

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

The Holy Spirit (11)

Walking by the Spirit: living

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “The Holy Spirit”, the eleventh message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

God gives us the Holy Spirit to enable us to develop the highest quality in our moral and spiritual being: the fruit of the Spirit. In order to do that to the fullest extent, we must learn to walk by the Spirit. How do we do so in practical daily living?

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

From all that I have learnt over the many years in which I have sought to walk with the Lord, I have come to the conclusion that the most important, the greatest and the most wonderful lesson that we can ever learn is to learn to walk by the Spirit.

This is so very important and yet, we may very often not be conscious of how important it is. We often live our lives without very much thought as to the significance of this path that God has called us.

We may ask, “Why is it so important? Isn’t it more important we focus on God, the Creator of all things? Isn’t it more important that we centre our life on the Lord Jesus, who has done all things for us? Why is it walking by the Spirit is so very critical and important?”

Yes, God is the Creator of all things. He is the Giver of all good things to us. Without God, we will not have anything of real value. God loves us. He created us in love. He made every provision for our well-being. He wants to help us in the best way possible.

And the way by which He has sought to help us is to give us everything in the Lord Jesus Christ. All the abundance of riches and glory can be found in the Lord Jesus Christ – God, who has become Man – the perfect Man: In Him, through Him, we will know life at the highest plane for us as human beings, in a way that is not otherwise possible.

But then, how does this come to us? How do the riches of Christ become ours? How are they imparted to us? We chose to go our own way; we live in a state of condemnation; how can we benefit from this?

God in His grace spoke to us through the Holy Spirit, helped us to recognize our need to repent, to come to Him. He helped us to understand the meaning of the cross, which to the world may be a stumbling block or foolishness. The Holy Spirit opened our eyes to help us appreciate our need of repentance, of faith, to come to the Lord Jesus, to find in Him our Saviour, our Lord, and all the riches of glory that God wants to give to us.

When we respond well, when we are truly repentant, we come to God, we come to the Lord Jesus in faith, the Holy Spirit works in us and brings about a new birth. We become born of the Spirit. And as we learn to give of ourselves to God, to seek to honour the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit so that we can live in the atmosphere of the Holy Spirit: He can empower us, He can teach us, He can fill us and He can bring the life of God into us to become part of our being.

Yet, we must always remember the Holy Spirit basically works in the background. He works in our hearts, He teaches us the ways of God, but our focus is on God – our Creator, our Redeemer, our Provider – and our concentration is on the Lord Jesus Christ – what He has done for us, how He lived His life, and we are to follow Him.

The Holy Spirit will teach us how to draw near to God the Father, how to come to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, how to appreciate who the Lord Jesus is so that we can follow Him, we can become like Him, that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith: The Lord Jesus Christ can become real in us, His character can be formed in us as a result of our learning to walk by the Spirit.

So today, I want to spend some time to consider how we can in practical daily living, learn to walk by the Spirit.

This is a very meaningful process, a most wonderful way of life, but very difficult.

It is so very easy to walk in the flesh. It is so easy to follow the world; it is so easy to go our own way. But if we do that, we will walk in the path of death.

Spiritual life comes to us when we learn to walk by the Spirit.

We sow to the flesh: we will from the flesh reap corruption – spiritual death. We sow to the Spirit; we will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

There are two major areas that we need to consider in practical daily living: The first area is what we think about; and the second area is what actions we take.

Ponder over this. Consider your life. What are the things that you usually think about? What are you most interested to think about? What do you let your mind dwell on?

This will significantly affect how you are going to live your life, what actions you are going to take.

Consider the way you live your life: What decisions you make, what actions that you take each day – what is the basis of that?

If we want to learn to walk by the Spirit, we will need to evaluate, consider, and reconsider how we have lived our lives in these two major areas: What do we think about and what actions do we take in our daily lives?

Let us turn to **Romans 8: 3-8**.

Romans 8: 3-8

- 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,
- 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.
- 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,
- 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*,
- 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

We may want to keep the law of God, but we find that we fail and we fail again because in ourselves, in our flesh, we have not the power to live a life of holiness and righteousness.

We need the life of God; we need to depend on God.

