

Walk This Way

The Spirit-Led Life

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INTRODUCTION

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..."

Hebrews 1:1-2

"So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit."

1 Corinthians 15:45

"Whether you turn to the right or the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"

Isaiah 30:21

A fellow was stuck on his rooftop in a flood. He was praying to God for help.

Soon a man in a rowboat came by and the fellow shouted to the man on the roof, "Jump in, I can save you."

The stranded fellow shouted back, "No, it's OK, I'm praying to God, and he is going to save me."

So the rowboat went on.

Then a motorboat came by. The fellow in the motorboat shouted, "Jump in, I can save you."

To this, the stranded man said, "No thanks, I'm praying to God, and he is going to save me. I have faith."

So the motorboat went on.

Then a helicopter came by, and the pilot shouted down, "Grab this rope and I will lift you to safety."

To this, the stranded man again replied, "No thanks, I'm praying to God, and he is going to save me. I have faith."

So the helicopter reluctantly flew away.

Soon the water rose above the rooftop, and the man drowned. He went to Heaven. He finally got his chance to discuss this whole situation with God, at which point he exclaimed, "I had faith in you, but you didn't save me. You let me drown. I don't understand why!"

To this God replied, "I sent you a rowboat, a motorboat, and a helicopter. What more did you expect?"

I have loved this old story since I first heard it many years

ago. It has been retold throughout the years for many reasons. I retell it here because it makes a crucial point about the importance of discerning when God is trying to communicate to us and when he is trying to lead us. The topic is certainly worthy of further examination.

There are many outstanding books on how to have a quiet time or morning devotion with God. There are Christian classics on living a disciplined life. I highly recommend them. Further still, there are volumes written on Christian character, “what would Jesus do?” and “the imitation of Christ.” They are all helpful reads. This book sets out to address a different subject. That subject is: how do we develop a Spirit-led walk with God?

Some people will read this book because they are my family or friends. Thanks, Mom! Others will read it because they know me from church. There is a group of people who will pick this book up because they read every spiritual book they can get their hands on. Some just liked the cover or the title.

My hope is to touch and inspire people in various seasons of their journeys with God.

God has always desired an intimate and active relationship with us. He enjoyed an intimacy with Adam and Eve. The Bible says he strolled in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, in the cool of the day. When Elisha ran for his life to the mountains of Judah, God appeared to him and whispered words of comfort and direction. The apostle

Paul reassured the Christians in Philippi, reminding them, "For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." God expressed his ever presence and aid to Isaiah with these words: "Whether you turn to the right or the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" Throughout the scriptures, God has been present, vocal, and active in the lives of his people.

Jesus communicated the nearness of God in even more intimate ways. He said that the Father would make his home in our hearts. It's one thing to have God show up for the holidays or in times of trouble; it's a whole other matter for him to take up permanent residence. Nothing says, "I want more out of this relationship," like moving in. Is that God's toothbrush on my sink?

You never really know someone like you do when they move in. And that's the point with God. A Spirit-led relationship leads to a greater experience and recognition of Him. Knowledge of the scriptures gives us an indication of what God is like, his ways, and the pursuits of his heart. The tricky thing is that a detailed knowledge of the scriptures alone does not produce intimacy. Relational intimacy is not a matter of knowing demographic information about someone. It is a dynamic mutual responsiveness to each other.

A great example of this is Israel's King David. The Bible says David was "a man after God's own heart." Though the biblical record spends time addressing David's embrace

of Scripture and commitment to spiritual disciplines, there is something else that sets him apart. It's this "after God's own heart" business. David didn't just read the scriptures; he went about his day in a moment by moment communication with the God to whom the Scriptures pointed. The Bible reveals that God communicated to David in ways David perceived, understood, and to which he responded. And at the same time, David's prayerful requests, concerns, and expressions of praise were heard by God and responded to in a way that David could discern. David had an ongoing communication and mutually responsive relationship with God.

Similarly, it was said of Enoch that "he walked with God and was no more because God had taken him away." There is no comment in Scripture about evening devotions, principles adhered to, or sacrifices made. The text only says that Enoch walked with God.

What did Enoch do? There was no Bible for him to read because the Scriptures had not yet been written. There were no prescribed sacrifices to offer, seeing that Enoch lived many years before Moses and the law. There was no temple service to attend. Enoch died over 2,200 years before Solomon's Temple was constructed. Somehow Enoch walked with God and pleased him in a manner that many others with the Bible, the Law, and the Temple could never match.

Lastly, in a prayer offered up before the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Jesus says of the father, "I know that you

always hear me. I've said this for the benefit of the people that they may believe and know that you sent me." In Jesus' relationship with the Father, he knew God was actively listening as much as he was gently speaking.

It is the Holy Spirit who makes a mutually responsive relationship with God possible. It was through the Spirit that God created us in the first place. Humans, unlike any other living creature, were created with the unique capacity to commune with God. It is the Spirit who fans that communion into flames, deepens it, and strengthens it.

