

TAKING GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF

What does it mean
to be alive
spiritually?

Written by Colin Lamb

About Colin Lamb

Colin and his wife Brenda spent 17 years working with New Tribes Mission in Papua New Guinea. In 1992 they left Papua New Guinea and the following year went to work in Latvia in the Baltic States. Colin was involved in ministry there for six years: in Bible teaching, leadership training and taking seminars. Part of Colin's ministry was in the care and counselling of missionaries.

Since returning to the United Kingdom Colin has been teaching and developing the Missionary Training Course with New Tribes Mission. He is now Pastor of Lilbourne Evangelical Church in Northamptonshire. As well as ministering there, he maintains an ongoing interest in the support of pastors and missionaries.

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1. An introduction to a refreshing daily spiritual walk.

What does it mean to be alive spiritually?

Christian leaders are encouraged by Paul in Acts 20:28 to "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." Many will devote their attention to caring for the flock, but are in danger of not taking care of themselves. Rural Ministries have asked Dr. Colin Lamb to contribute the material that follows to help church leaders maintain their spiritual health. Colin's writing is best worked through slowly, either individually or as part of a small group.

Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

It is a wonderful privilege to be serving the Lord. But in the busy life we live today, anxiety, worry and tensions can so easily affect us as we serve the Lord. It saps your strength and wears you down. We want to look at what it means to be alive spiritually and as we walk with the lord we can be refreshed daily in our lives. In John 7.37, Jesus says, 'if any man thirst, let Him come to Me and drink' where the idea is of drinking of the Spirit. As we daily drink from the water He gives us we will find as Jesus said, in us will be a well, and out from us will flow rivers of living water.

Do you enjoy the river of living water in your daily life, or do you find that in the midst of your ministry and daily life you seem to be labouring and it seems to be heavy and hard. You seem to be heavy laded, burdened? When we are overloaded or burdened it is easy to drift from our walk with the Lord.

This is a summary all that is essential in the Christian life. It is put in a few words. It can even be stated in smaller compass than that. Jesus put the whole of the Christian life in two phrases when He said, "You in me and I in you," (John 14:20b KJV). It is all we need.

In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus invites you to come under His yoke and walk with Him, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He says:

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“Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden (burdened), and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus says first of all: “COME TO ME”. Come to Him the Living Saviour. He means, come now. He is saying this to all who labour and are heavy laden. Come to Him and He says: “I WILL GIVE YOU REST”.

Then secondly, Jesus says: “TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU”. Come into His yoke, one He has prepared for you, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Then thirdly He says. LEARN OF ME” He does not want us to learn about Him, but of Him. For us to have a personal daily relationship with Him. To learn about meekness and lowliness.

“Come, Take, & Learn”

The yoke was a well known picture to the Jews of anything to which men committed themselves. As we are walking with the Lord and serving Him, He says come under my yoke. In general a yoke is made of wood and joins two animals so that it makes it easier for them, acting together, to pull a heavy load. The yoke would be carved so it fit perfectly so that it didn't chafe and harm the animal so that it could pull and carry the load. That is what Jesus is saying here, that he has a yoke that is perfectly made for us so we can fit into His yoke and follow Him. As we walk with Him, it will not chafe, we will not have to struggle in our own strength as we will fit into the yoke with Him, and He said, His yoke was easy and His burden was light.

And this is what our Lord is asking you to do, He is saying, come to me, take My yoke upon you. And then He adds this phrase: “And learn from Me,” it is a yoke of fitting in with Him, to His teaching, to His instruction. It is a yoke that implies obedience. And I believe that is where we find real joy in serving, when we fit into the yoke He has for us.

So as we have seen, first of All Jesus says to you and me “Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” This may well refer

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to those who are labouring (or weary) in their serving and heavy laden under the work, working to the point of exhaustion. Jesus says to those who come to Him, 'I will give you rest. Rest from the burden of the work. It means that He will refresh us, revive us. You can enter into a spiritual Sabbath rest, a rest from labour and being heavy laden. A genuine rest without it being a burden. As we come to Him He will give us rest of mind, rest of heart, rest from working with our own energies.

I personally found real help and encouragement from what Paul said to the Colossian believers in Col 1:28:

"To this end I labour, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me".

What Paul is saying here is that he was working hard, he was busy, He says, "to this end I labour". What he is saying here is that he grew weary, tired, exhausted from being busy, from his work. Now I found that encouraging, as it show us that we can be busy. It's great to go to bed at the end of a busy day being tired about the Lord's business. This says that I am allowed to be busy and work hard. But notice the next part of the verse, because this is the important part. Paul said that we was working in the Lord's energy, and that the Lord's energy was working powerfully in him. That is the key isn't it, to serve Him, to work, not in our own energy but with His energy that works mightily within us. Remember Paul also said, that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. We can serve the Lord in every situation through the strength Christ gives. Phil 4;13. Do you know that, do you experience that in daily life? You can as Paul did.

First Jesus says come, Then Secondly Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you, and Thirdly learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest to your souls."

This is something He wants us to do. First of all we come to him, then we need to take His yoke, we fit into His yoke and then we learn from Him. Learning from Jesus Himself what it means to be meek and lowly in heart, and walking in submission to Him. We learn as we come to Him that He is 'Meek and lowly

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in heart.’ The Greek word for meek is the word used to refer to a powerful stallion that is under the control of its owner. Therefore, it came to mean “God controlled”. Let us come under His control. Let’s be humble, and teachable.

What is He saying here? “For I am gentle” ... Do not fear my yoke for I am gentle and humble. You suffer now because your present pressure. He said, “My yoke is Easy and my burden is light.” Light, is a word that means useful, manageable, serviceable, it is tailor-made for you.

When He says Light, it means, light in weight, not burdensome, or overbearing.” When a young bullock is harnessed to a mature ox. The bullock will not even be pulling the weight on its own. It is learning to walk in a field with the mature Ox, under control with a yoke around its neck. So what does it mean to take Christ’s yoke? To take Christ’s yoke means to submit to Him, the one who is gentle and meek, as one who is gentle and caring and concerned for us. It means to put yourself under His leading, to join yourself together with Him, but the difference is, as we fit into His yoke He gives us rest and the work He gives us is not a burden, it is a joy.

It means walking alongside Him without chafing, it will involve putting in full effort, but it will make whatever burden we have to bear a light one. Our serving will not longer be a burden. It will be a ministry with joy as we fit into the yoke that He has for us.

Then He says, ‘And you will find rest to your souls.’ “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” You will find rest for your soul.” You see, there is the satisfaction of rest through Christ. He calls you to fit into His yoke and His burden, and guarantees by His power you will find rest as you serve Him.

There is a “rest” that is available to us “today. I see this rest has present and future dimensions, just as salvation has. There is surely a salvation rest, a resting from our works in an effort to earn God’s favour, when we come to faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary. And there is the eternal rest which all Christians will experience.