It is so easy for us to exercise ourselves by ourselves according to our own thinking and our own abilities, and that is how most people live their lives. In that state, we will not have spiritual life, we will not be able properly to submit to the laws of God and we cannot please God. We will be walking in the path of spiritual death. There is no life and instead, there will be condemnation.

If we want to find life, then we must learn to appreciate what the Lord Jesus has done for us. He came into this world in the likeness of sinful flesh. He condemned sin in the flesh. He overcame sin while dwelling in this body like ours, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. So what the Lord Jesus has done in His victory on the cross can become beneficial to us when we learn to walk according to the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has come in order to glorify Christ, to teach us who He is, help us to become like Him. He brings the Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts so that He may become real in us.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

That is a choice that you will have to make. Do you want to set your mind on the things of the flesh or do you want to set your mind on the things of the Spirit?

We cannot walk by the Spirit if we set our mind on the things of the flesh.

We may seem to be walking by the Spirit, we may say that we walk by the Spirit but in reality, we will walk in the flesh if we set our mind on the things of the flesh.

So this is an area that we need to consider carefully. As we live each day, ask yourself: What do you think about? What are you preoccupied with? What brings you so much happiness, eagerness and excitement in the things that you think about?

Is it about your work? Is it about the food that you would like to eat? Is it about the many places you like to visit?

There is nothing wrong in these things in themselves, but if we set our mind on things like these, if they preoccupy our hearts, if they are so important to us, then the things of God will fade even though we may have come to appreciate God. He will not very much be in our consciousness. Even in things that may be right to do, when we are preoccupied with them, day and night we think about these things, our hearts will very readily be drawn away from a deep fellowship with God.

We have to learn to set our minds on the things of the Spirit. This is not something easy to do. It may seem something so very abstract, something not so real to us. How do you think of the things of the Spirit as you go to work, as you go to the market, as you seek to do the daily things of your life? How do you set your mind on the things of the Spirit?

If we seek to understand how God has created us and what He seeks to do in our lives, then we may realize it is not so difficult after all.

The reason for our going astray is that we have concentrated on the wrong things.

We do not sufficiently appreciate what is really important in life and then choose to set our hearts on that. To us living in this world, the physical, the material, the emotional – they are so important, they are so immediate and they need our attention. We concentrate on these things but in reality, all these things are passing away.

The world is passing away and all its lusts. All the things that may be attractive, they will pass away.

What remains is the moral perfection of God, the love of God, the character of God, the purposes of God. They will continue.

So if we do not set our minds to concentrate on what is truly valuable, then the choices that we make will very much be based on these things that we see and hear and touch day by day.

As we look at the world around us, very often we can see many things going on that when we ponder carefully and calmly, we can say with all honesty they are quite senseless, there is no real meaning. And yet, we pursue them; we are so preoccupied with these things. Some areas may be very obvious but some areas are not.

We know for example, there are people who want to enjoy themselves, or they want to relieve themselves of their difficulties and troubles, so they drink and they get drunk. And when they are in that state of drunkenness, they may do things that normally they would not do. But they have put themselves in that situation, they lose their self-control and they do according to how they feel at that point of time. They can feel easily aroused, they can feel very angry; they can do many things without proper basis.

So we may say that being drunk is an extreme kind of situation; generally, we do not get drunk.

But in reality, the principle is applicable in the way we live our lives because most of the time, the way we make our choices is also by how we feel, what it seems to us to be better in terms of what we can enjoy, what we like. It is the same principle. It is based more on how we feel rather than what we recognize is good.

That is why the apostle Paul says: "Do not be drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit." This is the contrast: When you are drunk with wine, you move in the direction of living by your feelings, not based on meaning; when you are filled with the Spirit, you are conscious of the moral and spiritual meaning of life and direction, what is truly valuable, and that will help us to move in the direction of what is good.

So the apostle Paul says: "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace". Or, it can be translated as: "For the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace".

The basic meaning is that when you set your mind on the things of the flesh, your mind increasingly becomes like that; it can then be described as the mind of the flesh. When you learn to set your mind on the things of the Spirit, increasingly, your mind is renewed to think the way that God does and you develop the mind of the Spirit: The way you think more and more corresponds with the way that God thinks, and so there is life and peace.

"...because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God". So the issues are very serious, but we may not quite realize it.

