

Life in the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Well, I've been greatly helped over the years through good biographies, and so I have some here.

I actually read about some godly people. I was never really a history kind of guy growing up. I liked math and science. I wasn't really a literature and grammar person, and so history didn't really sit well with me.

But as I have grown up a little bit, I have come to appreciate more and more the beauty and the greatness of God showing up in the lives of saints of old.

Men and women, good biographies have helped to shake me out of my own complacency and helped me to realize how small I am compared to the men and women of old.

And I would commend that to you. I'll get to that towards the end of the message. But I want to begin just with a story about one of my heroes. George Mueller was one of them.

[1 : 33] He lived in the 1800s, and he lived till he was in his mid-90s. A guy that till the day he died, he was actively pursuing a life of joy in God and a life of service to God.

Talk about a man of faith. And it didn't begin that way for him because he didn't really come to Christ until he was in his mid-20s. But once he made that commitment to Christ, and once he began to see who God was from the Scripture, it began to change everything about the way he lived.

He saw that the Bible was talking about a real person, and he saw and understood that the Bible's description of God was meant to be acted on.

Not just filling up the reservoir of data and knowledge in our minds, but the knowledge was sufficient for faith. It was sufficient for action.

Here is what he says at the very beginning of his time as a believer, and this is the mission statement that guided him throughout the rest of his life.

[2 : 51] He says, I have joyfully dedicated my whole life to the object of exemplifying how much may be accomplished by prayer and faith.

I have joyfully dedicated my whole life to the object of exemplifying how much may be accomplished by prayer and faith. Now, that mission statement began as a new believer in one form and resulted in greater steps of obedience as he was tender and receptive to put those things to work.

As he continued to take baby steps into believing God and trusting that God would do what he promised to do, at the end of his life looking back, you could see the landscape of amazing accomplishments, not because of George Mueller, but because of George Mueller's willingness and commitment to trust God to do amazing things.

To make good on the promises that God had given to George throughout the Scripture. Now, I'm sure that many of you are aware of the commitment that George had to orphan care.

It started small and continued to grow throughout the course of his life. There were just a couple people, a couple young children that he adopted into his family, and that grew into dozens and then to hundreds and then to literally thousands, so that during the course of his life he had as many as 5,000 kids at one time that he was helping to care for.

[4 : 39] His commitment was that he would never ask anyone for money, but that he would depend fully on the ability of God to answer the requests of his life, the prayers that he would pray, that God was sufficient to minister and to take care of the needs that George would have.

He opened his orphan house with these three goals in mind. The first is that God may be glorified in so furnishing the means as to show that it is not vain thing to trust in him.

Two, that the spiritual welfare of the fatherless and motherless children may be promoted. And that's a biblical thing. And number three, that their temporal good may be secured.

Now, there is story upon story of how God showed up for George Mueller. As a matter of fact, he has a journal that records over 10,000 answers to prayer that he had through the course of his life. Specific requests that George had made that God fulfilled in very deliberate and specific ways. But one story kind of gives an idea of what we're talking about.

[5 : 58] A gentleman came and was visiting the orphanage and saw how many kids there were in this orphanage. And he asks the lady who was overseeing this particular dormitory.

There were several of them. They couldn't all fit in one spot. And he asks her and says to her, Of course, you cannot carry out these institutions without some good stock of funds, correct?

And the gentleman added, Have you good stock? Meaning, do you have good resources? Do you have a bank account that's full? No. The response was this. Our funds are deposited in a bank that will not break.

The reply drew tears from the eyes of the lady and the man, sorry, the man who asked the question. And then a gift was given of five pounds, five dollars at the time, from the pocket of this gentleman. A donation that was very timely because at the time there was not even a penny to be spared in the house. But a commitment to the faithfulness of God to see this ministry through.

[7 : 10] And there were countless opportunities, countless times in which the children would sit down at the table with nothing to eat. A knock would come at the door.

And a delivery man said, My truck broke down outside and I would love to donate my milk and bread to you. And God faithfully supplied the needs of those who were in this orphanage.

Time and time again, A commitment to faith demonstrated the faithfulness of God, the trustworthiness of God to come through at every moment.

What I'd like us to understand is the correlation now to our passage in Romans chapter 8. Because the passage that we're going to be focusing on this morning, Romans chapter 8 verses 5 to 8, begin to help us understand the significance of our thinking.

The significance of recognizing how fundamental our mind and our thoughts are in relationship to the spiritual life. What you think about God and what you believe about God will help indicate for you where you stand with God.

[8 : 27] So if you would turn with me to Romans chapter 8. Let me read this passage for us and we'll begin our study.