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But there must also be what we might call a daily rest that we can enjoy on a daily basis, a rest from striving as Christians in the power of our own efforts, in the flesh, in a futile effort to attain godliness. This is what we see in Romans 7 and 8. Chapter 7 is the description of a Christian trying to live up to God's standards in his own strength, in the power of the flesh, and failing badly. Chapter 8 is the solution. The Christian is to live daily, moment by moment in the power of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that raised the dead body of Jesus from the grave. By the working of His Spirit in us, we are able, to some degree, to live a godly life (see Romans 8:1-17). This is resting in Him, or we might even say, abiding in Him (see John 15:1-14). This is the key to fruitfulness, service from the viewpoint of rest, serving with joy, and we can say with Paul that, *To this end I labour, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.*

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 "Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
 Thy head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
 Weary and worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
 And He has made me glad.

What does it mean to be alive spiritually?

It is a wonderful privilege to know the Lord as saviour and serve Him every day in our lives. So how is it possible for us to know the Lord and walk with Him daily as we serve Him? We get some wonderful principles for living the Christian life to the full from the passage in Ephesians where Paul encourages the believers to be filled with the Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit is mentioned throughout the scriptures, and it would be wonderful to do a study on what the bible says about the Holy Spirit as a topic on its own, and gradually work through that. However, let us look at the work of the Holy Spirit within the context of Ephesians. At another time we are also going to be looking at Galatians, Colossians and Philippians and looking in each of these different sections, because in each of these different letters Paul is talking about the Holy Spirit in a slightly different way. Each of the letters was written to real people in real times with real needs. In the letter to the Ephesians Paul is writing specifically to the Ephesian church. Ephesians chapter 5, Verses 15-17 is where we are going to start. Paul says, "Be very careful, then, how you 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".

Verse 18-21 is one long paragraph, one complete section in the original Greek. So what does Paul say in this one complete thought, and what does he want us to see, to learn and apply in each of our lives on a daily basis? Paul continues by saying, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ".

There are several little nuggets there. Paul is talking about how we live "Be very careful then, how you live". At the beginning of Chapter 5 and verse 1 he says "Be imitators of God therefore and dearly beloved children and live a life of love." (or walk in love). Then in Chapter 5 and verse 8 he says "Walk in the light". So, walk in love, walk in light

and now he is saying he is saying here, he wants us to walk wisely. "Be very careful then, how you live". This phrase "very careful" is the sort of phrase we say to one another. Once when I get something out of the oven, my wife said to me 'Be very careful' but I tripped and it all went everywhere! And Paul is saying to these Ephesians, we've heard how wonderful our relationship with God is, (he shared this in chapters one to three), now BE CAREFUL, day by day, moment by moment, how you live. He is trying to bring into our daily lives and our daily experience, care. Are we making use of every opportunity, making use of the time that we have? We can lose money and perhaps get it back again, we can lose various different things and replace them but we can't replace time. Time is irreplaceable. Paul is saying to these believers - make every opportunity of the time that we have because the days are evil. We do live in evil days.

Many of us have heard about the splendour of Dubai. Dubai is supposed to be the best place to live in the world. There they are building things everywhere, huge skyscrapers; they are building this big palm island. Everything appears rosy there. Not so anymore. There is redundancy now in Dubai. What is happening all over the world, is now affecting Dubai. These are the times that we are living in. Paul is saying here to these believers in the times that *they* are living in - Be very careful how you live.

Notice then what Paul he says in verse 17 "don't be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is". Now I remember, a number of years, reading that and thinking "Wow, this is really good! I can now come to a point where I can understand what God's will is. Wonderful! I'm really looking forward to this. I can find out what God has for me, what God's will for me is. "I got a real surprise. I wonder whether you will be as surprised as I was. This is quite challenging actually. Paul says here "Don't be foolish - understand what the will of the Lord is". Then in verse 18 he tells us what God's will is for our lives - "don't be drunk on wine which leads to debauchery but be filled with the Spirit". What does Paul mean here? Be wise how you live. Live being filled with the Spirit.

Now there are five things here that we can work through to help us understand what Paul is talking about and how it applies to us.

What then is the key to being alive spiritually? It is to be filled (controlled) by the Holy Spirit. Allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us, to teach us on a daily basis. It is a daily letting the Lord lead and guide us in all we do. That is the key to being alive spiritually. That is the key to serving the Lord effectively. When we became believers we received the Spirit but Paul is saying we need to be filled with the Spirit on a day to day basis. So, what does that word "filled" mean and how does it really apply? Being filled with the Spirit is going to be what enables you and me to do everything that we do.

I really enjoy being at home on a Monday and like to spend 6-8 hours in my study. However, inevitably in the middle of day the phone rings and I need to go somewhere. How do I react to that? What goes on inside me? Something has happened to change my schedule, and as I'm fulfilling that, the Lord is saying - Be filled with the Spirit as you do this. So- everyday, let's allow the Spirit to fill us.

Now, lots of people get mixed up with what being filled with the Spirit means. There's some confusion here. It's not a blessing just for a few. It's not a second blessing - something which we receive later. When a lady has a baby, she doesn't go home with a leg and the doctor says come back tomorrow and we'll give you another leg! The baby goes home complete, normally. And we are born complete. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives as a once for all experience. We can't have some of the Spirit one day and some another. Paul is saying that it is a regular, constant, ongoing allowing of the Spirit in your life. We can't have more of the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit could have more of us, as we allow him in our lives.

One of the ways it is helpful to understand any book is to look at it in context. Let's do some background study before we get into this passage. What does the bible actually say about the work of the Holy Spirit and then we'll come back to Ephesians.

Firstly, Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 3. This is what Paul says here about the Holy Spirit.

v13 "and you" - he is talking to the Ephesian believers - "you were included, in Christ" - When?

"When you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation."

That's when you were included in Christ, when you became a believer. Then he says, having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. When did you receive the Holy Spirit? When you believed. The moment we believed, we were marked, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing our inheritance which is yet for the future. So Paul makes it very clear to these Ephesians that when they became a believers, the Holy Spirit came and took up residence in their lives. That is the same for us. That's a powerful experience, a once for all experience, that every one of us received the Holy Spirit the day we were born again.

The next time the phrase "Holy Spirit" comes is in Eph 4 v30 and it is in the context of how we live our daily lives. In the first 3 chapters Paul is telling us what's true of us as believers - all the wonderful truths which are true about us. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 he says we have received the Holy Spirit, so now how do we live? In Chapter 4, 5 and 6, he tells us. One of the things he says here in Chapter 4 is - *as we live, don't grieve the Holy Spirit.* Have you ever grieved your husband or wife? How does it go down? Not very well? And what happens when *you* are grieved? You see, the Holy Spirit is a real person and Paul reminds us here that we have received the Holy Spirit in our life, so don't grieve him. Let's look at the context here where he says don't grieve the Holy Spirit. How do we do it? Look at verse 27. "Don't give the devil a foothold". When we give the devil a foothold, we grieve the Holy Spirit. "He who has stolen must steal no longer but must work, doing something useful." If we are not being useful, we're grieving the Holy Spirit. V29 "Don't let unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building each other up, according to their need." How do we grieve the Holy Spirit? When we speak in ways that don't help each other along.

Now look at v30 "in whom you were sealed in the day of redemption" He's reminding us that we have been sealed. We are his, we belong to him. Then he carries on and says "Get rid of bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice". So very clearly, Paul is saying to these Ephesians - *this is true.* You have received the Holy Spirit, this is how you should live - don't grieve him.