So often we walk in the flesh, but we are not very conscious that we are moving in the direction of death.

It is because life and death can sometimes appear alike. The evil one can come like an angel of light and many things that are filled with death may appear quite good. And that is why it is very important that we learn to walk by the Spirit. Then we can recognize what is truly with life and what will lead to death.

So if we set our hearts to seek God, to want to walk in His ways and we set our minds to dwell on the things that are meaningful to God, we are led by the Spirit, we are taught by the Spirit, this will help us to move in the direction of choosing the right courses of action that will be associated with the right way of thinking.

Consider a thief. If a thief were to set his mind to think about the things that other people have which he does not have and he has no money to get, if he dwells on these things, it will be very easy for him the next step to plan how he can steal those things. And after he has planned, the next step would be to take action and to steal. That is how it happens very easily.

On the other hand, if the thief recognizes that he has this tendency to want to steal and if he were to set his mind to concentrate on what is good and right and helpful, and how he can contribute something positive to the lives of other people, and he begins to plan how he can change his life for the better, what steps he can take to do something that is good for society, then it is not so likely that he will decide and choose to steal.

Bear in mind that the courses of action that we take generally arise over a period of time. We learn from childhood and as we develop, more and more we develop habits that arise from the choices that we have made.

So it is important for us to think through: What are the things that are important, that are valuable, and we want to plan our lives, make choices in the direction that is good? Then the good habits will form and we will then be able more and more to move in the right direction.

When a thief sees something expensive, valuable, that he will like to have, generally he does not immediately steal it. He thinks about it: "How good it is! Shall I or shall I not? Will I be caught? What will be the consequences? Can I get away with it?"

If he thinks that he can get away with it and he considers further, it is worth the risk, then he will take the steps, he will make his decision; he will take the course of action. But if he were to think about it and then he remembers, "This is not a meaningful path; I don't want to live like that; I have seen the consequences of such a life, I want to change", so he says, "No, I shouldn't", and so, he decides not to steal. Instead, he chooses another course of action: to do something worthwhile.

And so, it is possible for us to change from good to bad, and from bad to good because within our hearts, we have the power of choice. But it is important for us, before we choose, to consider: What is the basis of our choice? Where is it going to lead us? Is this what we truly want in life?

One of the dangers of life that we encounter is that the evil one is very cunning and there are many ways by which he can lead us, draw us in the wrong direction, very often without our very consciously realising it. For example, a very simple way that he can do so is to keep you very occupied in doing many unimportant things. You are so occupied that you find it difficult to think about what is really worthwhile. You are very busy, doing many things that seem to be quite helpful, useful, but in reality there is no ultimate meaning.

In that state, when you are so very busy, he can then arouse your emotions, plant thoughts in your mind, and you do not have very much time to think. He arouses your emotion and you act based on that. You see something, you like it, you just do it. He plants certain thoughts, you have no time to properly think is it good or bad; and you just go ahead because you have not learnt to walk by the Spirit, you are not conscious of what is in the heart of God. And so you move, go ahead. This is very destructive.

Romans 8: 12-14

- 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh--
- 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
- 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

"...we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh..." If we set our minds on the things of the flesh, this will increase the push towards living by the flesh. The choices that we make, the practical actions that we take will be in that direction. And if we live according to the flesh, we must die, or we are about to die, we are moving in the direction of death.

So the answer is: if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Instead of death, we can live, we can find life. And the way to do it is: by the Spirit... putting to death the deeds of the body. This natural body that we have, it has many inclinations that are not good for us. If we give in to them, we live by how we feel, we will die. It moves in the direction of death.

So we need time to consider; spend time to think over. Set your mind on things above. Think through: What do you want in life? How do you want to live?

And coming to God, asking Him to teach us, learning by the power of the Spirit to put to death the deeds, or the practices, of the body: We do not give in to the urges, the desires of the natural body.

“...do not let sin reign in your mortal body... that you should obey its lusts”. So there are various lusts or longings or desires in the body that can easily lead us to sin. We should not allow that. And how do we do that? It is by the power of the Spirit, depending on the Holy Spirit working in us. By His power we put to death the deeds or the practices of the body.

