, Abraham wasn't perfect! His faith in God did have its flaky moments. But all in all, Abraham kept his faith in God who had promised to give him that wild country for his descendants, and to give him a son through whom his descendants would come.

God's promise of a son finally came true when Abraham was 100 years old. Abraham loved the boy very much! Then God asked Abraham again to trust in Him. Wow, what a test of faith this trial would be! God asked him to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. Abraham's trust in God was so very strong by then, he said, "OK Lord." Abraham packed up what he would need for a sacrifice, along with his son. Both of them immediately left their home to obey God. You see, Abraham knew God was a loving God, and would only ask him to do what was best for him and his son. And God did! He provided a ram which was a substitute sacrifice in the place of Isaac. The place God told Abraham to sacrifice his son was in the land of Moriah. Many centuries later in this same land, God's Son was sacrificed for Abraham, Isaac, and all of us (2 Chronicles 3:1).

1. We need to be like Abraham and trust God enough, so when He says something, we do it. **Read Romans 4:16-25, Hebrews 11:8-19 and James 2:21-23.** Ask yourself how often do you obey God instead of yourself? Remember Abraham's faith in God was shown through His obedience of God. On a scale of 1 being the lowest amount of faith in God and 10 being the most, rate how much faith in God you think you have?

Do you struggle with obeying anyone, even God? If you struggle with the idea of being obedient to God, you need to realize Jesus Christ is our example of being completely obedient to God. His love for you led Him to the ultimate act of obedience, dying for you (Philippians 2:8).

Power to trust and live for God

Before we were Christians, the Holy Spirit did not live in us, so we were powerless to do anything for God, even to have faith in Him. This is because we were spiritually dead. But the Spirit was still at work, He was wooing us to God. After we become Christians, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us, which makes us alive in God and empowers us to trust in and live for God.

When we have faith in God we are relying on His Spirit so we have God's power to live the Christian life. Yet, when we choose to have faith in ourselves we aren't relying on His Spirit, so we are suppressing God's power in our life. Now to be honest, some things we do by relying on ourselves look pretty terrific from a human perspective. However, Isaiah 64:6 informs us that our works are like the stench of old blood or death to God. Kind of sobering terminology, isn't it? By reading the book of Galatians we can hear how the Galatians weren't living by faith in God (even though they had been saved by faith) but by faith in their own works, leaving the Spirit out. When we are trusting in our own works, we can look spiritual to others, yet, are useless to God. Ouch!

1. Read Zechariah 4:6-7, Acts 1:8, Ephesians 3:16-21, and Galatians 2:20-3:5.

Faith in God allows the Spirit's power to flow in your life.

2. Read Galatians 3:1-14, 5:4-6, 13-25. The flesh, or sinful nature, is what we inherited from Adam at birth. As Christians, we inherit another nature, a new one, but we still have our old sinful nature with us. Our new nature comes from the Holy Spirit living within us. When we have faith in Jesus, the Spirit comes to live within us, and from then on we are controlled by the Spirit through that faith/trust but only if we chose to be. The Spirit controlling us gives us the power, strength, and even the desire to live for God. Letting the Holy Spirit control you, is letting the Person who knows you the best and loves you the most control you!

3. When we trust in God it gives us great benefit for now and forever. (You can't beat that for long term investing!) On the flip side, when we *don't* trust in God, we end up trusting in something like ourselves or others or money or job. We need to remember that we were created to trust, so when we *don't* trust in God, we automatically trust in something else. Make a list of reasons why you should trust in God instead of someone or something? If you are struggling with trusting God, ask Him to create a desire in you to trust Him.

To trust God is a moment-by-moment decision. When you are trusting in God then the Spirit is controlling you! When you decide to put your trust in yourself, at that moment the Spirit isn't controlling you. For example, when I am writing a Bible Study, I need to choose to rely on God by listening to His Spirit when I write, instead of relying on myself and writing and then expecting God to OK what I have written.

Thus says the Lord, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord. For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit."
Jeremiah 17:5-8 (NASB)

Day Five Loving God Enables the Spirit to Control You

As Christians, it is paramount that we love God because He tells us to (Matthew 22:34-37). If we are loving God, that means the Spirit is controlling us. If we aren't, we are in sin because we are disobeying God.

"What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'" Mark 12:28b-30

1. **Read Deuteronomy 6:3-9 and Mark 12:30-34.** Loving Him and others are the greatest things we can do for God. It says, we love You to God.

Love and trust go together

God tells us in many scriptures our relationship with Him must be one of faith in Him as our way of life (Hebrews 11:6). He also tells us, we must love Him with our whole being (Mark 12:30). A part of loving God with our whole being is trusting-relying on Him. Be aware you cannot trust or love God without the Spirit.