Let's go back a little bit further, and see what the Lord Jesus said about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Look at John Chapter 14 and some of the verses to bring us back to where we started in Ephesians:

v15. If you love me, you will obey what I command. I will ask the Father and he will give you another counsellor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees nor knows him, but you know him because he lives with you and he is with you. I won't leave you as orphans, I will come to you. Before long the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me because I live you will live also. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him".

v25 all this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things".

What does the Spirit of God do -teaches us. He uses the word to teach us. "And I will remind you Don't be afraid."

The Holy Spirit is going to come. He's going to be with you. He's going to be in you.

Look at Romans. Chapter 8v6. Again it's an amazing passage which tells us where we are now. Let's be aware in this passage here, of the word 'Controlled'.

v6 "The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" Isn't that wonderful? The mind controlled by the Spirit, as we allow the Spirit to control us, is life and peace.

v9 you, however, are controlled, not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you".

Now, notice this... "If anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ".

How do we respond in difficult situations? Paul is saying that we can, in all of our circumstances, allow God to control us. And he's going to tell us some of the results of that in a moment. What about this idea of control? It's not being filled, like a cup being full of water. The actual idea here is like that of the wind. Allowing the wind of God to blow you. The Spirit of God will blow you. As we see in the Christmas story, Simeon was led by the Spirit into the

temple. Day by day, allow the spirit to move you where he wants you to be. Another idea here is the idea of salt *permeating* meat to preserve it. Paul is saying, allow the Spirit to lead you in every way that you go.

2 Peter 1v21 is another verse where it says all the scriptures were written by godly men who were moved by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit caused them to write what he wanted them to write. So that tomorrow, next week, whatever we do, we can be allowing the Holy Spirit to cause us to be where He wants us to be. To do the things that He wants us to do. Jesus, when talking to some of the disciples said that "sorrow has filled your hearts". It controlled them. Another verse "fear had filled their heart". It's amazing that we can be filled with our own emotions but God wants us to be filled with the Spirit.

So, if we are allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us on a day to day basis, to blow us (lead us), and we are being sensitive to him, how does being controlled by the Holy Spirit work in daily life? It's interesting in these passages that Paul doesn't say what you do to be controlled by the Spirit but he does give us 5 examples of what will be true in our lives if we *are* filled with the Spirit. Some people might talk about their ecstatic experiences, wonderful experiences, wonderful understanding of the Word, the ability to preach and lots of other different things. But here Paul is saying - the evidence of someone who is being controlled by the spirit is fivefold. Every so often, I need to stop in my own life and ask 'Lord, where am I in these things?' Am I allowing the Holy Spirit to lead me and where am I in these 5 areas? Can we say we are controlled by Spirit? Are we allowing the Holy Spirit to fill us, because if we do, there are 5 amazing results of it? Lets look at these:

- Speak to one another.... it's interesting that he makes these 5 statements but doesn't explain them. Now this phrase "Speak to one another" is better rendered, speak *among* one another. It has the idea of the desire to speak with my brother, my sister, my friend about the Word. One of the evidences that I am allowing the Lord in my life, is that day by day I have the desire to speak with others about the scriptures. In Col 3 v16, Paul says in a slightly different way, "Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom and admonish one

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another.....” The word admonish means, to encourage. So the person who is filled with the Spirit is someone who wants to share with other people what God has made real to them. Perhaps on the phone, in church, after church, in the bible study meeting, when we speak to each other, let’s enjoy being in the word together. That’s the evidence. Do you enjoy the Word of God? Do you look forward to sharing with others what God has shown you?

- “Sing”. Psalm 40 says the Lord has taken me out of the miry clay and put a new song in my mouth. A song. Psalm 96 “sing to the Lord a new song.” We communicate with each other and we sing. The early believers in 1 Corinthians encouraged each other with the hymns. How wonderful it is to share a word with each other and be able to sing. Do you have a song in your heart?
- “Make music in your heart to the Lord” The phrase here has the idea of “have a melody”. Do you have a melody in your life? What steals your melody? My melody can go out of the window when the computer doesn’t work or the car doesn’t go. When things go wrong I can lose that melody and it’s gone. Paul says in Philippians “Do everything without moaning and complaining”. If you murmur and complain, the melody is gone, you are not being filled with the Spirit. This is so practical. Paul is saying here “Have you lost your melody?” We can have all the wonderful gifts, we can speak, and we can stand up and preach or teach. But it’s the way that I speak that’s important. If the way that I speak to you is unkind, if I murmur or complain, it doesn’t matter whether I can lead a bible study or stand up and preach, I’ve lost my melody. I encourage you -Go back to where you lost it.

Paul says in Phil 4 that we don’t need to be anxious, but we do sometimes get anxious. Come back to the Lord and share it with him. That’s how you deal with that melody. I love the thought in 2 Kings Ch6 v5 where a man comes to Elijah and says can you help me? I borrowed an axe and the head came off and it dropped in the river and I lost it. Elijah says to the man, go back to the river, throw the stick in where you lost it, and the axe head will float. That’s been a tremendous encouragement to me when I’ve

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thought about losing my melody. Go back to where you lost it. Go back to your husband, or your wife or your friend and apologise, make things right. You can speak in tongues if you want to, you can have all the wonderful gifts, but you are not filled with the Spirit. The evidence of being filled with the Spirit is practicing these principles. Now there are different gifts that God gives us and these are varied but the control of the Spirit is always here.

- "Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything". ALWAYS for EVERYTHING. I heard someone speak once about a gratitude attitude. Do you have a gratitude attitude? I read a book once and it says that for example, if you've got a bad leg, praise the Lord for a bad leg. That is not what Paul is saying here. I don't think God wants me to praise Him for a bad leg but we can praise him in *spite* of the bad leg. Paul is saying that one of the evidences of being filled with the Spirit is being thankful. In 2 Chronicles Chapter 20, Jehoshaphat had a problem. The enemy were coming and were going to capture Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat didn't know what to do about it so he went into the temple and laid his problem before the Lord and said "Lord, this is my problem." God told him to go out and face the enemy and as he went forward to sing and praise the Lord. Jehoshaphat must have thought "There are such great difficulties outside that door and you want me to go out there are praise the Lord?" But he did, and the Lord delivered him from the enemy. Now, the enemy won't always go away but the Spirit does give us a calm heart in the midst of our trouble.
- "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ". The word submit means abide under. It means me listening to each other. Fitting in with each other. We've got roles and responsibilities but as a fellowship, as a body, we should be submitting one to each other. Listening to each other, being humble with each other, working together under each other. Paul says submission is one of the evidences of being controlled by the Spirit. I think it's really interesting that these other three thoughts here take 3 verses but v21 takes the next 2 chapters. What is that possibly teaching? The others are perhaps easier but submission is a lot

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harder. In Chapter 5 v22, he talks about wives submitting to their husbands, Chp6 6 children to parents, slaves to masters.

Paul is saying here, be wise, understand what God's will is. Allow God's spirit to control you. Are you being controlled by the Spirit? That's the key to being spiritually alive.

3. What does it mean to live by the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit?

We looked in the first part of Ephesians at all the wonderful truths which were true of us as believers. Now in the second half of Ephesians, Paul is saying that all of these wonderful truths of the first few chapters ours, but now let's see them work out in our daily behaviour. We're talking here about belief and practice, what we believe and how it affects our daily lives. Paul's greatest desire for the Ephesians is that they would know of all of the wonderful riches that they have in Christ and that they would know these in their day by day experience. Paul wants you and me today too, to know that in our day by day experience. So now we have got to Ephesians Chapter 5:18, where Paul is saying we need to be controlled by the Spirit and we began looking at that. What does it mean to live a dynamic walk with the Spirit?