So if we want to walk by the Spirit, we must set our minds on what is meaningful and good and right in the sight of God. And it is the Holy Spirit who will teach us this, to understand the ways of God: what is truly good and right and meaningful; and as we look to Him, He will teach us how to choose the right course of action in our daily lives.

The apostle Paul tells us that if we are not careful in the way that we live our lives, we can grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

Ephesians 4: 29-32

- 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.
- 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
- 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

The apostle Paul in **Ephesians 4** talks about transformation: the renewal, changing from the manner of life of the old man to the manner of life of the new man. We have to take action. We have to do something about it so that we can be transformed, we can be renewed.

So he describes various aspects in our daily life that can take place, whether positive or negative.

And at the heart of it, in the midst of it, he says: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

That is to say: the way you live your life, whether good or bad, will affect your relationship with the Holy Spirit.

If you live your life in a manner pleasing to God, the Holy Spirit will be pleased to dwell in you, to work in you, to empower you, to lead you, to continue to fill you.

But if you go your own way, you follow the world, you harden your heart, you grieve the Holy Spirit of God then He will not work. You will not hear His voice, you will not understand His ways and you can be easily deceived by the evil one.

So we need to take care. The Holy Spirit is very, very different from the evil one. The evil one will seek by force to push you and compel you to follow him. The Holy Spirit does not do that. The Holy Spirit seeks to persuade you, help you understand, show you the right path, encourage you in the right direction. But if you choose to harden your heart, you do not wish to listen to Him, He will let you be. He will go away. He will not force you, compel you, to listen to Him.

So we need to be very careful. We cannot assume that the Holy Spirit will always continue to speak to us. It is true, even though at times we are rebellious, He may still with patience, longsuffering continue to help us. But we cannot take this for granted. He may not continue to do so.

I now want to come to what I see from the Scriptures as a very beautiful picture of a life lived according to walking by the Spirit. Walking by the Spirit is such a beautiful life, such a meaningful life and in these three verses, the apostle Paul describes such a life.

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

- 16 Rejoice always;
- 17 pray without ceasing;
- 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

There are three short verses and basically as I see, it is one sentence. These three verses form one sentence and they tell us something very, very important. If we learn to walk by the Spirit, these three verses will manifest in our lives.

Let us consider first **verse 16** and **verse 18**.

Rejoice always. Isn't it wonderful if we can rejoice always? It is so very difficult to rejoice always. We live in this world of pain and suffering and disappointment and sorrows and tears. How can we rejoice always?

Verse 18: in everything give thanks. Isn't it very difficult at times to give thanks when there is so much of suffering and difficulties, disappointments, frustrations, failures? How to give thanks in everything?

And yet, this is expected of us and it can be true and real in us. We can say that **verse 18** follows from **verse 16** quite freely because they refer to about the same thing.

Rejoice always... in everything give thanks. They are quite similar in nature. Rejoice always: as I understand it, the word "always" in this context refers to time. Rejoice all the time. Not just today, tomorrow, but always and forever; rejoice all the time. It is not limited by time. The rejoicing is not short-lived. In many things in life, we know we can be happy for a short time but it does not last. It comes, it goes. But here the apostle Paul says: "Rejoice always" – all the time; and it will be true, if we do it correctly, for all eternity.

“...in everything give thanks”. “...in everything” – the meaning here basically has to do with in every situation – whatever circumstance, whatever event, whatever happens, whatever may take place – give thanks. So all the time and in every situation, we are to rejoice and we are to give thanks. Can we do that?

If we observe Christian lives, we evaluate our own lives, we will find that it is not generally true and even if we seek to do so, it is very difficult to do that. Why is that so?

First, we need to understand when the apostle Paul says, “Rejoice always”, what is he referring to? Is he saying, “You bought a new house, so you rejoice, you are very happy, and be happy all the time, forever – be very happy with the house”? But then, few years later, a storm comes, there are cracks in the house, and things become rather unpleasant and ugly: Are you still happy with your house? So too, you may have bought a nice car but an accident takes place; you are no longer happy with that car.

Many things in this world we can be happy with, but they don't last. People work very hard, they become champion in badminton, in tennis, or in other fields. In a few years' time, they are out of sight, out of mind. People have forgotten all the great “heroes”, most of them, within a short while.

