“LIVING LIFE IN THE SPIRIT”
(As taught by the apostle Paul in Romans 8)
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Introduction

The apostle Paul discusses the subject of “holy living” in Romans chapters six, seven and eight. In chapter 6 he addresses the believer’s relationship to sin; though he is no longer a slave to sin because of the work of Christ’s on the cross, neither is he free to just go on sinning as he pleases. In chapter 7 he makes the case that living a holy life does not come by keeping the law; because the law does not provide the power that is necessary to overcome the believer’s sin disposition. And in chapter 8 Paul stresses the importance of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer; it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit whereby the believer can overcome his sin disposition and live a life of holiness. In this critical chapter of Scripture, Paul describes seven key ministries of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer —

• Walk according to the Spirit (8:2-4).
• Set your mind on the things of the Spirit (8:5-8).
• Put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit (8:13).
• Be led by the Spirit (8:14).
• Know the Fatherhood of God by the Spirit (8:15-17).
• Hope in the Spirit (8:23-25).
• Pray in the Spirit (8:26-27). In other passages Paul mentions —
  • Be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18).
  • Serve in the Spirit (Rom 7:6; 15:16).
  • Love by the Spirit (Rom 15:30; Gal 5:22-23; Col 1:8).

1. Walk According to the Spirit (Rom 8:2-4)

The apostle Paul believed living life in the Spirit was best compared to the concept of “walking.” In the eighth chapter he writes, “The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death…. through God’s sacrifice of His Son on the cross as an offering for sin… in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:2-4). The Old Testament tells us that “Enoch walked with God” (Gen 5:24)… “Noah walked with God” (Gen 6:9)… God told Abraham, “Walk blameless before Me” (Gen 17:1)… The Lord told Israel that He would establish them as a holy people to Himself “if they would walk in His ways (Deut 28:9)… the psalmist David said, “Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and I will walk in Thy truth” (Ps 86:11)… likewise the psalmist writes, “How bless are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord” (Ps 119:1)… God told Solomon, “Walk in My ways… as your father David walked” (1 Kg 3:14)… The Lord told His people, “Where the good way is, walk in it, and you shall find rest for your souls” (Jer 6:16)… the Lord prophesied to His people, “I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes” (Ezek 36:27). As I reflect upon these verses, I am reminded of the word of the Lord to the prophet Amos: “Do two men walk together unless they are one?” (Amos 3:3). And then there is the word of the Lord to the prophet Micah: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to
walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:8). Walking was the apostle Paul’s favorite metaphor for the Christian life — perhaps it was because he did a lot of walking in his life; it has been estimated that he traveled some 12,000 miles during his various missionary journeys (most of which were on foot). Paul uses the word “walk” thirty-two times in his letters — “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph 4:1)... “walk in love” (Eph 5:2)... “walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8)... “walk by faith” (2 Cor 5:7)... “walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16, 25)... “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Col 1:10). So life as a Christian is “cooperating” with the Holy Spirit in a daily walk; as believers, we are now no longer obligated to live according to the flesh, but free to live according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:2-4). The characteristic principle of the Holy Spirit is to empower believers for holy living — “walking according to the Spirit” is Paul’s chief expression of the Christ-life.

Though every believer in some mystical way (known only to God) begins “walking in the Spirit” the moment he places his trust in Christ for salvation, he is also admonished to “walk in the Spirit” as he lives out his earthly life under the lordship of Christ and in the power of the Spirit. As John MacArthur says in his Commentary on Romans, “Everything that is a spiritual reality [for the believer] is also a spiritual responsibility” (MacArthur, p. 412) — for example, just as we in fact “are holy” or “saints” (1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 3:12; Heb 3:1), we are called to “be holy” (1 Pet 1:15-16). Likewise, though the Holy Spirit will produce spiritual fruit in our lives, we are also admonished to bear fruit. The person who is genuinely saved has a new and divine nature that is, by definition, attuned to God’s will; nevertheless, he is admonished to live by his new nature in the power of the Spirit. Because we are still clothed in the old self, we will sometimes resist God’s will. When we live by our new nature in the power of the Spirit, God’s desire becomes our desire without any compulsion involved. It is only when we go against God’s will and against our own new nature that the divine commands and standards seem onerous and burdensome to us. On the other hand, the faithful child of God who is obedient from the heart always says with the psalmist, “O how I love Thy law!” (Ps 119:97). These truths are part of the amazing and seemingly paradoxical tension between God’s sovereignty and man’s will. Although our minds are not capable of fully understanding such mysteries, as believers we accept them because they are clearly taught in Scripture, and we are convinced they are true by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:14).