I really enjoyed watching the television the other day where there was a sailing race and to see the sail going up and the wind blowing the yacht along and then realise that God wants us to be filled by the Spirit, in other words, controlled by the Spirit. It's a choice and it's a command to us. In fact he gives a contrast here - don't be drunk on wine and we all know the terrible control that wine or alcohol has on a person. It takes complete control. Paul is saying that in the same way that the alcohol controls that person, because you are in Christ, allow the Spirit of God to lead you and guide you.

So let us move now to Galatians where Paul looks at the work of the Holy Spirit in a slightly different way. The Galatians were a group of people who were caught up in a lot of do's and don'ts. We can respond in the same way. We can think that the way to be a Christian is you go to church twice on a Sunday, go to the prayer meeting and do this and do that, read your bible every day etc. When I was a young Christian, I was encouraged to read 4 chapters of the bible each day and 5 on a Sunday. Once, I went to the young people's meeting on the Friday and I hadn't quite got up to the place where I should be in the readings, so I pulled up in the car and read it through so fast I hadn't a clue what I'd read but I walked into the meeting and replied to the question "Have you read your chapters?" - "Yes, I've read them." I began to realise it doesn't do you any good and Paul is saying that rules and regulation don't make us godly. He says what I want you to realise is, that it's the Spirit of God as you walk with him, He's going to be the one that helps you live the life

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that God wants you to walk. Here in Galatians we're looking at what it means to live by the Spirit.

1. Galatians 5 v16 Paul says "Live by the Spirit" We're going to look at what does this mean?
2. Then in verse 18, he says be led by the spirit.
3. v22 Producing the Spirit's fruit.
4. v25 Keeping step with the spirit.

Looking at those four things, what is Paul trying to talk about? He's saying to these believers, the greatest key, the greatest desire he has for them, is that day by day as believers they will live being controlled by the Spirit of God. Now how does that work in practice? We saw earlier that it's not just for a few super saints, but it is something that is possible for every one of us who is in Christ. I want to begin with v16. Paul starts off with the word "so" and when he does this it means that there is something that has been said before. So just before we get to verse 16 let's try and get the background to see what Paul is trying to say before he gets to how we can live by the Spirit. Look at Galatians chapter three and verse two, 'I would like to learn one thing from you' says Paul. In other words, can I ask you a question? "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you heard?" Very similar to what he says to the Ephesians. How did you receive the Spirit? By doing things? Or when you believed? Paul is saying again - remember you received the Holy Spirit when you believed, when you heard. Moving on to verse three - are you so foolish, having begun with the Spirit, are you now trying to obtain your goal by human effort? How are you walking with God today? Again in v5 - does God give you His spirit and work His miracles among you because you observe the law or because you believed and heard? God works in our lives, He does miracles in our lives, His Spirit works in us because we believed the message of the Gospel and God's Spirit lives in you and me, working in us day by day, moment by moment.

Look at Chapter four and verse four.

When the time had fully come, God sent His son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

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Isn't that wonderful? We have the full rights of sons. That happened when you believed. You had full acceptance. Someone told me a story once. It went like this. A young man went to the gates where Prince Charles lived and told the guards there that he had been invited in for a meal. The guards didn't believe him and wouldn't let him in until Prince Charles himself came to the gates and said "Excuse me that man's coming for tea". The guard said "Yes, sir" and let the man through. He had the full rights to walk through. It is so thrilling to know that we can use those rights to pray for one another and to know that our Father hears and will answer our prayers.

Then look in v7, you are no longer a slave but a son, and since you are a son you have been made heirs. Paul says that if all of this is true, he wants you to be free. (5v13) He wants you to enjoy your freedom in Christ and walk with Him. Don't use your freedom to indulge your sinful nature but to serve one another. As believers, because God's power lives within us, let's use that love and joy we have to be involved in serving one another.

In Chapter 5v14 Paul says

The entire law is summed up in a single commandment - love your neighbour as yourself.

Paul can see there is a problem developing. It's clear that it wasn't all perfect. Just like our lives, it's not all perfect. Paul goes on to say that there is something wrong with the church here. If you go on biting and devouring one another, watch out or you'll be destroyed by one another. Some of these believers, even though they had the Holy Spirit, they were fighting with one another. This phrase "biting and devouring" has the idea of differing with one another. Some time ago a friend of mine was watching two swans and they were having a fight and they got at each other so much they eventually killed each other. They destroyed each other because they were biting so much. That's what this passage is talking about - there are believers who do just that! These Galatians were doing that. They were like Christian cannibals.

You have been called to be free! We've been called to serve one another. Let's be careful we don't destroy one another. Then Paul comes to what he wants to say- "so". "live by the Spirit". I'm not certain why the NIV translation says live by the Spirit there, the phrase 'live by

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the spirit' actually means walk. It means step by step. Listening to the Holy Spirit, having your conduct controlled by the Spirit. Paul doesn't want them to get it wrong. Walking in the Spirit is not something special, an extra special gift, it's not something that arrives, it's something we all have and Paul is saying that as we have the Spirit, so day by day walk in the Spirit.

I have a bad leg. Some days I have a good day but not others. When it is a bad day and I want to go somewhere, I just put one step in front of the other. What Paul is saying here is the same principle. Believers who have God's spirit where He lives in you, in the same way go step by step, day by day, one step by another.

Once, my wife and I were going up a mountain. Some friends were going to meet us up there. So we were going up this virtually vertical mountain, and we got so far before my wife said. "I'm not going any further". I said, "well you can't stay there you'll fall off! ". So she said "well, what do I do? I told her, "All you've got to do is move one leg above the next one and then the next leg above the next one". For the next half an hour she put one leg above the next one. God is saying to you now - day by day, step by step. What is God saying to you now? What has God been teaching you? Step by step, listen to what He's saying and you won't gratify the sinful nature.

Moving on to v17

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with one another, so that you do not do what you want.

Do you sometimes find yourself doing the things you don't want to do? There is conflict in our lives, we want to walk with God but find ourselves not doing that. This bothered me quite a bit. I was in Papua New Guinea and teaching believers and as I was sitting there I began to realise that even in my own life there were things that were bothering me. That I wanted to walk with God but there were other things that were troubling me. I remember sitting there one night and I just started to cry because I sat there thinking "I can't do it". I'm a believer, a missionary, I'm teaching all of these people but I was challenged by my day by day walk with the Lord. I really wanted to grasp and understand this and had to ask the Lord what it meant

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The Lord took me to Romans and I read something there that totally changed my life and believe it's still impacting my life. Chp8 v13 - 'If you live according to the sinful nature you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live.'

What does this mean? When Christ died on the cross, I died, and I don't need to be dominated by my old nature. How can I change? Through the Holy Spirit. I saw something I'd never seen before - day by day allow the Holy Spirit to be in your life, to teach you, direct you and listen to what He says. After that, I said "Lord, I just want to live my life dominated by your Spirit, help me to be submissive and responsive to what you say."