When you love someone, you want to be able to trust that person. Love and trust are important in a close relationship. I know some of you have had people in your life you love so much, but you can't trust them. These types of relationships are difficult! Not being able to trust someone you love, at times makes you wish you didn't love that person. Can you relate? I think many of us can!

When you can trust someone you love, that relationship tends to be very close and healthy. When you trust and love God, it does the same. Trusting and loving God can accomplish amazing and wonderful things in our lives as Christians! It will give you a relationship that will make you want to simply sing God's praises, talk to Him as if He were your best friend, dance to His will, and freely with no strings attached, please Him and serve Him. When there is love and trust between you and God, the Spirit is controlling you.

1. **Read Galatians 5:6, 14-26, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, and Ephesians 5:1-2.** Describe how you should act because you love and trust God.

2. Think about this: If you truly trust in God you should believe Him when He says He loves you (Numbers 23:19). And because of His love for you, shouldn't you be willing to love Him? Remember, the Spirit is within us flooding our whole being with God's love, so of course He will give you what you need to love God, just be willing to rely on Him (Romans 5:5).

How to love God

The more you are willing to deeply get to know God, the more you will grasp His love for you. This in turn will give you the desire to love Him. I have found in my own life that the more I comprehend who God is and how much He loves me and has done for me, the more easily I trust Him, and love Him in return. 1 John 4:19 says,

We love, because He first loved us. (NASB)

We could say from a human perspective: God is very lovable, so if you get to know Him, you will love Him!

When we love God we are naturally close to Him. This makes sense because the more you love someone the more you want to be close to them. To get close to God and stay close, you must cultivate a relationship with Him! You cultivate a relationship with God just as you would someone you love.

1. Why don't you prayerfully come up with some ways to make your relationship with God stronger, like what my daughter does to connect to people she loves. When my daughter takes a walk, she calls people on her cell phone to connect to them. With God we don't need a cell phone. He is right there. So for example, when you exercise, why don't you connect to God? You could do this by talking to Him about what is happening in your life. (The good, bad and ugly...Be honest He knows everything anyway! He wants you to talk to Him, not because He needs informing, but because He wants you to be connected to Him.) He loves you and is waiting to hear from you!

You might be wondering, "How in the world do I love God? How do I show Him I love Him? In reality there is nothing I can give Him that He doesn't have!" Did you know Jesus tells us, when you obey God's Word you are showing your love for Him? The first time you truly obeyed God's Word was when you believed in Jesus Christ, which was the first time you really showed your love for God. Neat thought!

In John 14:23-25, Jesus Himself tells us if we love Him, we will keep His Word,

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. (NASB)

Jesus is our example on how to love God through obeying. Jesus says in John 14:31,

...but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go from here. (NASB)

The Holy Spirit gives you the desire and power to love and obey God. In reality, you can't love or obey God without the Holy Spirit, because you are spiritually dead to Him without the Spirit in you (Romans 8:9-11). So you absolutely need to have the Spirit and rely on the Spirit within you to love and obey God (Romans 8:1-8). Look at it this way: The Spirit naturally loves God the Father and God the Son, and He most definitely obeys, so why wouldn't He help you too. If you are struggling with obeying God, remember you are obeying Him because you love Him, not because I told you so!

1. **Read John 15:4-11 and 1 John 3:24, 4:13, 16.** These verses give a glimpse into how and why we abide with Jesus and His Spirit. Abide means to dwell, to remain with someone, or in other words, to be one with Jesus in heart, mind, and will through His Spirit within us. We could say that if we are abiding with Jesus, then we are in a mutual love relationship with Him. When we are living in this type of intimacy with God, the Spirit is there controlling us. If you are struggling with wanting a close relationship with God, ask Him what is stopping you? It might be a sin or it could be your hormones speaking to you. This would be a good time to ask God how you can specifically love Him. (What you have studied in the 3 other principles should give you some ideas.) Write out what God's Spirit showed you. Ask Him to empower you to live out what He just showed you.

God loved you first, so please love Him back. If you do, His Spirit will be controlling you. (I know I struggle with showing others love because, Egads!, they might not love me. It's hard and just plain embarrassing at times to love someone who doesn't love you. However, you won't have those problems with loving God. God has loved you from ages past! So ladies throw those daisy peddlers away, because there is no doubt that He loves you. If you are wrestling with whether or not He loves you, remember He died for you when you didn't love Him at all.)

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10 (NASB)

End of the lesson application: Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind one thing you learned from this lesson that He wants you to remember and make a part of your life. Be quiet before God and wait on Him to tell you. Write it down and ask Him to help you to do it!

Write out from memory the four principles that will allow the Holy Spirit to control you. If you are doing this study in a group, be ready to share which principle was the most meaningful to you.

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