It says, In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh set their mind on the things of the flesh. But those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the spirit.

For to set your mind on the flesh is death, but to set your mind on the spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile towards God.

It does not submit to God's law. Indeed it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. As we've been walking through this chapter together, there have been some truths that have come to the surface.

[10 : 07] We've begun to recognize the significance of the work of Jesus Christ in declaring for us no condemnation. It is a work that Christ has accomplished in our place and in our stead so that we did not have to bear the condemnation that we deserved.

And that as a result of the saving work of Christ, the declarative work of Christ, the formal doctrinal theological term justification, having declared us righteous, now leads to something else.

It leads to a sanctifying work, a setting apart work, a purifying work that happens in our life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul has preceded this conversation in Romans chapter 8 to help us recognize that this struggle that we face now as those who are believers, those who are in Christ, is not an easy struggle.

He says in Romans chapter 7, as he's talking a little bit about this struggle, he compares it to a war that is raging within you.

[11 : 28] Romans chapter 7 verses 22 and 23 says this, For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law, waging war against the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

He follows this in a later passage in 2 Corinthians. He describes this similar struggle using similar terms in 2 Corinthians chapter 10.

Listen as I read, beginning in verse 2, I beg you that when I am present, I may not have to show boldness with confidence, as I count on showing against some of you who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy arguments.

We destroy arguments in every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

[12:47] So I'm going to frame our conversation this morning in points that describe the battle that we are in. It is a spiritual struggle. It is you are in spiritual war against the heavenly places, against the schemes of the devil, who wants to come in and bombard you with temptations, but also a struggle against your own flesh, the difficulties you have of reverting back to your old way of life, and the Holy Spirit, in fact, trying to overcome and help you to live the pure, righteous life that he has called you and enabled you to live.

But first, I want you to notice this morning that this battle that we're in is a battle for the mind. It is a battle for the mind. 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit. It is a battle for your mind. First and foremost, what you think is what you believe.

And what you believe is what you'll act on. We said this in the tail end of our series in 1 John. You are what you believe. Not what you say you believe, but what you, in fact, really believe.

It will play out in how you live. Just as it played out for George Mueller. His commitment to believe that God was able and sufficient to provide led him to trust God in very difficult and hard circumstances that seemed impossible, but his commitment to faith demonstrated the trustworthiness of God.

[14:33] It is a battle for your mind. There are really only two possibilities in life. You are either one who is of the flesh, one who is living consistently by the flesh, and in this passage, as Paul is beginning to demarcate between these two groups of individuals, these are unregenerate people.

Those who are not in Christ, and thus those who are condemned. The other group, of course, is those who are in the Spirit.

Those who demonstrate a consistency, a pattern of life, of an affection for the things of God.

Allowing the Holy Spirit to speak into their lives, and to guide, and to govern their thoughts, their beliefs, and their activities.

Those then would be the ones who are regenerate. Those who are in Christ, and thus those who are pronounced no condemnation. It all begins, though, with how we think.

Paul uses several words in this verse to help us understand the significance of the permanence of what he's talking about. He uses the word to live, which is given to us in a present active participle.

[15:59] He wants us to recognize that this is an ongoing way of life. A perpetual, present activity of life. Those who are living in a way that is giving themselves to fleshly thinking.

He also uses the word according to, which refers to their basic spiritual welfare. What is their bent? What is their tendency?

What is their likelihood or orientation in relationship to how they think? Are they those who think according to the flesh, or are they those who think according to the Spirit, governed by the things of the flesh, or of the Spirit?

And the third word that is used consistently throughout these next several verses is the word to set your mind, to establish or to set something.

It, again, refers to basic orientation, a thought pattern. It's not dealing specifically with the intellectual way of life, but it is dealing with attitudes.

[17:09] It's dealing with affections and reasoning. What governs the way you make decisions? What helps to lead you and guide you in the purposes that you have in life?

It's used, this word used four times in these four verses. Maybe you would remember this verse in Colossians chapter four, verse two.

Set your mind on things above, right? Not on the things that are on the earth, for you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Same word. You're, to establish or to set your mind on the things that are either fleshly or the things that are spiritual. Now, to be clear, I want us to understand and recognize that there are times in life, and Paul has even talked about this in Romans chapter seven.

There are times in life where even though the pattern of life is set in thinking about the Spirit, where we fall into, we fall into areas of sin and thinking according to the philosophies of the world.

[18:19] We get caught up in fleshly, earthly, temporal pleasures. We're not guided by the Holy Spirit in our affections, and we sin.