Basically then, as we listen to the Holy Spirit and respond to Him, we will live lives governed by the Spirit. Let me give you an example of this from Ephesians 4 v29

'Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those that listen'.

"Only that which is helpful"- look at that phrase. Every now and again when I'm speaking to my wife a little thought comes to my mind "Is that helpful". Perhaps not? "Ok, well don't do it". Every now and again something comes up and the Lord says to me "Is that going to be beneficial what you're going to say to that person?" That's just one aspect of my life and the Lord wants to work in all of our lives in different ways. I want to constantly learn that, step by step. Walking with the Spirit is a day by day walk with the Lord. If we do that, our lives will be governed by the Spirit.

Galatians 5v18 - if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the Law. In other words, if we are allowing the Spirit to lead us we are not going to be living by a whole list of do's and don'ts. Paul makes it clear that we are not free to do what we want, but we are free to walk with the Lord. Allow him to lead you and guide you, step by step.

Paul does tell us what the life that is not led by the Spirit is like. Just read v19 where the acts of sinful nature are listed, sexual immorality, idolatry, debauchery, witch craft. He says something which is perhaps closer to some of us - "hated, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition etc." Those who live like this, he warns, will not inherit

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the Kingdom of God. No inheritance in the Kingdom of God for those dominated by the flesh. He's talked about walking with the Spirit; he's talked about allowing ourselves to be led by Spirit. Then he says, if we are living by the Spirit and being led by Him then we are going to produce the Spirit's fruit. V22 talks about the fruits of the Spirit which we will look at later. How can I tell if I'm walking in the Spirit? I'll be producing the Spirit's fruit. Paul says in Ephesians - if you are filled with the spirit you will be talking to one another, you'll be singing, having a melody and submitting. Here, he says if you are walking with the Spirit, it'll be a day by day walk and you will be manifesting the Spirit's fruit. We taught this at Northcotes, missionary training college, a couple of years ago. We had one lady there, and I was talking about the fruit of the Spirit (not fruits, one fruit in it's different manifestations) and this young lady shouted out "Do I have to have all of those?". I replied that it's not that you have to have all of those but gradually they are all being produced in your life. Paul is saying that the evidence of walking step by step is the gradual, manifestation of this fruit in our lives. How are we doing in our lives with love, joy, peace, our relationship to God? What about with each other - patience, kindness, goodness? What about yourself - faithfulness, gentleness, self-control? Peter says, if we possess these things in increasing measures we won't necessarily be liked but wouldn't it be a dynamic walk with the Spirit?

A pastor in India had this young man come to him who said "I think I've got a bit of a problem, I don't think that I'm growing spiritually". So the pastor took him out into the garden and showed him an orange. "See that orange?" he said. "Come back in a week's time". So the man came back in a week's time and the orange was a little bit bigger and it was green. The Pastor said "Can you see that? What's it doing?" The man said "It's green". The Pastor said "Come back in a week's time" Eventually, he came back and the orange had turned yellow and was ready to be picked. The pastor said "Look it's ready to be picked". The young man said "Yes, but I'm still not growing". The Pastor said "How do you know? The orange was growing, it's ready to be eaten now. Can I ask you a question? What did that orange do to become an orange?" "Nothing" replied the man. The pastor said "It was growing on an orange tree and the tree roots were down in the ground, and drawing up the moisture, and as it gained the moisture, gradually it produced the fruit."

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God is producing oranges in our lives. We are all at different stages but his fruit is being produced in our lives.

Notice verse 24. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

He's now saying something very different. He's making the point that we should keep in line with what God is saying. When I was a young lad, my father was in the RAF and he made me join the Air Training Corps. Those who were new had wooden rifles and those in uniform had real rifles. I wanted to get a real rifle and I wasn't allowed to get a real rifle until I'd gone through the initial training programme and everything else. So we were taught to march and to stand in line. I was very young and foolish. There was a guy in my Corps and he had corporal stripes on and he was in the class below me at school. He said "Lamb, get back in line" and I thought "who does he think he is, he's younger than me and a class below me?" But when the RAF officer told me to get back in line, I did it without arguing. I told my father what had happened and he was not impressed.

Paul is saying to keep in line with what the Holy Spirit is saying to me and you today. Isn't' that powerful? Let's not worry about all the ecstatic things that people have to say, but let's see what the Word says and keep in line with what God says. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature v24. You died to the sinful life. "I have been crucified. I no longer live like that. I want to keep in step with him. This verse really belongs with Chapter 6 because part of keeping in step with the spirit is keeping in step with God's family. We need to walk as a family. When you come to Chapter 6 and Paul says "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, (the word caught means slipped), you who are spiritual, restore him gently." Who is a spiritual person here? If you are in Christ - you are. Part of walking in the spirit is helping each other - gently. I used to say to my colleagues - I don't care what you say to me, but please be careful how you say it. I'm not made of steel. Restore gently and watch yourselves.

The outworking of the Spirit's care is that we keep in step with the Spirit by helping and caring for one another. I think that's wonderful. Paul is saying - live by the spirit, walk with the Spirit, let's be led by the Spirit, let's be

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producing His fruit. As we do that let's keep in step with Him and that will be a dynamic walk with God. Do you want it?

There is sometimes a bit of confusion, I feel, when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit. We've been talking initially about the fact that when we become members of the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit comes and takes up residence in our lives and baptizes us into the body of Christ and we become believers. Every one of us in Christ has received the Holy Spirit. If we haven't received the Holy Spirit we are not His. That is the one major thrill that we have when it comes to our walk with the Lord. Then, secondly the scriptures talk about gifts of the Spirit. These are different gifts that the Lord gives to the Church. It is interesting that the gifts are not for ourselves, they are not for our personal edification. They are for the work and benefit of the Church. Then, there is being filled or controlled by the Spirit. Paul is saying, with the authority of God, that we should allow the Spirit of God to be leading you and moving us.

So, who is the Spirit filled person? A Spirit filled, Spirit controlled person is someone who is allowing God in their lives. In the same way, it says in 2 Peter that the Word of God was written by different men as they were carried along by the Spirit, God wants us to be channelled along and moved. The evidence should be there in our lives. Then, lastly, there is walking with the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, living by the Spirit.

Now we come to the passage where Paul is talking about the fruit of the Spirit. Note that it says *fruit* not fruits. There are nine manifestations here about the fruit of the Spirit. So, lets do some fruit inspection. This is not a test to see if we have six out of the nine! This is not something that we produce some of and some we haven't started to produce yet. As we are walking with the Lord all of these nine are in our lives because we are in Christ. We are gradually becoming more and more like Him and gradually producing more fruit. So, the nine aspects here that Paul is talking about are evident as we are walking with the Lord and therefore we are producing the fruits of the Spirit. We can get so caught up with "gifts" and the things that we are doing but where are we when it comes to producing the Spirit's fruit?

Let's look at the first three - love, joy and peace. These three refer to the New Birth, to our basic relationship with Christ. An article by Donald Barnhouse is really interesting because he says Love is the key but joy is love singing and

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peace is joy resting. Do we enjoy the key? Do we enjoy the singing? Are we experiencing the resting? So, what is love? Some people say - I love my pizza or I love my dog. The word has so many different ideas. The following are three of the Greek words for love. One is 'Eros' to do with passion. The next one is 'Philadelphia' - to do with friendship, mentioned in the scriptures a number of times. The other one is 'storge' to do with the parent/child relationship. But the word that Paul is using here is 'agape' love which we probably all know has to do with divine, sacrificial love. This is the introduction to what Paul is talking about when he is saying let's produce the fruit of the Spirit.

