

Walking by the Spirit

Some christians beleive being Spirit-Led applies to only one aspect of their lives. But God wants us to be guided by Him in all areas.

One day shortly before the November 2000 presidential election, I came home from work and found my son listening to sound clips on his computer that had been posted on Rush Limbaugh's Web site. The clips were recordings of the voices of women who, previously unsure about their choice for president, had de-cided to vote for Al Gore. Their reason? He had kissed his wife publicly before giving his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention!

"It made my knees go weak," one woman commented. Another said she nearly swooned when she observed Gore's public display of affection. Several admitted that the kiss alone had caused them to become avid Gore supporters.

I was shocked when I heard these women's remarks. How could anyone determine, based solely on a preplanned, politically correct kiss, which man would be best qualified to run our country? I wondered. How could anyone make such an important decision without consulting God—or if an unbeliever, without at least evaluating other, more significant criteria?

"No wonder it took women so long to earn the right to vote," I commented wryly. "The lawmakers knew they would use their hearts rather than their heads to mark their ballots!"

I don't know if any of the women Rush Limbaugh recorded were Christians. But I do know that unbelievers are not the only ones who often make decisions or take action based on something other than God's direction. Listening to the sound clips prompted me to consider why. And I believe I have the

answer: It is because many of us who profess to be Spirit-filled are not truly Spirit-led in every area of our lives.

FLESH VS. SPIRIT Actually, this is not a surprising revelation. As human beings, we tend to compartmentalize the various activities we engage in, applying our own skill and knowledge where applicable and leaving to God only what seems to come under His domain—or what is outside our ability to handle. In other words, when we are dealing with something clearly “spiritual” or when we come to the end of ourselves, we turn to Him.

It would be perfectly in keeping with this outlook, for example, to seek God’s will when we are praying for someone, especially someone we don’t know. We understand that God knows more about the person’s situation than we do, and we recognize that we need His insight, direction and power in order to make a difference. Praying is a spiritual activity, after all.

It would also seem “natural” to seek Him when we need Him to do something for us we can’t do for ourselves—something that’s bigger than us or beyond our capability—such as protecting our children when they are away from home, bringing in money to finance a ministry, changing a person’s heart or opening a door of opportunity.

But what about those activities we think we can handle on our own? Do we consult God regarding how to perform our jobs, how to parent our children, how to decorate our homes, or how to fulfill our civic responsibilities—including voting? Many of us assume God doesn’t have an opinion about the mundane aspects of our lives—or that He doesn’t want to be bothered. Why would He give us minds if He doesn’t expect us to use them? we reason.

The problem is that our minds, along with our wills and emotions, are part of our flesh—and our flesh “lusts against the Spirit,” the apostle Paul tells us. “These [the Spirit and

the flesh] are contrary to one another, so that [we] do not do the things that [we] wish" (Gal. 5:17, NKJV). Neither do we do the things that God wishes.

There is only one remedy: "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (v. 16). This is essential, Paul says, "for those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5). And it is the things of the Spirit with which we are to be concerned.

WALKING IN THE LIGHT Trying to live any part of our lives without the guidance of the Holy Spirit is like walking through a dark house without a flashlight. We may be able to feel our way to a certain extent, but inevitably we are going to stumble. Even worse, we are liable to miss some aspect of God's plan for us or for our family.

The Bible is full of examples of people who would have "missed it" if God had not directed them. Joseph would have "put [Mary] away secretly" if an angel of the Lord had not come to him in a dream and told him not to be afraid to take her as his wife (Matt. 1:19-20).

The wise men from the East who visited Jesus would have unwittingly revealed the Child's whereabouts to Herod if they had not been "divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to [him]" (Matt. 2:12). And more than once Paul or one of the other disciples would have tried to preach the gospel in a place God had not called them to go, if the Holy Spirit had not restrained them:

"Now when they [Paul and Timothy] had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:6-10).

The Holy Spirit directed Paul and Timothy on every step of their missionary journeys. This is what He wants to do for us, moment by moment, day by day, in every area of our lives. As long as we follow His lead, we will always walk in the light (see John 3:21).

JESUS’ EXAMPLE In order for us to be receptive to the Holy Spirit’s leading, however, we have to have the same revelation Jesus had—that we can do nothing by ourselves. We don’t need God for just some things; we need Him for everything.

“‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself,’” Jesus declared (John 5:19, NIV). He understood that He was helpless without the Father, so He took all His directions from Him. According to His own testimony, He did only what the Father told Him to do; said only what the Father told Him to say; and went only where the Father told Him to go (see John 14:31; 8:28,42).

We are to follow Jesus’ example. “As He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17, NKJV).

But we can’t do it on our own. That’s why Jesus asked the Father to send us the Holy Spirit. He was given to be our Counselor—our Teacher and Guide. If we yield to His direction, He will “‘teach [us] all things’” and “‘guide [us] into all truth’” (John 14:26; 16:13).

It is the Holy Spirit’s job to tell us the Father’s will. He is the only one who “knows the things of God,” the Bible says (1 Cor. 2:11). And like Jesus, He does not speak on His own; He says what He hears from the Father (see John 16:13).

It is not difficult to see that living as Jesus did is the key to walking in the Spirit. But knowing what is required and doing it are two different things.

How is it possible to remain in such close communion with the Holy Spirit that you are continually Spirit-led? There are several things you can do to follow Jesus in hearing and obeying God's voice, not just for the "spiritual" aspects of your life, but for all areas:

1. Cultivate a relationship with the Holy Spirit through prayer and studying the Word. He is not just an "it," a manifestation of God or the gift of tongues. He is the third person of the Godhead, and He wants to fellowship with you. Get to know Him—His character, His purpose, His desire for you.

2. Be open to hearing His voice in several different ways—in your own spirit, where He dwells, and through dreams, visions, angels, prophetic words, and so on. Search the Scriptures to see the many ways in which He speaks.

3. Look for confirmations of His word to you in the Bible, in prayer, in your circumstances and in the body of Christ around you, including leaders or members of your church.

4. Have faith to believe He cares about you and wants to speak to you about everything—yes, everything—that concerns you. The Bible says, "'According to your faith will it be done to you'" (Matt. 9:29, NIV).

It is not weak or foolish to look to Him for guidance on the natural-realm issues you face. Yes, He cares about your eternal destiny, your spiritual gifts and your ministry; but He is also concerned about what color you choose for your new carpeting, what school your child attends and how you express love to your spouse.

5. Record in a journal what you believe the Holy Spirit is

saying to you. Also write down your response and the results of following His direction. Keeping an ongoing account of His activity in your life will encourage you to maintain an intimate relationship and convince you of the benefits of heeding Him.

6. Be obedient. There's no point in asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the Father's will if you don't intend to do it. Determine to have an eternal "yes" in your spirit, and be quick to respond when you are given an instruction, no matter how slight the prompting. If you don't share your testimony at prayer meeting or discipline your child when He tells you to, you might not hear His voice on bigger life issues.

Ultimately, being a Spirit-led woman is not something you do; it is something you are. As you come to know the Holy Spirit and gain confidence in hearing His voice and responding to it, you will begin to consider doing God's will a natural outgrowth of a loving relationship with Him rather than an act you must perform. And you will find it much easier than trying to handle all that concerns you on your own.

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