Paul is clear about how that war is raging in his own life, and he says that he wants to do, in chapter seven, he desires to do what God calls him to do, but he even sees in his own members a law that is waging war against the members of his mind, making him captive to the law of sin that dwells in him.

There are times where even godly people step in to sin. But the consistent pattern of those who are walking after the Spirit and living according to the Spirit is those who are setting their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Maybe if I can put this in movie vernacular. We've been watching Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit at our house over the last couple of weeks. Now, I think that movie series does a great job helping us to understand the significance of the ring.

How many of you watched? You don't have to raise your hand. You've watched. All right, good. I have a taker back there in the back. Thank you. You know the journey of the ring, taking that ring back to Mordor, right?

[19:45] And dumping it into the fires of Mordor to finally remove this blemish, this spot, this stain on the earth. But regardless of who takes the ring, they are overcome.

By the burden of sin. Whether you're an elf, or whether you're a wizard, or whether you're a dwarf, wherever you might be, even The Hobbit, even Frodo at the very end is unable to cast that ring into the fires of Mordor.

It totally changes the heart and perspective. It is a gripping anxiety that overcomes everyone who carries the ring. The same is true only to a greater degree the corruption that happens of sin over an individual.

And Paul wants to leave no room for confusion. Those who deliberately and consistently walk and live according to the flesh demonstrate that their mind is actually set on things of the flesh.

But those who consistently live according to the Spirit, the Spirit's life will show up inside and overcome the sin barrier that's in their heart and help to lead them and enable them to godliness and purity.

[21:09] We find some of the corrupting force of sin found in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 17 to 20.

Look at some of these descriptive words in this passage. Now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them. Due to the hardness of their hearts they have become callous and given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

But that is not the way you learned Christ. So those who are in the flesh have no choice but to walk in the way of ignorance, to walk in a way of futility, to demonstrate their true character of those who are alienated from God.

The passage continues in verses 22 to 24 to begin to describe now the work of the spirit in your life. You're to put off the old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

[22:42] You see, that's what the spirit does. Jesus, in speaking to Nicodemus, wanted to help him understand the significance of the new birth and he says, that which was of the, of the, that which is born of the flesh is flesh but that which is born of the spirit is spirit.

Nicodemus, I tell you, you must be born again and Nicodemus didn't understand but what Jesus was pointing to was the work of the spirit in life to help regenerate them and to make them a new individual completely, this complete transformation and as the Holy Spirit who is God and dwells a life, he will help the mind overcome the sinful tendencies, the sinful desires and lead us to new joys, to new satisfactions, to lead us to true righteousness and holiness.

There is a mandate that God has given to us, a mandate to align our hearts and our lives to his, the spirit's work.

There is a mandate to alienate our thoughts and convictions, convictions, to align our thoughts and convictions to God's thoughts. His standard then becomes our path.

We look for direction from his word rather than the philosophies of the world. We saturate our minds in the things of the scripture, those things that are pure rather than those things that are unwholesome and unholy.

[24 : 23] Philippians 4.8 says this. It says, Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is commendable and pure and lovely, if there's anything excellent, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Now, there was a time where I did some youth ministry and the constant complaint or criticism that I would get was, hey, I can listen to that music, I can watch that movie, I can play that game because God doesn't forbid that.

But the call for us as spiritual people, those who are called to a spiritual life is not just to avoid the clear ungodly things, but it is to pursue the things that are righteous.

It is to have as a perspective what is true and honorable and just and pure, that those things will dictate to us the activities and the thoughts that we are to have.

What are we filling our minds with? When we come to really appreciate the truth, we come to understand how vital it is to condition our minds to think God's way.

[25 : 57] Just the other day, I was driving home with the windows open and there was a guy who pulled up beside me, beside me, his windows were down, his music was blaring and I could feel it.

You know, you ever been next to those? You're like, wow, I like feeling your music and hearing your music. Well, I have never listened to violent rap music before, it's just not something I do.

but I was absolutely horrified with the violence of the music that he was playing and I looked over to see, who is this guy?

and he was a normal guy. But let me tell you, if he actually carried out the things that were in his music, he would be in prison for life because they were murderous and heinous to the core.

I did a quick search, I probably shouldn't have, the top 25 rap songs that are the most violent and it is repulsive to see what our kids and what our teens and what the younger generation is filling their minds with on a consistent basis.

[27 : 19] There is no wonder why we're a generation of individuals who is given to violence because of what we fill our minds with. It's not spiritual things, not godly things, not pure things, not lovely things, but vile and wicked and repulsive, reprehensible in every way.