A Spirit-led life cannot be achieved by our works, efforts, or even sacrifices. Never has the Scripture been truer, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6). It is the Holy Spirit who communes with our spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who knows the mind of God. He communicates the longings of our hearts to God. He comforts us. It is through God's Spirit that in addition to our Bible knowledge, a moment by moment connection with God is made possible.

It is humbling to realize that we don't start this kind of relationship, and we are not in control of it.

"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

The Spirit initiates and leads us through the superior wisdom, power, and love of God.

For me, the Spirit's leading has been anything but a straight line. He has led me to unexpected places, wonderful people, and a surprising understanding of God and life. The Spirit's leading is not likely to be any different for you, so get ready and hold on for the ride of your life!

At the start, it's God's promises that make a Spirit-led walk with Him attractive. When we don't know someone well, we're not motivated to draw close to them. But if that person is particularly attractive, famous, wealthy, or strategically connected, we might be persuaded to move in their direction. God's amazing promises are the things that pique our interest. They make us consider moving in His direction. He has what we want. He has what we need. He has what we are looking for.

Learning about God's promises is like finding a treasure map that leads to hidden gold and jewels. In the beginning, we want more of what he has to offer than we want more of Him. But as our pursuit of the treasure draws us closer to Him, our sentiment begins to change.

So much of the Spirit-led walk with God hinges on the image we hold of Him in our hearts. Seeing God accurately makes walking with Him feel safe. That's why we are told to "fix our eyes on Jesus," to "set our minds on things above", and "to set our hearts on things above." The intent of these admonitions is for us to focus our attention on the uplifting and reassuring face of Jesus. When we see God as safe and approachable, we pursue with confidence the treasures He offers.

Many treasures are surrounded by dangers and can only be pursued at our peril. In real life, treasures are kept secure by armed guards and sophisticated detection systems. In literature, treasures are guarded by mythological beasts. Though we may have heard from others that God is safe and approachable, we don't always see it that way. Based on what some of us have heard in addition to our personal experiences, dealing with God doesn't feel safe at all. The view many have of God makes them uncomfortable at the thought of getting any closer than they have to.

We see God in less than desirable ways because a tangle of emotion-laden memories and unconscious commitments distorts our view. It's our perspective that obscures our ability to see God clearly.

When we look closely at the things that distort our views of God, we will find them based on trumped-up charges, tampered evidence, and faulty logic.

We need a retrial. There needs to be a serious re-examining of the evidence. Have you ever watched a sporting event and been convinced that the player on other team was clearly out-of-bounds? Ah, the emotion, the yelling, the pointing at the television. That is, until they show the replay in super slow motion. And much to our surprise, from every camera angle, the player was clearly in bounds. The argument is over. The emotion fueled by the thoughts of biased or incompetent officials dissolves. Of course, we usually move on to complain about other aspects of the play, but nevertheless, when we take a super slow motion

re-examination of how our distorted views of God came about, our perspectives change instantly.

When we see how inaccurate our view has been, we lose faith in that view, move beyond it, and are free to see the safe and approachable God, who longs to lead us to amazing heights.

For much of my life, I was enamored with the heroes of the late 1940s, '50s, and '60s, like John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi to name a few. They all espoused the highest ideals for humanity. Unfortunately, they all died at the hands of assassins. I drew many erroneous conclusions about life, leadership, and making a difference in the world from the struggles, opposition, and ultimate fate those men shared. Little did I realize I was developing a kind of “martyrs' perspective” never intended by God. It took even more years for me to understand the implications of this point of view. It was because of this lens through which I saw everything that I would encounter many unnecessary obstacles to a truly Spirit-led life. It wasn't until I took a super slow motion re-examination of some of the conclusions I had drawn that I realized how the meaning I attached to these events distorted my view of God.

It's only when we see God as he truly is that we recognize his promptings and welcome the small voice that leads the way.

Seeing God more accurately has had a profound influence

on me. I committed myself to God many years ago, but I have grown more spiritual in the last three years than I had in the previous thirty. Now, however, I find myself drawn to Him in new ways. I am stunned by His enthusiasm, generosity, grace, and cheerfulness. I no longer have hidden reasons why God could not or would not bless me as He has those in the scriptures. The story of my life is no longer the heroic tale of surviving wave after wave of tragic events; it is a treasure hunt. It is a life of wonder and awe.

Here's what you can expect to gain along the way if you can muster the courage to look inside your heart and stay open to the powerful truths of God:

- Understanding and awareness of the great influence your view of God has on your life
- Practical tools for identifying and overcoming false beliefs
- Straightforward process for accepting empowering truths
- Skills and emotional space to bring forth untapped abilities
- Access to the Spirit's wisdom for guidance and inspiration in all aspects of your life
- Healing, wholeness, and transformation through intimacy with God

CHAPTER ONE

THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."

Ephesians 3:20

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"

Jeremiah 29:11

"He who loves with purity considers not the gift of the lover, but the love of the giver."

Thomas A. Kempis

Who will benefit from reading this book and what results should they expect from applying its strategies?