You have no doubt heard it said that a person’s character is the sum total of a lot of little choices. Well similarly, the Christian life is the sum total of a lot of little steps taken in submission to the Holy Spirit... and as we walk in the Spirit, God fills us with His Spirit in such a way that our lives more reflect His will, and our desire to sin lessens. Galatians chapter five parallels Romans chapter eight in many ways — Paul says the following in his letter to the Galatians: “Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). As we walk in the Spirit (depending upon Him and being filled with Him), our craving for sin will lessen — obviously, spending time with God and walking with Him will lessen our desire to spend time in the world and walk in its ways. So those who do not walk in the Spirit on a moment-by-moment basis will not be thinking on the things of the Spirit and become more oriented toward the things the Spirit desires; as such they will feel the pull of temptation more intensely. If you have ever gone through “physical therapy” because of an injury, no doubt you know its value in building up your strength, and the positive effect it has on you becoming physically healthy again. Well, think of “spiritual therapy” in those same terms — your spiritual muscles need exercise... without exercising them, you will experience atrophy due to inactivity. Obviously, it takes time to get
accustomed to a moment-by-moment, day-by-day walk in the Spirit if it is not the regular pattern of your life. So what’s the first step then in learning to walk in the Spirit? It involves the mind.

2. Set Your Mind on the Things of the Spirit (Rom 8:5-8)

Paul says, “Let 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” (Rom 8:5). In short, those who are unconverted are concerned with the things of the flesh — they obey the impulses of the flesh; they live to gratify the desires of their fallen nature. Conversely, those who are believers live according to the Spirit — they live for those things that are eternal; they are occupied with God’s perspective and God’s program for their lives. So life in the Spirit has a lot to do with our “mind-set” — whatever our minds are set upon will determine to a large degree how we are doing in our Christian walk. If our minds are set on the things of the Spirit, we will indeed discover a life characterized by peace; if our minds are set on the flesh, we will experience hostility toward God (Rom 8:6-8). The mind-set of the flesh is death because it is enmity against God — the unconverted sinner is actually a rebel against God and in active hostility to Him — he “runs his own ship,” “calls his own shots,” and “does his own thing;” essentially he is “the captain of his own soul.” Fleshly minds are not subject to the law of God — they want their own will, not God’s will. So there are two categories of people in the world — those who are of the flesh, and those who are of the Spirit — and these two types of people have two vastly different mentalities or outlooks on life… which lead to two patterns of conduct, and results in two spiritual states (death and life). The unsaved person is simply a spiritual corpse (there is no life in him — Eph 2:1-7); he neither wants to nor can he live a godly and righteous life because his nature and resources are not godly and righteous — he is not motivated nor empowered by God. Remember, even believers cannot “bear fruit” apart from Christ — branches can only bear fruit when they abide in the vine (Jn 15:5). As John Stott says in his book Men Made New, “What we are governs how we think; how we think governs how we behave; and how we behave governs [the outcome of our lives] — death or life (Stott, p. 88). That is the significance of our mind-set.

The “flesh” is the tendency that everyone feels to be pulled toward sin and self — it is the inclination to sin that every human being experiences… it is the downward pull that every descendent of Adam faces (Rom 5:12-21), and can only be overcome by the Holy Spirit. The flesh is frequently referred to as our sin disposition or our sin nature. The good news for the child of God is that the gravitational pull of the flesh has no power over the one whose mind is set on the things of the Spirit. Leon Morris describes those who have this Spirit-oriented mind-set in his commentary on Romans: “Such people are not intermittently interested in the things of the Spirit; their whole being centers on them. What the Spirit does is their absorbing interest…. It is a delighted contemplation of what the Spirit does wherever the Spirit chooses to move” (Morris, p. 305). As Morris says, it requires a thoroughgoing concentration — it is not something you just give lip service to; it involves a commitment in the deepest recesses of your being (Mt 6:21).