The question about our mind is a question about ownership. Who do you belong to? Who is your master?

Are you a master to your flesh or are you a master to the spirit? And here's why it is so important is because in the next verse, verse 7, we finally see the implications.

Here are the implications of a life given to the flesh versus a life given to the spirit. For to set your mind on the flesh is what, church?

Death. But to set your mind on the spirit is life and peace. It is a battle of life or death.

[28 : 32] life. That's point number two. There is no middle road. There is no both and in this scenario. It is either life or death.

Life that begins with God and continues for eternity or death that is perpetual and leads to eternal separation and damnation forever separated from God and hell.

It is a significant and urgent crisis that we face. A question that we must answer. Because to set the mind on the flesh is death.

James chapter 1 talks about this a little bit because we tend to push away and point fingers and find somebody to blame for our sin.

God wants us to understand that sin not only leads to death but sin is your problem and it begins in the mind. Here's what he says. Let no one say when he's tempted I'm being tempted by God for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.

[29 : 47] But each person is tempted when he is alert and enticed by his own desires. Then desire when it is conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is full grown brings forth death.

Sin begins in your mind. It begins with how you think. It leads to action and then leads to death.

Not only eternal death and separation from God forever but even death today. Barrenness in your relationships. Fruitlessness in your personal life.

life. No fellowship with God. No light in his presence. No insight in decision making. You have nothing but relational conflict, emptiness, fear, destructive behavior, deception, ruin of others for personal gain.

Those are all coming from Romans chapter 3 verses 10 and following to describe the consequences of those who carry out the sinful fleshly tendencies that are within them.

[31 : 00] There is nothing but barrenness and death in their life. But don't misunderstand as the psalmist is looking at those who prosper around him.

He asks the question why do they seem to prosper? Why is justice not occurring? his takeaway after his spending time in prayer with the Lord?

He says then he considered their end and when he considered their end he realized it was an entirely different scenario because God sets them in slippery places.

God will enact vengeance on them. Justice will prevail. None will escape. But to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace.

First and foremost it means that we have life and peace with God. Romans 5.1 says therefore since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 10] Because of the work of God in our lives we can enjoy peace with the only one that really matters and that is God himself. We can have fellowship with him communion with him forgiveness and cleansing that comes from him intimacy with the God of the universe peace and life to look forward to because of the work of justification that God has worked in our life.

Eternal peace because he is our peace who has broken down the wall of division as we find in Ephesians chapter 2 Jesus absorbed the wrath of God on our behalf so that we don't have to experience the wrath that we deserve because of our sin and now as one who has the spirit of life within we have been tasked to be those who are life giving to others think about the mandate that God has given to us as ambassadors of Christ to go and to make disciples of all nations to carry the life giving message of the gospel to those who need it so desperately to be those who are about the ministry of reconciliation drawing others back to God helping to bridge the gap for them and as those who have the spirit of peace we are called to the peace pursuing ministry

Galatians 5 22 says the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace it will work its way out in the lives of those who are indwelt by the spirit of peace peace making will be your prerogative Romans 12 18 says it this way if it is possible as much as depends on you live peaceably with all men Ephesians chapter 4 verses 1 and 3 says I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called with all lowliness and gentleness with long suffering bearing with one another in love endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace those who are indwelt by the spirit of peace will show the work of the powerful spirit in their life by pursuing peace with those around them if you listen to the spirit if you are obedient to what he is commanding you to do you will be one who is pursuing peace if instead you pursue the flesh and allow division to continue then you are demonstrating a tendency to the flesh rather than allowing the spirit to have his way in your life the next point is found in verse 7 verse 7 says this for the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile towards

God it does not submit to God's law indeed it cannot we find from this that it is a battle you cannot win in your flesh it is a battle you cannot win in your flesh godly righteousness cannot be obtained by rule keeping godly righteousness cannot be obtained by better discipline by being a harder worker by having more rules by setting more boundaries by having more accountability partners being a spirit led person is not about mastering your flesh but submitting yourself to the power and the work of the spirit Paul makes this absolutely and abundantly clear in Galatians chapter 3 he says this this only

I want to learn from you did you receive the spirit by the work of the law or by the hearing of faith are you so foolish having begun in the spirit are you now being made perfect by the flesh Paul wants them to understand that that all of their desires to conform their flesh to the likeness of Christ's standard is all futility it is not something you can accomplish on your own it is something that only can be done as you submit your life to the spirit himself it's not that those things are unimportant it's not that those things are to be excluded certainly we're called to obedience but how is obedience carried!