Let's look first of all then: divine self-sacrificial love. "No greater love has man than the one which lays down his life etc ". You may remember the story of the soldier in Afghanistan or Iraq where a grenade fell and there were a number of soldiers around and this one soldier, who had a backpack on, fell backwards on to the grenade and it blew up. He did survive and so did all of his colleagues. He basically said that that was the natural thing for him to do. He was given a reward but he said that he was just doing his duty. But there was love there, a desire to save his comrades. John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only son. captures this. Again, Romans 5 "he poured out his love into our hearts". This is the key that Paul is talking about here. In John 15 verse 11, Jesus says "I want my joy to be in you and your joy to be complete". We love him because he first loved us. Peter says that we love him with "a joy that is inexpressible." So, the love that is here is first of all what Christ has done for us. Paul says to the Colossians (Chapter 1 v9) that our love should abound more and more, because of what he has done for us. He wants us to abide in His love. The greatest thrill of knowing that not only did He die for me, because He loved me, but that I can think of no greater thing than giving my self totally to serve him so that my love might abound more and more. I wonder how much do we stop and think of what Christ has done for us? How great is His love for us? As a result we want to be able to pour out our love for each other. Hebrews 12 v2 - for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross. The tremendous joy of knowing him, because of what He has done for me, makes me want to give myself totally, without reserve to Him. Are we captivated by that love?

I read a missionary story of two men in a village in Africa. One of these men was a brother who had killed somebody. He came running into the house, his clothes covered in blood. His brother said "Quick, change your clothes and swap them. When the police came they saw this man covered in blood and he was taken out and arrested and executed. One man did that for his brother. That is what Christ has done for me. Paul says - I want that love which Christ had for me, to be in me, to be in you and to abound more and more.

The second gift here is joy. Donald Barnhouse says that joy is love singing. Not only do we have the love of Christ in our lives, but it produces joy. When you first became a believer there is something that happens inside, the joy that we have. Two passages of scripture remind me of this. One of them is Nehemiah 8 v10 where Nehemiah says that "the joy of the Lord is his strength". When we don't know where we are going, the joy of the Lord is our strength. Paul says - "rejoice in the Lord always". There is a difference here, it is not necessarily happiness, because happiness can come and go. He is talking here about deep joy. Romans 14 v17 - the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. So whatever happens in our lives there is a joy that cannot be taken away. John 15 v11 says 'My joy be in you that your joy may complete'. John 14 'My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, don't let your hearts be troubled.' There is wonderful peace that comes. Paul says in Romans 5 "Being justified by faith we have peace with God". The word peace has the idea of harmony. There is harmony between us. In our human relationships, every so often, the harmony disappears. Sometimes the harmony between a husband and a wife disappears, and needs to be restored. When it comes to the Gospel, the harmony has been put together in Christ. When there is friction, something has to be done to restore the harmony. Paul says it is love which results in joy which brings about harmony. The peace of God which passes all understanding will guard our hearts. Sometimes when we are in situations where everything is going wrong, we can know the peace of God. The world can't understand it. This is all God related. These first 3 fruits relate to our relationship with God. We love Him, it produces joy in our lives and nothing can take our peace away, our relationship is secure. Do we know that? Do we enjoy that? It's interesting in Philippians 4:7 that Paul says two things.

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1. "The peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts". It is like a garrison around our hearts
2. Phil 4:9 "the things you have learned, what you've received, what you've heard what you've seen in me - do these things and the God of peace will be with you". We know the peace of God because of the Gospel. Do we put into practice what we know God wants us to do? If we do, then we can have the God of peace with us. I find it interesting to think of that passage in James 1 - consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds - often there can be turbulence inside when we face difficulties, but Paul is talking about the fact that we can have the peace of God because of what He's done for us on the cross.

Paul is saying that we can produce the Spirit's fruit. Are we doing that? Are we enjoying God's love? Do we understand that joy? Are we experiencing that peace in our lives?

These next 3 fruits relate to our relationship to each other. How are we doing in our community relationships? Again, Donald Barnhouse says that patience is love enduring. Kindness is love touching, and goodness is the character of love. Patience is a word that means long-suffering, courageous, enduring without quitting. How are you doing with patience? There are 2 aspects to it. Firstly, it means long-tempered. The simplest way of explaining it is to say it takes a long time before it boils. Being able to wait. If you want to test my patience, give me a flat-packed table or something and ask me to put it together. That is a real test of my patience! We all get tested in various different ways. Are you more patient now than you were before? Are you allowing God to work in your life? Are you growing in patience? Paul wants to be very practical with the believers here. But God wants us to be working in these areas of our lives.

Secondly, it has the idea of having the capacity to endure injury. This is a little bit stronger. I can be injured by somebody and I don't pay it back. Someone speaks harshly to me, but I don't respond with harshness. I endure it. Love is patient. We need to take time. We need to listen. When someone injures us we don't pay it back.

The next fruit is kindness. If patience means I can be hurt and I don't pay it back, kindness is, instead of responding negatively, responding positively. If I respond positively to someone who has hurt me, I am demonstrating kindness. Paul talks here about being gentle and gracious, responding graciously. Kindness puts people at ease. Think about how politicians speak to each other. Sometimes we can do that too! I took my children to the Houses of Parliament once to show them how the government acts. We sat there in the visitor's gallery and we had been there 5 or 6 minutes and I said we were leaving. If I had stayed there 5 more minutes I would probably have stood up and said "Excuse me, I don't let my children speak to each other the way that you do." I notice they always start off by saying "the right honourable gentleman" and then say whatever they like! Paul says love is kind. Do we give kindness back to each other? That is the way the world can see that we are God's people, by the way we respond to each other. I looked for some passages of Scripture about this and one that stands out to me is 2 Corinthians 10 v1 where Paul is pleading to the Corinthians about the meekness and majesty of Christ.

There is an interesting connection between these 3 fruits. Love is patient, love is kind and then love is good. This word goodness means generous. If someone attacks me with harsh words, I respond back not only with kind words but besides that, I'm generous. The bible talks of Barnabus, that he was a *good* man, and he was full of the Holy Spirit. Paul in Thessalonians is talking about the way that we should be fruitful in every good work. So we are patient with people, we respond with kindness to people and we show goodness in every way that we can. How are we doing with these 3 fruits?

The next 3 fruits deal with us personally, our inward look. How we are ourselves in our walk with the Lord. The word faithfulness means 'dependable'. Are you dependable? We all mistakes but we don't want to make that same mistake on a regular basis. Can we be depended on? As a fellowship, enjoying one another's company, we want to be dependable and faithful in the ministries that God has given to us. I love the passage in Colossians 1 v9-"God who has called us into the fellowship of his son is faithful". God is dependable. He leads us and guides us and never changes. There is an interesting statement in Ephesians where Paul mentions Tychius who is a "faithful servant".