These are the things we cannot properly rejoice, and that is not the kind of rejoicing that the apostle Paul is talking about. Rejoice always has to do with our being very happy, glad, thankful, appreciative of what is truly and meaningfully good: that which has eternal value, that which is in the heart of God, that which has ultimate meaning forever – rejoice in that.

If our hearts are filled with that, if this is what matters to us, we are happy with that, we rejoice in that, then we can rejoice always: because God is good and God is always good.

If we choose what is right and what is good, we can always choose it. We do not need to give it up, no matter what happens. That is a path that we can always take. So, we can always rejoice – not just for a short while but forever.

“...in everything give thanks”: not just in situations that are pleasant and easy, situations that we like; but in situations that can be very difficult, painful, unpleasant, we can still give thanks. Why? The apostle Paul is not talking about giving thanks just because we receive something nice. Yes, we should do that. But he is going beyond that.

We give thanks because we are very grateful for the way that God has created us. We are very grateful for the way that God has looked after us. We are very thankful for the way God has made provision for us. We are very grateful for the way that God is prepared to forgive us even when we failed. We are so thankful for everything that God has done for us.

If that is what you are thankful about, then you can give thanks in everything. Whatever situation it may be, you will know that God remains good and God still cares for you, He is still desiring the best for you, and He will help you to live a life that is meaningful. That is always true whatever the situation. So if that is the case, can we not give thanks in everything?

We are not giving thanks for things that are morally negative. We are giving thanks to God. We are giving thanks to God for His love, for His care, for His concern, for His provision for us.

We also give thanks to God when He disciplines us, when He brings us through difficult times to teach us difficult lessons, when He helps us to be corrected of our failures. We must thank Him because if we respond well, it will do us good. But it is so difficult to learn.

Well, we have to spend time to consider how we can rejoice always, and in everything give thanks.

The apostle Paul told the Philippian Christians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" He emphasized it. We must rejoice.

Then, as we look at these two verses ("Rejoice always", "in everything give thanks") we see something in between. And this is the heart of the issue.

Rejoice always... in everything give thanks. How are we to live like that? The answer is: pray without ceasing. If we do not learn this, we will not be able to properly rejoice always... in everything give thanks. We must learn to pray without ceasing. But what does that mean?

Does pray without ceasing mean that we keep on telling God, "Lord, please help me in this, please give me that; I want this" and keep on saying and saying throughout the whole day? Then we are praying without ceasing? Is that the meaning? Obviously it cannot be.

Pray without ceasing is not self-centred. Pray without ceasing does not concentrate on the unimportant but it can include the unimportant. But it does not concentrate on these things. Pray without ceasing has to do primarily and basically with a heart of identification with the heart of God, that we appreciate Him so much that we want to be close to Him, we want to talk to Him, we want to discuss with Him, we want to hear what He has to say, we want His will to be done.

Pray without ceasing is a very deep communion with God, it is a fellowship with God of the highest level, unbroken, uninterrupted in all situations of life. That is why "Rejoice always" – uninterrupted. That is why "in everything give thanks" – never interrupted.

When we learn to pray without ceasing, our heart beats together with the heart of God.

But then we may think: Pray without ceasing means that I must ask God to tell me what to do every single moment of my life. That is praying isn't it? Should I walk five steps or ten steps? Should I walk backwards or forwards? Is this what is meant by that? Should I eat this apple or this orange? Do we need to ask God for every single step that we take?

In principle, we can say, "Yes". But in terms of its meaning, it does not work that way. We want to take every step in fellowship with God. We want to take every step in accordance with His will. That is correct. That is the way we should live. But how do we do that?

When we understand the character of God, when we understand how God works in our lives, we will realize that the way He works out is very, very meaningful.

God does not tell you, "Today you get up at 5am. Tomorrow, you get up at 5.10. The next day you come back to get up at 5, and then I want you to spend half an hour reading the Scriptures, then another hour praying." Does God tell us all these?

From all that I can understand, it does not work this way. He may at times tell us some things like this. But as a general rule, God does not tell us like that.

What God is more interested in is the direction of your heart, the basis of your life, the meaning within you, why are you doing the things that you do. God wants to help us to know what is really important. So if our heart is one with Him, we love what is good, then God does in reality give us much freedom to consider what is a suitable thing to do, what courses of action will be meaningful and appropriate.