[37 : 20] out in your life it's carried! as the Holy Spirit is working to change and transform the way you think we find from Romans chapter 12 verse 2 be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind it's the Holy Spirit who does that work and makes you like God every other life that is not yielded to the spirit make no mistake is hostile towards God you make yourself an enemy of God if you refuse to listen to the spirits working in your life and the spirit message through the word of God he doesn't mince any words you can't have it both ways you can only live according to the flesh or live according to the spirit and those who choose to do what the flesh is calling them to do pulling them to do urging them to do they can't help but do what the flesh is calling them to do demonstrate that they have no spirit in their life and thus demonstrate they're rejecting

God himself they have made themselves an enemy of God well how does the spirit speak well the spirit speaks! through his word holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy ghost it's the spirit's primary goal to point us to Jesus Jesus tells his disciples this on the night before he was crucified he says when the helper comes whom I will send to you from the father the spirit of truth who proceeds from the father he will bear witness about me the work of the spirit is to point us to God to help us understand his thoughts his heart his priorities and to see and to show his glory those who pursue the things of God can begin to think God's thoughts it's almost incomprehensible! to imagine what Paul says to the church of Corinth in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 he says you as regenerated and new individuals indwelt by the Holy Spirit can begin to have the mind of Christ you can think God's thoughts you can know God's heart but ultimately in our last point we find in verse 8 it is a battle of faith it really boils down to this it is a battle of faith what do you believe those who are in the flesh cannot please God well the corollary is found in Hebrews chapter 11 verse 6 without faith it is impossible to please him for he who comes to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him so I want to approach this from a positive standpoint rather than continuing down the negative track if you want to be one who is pleasing to God you must recognize that fundamentally this is not only a matter of thinking but a matter of faith what do you believe about God without faith it is impossible to please him God I want to close with another illustration a guy by the name of David Brainerd who lived in the 1700s another one of my favorite guys David Brainerd when he was in his early 20s was still unsaved he was still not following after Christ and he was going to Yale he was at the top of his class but God got a hold of his heart one day as he was out walking and praying alone just reflecting on the glories of God and trying to commune with him through prayer and God intervened in that moment and rescued him and caught him up essentially to glory and captured his attention and his affections well at age 21 he then shifted course and said

I want to be a minister in his home state without being licensed by the institution so he went to Yale and changed his major but the problem was he got expelled one day because he said something negative about his teacher he said this teacher has no more grace than a chair and he wondered why the pastor over the institution did not drop down dead for finding students for their evangelical zeal he couldn't get it George Whitefield had just been on campus had ignited a flame in the hearts of many of the students they were zealous about the things of the Lord but the pastor over this institution was trying to quench the flames and David Brenner couldn't understand it and for that slip of the tongue he was expelled and what would seem to be a bummer in terms of circumstances

[43 : 06] God used then in his life to totally make him a person who not only loved God but demonstrated a commitment to Christ in the middle of great suffering he suffered with tuberculosis which in that day is in this day too is a disease of the lungs he had it from the time he was 21 to the time he died at age 29 with increasing intensity so that he could not even hardly breathe and constantly coughed up blood it was a it was a an existence of constant turmoil distress and pain he describes his experiences in a journal but what comes to light is his absolute commitment to God in the midst of intense suffering he says when I really enjoy God I feel my desires of him the more insatiable oh for holiness oh for more of God in my soul oh this pleasing pain it makes my soul press after God oh that I might never loiter on my heavenly journey if I had a thousand lives my soul would gladly have laid them all down at once to have been with Christ and this deep commitment to faith in God in the midst of incredible adversity and suffering led him to not only minister to the native

Indians but to be a catalyst for the worldwide mission across entire Europe and Asia if we want to be people who are spirit filled and spirit led we must be people of faith how do we go about this how

do you nurture a renewed mind how do you cultivate a spirit filled mind well there are many ways we can do this but it must begin with the word of God memorization meditation meditation on the scriptures blessed is the man Psalm one says who delight in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night he will be like a tree planted by rivers of water that brings forth fruit in its season its leaf will not wither and whatever he does will prosper that kind of life that kind of person communion and prayer with God but perhaps the greatest way that those of us in this room need to begin to cultivate a spirit filled life is putting aside worldly fleshly thinking that may not be bad in and of itself but the leisure and the media that we bombard ourselves with day after day after day keeps us from being able to listen to the spirit's voice whether it's sports or news or music or movies or tv shows or netflix or whatever you might fill in the blank with we are becoming numb to the things of the spirit and not listening to his voice in our lives we must listen to the spirit and find ways to allow the spirit to transform the way we think let's pray miracle miracle
Thank you.