

Maintaining the Spirit-filled Life



**by
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INTRODUCTION¹

Things fall apart.” That’s a saying that is often heard in Africa. And it’s true. Anything in this life which is left to itself falls apart. It deteriorates. In physics this phenomenon is called entropy. In the material universe things move naturally from a state of order to disorder.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. Unless they are constantly maintained they deteriorate. Paul instructed Timothy to maintain the touch of God that was on his life (2 Tim. 2:6). A life lived in step with the Spirit of God must be perpetually maintained (Gal. 5:25).

A believer begins his or her spiritual life by being born again by the Spirit of God. He should then be immediately baptized in the Spirit. This baptism in the Spirit opens the door to countless other blessings. The newly Spirit-baptized believer should not, however, make the mistake of presuming that, because he has been baptized in the Spirit, his spiritual quest has come to an end. It has, in fact, only begun. Neither should he make the mistake of thinking that now that he has received the Spirit, he can relax and do nothing further. A life lived in step with the Spirit must be constantly maintained. In this booklet we will discuss how the Spirit-baptized believer

¹This booklet is an adaptation of chapter 5 of the author’s book *In Step with the Spirit: Studies in the Spirit-Filled Walk*..

can maintain his walk with the Spirit. In doing this we will address two important issues:

- The Importance of Maintaining the Spirit-filled Life
- Guidelines for Maintaining the Spirit-filled Life

Let's now look at our first issue, the importance of maintaining the Spirit-filled life.

Chapter 1
THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING
THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

The importance of the believer maintaining the Spirit-filled life cannot be overemphasized. Once a person has been baptized in the Holy Spirit, he would be very unwise to assume that there is nothing more for him to do to maintain his spiritual life.

The Experience Must Be Maintained

No matter how powerful one's initial reception of the Holy Spirit may have been, if that believer does not maintain the experience through a life of dedicated prayer, witness, and holiness, the experience will soon fade. The baptism in the Spirit brings the believer into a relationship with the Spirit that must be continually renewed.

Each Believer's Personal Responsibility

Every believer in Christ must accept personal responsibility to maintain his or her own spiritual life. Although pastors and Christian friends can encourage and inspire him, the final responsibility lies with the individual Christian. Like king David, each believer must learn to encourage himself in the Lord (1 Sam. 30:6).

Failure to do this will result in backsliding and loss of power. Eventually, one could even lose his salvation. Paul encouraged Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God” that was in him (2 Tim. 1:6). Just as a campfire needs constant attention if it is to remain blazing, our spiritual lives also need constant monitoring. When the camper goes to sleep, his fire goes out. When the Christian sleeps, his spiritual fire goes out. We must therefore maintain constant vigilance over our spiritual lives.

Chapter 2 GUIDELINES FOR MAINTAINING A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

A fire needs occasional stirring if it is to remain white hot, and fuel must be continually added if it is to continue to burn brightly. In the same way, we must continually monitor our spiritual lives. This monitoring should include frequent spiritual checkups. Paul instructed the Corinthians to “Examine [y]ourselves to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5). Each believer must accept personal responsibility for our his or her own spiritual life. The Christian whose spiritual fire goes out has no one to blame but himself.

One may ask, “If I am personally responsible to maintain my own spiritual life, what must I do? What specific steps can I take to ensure that I continue to walk in the Spirit?” We will examine eight specific strategies for maintaining one’s Spirit-filled life.

Seek Fresh Refillings

If a Christian is to remain full of the Spirit, he or she must seek fresh infillings of the Spirit. As mentioned above, every believer in Christ should be baptized in the Holy Spirit immediately after conversion (Acts 1:4, 5; 8:14-17). This spiritual baptism is a wonderful life-empowering experience.

However, the believer must also realize that the baptism in the Holy Spirit it is not a once-and-forever event. Every Spirit-filled believer should seek to be continually filled and refilled with the Spirit throughout his entire life.

On the Day of Pentecost the disciples were initially baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). Sometime later, they were refilled with the Spirit (4:8, 31). Paul was first baptized in the Holy Spirit in the city of Damascus (9:17, 18). Yet, he was filled again with the Spirit on the island of Cyprus (13:9). The twelve Ephesian disciples were first baptized in the Spirit when Paul laid hands on them (Acts 19:6). Later he wrote them, urging them to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Every believer needs to be baptized in the Spirit, but he also needs fresh refillings as he lives his Christian life.