But be careful. When we say that, it is very easy for us then to actually go our own way. "God gives me the freedom. I think, I decide." But actually, we are deciding according to the flesh.

So in order to do that properly, we must first make sure that we truly love the Lord - that our heart is completely His. And this is something we have to evaluate, examine again and again before God. Is it true? Are we really living like that?

If we are, if our heart truly loves Him, then we can discuss with Him: "Lord, I am considering taking this course of action. What do You say?" And if it is something meaningful, the Lord will say, "Go ahead." He may not direct you in every specific action, but He gives you the freedom to consider. The important thing is: Are we truly seeking His will? And if the Lord says, "No", will we obey Him or will we try to convince ourselves that this is the best?

God does want us to discuss with Him, even argue with Him if our basis is good. We have seen in the Scriptures how Moses argued with God so that God would not destroy the nation of Israel. And God was pleased with Moses because Moses argued on the basis of wanting to bring honour to God. He was not arguing for selfish reasons. So if we argue on the basis of what is truly good and meaningful in the eyes of God, God will be pleased and He will work in our lives.

So pray without ceasing has to do with a heart of constant continuous fellowship with God, identified with His will and His ways, learning from Him, submitting to Him, seeking to understand more and more of what is important to Him, and always eager to do His will.

And this can continue even in the midst of a life of great busyness, of many things that we need to attend to. God has given us a brain that can attend to many things and yet a spirit that can be in fellowship with Him all the time. Our brain can be at work, dealing with many things and yet our heart can be in deep fellowship with God: We are seeking to do all these for the Lord, and in accordance with His will.

But the problem is that very often, we are busy for the wrong reasons. We are busy because we like those things, so our heart is actually drawn into those things that we are busy in. In such a state then, we will not be able to pray without ceasing.

So to pray without ceasing, we must first ensure that our hearts are truly one with the Lord and the things that we do and are occupied with are in the context of what the Lord desires of us – they are meaningful. And if that is so, then even when we are very, very busy, we can maintain a very deep fellowship with God.

So ultimately, it is not a question of time but it is a question of the meaning and the reality within the heart.

But of course, having enough time to spend specifically to pray is very important. To spend time to seek God specifically without distraction from other things is very important.

But pray without ceasing goes beyond that. It is a life of prayer, of fellowship with God, of oneness with Him, communion with God.

Colossians 3: 15-17

- 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.
- 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
- 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

So we notice that in these three verses in **Colossians 3**, the apostle Paul again and again refers to thankfulness, giving thanks. And we can see that this spirit of thankfulness is associated with three different areas: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts; Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you; Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

These three aspects are very important and this is what the Holy Spirit will teach us.

If we learn to pray without ceasing, He will guide us such that we will know the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts, we will do things based on our fellowship with God and what the Lord Jesus has taught us. He says: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

The peace of Christ can rule in our hearts when we are settled in Him: What we want is to live for Him, with Him, in accordance with His ways. When there is peace in our hearts in Christ, it will not be so difficult for us to give thanks: Be thankful, for this is what the Lord wants us to have in all situations of life.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you. In that context, we can sing with thankfulness in our hearts. The word of Christ must form the basis upon which we make our decisions.

The Holy Spirit will teach us to remember what the Lord Jesus has said: either what we have read before, what we have been taught before or as we read again, the Holy Spirit will teach us, so that the word of Christ dwelling in our hearts richly will guide us in the decisions that we make, the values that we hold. And if we act upon the words of the Lord Jesus, we will be like the man who built his house on the rock and it can withstand the storms that may come.

Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus. The things that we do, can we say the Lord Jesus can say: “Yes, it is in accordance with My will. It is consistent with My name being stamped on it.”? Can we say that? Or can we say: “This is just my own idea. This is what I like.”

The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Lord Jesus. So when we learn to appreciate who the Lord Jesus is, identify with what is important to Him, live according to His will, then we will be able properly to give thanks through Him to God the Father in all situations of life.