The mind set on the Spirit is not just about what you do in the moment of temptation — it is a reorienting of your thoughts, your desires, and your motivations, so that a Spirit-oriented focus becomes the established pattern of your life. As Kenneth Berding says in his book “Walking in the Spirit” — “Your thoughts need to be trained so that they stay focused on the things the Spirit produces, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Normally, your thoughts will try to escape toward jealousy, envy,
anger, sensuality, immorality, and idolatry (Gal 5:19-21). But you have been called as Paul says, ‘to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor 10:5).” In daily life this means that you talk to God throughout the day… you let your thoughts dwell on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praise-worthy (Phil 4:8). You actively, by the Spirit, reject wrong thoughts as they enter your mind. By the way, “wrong thoughts” are not up for negotiation, consideration or reflection… they are only up for exclusion, elimination and rejection. Obviously, this isn’t something that is easy or automatic — it requires immediate action and involves a “turning”… turn your ears and eyes away from the things of this world, and as Helen Lemmel says in her hymn, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.”

3. Put to Death the Deeds of the Body by the Spirit (Rom 8:13)

Many believers have actually come to the conclusion that “living a life of holiness” is really not a possibility, because they have entreated the Lord numerous times in an effort to overcome their sinful tendencies and the pull of the flesh… yet they never succeeded. As such, they pessimistically conclude that their “expectations” were simply too high… that a life of over-coming sin is probably not what the Bible really teaches… and that they simply need to accept themselves the way they are and get on with life. To come to the position that we are actually obligated to live according to the flesh, however, is completely contrary to what Scripture teaches — that we are not obligated to live according to the flesh (Rom 8:12-13). By the way, the issue of being obligated to live according to the flesh is one of the main differences between a person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and one who is not (Rom 8:9-13); between a believer and an unbeliever. Scripture does teach that the person in whom the Holy Spirit lives can consistently live a life that pleases the Lord when he sets his mind on the things of the Spirit and puts to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit. According to Romans 8, here is what is possible in the Christian life —

- We can live with the knowledge that we are free from condemnation (v. 1).
- We can live as people set free from the “law (power) of sin and death” (v. 2).
- We can live realizing that God fulfilled the requirement of the Law in us thru Christ (vv. 3-4).
- We can walk according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh (v. 4).
- We can set our minds on the things of the Spirit rather than things of the flesh (vv. 5-7).
- We can live as people who are characterized by peace (v. 7).
- We can live lives that are pleasing to God (implied in v. 8; cf. Heb 11:6).
- We can live free from the obligation to do the things of the flesh (v. 12).

All of these things are an integral part of the life Jesus referred to as the “abundant life” (Jn 10:10). It should be noted, as we redirect our thoughts toward the things of God, we increasingly become a person whose thinking processes are so filled with the things of the Spirit that the pull of the flesh lessens (Rom 8:5-6) — with that said, however, there is still the need for an “act of the will”… the discipline to “think godly thoughts”… the putting to death the deeds of the body, and “saying no to sin by the Spirit” (Rom 8:13). Paul stresses that you will live if (and only if) you mortify (put to death) the deeds of the body. Notice again, it is only by the enablement of the Spirit that one can consistently put to death the deeds of the body— by the way, this verb literally means to “render ineffective”… and the verb tense makes it clear that Paul does not have in mind something that you just do “once and for all” and you are then done… as believers, we have been...
given the responsibility of putting to death the deeds of the body over and over again throughout our earthly pilgrimage — there is no passivity being suggested here, only “active engagement” in the fight... it is not just a matter of “letting go and letting God do the work,” as the Keswick Movement maintained; note the teachings of Paul in the following passages:

- Do your best to present yourself approved to God (2 Tim 2:15).
- May I hear that you are standing firm... and striving for the faith of the gospel (Phil 1:27).
- Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness (2 Tim 2:22).
- Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the devil (Eph 6:11-14).
- For this I labor, striving by God’s power which mightily works within me (Col 1:29).

Whereas some believers only focus on “trusting,” the Bible clearly teaches the importance of “obedience” — we are not encouraged to passivity; we are to actively kill sinful deeds by the power of the Spirit — such activity is both Spirit-empowered and Spirit-motivated. Remember the words of the hymn, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus.” The hang-up for many Christians is the thought that if they are actively battling sin, then they cannot possibly be trusting in the Spirit — they think that if they are striving hard, then they must be working in their own strength rather than the strength of the Holy Spirit. Scripture teaches that we are to render the deeds of the body ineffective (by the Spirit), and not give the devil any sort of foothold in our lives (Eph 4:27). So in prayerful trust and continual dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit, we take action so that the sinful deeds of the body are not given any life.