A careful study of Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) reveals a powerful spiritual principle: We must each be repeatedly filled with the Spirit. The Greek verb translated “be filled” in this text is in the *present passive imperative* tense. This simply means that the phrase “be filled with the Spirit” could be accurately rendered “be being filled with the Spirit”²

Stanley Horton wrote about this verse: “We are to keep being filled with the Spirit (5:18). This (as the Greek indicates) is not a one-time experience, but a continued filling or (better) repeated fillings, as the Book of Acts suggests.”³

²Ralph W. Harris, *Complete Biblical Library*, “New Testament Study Bible, Galatians— Philemon,” (Springfield, MO: World Library Press, 1989), p. 155.

³Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), p. 244.

The Spirit-filled believer must know that, if he is to maintain the Spirit-filled life, he should seek fresh infillings of the Spirit each day of his life.

Jesus was speaking about receiving the Holy Spirit when he said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9, note v.13). Horton points out that these three verbs (ask, seek, knock) all speak of continuous and repeated action:

To emphasize this, Jesus said plainly, “Ask [keep asking], and it shall be given you; seek [keep on seeking], and ye shall find; knock [keep knocking], and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh [who keeps on asking, who is an ‘asker’] receiveth [keeps on receiving]; and he that seeketh [who keeps on seeking, who is a seeker] findeth [keeps on finding]; and to him that knocketh [who makes it his practice to knock on doors] it shall be opened.”⁴

To maintain the Spirit-filled life the Spirit-filled Christian must continually seek new refillings with the Holy Spirit. He must continually ask, seek, and knock if he is to continue and progress in His life in the Spirit.

Pray Without Ceasing

A second thing that one can do to maintain his Spirit-filled life is to “pray continually” or as the King James Version puts it, “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Prayer is an essential discipline for the Christian if he is to walk in

⁴Horton, p. 244.

the Spirit. Paul told the Thessalonian believers to be constantly in prayer: “Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit’s fire” (vv. 17-19).

Note carefully what Paul is saying here. He is saying that, if believers will pray continually, they will not make the mistake of “put[ting] out the Spirit’s fire” (v. 19). We must, as Goodspeed translates the verse, “never give up praying”⁵

Paul instructed the Ephesian believers in spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-18). He ended his instructions by writing, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (v. 18). The lesson is clear: In order to maintain our lives in the Spirit, and be ready to do spiritual warfare, we should “pray in the Spirit on all occasions.” We should pray daily, asking the Spirit for His infilling and guidance.

Our daily prayer should include prayer in tongues. Paul instructed, “He who speaks [prays] in a tongue edifies himself” (1 Cor. 14:4). That is why he said, “I would that everyone of you speak [pray] in tongues” (v. 5), and later, “I thank God that I speak [pray] in tongues more than all of you” (v. 18). Through praying in tongues, we maintain a powerful spirit-to-Spirit communion with God.

Be Fervent in Worship

A third way a Christian can keep in step with the Spirit is through fervent worship. Worship holds an important place in the Spirit-filled life. It is through Spirit-anointed worship that we are “raised . . . up with Christ and seated

⁵Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The New Testament: An American Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

. . . with him in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 2:6). These worship times result in “times of refreshing . . . from the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

In order to maintain our lives in the Spirit, we should seek out worship opportunities. These opportunities could include times private devotion. Great spiritual strength can come from these private worship times (Isa. 40:31). We should also worship with other Spirit-filled believers in church services. The Bible exhorts, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

When opportunities present themselves, we must enter into wholehearted spiritual worship with our whole heart (Psa. 100:4). David prayed, “Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, bless his holy name” (Psa. 103:1).

Paul spoke of one powerful way of maintaining the Spirit-filled life. In Ephesians 5:18 he exhorted, “Be filled with the Spirit.” Then in the verses following, he us told how this may be done:

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 the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 19-20).

Again, Paul’s teaching is clear: Worship is one powerful way to maintain the Spirit-filled life. As one worships in the Spirit, his own spirit is renewed; his faith is built up, his soul is refreshed, and he is empowered for spiritual battle.

Meditate on the Word

Daily meditation on the Word of God is another essential element for maintaining a Spirit-filled walk. Jesus said, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words that I have spoken to you, are s[S]pirit and they are life” (John 6:36).

What Jesus said about His own words, can also be said for all the words of Scripture—they are Spirit and they are life. As we read the Bible, and meditate on its words, the Spirit of God speaks new life into our spirits. If we are to maintain our lives in the Spirit, we must, therefore, dedicate ourselves to daily devotional reading of the Word of God. The word of God is food for our spiritual man. It is through reading the word that our spirits receive new life and strength (Psa. 119:92-93).