And **Colossians 4: 2**, the apostle Paul says:

Colossians 4: 2

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving;

So again, we see here the emphasis on thanksgiving: a heart that is thankful to God. But notice: it is associated with a heart of devotion in prayer. It is in a context of the fellowship with God that we will nurture this spirit of thankfulness to God because the more we keep close to God, the more we appreciate Him, the more we realize how good God is and the more we can freely express our gratitude to Him to thank Him.

I now want to conclude with an example in the Scriptures of a life lived according to walking by the Spirit to a meaningful degree. I cannot say how meaningful it is but the way it is presented in the Scriptures, it is meaningful.

But what I want to concentrate on is the underlying issues involved that we can learn from and appreciate.

Luke 2: 36-38

- 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage,
37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.
38 At that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

It does not mean that if a person stays in the temple night and day fasting and praying that this would be necessarily a very meaningful life. People can do that because they want to earn some merit, some credit; want to be accepted by God. They are prepared to go through many difficulties in life. So this by itself does not mean that it is something positive.

But in this context – the description in the Scriptures – we can see the presentation is something positive and meaningful. She was a prophetess, she was serving night and day with fastings and prayers and she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

So this was a context in which the Lord Jesus was presented at the temple and Anna the prophetess was able to recognize the occasion and she gave thanks to God, she rejoiced to see God's redemption being carried out and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem

So we see here basically, it is a presentation of a person who is walking in fellowship with God, sensitive to God's guidance, appreciative of what God is doing, identified with Him and serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

In this context, it is associated with a meaningful devotion to God.

When we read this passage by itself, we may think it is not a very pleasant life: staying in the temple for so many years, day and night fasting, praying. Who wants to live like that? Very, very few people are prepared to even think about it.

But she lived like that. She was advanced in years. She lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage – not very long – and after that until the age of eighty-four... She never left the temple. So she must have spent many years in the temple, may be fifty years or thereabouts – in the temple night and day with fastings and prayers and She never left the temple.

Is that not a very difficult life? Do we not pity her for spending time like this?

If you were to ask her, what do you think she would say?

I do not know, but I think likelihood is that she will say, "I am so grateful to God for giving me such an opportunity to have such deep fellowship with Him every day, to be identified with His purposes, to contribute to the kingdom of God in praying for God's purposes to be fulfilled; yes, at times it is unpleasant in the physical realm but the meaning of it is so great that I can say I rejoice always, in everything I give thanks."

And she was praying without ceasing, in that direction.

So we may not be able to tell to what degree she has attained to the quality in walking by the Spirit but we can say that it is a meaningful direction, a meaningful life, and the principles underlying are helpful for us to consider.

Why did she do that?

She did that because she loved God. She did that because her values were right. She did that because she understood what is truly important in life and she was prepared to spend her time, her energy, her resources in this direction.

What about us?

How will we spend our time, our energy, our resources?

It does not mean that if you love God with all your heart, and you learn to pray without ceasing, you must spend time like her in this way. But this is just an example of the underlying principle.

We all know the apostle Paul was very, very busy. He travelled, he preached, he taught, he laboured, he went through many difficulties. But what comes through again and again is: he says, "Pray, pray and pray." "Pray without ceasing" is what he said. And in the midst of great suffering and pain and difficulties, he continued to say, "Rejoice in the Lord always". He continued to give thanks.

So, we can do this in different situations of life.

Our circumstances are different. What God wants of us individually can be very different but the underlying principle is the same.

Will we learn to walk by the Spirit, walk with the Spirit, walk in the Spirit that our fellowship with God will be all the time present and growing with each passing day as we mature, as we grow in Him, as Christ is increasingly formed in us?

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must learn to pray at all times in a spirit of gratitude and joy in the Lord, always seeking to walk by the Spirit, to fulfil the perfect will of God.

So let us ask the Lord to help us to ponder over what it means to walk by the Spirit that we may properly appreciate who the Lord Jesus is and how we can benefit from what God wants to give to us and how we can truly worship God and live for Him with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength.

Let us come before the Lord to ask Him to search our hearts, help us to recognize: If our lives are not what they ought to be, let us ask Him to teach us how to be corrected.

Let us learn to spend our time to think about what is really worthwhile to think about, and to make our choices based on what is truly good in the eyes of God, the courses of action that we take each day.

Then we can learn more and more to pray without ceasing and know the joy of living for God and with Him.