

L >> Lifestyle

Anyone have a favorite drink? Coffee? Water? Tea? How about Coca-Cola? My favorite is Coke Zero. The story of Coca-Cola is pretty interesting. Invented by pharmacist John Pemberton in May 1886, Coca-Cola has become the predominant soft drink of choice the world over. During World War II, then Coca-Cola President Robert Woodruff made a bottle of Coca-Cola available to a soldier anywhere in the world for only a nickel. With a worldwide distribution system now in place, it wasn't surprising on the 100th anniversary of Coke in 1986 that the company declared that 97% of the world had *heard* of their product and that 51% of the world had *tasted* Coca-Cola. If a company that specializes in making "sugar water" can impact the world like that, why can't we? Perhaps we are "running on empty and are not filled with the Spirit."

Today is week four in a four-week series on the Holy Spirit. Among Christians, it is very common for people to experience one of two extremes when it comes to the Holy Spirit. At one extreme, we focus on the Spirit even more than on Jesus Himself, or at the other extreme, we ignore the Spirit completely, primarily because we are ignorant of Him.

In these four consecutive messages, we have explored the why, the how, and the what of the Holy Spirit, God in us. People feel some pain at the pump when buying gas, and some people choose to "run on empty instead of filling up." Similarly, are we running on empty or are we filled with the Spirit? Are we living mediocre, run-of-the-mill lives as Christians, trying to do life in our own strength?

F.U.E.L. is a memory tool to help us recall four essentials for being filled with the Spirit of Jesus. In message #1, we dug into the Scriptures a few weeks ago and discovered that we must FOLLOW (i.e., surrender to, obey) the Spirit if we are to be filled with Him. In message #2, two weeks ago, we discovered in the word that to be filled with the Spirit happens when we are UNHURRIED. When we want, wait for, and walk with, we are more aware of His abiding presence, His speaking into our lives as He fills us. In message #3 last weekend, we discovered how the Holy Spirit EMPOWERS us to live God-honoring lives from day-to-day.

In this message #4, we will realize that this is not a one-off filling of the Spirit, but a way to live with the Spirit. Think "L" for LIFESTYLE. One of the first reality shows created for TV was called *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* (airing 1984-1995). The show gave a glimpse into what it was like to live with off-the-chart wealth. The Apostle Paul provides us with a glimpse into what it looks like to live in the fullness of the Spirit.

In the book of Romans, Paul spoke very transparently about a struggle he had each and every day of his life. Nicknamed the "Gospel According to Paul," Romans is a book that mentions sin—a lot! Roughly half the letter, about eight chapters, speaks of sin. In chapters one through three, Paul wrote that we are rotten to the core. In chapters four and five, Paul introduced Jesus, declaring that He died for us, and that the death of Jesus removed the penalty of our sins, just as if we had never sinned in our entire lives (i.e., justification). In chapter six, Paul asked a

provocative question, “Should we (therefore) keep on sinning so that we can continue to be forgiven?” (v. 1-2). To which Paul answered with a resounding, “By no means!” Then, in Romans 7, Paul pulled back the curtain on his own personal struggle. He described it in these words.

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is the sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. (Romans 7:15-19)

Every morning, Paul woke up to another day of playing tug-of-war within his interior world. Anyone else do the same? I certainly do. I know the good I ought to do, but that is not what I end up doing. I know the good I ought to do, but that is left undone. Spiritual tug-of-war is a tiresome experience, and it is **not** a game. Paul then ended chapter 7 and began chapter 8 with a tremendous declaration. “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25). “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). We have been justified by the atoning death of Jesus Christ, and we are sanctified through the work of the Spirit of Jesus until the day we pass from this life into the next.

Paul described life in the Spirit in chapter 8. Actually, Paul made mention of the Holy Spirit over twenty times in this one chapter—16 times in the first 16 verses alone! The Holy Spirit is also mentioned over 50 times in the 28 chapters of the book of Acts. The book is called Acts of the Apostles, but it could easily be called Acts of the Holy Spirit! “If it is repeated....”

What is day-to-day life like with the Holy Spirit? We can easily discover from Paul in Romans 8 four marks, four identifying traits of life with and in the Holy Spirit.

Trait #1: Help & Hope

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness.” Are there times in life when we feel weak and confused, unable to take another step in life? In those moments, the Spirit of Jesus prays FOR us. When we are not praying for ourselves, the Spirit of God is! Imagine having the Holy Spirit Himself as a prayer partner. Moreover, He always prays for us according to the will of God. Speaking for myself, I fail time and again to pray in keeping with the will of God.