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One who is dependable. My mind goes back to when we were in Papua New Guinea and working in a rural area. I couldn't find a word for 'faith'. Faithfulness is being faithful in the faith that we have. Some people came to me and asked me to help them with this new business. I helped them to start their business, and it began to grow, and eventually they needed someone to put in charge of it. It meant being in charge of all the money and all the goods that were going in and out. They couldn't find anybody who they could trust to do that. Eventually this one guy said "Lets 'dekor' this person because we 'por teko him" I had never heard of this phrase before. It literally means we "have strong thinking". Our thinking goes strongly to him because whatever we ask him to do he will do it. That is the word we used for praying. Putting our thinking *strongly* in what Christ did for us on the Cross.

Are we dependable? Are we faithful? Can people rely on us to see something through? Do we have a good attitude when we do something that we have been asked to do? Paul says that this is a fruit of the Spirit.

The next fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. The most wonderful way that we could express what gentleness is, is demonstrated in Matthew Chapter 11, v28/29 where Jesus says:

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and gentle in heart".

That word Meek is what is used to describe a trained racehorse. You have this trained stallion, that's full of power, but it needs to be reined in, it needs to be controlled. Paul is saying here, gentleness is about being controlled by God's spirit. Meekness, gentleness, and humility have the idea of being tamed, being under God's control. I am under God's control and I can be gentle with other people and gentle with the things that I say. Are we gentle people?

The last gift that is mentioned is self-control. There are a couple of passages here where Paul talks about being self-controlled but the one I most like is 1Cor 9 v25 where Paul talks about an athlete who wants to win the race, so he beats his body and controls it so that he can focus on what he wants to do. The believer is self-controlled.

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When it comes to my *time*, when it comes to what I eat, when it comes to my ministry, I need to be under self-control. I need to have the focus of Christ. That is one of the evidences of producing the fruit of the Spirit. I remember a lady in my home church who wanted to win a gold medal in the Olympics and she cycled every day morning and night, went without holidays etc because she gave herself completely to her goal of winning the gold medal. Paul says that for us, we need to have the spirit of self-control for the message of the Gospel. How about us individually? Again, Donald Barnhouse says "faithfulness is the habit of life, gentleness is the carefulness of life and self-control is holding and reining myself in." Then the hope of the Spirit is there. If I'm controlled by the Spirit, if I'm walking with the Spirit, I will be producing that fruit. Let's ask the Lord to help us to produce that fruit more and more.

5. Keys to overcoming anxiety

I remember on one of my journey's to Latvia, when we were living in Southampton at the time, and I got on this train in the morning at Southampton, and I got to Gatwick Airport, where I was going to fly to Riga, and when I got to Gatwick, I was absolutely, totally exhausted. I got on the plane and before the plane took off, I fell fast asleep. Eventually, I woke up and the man who was sitting next to me, whom I had never met in my life, said to me, "I want to let you know that you are a tremendous encouragement to me". I was bemused as to how I could be an encouragement to this man who I didn't know and had never met before. He told me "I came on this plane, absolutely an emotional wreck. I'd never flown in a plane before. I'd taken tablets; I was scared stiff and got on the plane shaking. I came in and sat down, saw you sitting there fast asleep and thought well if he's not worried about it, why should I be?" He said, "That really helped to calm me down."

We've flown a lot over the years, and sometimes with my family. When you land, you've got to get off the plane and go and get another flight, get all your bags etc. As soon as the lights go on, you stand up with everybody else like a herd of sheep, only to realise there's a bus outside and the bus can't go until everybody's on the bus. Then you get back to the airport and run through customs and rush on to the baggage collection, and find the bags haven't 'come yet. My wife and I would sit with our children, wait till everybody got off the plane, then we'd go. Sometimes we found out that if you are last on the bus, you're the first to get off the other end. It's amazing how you can learn to handle stress in a practical way.

We are going to be looking at some practical ways to handle anxiety. It doesn't say in Philippians chapter 4 anything about walking with the Spirit but there are some practical applications here, about what it means to trust God in our circumstances. What Paul wants to do with these believers now is to try and help them in day by day practical ways. By way of illustration, let's look at Chapter 4 v2 and 3 which introduces us to the subject. 'I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord'

What was happening here? We've got two ladies who were having a problem agreeing with each other. There was friction here. In verse three he says "I ask you loyal

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yolk-fellow to help these women who have contended at my side” Now these men, these yolk-fellow, we don’t know who they are, but the word ‘help’ means “take it in hand”, “do something about it” “sit down with these two ladies and sort out the situation” because it can be sorted out. So the anxiety issue that Paul is talking about could be to do with anxiety in the church or with individuals.

Then, he continues “along with Clement and the rest of my fellows, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always!” How often? Always. “Let your gentleness be evident to all because the Lord is near”. There are these two ladies with their issue or me with my issue, or you with your issue. Paul says “The Lord is near”. Now a lot of bible commentators and preachers see this as meaning two different things. “The Lord is near” in this phrase could mean the Lord’s return is near. On the other hand, in the context of what this passage is talking about, I’m not sure that is strictly what it means, but rather in the circumstances and in your anxiety realise that the Lord is here with you. Think of Hagar in the Old Testament, she was in a situation she had no control over. She was in the desert, she was about to die and the angel comes to help her. She named that place ‘the Lord who sees me’. It doesn’t matter what situation we are finding ourselves in, there is a Lord who sees us. So, I’d like to suggest that this phrase means that right where you are today, in this particular situation, the Lord is right here. He is with you and He can help you. That’s why he says in verse six, “do not be anxious about anything” which is the key to what we are looking at.

I like reading Warren Wiersbe’s commentaries. In his the outline on the book of Philippians he says that for the key to overcoming anxiety is:

Right praying
Right Thinking
Right Living (actions)

How do we pray in anxiety situations? What do we think? What’s in our minds when we are going through these situations and what do we do about it? I’ve constantly gone back to Philippians in my own life to see that there are some real practical goals here to help me.

In verse six “Do not be anxious about anything” or in the King James version “Be anxious for nothing”. Many years

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ago, I read that and it didn't help me. Does it help you if you're worried about something and I quote this verse at you? So what does it mean? It has the idea that when an anxious situation comes up in your life, let me give you some keys how to handle it. The word "anxious" has two ideas. Firstly, that of being pulled in different directions. Paul says that there are times in our lives, where natural situations come up and they pull us in different directions. Another word which is perhaps closer to the word "anxiety" means to be strangled. A situation comes up and you begin to feel strangled by it. One of the best ways to explain this is in Luke 10 where Jesus is with Mary and Martha. Mary is sitting listening to Jesus and there is Martha who was oh so busy. Martha was upset with Mary for not helping her. She was upset with Jesus for not telling Mary to help her. Jesus says to her "Martha, Martha, you are troubled about many things. There's something strangling you. Yes, we need to have the dinner on the table but it's strangling you, Martha." Then he says – Mary has chosen the best part.

There are times we need to sit down and listen and times when we need to be busy. If you look at the rest of Martha's life, you never see her being strangled again. It looks like she might have learned something that day.

So, how do we overcome anxiety?

Paul suggests three ways to overcome anxiety in this passage.