Furthermore, we prepare for temptation ahead of time through prayer, study of the Word, and growth in faith (Eph 6:10-20) ... and we carefully avoid places and situations in which we are highly susceptible to temptation... and when we are tempted we call out to the Lord and stand firm (Eph 6:13-14) or flee (2 Tim 2:22)... and if we succumb to a temptation (which we will do over and over again), we don’t wallow in our sin, but immediately confess to the Lord that we have sinned, and promptly make restitution if need be, and actively begin to prepare for the next time we are tempted (thru the practice of spiritual disciplines). By the way, being as we all have areas of significant weakness (2 Cor 12:7-10), it is important to recognize that those areas of temptation will require more attentiveness than others.

Putting to death the deeds of the body is a characteristic of God’s children. The Scottish theologian David Brown said, “If you don’t kill sin, sin will kill you.” Conversely, Jesus said, “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of your parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Mt 5:29). His message was this: No action is too drastic in dealing with sin: no price is too great to pay in turning from sin to trusting Christ and thereby escaping the damnation of eternal death in hell. The apostle Paul said, “I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12-14). Obviously, Paul had not achieved perfect righteousness in Christ, but that was the supreme objective of his life. Although his flesh sometimes held him back and temporarily interrupted the full joy of his fellowship with Christ, his basic heart’s desire was to obey and please his Lord. John MacArthur reminds us that “God’s people invariably fall into sin when their ‘focus’ turns away from the Almighty to themselves and to the things of this world” (MacArthur, p. 424), and for that reason Paul admonished the believers at Colossae: “If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.
For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:1-3). Paul was not suggesting the “Let go and let God” philosophy — that was not the kind of spiritual life Paul promised or that he experienced. No. As long as a believer is in his earthly body, he will be subject to the perils of the flesh and will need to keep putting its sins to death. Only in heaven will the need for practical sanctification end — until then, all believers are admonished to put sin to death and to live for their sovereign Lord (cf. Rom 6:3-11).

Because of the influence of our human weaknesses and limitations on our thinking, it is often difficult to recognize sin in our lives. It can easily become camouflaged, often under the guise of something that seems trivial or insignificant, even righteous and good. We must therefore pray with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps 139:23-24). By the way, sincere prayer has a way of unmasking sin’s deceit — when God’s children open their minds and hearts to their heavenly Father, He lovingly reveals sins that otherwise would go unnoticed. Another psalmist testified, “O that my ways may be established to keep Thy statutes! Then I shall not be ashamed when I look upon all Thy commandments…. Thy word I have treasured in my heart that I might not sin against Thee” (Ps 119:5-6, 11) — in other words, when we know and obey God’s Word, we are building up both our defenses & offenses against sin. And then there is the challenging counsel of the prophet Haggai to ancient Israel — “Consider your ways!” (Hag 1:5, 7). Paul’s main point in Romans 8:13 is that, by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, we are able to successfully resist and destroy sin in our lives. As a believer faithfully and submissively saturates his mind and heart with God’s truth, his Spirit-controlled behavior will follow as sure as night follows day.

4. Be Led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14)

The apostle Paul writes, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom 8:14). Several passages refer the Holy Spirit witnessing directly to our spirits (Rom 8:15-17; 8:26-27; 9:1), not only through the Word (2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Tim 3:16-17) — we shouldn’t be hesitant to consider that the Holy Spirit directs our lives in more specific ways, and that this is all a part of what it means to be “led by the Spirit.” Being led by the Spirit through God’s Word assumes, of course, that we are saturating ourselves in it, reading it, studying it, memorizing it, and meditating upon it. When we face situations where we do not know what to do, Scripture tells us we can ask for an increase of wisdom — God promises to give it to us when we ask in faith (Jam 1:5-6). The Holy Spirit moves us in our spirit as we move through the decisions of life, be they small or major decisions. It should also be noted that Paul says all of God’s children are “led by the Spirit” — not just some of them. God’s children are secure in Him even when they are not as responsive or obedient to His leading as they ought to be. The Christian who neglects the spiritual disciplines, however, will invariably have doubts about his salvation, because He is indifferent to God and the things of God. By the way, Satan (the great accuser of the brethren) is always ready to take advantage of our circumstances and plant seeds of uncertainty in our minds.