We have enhanced 911 dialing on our phones. Should we have an emergency, all we need to do is dial 9-1-1 and the dispatcher’s computer will reveal our location and other pertinent information connected to that phone. The Holy Spirit is better still as He knows us by name,

where we are, what is happening in our lives—and then prays for us according to God’s will. Moreover, that supernatural HELP today produces HOPE for tomorrow. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

There is no condemnation for those who are IN Christ Jesus, who have a relationship with Jesus as Savior and as Lord. Moreover, it is the “Spirit who gives life (who) has set you free from the law of sin and death.” Remember the awesome, miraculous power of the Spirit in verse 11: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

The same power of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that raises us from the dead! Talk about HELP for today and HOPE for tomorrow! The “lifestyle of the Spirit-filled Christian” is marked with both help and hope.

Trait #2: Obedience

The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus is HOLY. An adjective describes Him as holy, hence His name is the Holy Spirit. He is holy for He is God. The Holy Spirit fills a holy vessel, and our bodies are that vessel (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. (Romans 8:5-11)

Notice that Paul makes mention of the mind. Our minds play a central role when it comes to our sin. If we have minds that are led by, governed by, the flesh (i.e., our sinful nature), our minds are “hostile to God.” The mind that is governed by, surrendered to, the Spirit produces life and peace. Think with me. Every day, you and I are at war, and it’s a war between good and evil. Each battle happens twice—first in our minds and then by our actions. Jesus described it this way.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ but I tell you, anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It would be better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right

hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It would be better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” (Matthew 7:27-30)

Jesus clearly preached that sin happens first in the mind, then in our behavior. Moreover, Jesus preached that lust is pretty serious in that it has eternal consequences, and it requires significant action. Jesus used hyperbole (i.e., exaggeration of speech) to emphasize how serious He is about lust. Gouge out that eye, cut off that hand, throwing the eye and hand as far from you as possible. In other words, put as much distance between you and lust as fast as you can without delay! Sin happens first in my mind and then in my behavior, and I cannot win the battle in my strength. I need the help of the Holy Spirit! In modern day war, when an enemy soldier is captured, the captor plays with the mind of the captive, trying to break his will and spirit. As Christians, we are at war. Our enemy attacks the way we think, and if he captures our minds, he controls our behaviors.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth that we “take captive every thought making it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). I can only do that in the power and strength of the Spirit in me when I surrender to Him! The Spirit helps us repent and obey. Remember, when we are immersed (i.e., baptized), two things happen: 1) our sins are forgiven, and 2) we receive the gift of the Spirit. Also, remember that repentance precedes receiving the Spirit (i.e., “Repent and be immersed...” (Acts 2:38)). Repentance is having a broken, contrite heart over sin in our lives. When we fail to repent and obey, we “grieve the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:30), God in us. Jesus also preached in His Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6), and not only filled as in satisfied, but spiritual hunger for obedience results in being filled with the Spirit (i.e., cooperating with Him).

An age-old saying goes something like this: “Two hearts beat inside my chest. One is cursed and the other is blessed. One I love and one I hate. The one I feed will dominate.” Do we feed the mind of the flesh or the mind of the Spirit? In this summer season, many of us like to grill out, and sometimes, whatever it is that we are grilling may smell and look great. The meat may look like it’s done on the outside, but it’s not done on the inside. The same phenomenon happens spiritually: we look great on the outside, but we’re not done on the inside.

Obedience is the key that unlocks every door to an ever deeper walk with Jesus. The “lifestyle of the Spirit-filled Christian” is marked with obedience.

Trait #3: Love

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we

are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:14-17)

When we are filled with, led by, the Spirit, we are children of God! In every sense of the word, God is our father, and we even call Him “Abba,” a term of endearment. We have no need to live in fear, for “perfect love casts out all fear” (1 John 4:18). As the Spirit fills us and we are led by Him, we realize more deeply, “How great is the love that God has lavished on us that we should be called His children and that is what we are” (1 John 3:1). Remember, we must want this relationship with God through His Spirit. So, we must ask ourselves, do we want the things of God or God Himself? God’s presents or His actual presence? The fruit or the source of the fruit? The promises of God or the Person of God?

Do not miss the fact that, “...if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17). Suffering? What’s with that? Who wants to suffer. Yet, Paul reminds us that, “...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

This verse declares a conditional promise, meaning that God works for the good in all things, all circumstances—even in the suffering—of those individuals who “love Him.” Love must be reciprocal and not one-sided. Those led by the Spirit are the children of God, and the children of God have this undeniable, indescribable reality!

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

British author and Christian apologist G. K. Chesterton (1874 -1936) once commented on the French fable “Beauty and the Beast,” saying, “There is the great lesson of ‘Beauty and the Beast,’ that a thing must be loved before it is lovable.” A person must be loved before that person can be lovable. Many unlovely people grew to be unlovable because they thought that no one loved them. Until we feel that we are loved, we will not be able to love others. Children who grow up being loved will someday love their children. People who are loved are able to love others, particularly when we know that we are loved by the Creator, Savior, and Sustainer of life! When we know that we know that we know “how great is the love that God has lavished on us that we should be called His children and that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1). The degree to which we know and experience the inseparable, indescribable love of God through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, is the degree to which we love others. The “lifestyle of the Spirit-filled Christian” is marked with love.