1. Right Praying – in everything, in every type of anxiety situation, by prayer, by petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Now there are 4 different Greek words here. The first one is "by prayer" and this is linked with the area of adoration. Linked with the area of praise. In Acts 4 v24 when Peter and John come out of prison, and go back to the house they had come from and they sat there and recount with everybody in the room, the greatness and the mightiness and the majesty of God. They started off with praise. They didn't go back in and say "oh we've just had a really terrible time in prison". They started with prayer and praise and that is the word that Paul uses here. So when we find ourselves in a certain set of circumstances, let's come to God with prayer. Prayer with a worship attitude. Another example is in Nehemiah 1 – Nehemiah was in captivity, so his friends come

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and Nehemiah starts asking questions about the situation in Jerusalem. He gets his answer. What does he do? When he gets on his own, he stops and begins to praise the Lord. After this, he spends time praising the Lord and getting his focus back on the Lord, then he begins to talk to the Lord about the problems. I find that tremendously encouraging. What happens when we find ourselves in an anxiety situation? It depends on your focus. Paul says; let your first area of focus be praise and adoration. Spend time, praying and thanking the Lord, thinking about who he is.

Next comes this word "petition". It has the idea of earnestly sharing what you have to say. We bring specific needs to the Lord. These are our circumstances, our problem. I love 2 Kings 19 v14-20, where Hezekiah had received a letter from Sennacherib, saying that he was going to come and destroy Jerusalem. Hezekiah takes this letter and goes into the temple and spreads it before the Lord and reads it. He takes it straight to the Lord, this specific problem that he had. I find this really helpful. The word "petition" is the same word that is used in James 5 where it talks about Elijah who petitioned the Lord that it wouldn't rain. He made a specific prayer request. God answered his prayer. So, in times of anxiety, there is prayer, and then there is petition. It's interesting that it then says – "with thanksgiving". How do we function when we get anxious? Do we praise and worship, do we specifically petition WITH thanksgiving? That is quite a challenge! But, we can thank Him that He is in control. What it is to have a thankful attitude in the midst of difficult circumstances. We can have a heart of eager appreciation and thanksgiving for who He is and what He's done.

Then he says – bring your requests. Don't *start* with your list but begin with prayer. When we're anxious we can do all kinds of different things, see people, talk on the phone, try and work it out ourselves. We need to stop and go back to Philippians and work these thoughts through. The situations don't always go away, but the peace and the confidence in finding the Lord's help is there. "And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds"

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The word "guard" here is the word "garrison". The peace of God will protect you; it will protect your mind from going astray. The Lord will be all around you, helping you and supporting you.

Colossians says it slightly differently. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts". I think these two go together. As we bring our requests to the Lord, He will guard our hearts, He will protect us. He will also rule. The word has the implication of a referee in a football match. Let the referee blow the whistle and everything stops. Let the peace of God which no-one can understand, can't fathom, protect you and look after you. The Spirit of God will blow the whistle and show us that we are getting anxious. We can apply these principles. When will the peace of God guard us? The answer is, when we come to the Lord like this.

2. Next we overcome anxiety by right thinking. What you think affects what you will do. Paul says that wrong thinking leads to wrong actions. What is your thought life like? Think of an anxiety situation you have faced or are facing, Paul urges us to look at our thought life. We need to say – is this true or imaginary? The Word of God will help us with the truth. A young man gets a spot on his face and immediately thinks its cancer and he starts to work out his funeral arrangements. Is it true? He may have to get it checked out. We may go into areas of anxiety but is it true? How does God want me to think? Is it noble, is it honourable? Is it worthy of thinking about? Is it a valuable thing to think about and if yes, we perhaps need to spend time thinking about it. Is it right? Does this fit into God's character? Is it free from evil, free from defilement? Is my heart pure? Is my mind pure? When it comes to my own walk with the Lord, with my thoughts about other people, are they lovely? Are my thoughts attractive and beautiful? Will they produce peace in my life? Are my thoughts admirable? Is what I'm thinking going to be respectful?

Sometime ago I was talking to someone who was feeling really anxious and I encouraged them to write these 8 words down. When you are going through the anxious situation, read these through. Then write down – what does God want me to

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think? The passage says if anything is admirable or praiseworthy, think on *these* things. Think on things that are valuable. It has the idea again of “chewing the cud”, meditating on these things, reflecting on the value of what God is saying. Are you anxious? What’s your prayer life like? What’s my thought life like? Does God like what I’m thinking? Where’s my focus? Is it on me or on Him?

3. Lastly, it’s to do with our actions – right living. Look at what Paul says in v9 “Whatever you’ve learned, whatever you received, whatever you’ve heard or seen in me, put it into practice”. Now, the Philippians had learned some things when Paul was with them. They had received lots of things from Paul, by his words, by his mouth, they had seen his life, seen his character. Paul says -Follow me as I follow Christ. All the things they had learned he urges them to put into practice. Make this part of your life. Then he says “the God of Peace will be with you”. When? As we apply some of these things. It’s not going to happen overnight. It takes time. Paul says that this could have a dramatic effect on the way that we live our lives.

Paul also talks in verse ten and afterwards about contentment. I heard of a man who was flying a plane and he was flying over a lake. He said to his co-pilot “I used to be fishing in a boat on that lake, always wishing that I could be up here. Now I’m up here, flying in the plane, I wish that I could be back down there fishing”. He just wasn’t content. Paul talks twice in these verses about being content. In verse 11, “I am not saying this because I am in need for I have learned to be content” Isn’t that interesting? We can *learn* contentment. Verse 12 “I know what it is to be in need and to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation”. So what does the word ‘contentment’ mean? The basic word contentment has the idea of finding my sufficiency in Christ alone but it also means to be internally secure. It doesn’t matter what happens in my life or where I’m going or what I’m doing, inwardly I’m secure with my relationship with God. Let’s see how Paul unpacks this.

First of all in verse ten, “I greatly rejoice in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned but had no opportunity to show it.” The people here had shared things with Paul and he

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was writing to say thank you for the financial gift he had received and states they hadn't had the chance to share with him before but now they had the opportunity. In verse 11, he states that contentment is not only learned but learned over a period of time and as we go through different circumstances. As different situations come into our lives, it's an opportunity to learn from our experiences, to be content. In verse 12 the word 'need' there means, to have nothing. There were times when Paul had nothing. There have been times in our mission where missionaries have suffered lack. One family lived for 10 days on tomatoes! In those situations of lack, it was an opportunity for Paul to find himself internally secure. He also knew what it was to have plenty, to be full! Paul is giving a personal testimony. Through his different circumstances, he had learned to be secure in Christ. He had been initiated into the secret. He goes on "whether well fed or hungry". The word "Well-fed" means to be fat like a fat cow. He also knew what it was to be hungry. So whether he was living in plenty or want, "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength". That's the key to contentment. My focus is on Him. Whether I am full or empty, He's the one who can strengthen me. Isn't that wonderful to realise that, as believers? That our lives don't consist of the abundance of the things we have or don't have? Our security is in Him.

So as we come to the end of these thoughts, what a privilege to know the risen Lord in our daily lives. To know that in us is a well, and out from us can flow rivers of living water. That we can come to the Lord and rest. What a privilege to know the Lord and walk with Him day by day, knowing that filling of the Holy Spirit in our day by day lives. What we do for the Lord comes from our relationship with Him. Let's continue to serve Him with His strength. Let's serve the Lord as Paul did serving with His energy which so powerfully works in us.

Let me finish with how Paul finishes his second letter to the Thessalonians, in 2 Thess. 3:16.

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all.