Just as our finite minds cannot fully comprehend how the Spirit leads us, so also we cannot fully understand any of the supernatural works of God. We do know, however, that our heavenly Father does not force His will upon us — rather, He seeks our willing obedience. It is when we are genuinely submissive to Him that our Lord supernaturally reshapes and redirects our will into voluntary conformity with His own. When the Spirit leads us He does so by making us sensitive
to issues and situations, that result in our being encouraged to take some kind of action. Though we need to be ready to make decisions based solely upon biblically-grounded missional wisdom, we also need to intentionally develop a sensitivity to a more direct leading of the Spirit. Then when He brings to mind a wrongdoing of which we were unaware (compare Ps 139:23-24 and Phil 3:15) or prompts us to speak to someone in need, we will be ready and available. Kenneth Berding says, “Attentiveness to the written Word sensitizes us to the ways of the Spirit, to His priorities, and to His patterns… then when the time comes, despite all the noise in our lives, we become accustomed to distinguishing the Spirit from other voices whenever the Spirit chooses to lead us in this manner” (Berding, p. 60).

God saves us through our faith in Him, and He leads those He saves through the same human channel of faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 11:1, 6). Writes Solomon, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart…. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Prv 3:5-6). Later in that psalm he remind us that “God leads the humble in justice, and teaches the humble His way” (v. 29). Isaiah assures us that if we truly seek the Lord’s will, He is already beside us ready to say — “This is the way, walk in it” (Is 30:21; cf. Is 48:16-17). God’s Spirit sovereignly leads His children in many ways, including ways that are often direct and unique, though the primary way in which God leads us is divinely clarifying His Word to make it understandable to our finite and still sin-stained minds. As we read, meditate on, and pray over Scripture, the indwelling Spirit of God becomes our divine interpreter (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:14; 1 Jn 2:27).

Some spiritual things that are “real” are not easily communicated through concrete language. Many commentators suggest that the best analogy for the “leading” in this verse (Rom 8:14) is that of a shepherd and his sheep. God regularly compared Himself to a Shepherd who leads His sheep (Ps 23:1-3; 78:52; 80:1; Is 40:11; Jer 31:10; Ezek 34:11-13; Jn 10:11, 26-28). Probably the most important thing we can do to develop sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s guidance in addition to saturating ourselves in the Word, is to spend blocks of time in prayer before the Lord — learn to pray in the Spirit, and let Him guide you into the types of things you should pray about. As you pray, if you think that the Holy Spirit is impressing upon you that you need to be doing something in particular, or need to be praying about something in particular, spend more time on that point. The key here is “being open” to the Lord’s leading. Though the Holy Spirit doesn’t always lead us this way, sometimes He does. Obviously, the Holy Spirit can choose to act in any way that He wishes. For me it’s been a matter of “believing in divine appointments” throughout the course of a day — though I work as hard as anybody to orchestrate all the events of my life, “reality” (God is the power behind reality) always interjects its own array of circumstances and events — so I have learned to see the hand of God superintending the various events and the appointments of my life. Each time we respond to the Spirit’s promptings and receive confirmation that it was in fact the Spirit, we become increasingly able to discern what the Spirit is doing and have more confidence in His guidance. With that said, as believers we can be confident that it is God who “leads us” to the various people He puts in our path each day… confident that God has already prepared them to hear from us in some way, even if it means only planting a seed of kindness in their lives. Knowing this should daily cause us to pray that “God use us” in the lives of others (Mt 25:35-40), and confidently expect Him to work in our life accordingly (Ps 139:16; Ecc 11:5; Jn 3:8).
5. Know the Fatherhood of God by the Spirit (Rom 8:15-16)