Trait #4: Yielded

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:12-13).

We have an obligation – and that is to yield to the Spirit, God in our skin, to live according to the Spirit. Yielding (i.e., surrendering) is not something that we do naturally or easily. But it is essential and necessary. In 1 John 2:6, we are reminded that if we claim to be a Christian, we must live as Jesus lived. And how did He live?

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing. Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

I cannot wrap my mind around that statement. Deity was poured into a container called humanity! In some passages Jesus is called Son of God, and in others He is called Son of Man. Jesus was the most unique person ever to live on earth because His mother was a virgin, and His Father was none other than Almighty God: Son of Man and Son of God. Think with me. Jesus was born of a virgin to whom He gave the breath of life. Jesus was laid in a manger made from the wood of a tree that He had created on planet earth. When He was thirsty, Jesus drank water, and at other times, He walked on water. Though He could have done so, Jesus did not demand to be equal to God, holding on to, grasping deity. Jesus intentionally humbled Himself, “going to a lower place.” Jesus yielded to the will of God, even praying the night before His death: “Father, if it be possible, may this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but your will, be done.” The Spirit, who came and remained on Jesus from the time of His being immersed in the Jordan River, gave Jesus the power to yield.

My attitude—and yours—must be like that of Jesus (Philippians 2:5), meaning one of humility. Humility is not when we think less of ourselves, but when we think less often of ourselves. Humility is yielding to the Spirit, God in our skin. I don’t yield very well because I’m a work in progress and will be until the day I draw my last breath. To that end, as I strive to move into humility, I have four simple initiatives: 1) be quick [to praise others], 2) be quiet [speaking less of myself], 3) let go [of control to others], and 4) go last [(in line, in traffic, etc.). Unless I learn to yield, I will not experience the filling of the Spirit of Jesus. Either I am full of myself or full of the Spirit. I must be emptied (i.e., yielded) before I can be filled.

One last point about yielding to the Spirit. One of the hard sayings of Jesus involves the Spirit. This saying of Jesus appears not simply in one gospel, but three: Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and it is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. “And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31-32).

Earlier in Matthew 12, the Pharisees who hated Jesus, criticized (i.e., reviled) Jesus saying that He was driving out demons by the spirit of Beelzebub (i.e., Satan), though Jesus did so by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Pharisees called the Holy Spirit an unholy, demonic spirit.

Then, and now, people reject the Holy Spirit and His conviction of them. “The Spirit convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment to come” (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit convicts every person, and when we ignore, resist, or refuse His conviction, and in turn, do not surrender to Jesus Christ, our sins are not forgiven. We are not saved but eternally condemned. God cannot give what we will not receive.

Roundabouts are somewhat of a new thing here on the south side of Indy. For a number of us, learning to yield as we enter a roundabout is difficult, particularly if we are not in the habit of yielding. Yet the more we drive into a roundabout, the more we learn to yield. The same can be said of us when it comes to yielding to the Spirit. It is difficult and hard but it is a learned behavior. The “lifestyle of the Spirit-filled Christian” is marked by yielding.

CLOSING

FUEL: are we running on empty or are we filled with the Spirit?

F for follow. U for unhurried. E for Empowered. L for Lifestyle. And what does a lifestyle of walking in the fullness of the Spirit resemble? Did you notice those four traits of the HOLY Spirit? H—help & hope, O—obedience, L—love, Y—yielded.

During December every year, I spend time asking God what He wants of me in the new year. As I sense Him revealing that to me, I create for the new year what I have referred to as a Life Map. I do it every year and have done so for many years. This past December, I sensed the Lord stirring me to study and learn how to keep in step with the Spirit, being filled by Him—then teaching what I learn to others. This four-part series has been a blessing to me. Yet, as I end this, I confess to you something I experienced time and again while learning, writing and even in these recent weeks, speaking.

Leah and I have a favorite Christmas movie above all others, and it is *A Christmas Carol* starring George C. Scott in the starring role of Ebenezer Scrooge. You may have seen this rendition a time or two. After Scrooge had his epiphany and woke up on Christmas morning, full of joy, he got dressed and hurried to the home of his nephew Fred to enjoy Christmas dinner. In the last few moments of the movie, Scrooge becomes introspective. Fred and his wife thank Uncle Ebenezer for coming to their home for Christmas Day, and Scrooge then replies, “God forgive me for the time I’ve wasted.” I think back over 40 years as a pastor, and I find myself with that same gnawing regret of the time I have wasted NOT being filled with the Spirit of Jesus, but running through life on empty, living in my strength and not His.

If you are of the same mindset, let me leave you with this. The Apostle Paul said, “This one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:13).

We learn from the past. We don’t live there. Leaving our regrets behind us, we press on—filled with the Spirit of Jesus.