It is not enough, however, to simply read the Bible and then do nothing about it. We must obey the Word and apply its truths to our lives. James wrote, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (1:22). Jesus said that “everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand” (Matt. 7:26). When the trial comes, he will be unable to stand. Our spiritual lives are maintained, then, not by merely reading the Word of God, but by reading it—and then doing what it says.

Walk by Faith

Another strategy we must employ if we are to maintain our lives in the Spirit is we must walk by faith. To walk by the Spirit is to walk by faith, and to walk by faith is to walk by the Spirit. The terms are synonymous. Paul connected the walk of faith and the walk of the Spirit when he wrote, “For we *through the Spirit, by faith*, are waiting for the hope of

righteousness” (Gal. 5:5, NASB, emphasis added).

It is by faith that we receive the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:2, 14), and it is by faith that we maintain our life in the Spirit (3:3). It is also through faith that spiritual gifts are released in the believers life resulting in miraculous works. Paul continued, “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?” (v. 5). The obvious answer to Paul’s rhetorical question is that we receive the Spirit and work miracles by faith.

On another occasion Paul said that God “has given us the Spirit as a deposit” into our lives (1 Cor. 5:5). He continued, “Therefore . . . we live by faith, not by sight” (vv. 6-7). The one who desires to live in the Spirit must, by faith, focus his attention on the unseen things of the Spirit. He must walk by faith and not by sight.

Live a Yielded Life

There is a sixth thing that the one must do to maintain the Spirit’s touch on his or her life. He must learn to live a yielded life. This involves being submitted to the Spirit and His will. It also involves an attitude of openness to the Spirit’s promptings. The one desiring to live a life in the Spirit must live in a state of constant readiness to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus lived such a yielded life. He testified concerning Himself, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the son and shows him all he does” (John 5:19-20). Jesus completely submitted Himself to the will of His Father. This even included His willingness to go to the cross

(8:28-29).

In like manner, the apostles lived lives that were yielded to the Holy Spirit. Whatever they did, whether praying (Luke 24:53; Acts 1:14; 3:1; 4:31), worshiping (Acts 11:15; 13:1-4), witnessing (1:8; 4:8, 31), ministering (6:8; 16:6-10), or even conducting church business meetings (15:28), they did all under the authority of the Holy Spirit.

If we are to walk in constant communion with the Spirit we, too, must learn to live lives that are yielded to God and His purposes.

Cultivate a Sensitive Spirit

Another necessary requirement for living a Spirit-filled life is spiritual sensitivity. By this we mean the ability to sense in one's spirit what the Spirit is saying and doing. Such spiritual sensitivity is essential. The one who wants to truly follow the Spirit must be keen to listen to His voice. He must also be quick to respond to what He says—even to repent when necessary.

We tune in our radio receivers to the proper station in order to receive a clear signal. In like manner, we must learn to tune in our spirits to the voice of the Spirit of God. The Bible says that we must not harden our hearts to the Spirit's voice (Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7). One way of hardening our hearts to the Spirit's voice, and thus "tuning out" the Spirit, is to look with contempt on manifestations of the Spirit. Listen to what Paul said: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt" (1 Thess. 5:19-20). By treating the Spirit's manifestation with contempt we can put out the Spirit's fire in his hearts. We must never be guilty of this foolish sin against the Spirit.

Walk in Obedience

Obedient, holy living is another requirement for maintaining the Spirit-filled life. The Holy Spirit can be grieved, and our spiritual lives can be stunted, by impure living. In Ephesians 4:29-31 Paul made a list of sins that grieve the Holy Spirit of God:

- Unwholesome talk (corrupt speech, foul words)
- Bitterness (grudges and resentful thoughts)
- Rage (uncontrolled anger)
- Anger (desire to hurt and fight back)
- Brawling (railing, clamor)
- Slander (abusive and insulting language)
- Malice (desire to hurt for revenge)

Such unholy actions and attitudes will quench the Spirit's moving in our lives. They will grieve Him and cause Him to depart.

On the other hand, as we obey the voice of the Spirit, His presence grows stronger. At the same time we learn to better follow Him (Heb. 5:14). As The Spirit prompts us to witness, to release spiritual gifts, and to pray, we must be quick to obey. As we do, we grow stronger in our spiritual lives.

CONCLUSION

Things do indeed fall apart. Buildings fall apart, machines fall apart, and spiritual lives fall apart—if they are not properly maintained. Life is the Spirit is not an automatic thing. It must be nourished and cared for. We maintain our spiritual lives by giving diligent attention to them, and to the things of the Spirit. We must never be guilty of allowing the our spiritual lives to fall apart. We must do whatever it takes to keep in step with the Spirit of God.