There is a “spiritual instinct” in the newborn believer that he is a child of God — the Holy Spirit tells him that it is so. He does it primarily through the Word — as a Christian reads the bible, the Spirit confirms the truth that, because he has trusted the Savior, he is now a child of God. So the Holy Spirit enables us to see that God is “our Father” and that we are “His children” (Rom 8:15-16). God’s Spirit has transferred us from a place where fear reigns, and put us in a secure and loving family with a Father who is strong enough to protect us from all that would harm us. “Abba” is an Aramaic word which suffers in translation — it is an intimate form of the word father or papa and carries both an element of intimacy and an element of respect at the same time. In the gospel of Mark we find Jesus crying out to God, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will” — you can detect both the intimacy and the submission in His words. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: “Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” — the Holy Spirit is testifying to our spirit even as He testifies with our spirit to God; this testifying is simply a declaration and acknowledgement of the truth that we are children of God. What a remarkable thought this is — each of us who truly knows Christ is being reminded by the Holy Spirit over and over that we are adopted members of God’s family. Internalize that truth. Many of us, however, spend our days “listening” to criticisms that we allow to bounce around inside our heads, rather than letting God’s Word form the way we view ourselves. We tell ourselves the things we have heard over and over and over again in the past —

- You never do anything right! You’re a loser!
- Nobody wants to be your friend!
- You’re the reason your family is so messed up!
- You’re as stupid as a rock… and everybody knows it!
- You’re never going to amount to a hill of beans!
- What’s the matter with you!

Fellow believer, stop listening to those words! Our identity is formed by what God thinks of us… by what He has done for us… and by what He intends to do with us; not by anything else, and certainly not by the opinion of others. We need to turn off these destructive messages and start listening to what God says about us. So what has God said about us in Romans 8 up to this point? These are the truths we need to affirm over and over again… speak them out loud to yourself, and ask the Holy Spirit to solidify them in your own spirit. Meditate often on these truths so that you begin believing them — may you deeply come to know that God is truly your Father, and may you daily learn to walk in the light of that reality! Let me begin the list by adding one that probably sums them all up. It was one I heard in a recent sermon. Imagine this scenario — the first thing God does every morning after getting out of bed is turn on His computer to see how things are going in the world, and as it boots up, there on “His screen saver” is a picture of the love of His life — you! Most of us may find that impossible to believe, because our sinfulness simply overwhelms us… but the reality is God loves us with an everlasting love! Give real serious thought to the foregoing scenario — remember, He loves you so much He actually died for you. This little scenario reminds me again of the wonderful words Charles Wesley penned: “Amazing Love! How can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me?” Wow… if the reality of that truth doesn’t rock your world, nothing will. If you’re struggling with believing it, you need to know that statement is true. Affirm the truths Paul has taught us up to this point in Romans 8:
• You are not under divine condemnation.
• You are not in bondage to the flesh.
• You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
• You belong to Christ.
• You are spiritually alive in Christ.
• You are children of God.
• You are adopted into His family.
• You will be glorified together with Him.

6. Hope in the Spirit (Rom 8:23-25)

Do you ever feel like you just don’t quite belong in this world… that you don’t exactly fit? That is a common feeling for believers, because this world is really not their home… we were really made for heaven. One of the central themes of Christianity is that of spending eternity in heaven with God. That was the message of the apostle John: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal (emphatic!) life!” (Jn 3:16). The apostle Paul writes, “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom 8:11). Paul states emphatically that one day God will raise us from the dead and give us resurrection bodies through His Spirit — we will be “glorified with Christ” (Rom 8:17). C. S. Lewis comments on this in his best selling book Mere Christianity: “A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do” (Lewis, p.118).

Paul goes on to say in his letter to the Romans that we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body… with perseverance we wait eagerly for it” (Rom 8:23, 25). The Holy Spirit Himself is the firstfruits. Just as the first handful of ripened grain is a pledge of the entire harvest to follow, so the Holy Spirit is the pledge or guarantee that a future full inheritance will be ours. Specifically, He is the guarantee of the coming adoption, the redemption of the body (Eph 1:14). As William MacDonald states it in the Believer’s Bible Commentary, “Our hope for deliverance from the presence of sin and all its baneful results is based on the promise of God, and is therefore as certain as if we had already received it; so we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (MacDonald, p.1712). The biblical concept represented by the English word “hope” is so strong that it is almost a synonym for “eager expectation” — as such we are absorbed with the “glorious life to come.” Paul says it is because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that we groan within ourselves for the ultimate redemption of our bodies; He is the One who has placed an eternal perspective in our hearts, the desire to abandon our bodies, get a new one, and live forever in heaven with God.

As John Stott says, “It is a fact that not one of us is wholly saved yet; our souls are redeemed, but not our bodies; and it is our unredeemed bodies which cause us to groan” (Stott, p. 96). Why is this? For one thing, our bodies are weak, fragile and mortal, subject to fatigue, sickness, pain and death (2 Cor 5:2, 4). But it is also the fact that “the flesh” (our fallen sinful nature) dwells in our mortal bodies (Rom 7:17, 20), and it is this indwelling sinfulness which causes us to cry out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24). Such a shout of anguish is precisely what Paul means by our present inward groaning. Acknowledging
his own sinfulness, **King David** cried out to the Lord, “My iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me…. Lord, all my desire is before Thee; and my sighing is not hidden from Thee. My heart throbs, my strength fails me; and the light of my eyes, even that has gone from me” (Ps 38:4, 9-10). Likewise, Paul grieved over the remnants of his humanness that clung to him like a rotten garment that could not be cast off. That reality brought him great spiritual frustration and anguish (Rom 7:24). In his second letter to the Corinthians he reminds all believers of their same plight: “For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor 5:4). As long as we are in the “tent” of our human body, we will never fully escape sin’s corruption in our lives. That truth causes each of us as Christians to **suffer times of deep inner distress over the debilitating sinfulness that still clings to us**. As believers, we therefore find ourselves waiting eagerly in anticipation of the fullness of our salvation — it is only our “bodies” that are yet to be redeemed; the “inner person” is already a completely new creation, a partaker of God’s nature and indwelt by God’s Spirit (2 Cor 5:17); though our souls are fit for heaven, our bodies are not (hence their need for redemption).

Paul assured the Corinthian believers that “He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge” (2 Cor 1:21-22; also cf. Eph 1:13; 4:30). So “in hope we have been saved” (Rom 8:24) — the completion of our salvation is presently a **hope**, and not yet a **reality**, so “with perseverance we wait eagerly for it” (Rom 8:25; Phil 1:6; 1 Pet 1:13). Lord willing, you are tracking with me on this point! Paul goes on to say that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18). He then concludes his letter to the Romans with this benediction: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13). How often do you think about the glories that are yet to come? Do you habitually ponder them in relation to your present suffering? Or is your hope drowned out by an addiction to entertainment and the pursuit of happiness in a transitory world? The words to an “old spiritual” we used to sing years ago, help express the passion of the committed believer’s heart (there are other verses but I can’t recall them):

> This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through;  
> My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.  
> The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door,  
> And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore!  
>  
> Oh Lord, you know, I have no friend like you,  
> If heaven’s not my home then Lord what will I do?  
> The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door,  
> And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore!

7. **Pray in the Spirit** (Rom 8:26-27)

Just as the Holy Spirit sustains us with the glorious hope of heaven, so He sustains us in our weaknesses, and one of those weaknesses is our “ignorance in prayer” — “we simply don’t know how to pray as we should” (Rom 8:26); we pray selfishly, ignorantly, and narrowly because of our “spiritual weakness.” Even though we are saved we are still characterized by spiritual weakness, and a very shallow understanding of our world, ourselves and our limitations.
Throughout the course of a day we all repeatedly hit barriers in our thinking, where we are simply not able to comprehend the fullness of what we are experiencing, and try though as we may to fully reconcile everything that is going on in our lives, we can only conclude that “it is simply not in us to do so.” As such, the Holy Spirit comes alongside to assist us in our weakness, “interceding for us with groanings that transcend verbal expression” (Rom 8:26). Paul’s message is clear—we often don’t know how to pray because we don’t fully comprehend the specifics of a given situation, so the Spirit helps us pray by interceding for us with groanings too deep for words (human words are not adequate to describe His prayers on our behalf)… thus the Holy Spirit joins our groanings, making them His own, and intercedes with these wordless groanings to the Father. It is important for the believer to “consciously be mindful of the fact” that when he struggles to verbalize his feelings, the Holy Spirit intercedes on his behalf with those same seemingly convoluted groanings—so when he reaches this point, the believer needs to “affirm” the fact that his groanings are not nonsense to God, but are intelligible to Him and that He fully empathizes with them—realizing this is tremendously therapeutic and comforting to the mind and heart of the believer (Abba Father understands your groanings!)… to not affirm this, is to remain disconsolate, bewildered and frustrated spiritually (a very common condition for many believers). For the believer to somehow think that his inability to articulate his feelings to God, will result in making his prayers ineffective is an extremely troubling thought. The Christian needs to know that in the midst of all his utterances and groanings before God, the Holy Spirit is “searching his heart” (Rom 8:27) and is interceding before the throne of grace on his behalf “according to the will of God” (Rom 8:27). The general ministry of God’s Spirit in prayer is a seriously misunderstood and neglected reality in the Church today, yet we are clearly told in Scripture that our access to the Father is not only through the Son, but through the Spirit (Rom 8:26-27, 34; Eph 2:18; 6:18) — the Holy Spirit’s inspiration is as necessary as the Son’s mediation.

The truth of the matter is “God is at work in us both to will and to do His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13), and His work takes on manifold dimensions. Though we frequently lack the ability to clearly articulate our prayers, God still hears our groanings and understands them. Consider the Lord’s words to Samuel: “God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). And then there is the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple: “Hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart Thou knowest, for Thou alone dost know the hearts of all the sons of men” (1 Kg 8:39; 1 Chron 28:9; Ps 139:1-2; Prv 15:11). When the apostles were choosing between Joseph Barsabas and Matthias as a successor for Judas, the eleven prayed, “Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen” (Acts 1:24; 1 Cor 4:5; Heb 4:13). If the Father knows the hearts of men, how much more does He know the mind of the Spirit? The Father understands exactly what the Spirit is thinking because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

To quote the late E. F. Kevan: “We find ourselves brought to silence by the very intensity of our longings, or so burdened by our mortality or indwelling sin that we can only groan with sighs too deep for words” (Stott, p. 98). The wonderful truth here is this—when we sign with inarticulate desires, it is the Holy Spirit Himself who is interceding on our behalf, prompting these groans. So the Father in heaven answers the prayers which are prompted by the Spirit in our hearts. Reflect upon the words of James Montgomery —
Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire… uttered or unexpressed,  
The motion of a hidden fire… that trembles in the breast.  
Prayer is the burden of a sigh… the falling of a tear,  
The upward glancing of an eye… when none but God is near (Stott, p. 99)

The Lord Jesus said, “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it (Jn 14:14)… “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (Jn 15:7). Likewise the apostle John said, “If we ask anything according to His will He hears us… and that we will have the requests that we have asked of Him (1 Jn 5:14-15). As believers we are to pray “in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18; Jude 1:20) so that what we pray for is in accordance with the will of God (Rom 8:27). Remember, it is the Holy Spirit who moves us to pray and gives direction to our prayers. That is what it means to “pray in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18). Charles Spurgeon describes this process as follows: “Should we not wait upon God in prayer; asking Him to reveal to us what those matters are concerning which we should plead with Him?…. We feel secure when the Holy Spirit guides our minds…. [therefore let us] obey the Holy Spirit and pray as He directs, for He knows what our petitions should be. Pray for what the Holy Spirit moves you to pray, and be very sensitive to His influence” (Parkhurst, p. 63). As believers we need to become increasingly sensitive to the influence of the Holy Spirit and receptive to the way that He is guiding us to pray, so that our prayers become increasingly aligned with the will of God. Sadly, the issue of praying in the Spirit according to the will of God isn’t even on most believer’s radar today — they simply pray for whatever they want to have happen (Mt 26:39; Jam 4:3). In closing, reflect upon the words of a hymn that Kenneth Berding penned —

Spirit I Come, not knowing what to say  
Spirit I come, and needing help to pray  
Spirit I come, but my weaknesses are getting in the way  
Spirit I come.  
Help me as I pray  
Search my heart, Lord, know my mind  
In my weakness join to help me  
Wordless groanings  
Spirit intercede for me  
Help me as I pray (Berding, p.110)

Many believers have chosen to preface their prayers with this prayer to the Spirit, because it gives them a wonderful perspective from which to petition the throne of grace. Remember, we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need.  
(Hebrews 4:15)
In addition to the various individuals stated in the foregoing material, some of the themes of this study were taken from the following authors/sources —

**Leon Morris** — *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1988