To those new to the faith, I say, what an opportunity to start off on the right path. Over the course of your life, you

have a chance to move the body of believers forward in unprecedented ways. To the larger group in the mid-season of their faith, hope is on its way. This is a special group of unsung heroes. Though I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting most of them, I feel a special connection to them. They are always on my heart. You pass them on the way to work every day. They nod hello as you pass them in the train station. They are good-hearted souls. Far too many, however, are living lives of quiet desperation.

They are the disquieted majority. Some read their Bibles. Others don't. Many pray, attend church regularly and try their best to do what is right. In the quiet moments, if pressed to be perfectly honest, many would admit they are disappointed, confused, and uninspired in their experience with God.

They are committed to church, but that commitment gets harder to maintain with every year that passes. They know their Bibles well, but can't relate to the people in scripture through whom God worked so powerfully. They are willing to serve and to dutifully take on any task assigned. In their hearts, though, there are no compelling visions that have captured their imaginations and fuel their actions. They don't wake up each morning with enthusiasm and excitement at what the day may hold.

These spiritual soldiers are not going anywhere. Yet, they are barely holding on. In frustration, many have concluded that the promises they read about in scriptures are either hyperbole or reserved for the spiritually elite.

And finally, there's a small influential group I would also like to reach. This is a high energy and passionate band of people. They work hard and stay up late in service to others, but they have reached a ceiling in their effectiveness. Something in their gut tells them more of the same is not the answer. Maybe it's time to "plow up their unplowed ground" and be open to a different way of seeing things.

Many of these people have so much church and related events in their lives that it's just beginning to dawn on them that what's missing cannot be found in another activity. Others see super-religious people from a distance and are completely turned off by their lack of relatability and judgmental attitudes toward others.

Individuals in all of these groups feel a need for something. Few would describe that feeling as a longing for a Spirit-led life. Surprise! However, the moment they taste the fruit of pursuing a mutually responsive relationship with God, they will recognize it is what they were missing all along.

Fortunately, God has provided a way forward. We are going to spend the bulk of our time together learning three strategies that will help us embark on and continue in a Spirit-led life.

The first strategy strengthens our motivation for changing how we relate to God.

The second strategy identifies our prevailing view of God and corrects any misimpressions of Him.

Lastly, the third strategy delivers practical aid in overcoming obstacles to following the Spirit's lead once we've discerned His prompting.

What are the results? The first thing you will notice is a tremendous feeling of relief. That nagging sense of frustration will be gone. That cloud of confusion regarding what's going on with your life will be lifted. Taking its place will be a sense of clarity. A clear path forward will be opened up to you. The second benefit you'll reap is hope for a brighter future. With God clearly working for your benefit and nothing in your heart to hinder his efforts, the future looks better than ever.

Lastly, you'll enjoy the benefit of Spirit-enabled strength to tackle anything. God's power and presence in your life will inspire the confidence to dream big dreams (again).

Putting these strategies into practice has changed the trajectory of my life in many ways. The first change I noticed involved my prayers.

Have you ever decided to pray because you were tense and stressed about work or school, but when you left the prayer you still felt tense and stressed about work or school, and now also worried about your evangelism, an unresolved relationship, a church obligation and where you stand with God? That ain't right. Who wants to pray if that's the result?

I can relate. Years back I had an incident at work that told me something needed to change.

One of my early career positions was as a management trainee at a Fortune 500 bank. At that time, the company had a reputation for hiring to meet a certain quota and then making sure those members of "certain demographics" didn't make it through the training program. When I heard about this, I decided that was exactly the kind of rigorous challenge I needed in order to prepare myself for success in life. Every day as I walked between the massive Corinthian pillars, through the revolving door, and across the marble floor of this impressive bank, I knew I was in over my head. The volume of material to be learned, the load of work to be done, and the pervasive culture of superiority drove me to God every day, throughout the day.

I'll never forget one particularly challenging day. I had to pick up a few things at the office supply store next door to the bank. I walked the aisles of the store, not even aware of my demeanor or the expression on my face. Out of the blue, a woman in the store felt compelled to come up to me, put her hand on my shoulder, and assure me that everything was going to be all right. I thought to myself, now this is great. How am I going to let my light shine and be a source of encouragement to others when the people I'm trying to influence feel compelled to come and encourage me?

Now, I had a time of Bible study and prayer that morning. I had prayed about the difficult people and the overwhelming workload. I asked God to help me make a difference at work and in the world. I got off my knees, left the apartment, and caught the bus for downtown. On the ride, I thought some more about what awaited me at the office. I got to the building on time and climbed the steps

to the main entrance. I took the elevator to the second floor, envying the tranquility of the elevator attendant. It was a short distance from the elevator to my desk. Slowly I walked this "green mile" and began my day.

What I didn't understand, however, was that I had underlying dispositions and views of myself that were negatively influencing how I prayed and the effectiveness of those prayers. I thought my prayers were to help me endure the burdens and pressures I felt. Little did I realize that God's plan for me was to transcend that whole way of being, not endure it.

My prayer life has been transformed with the Spirit's help. He has led me to a truer view of God and reminds me throughout the day to rest in His goodness. No angst, no concern, no catastrophizing, no making up unpleasant scenarios regarding the future, just a light, praise-centered, ongoing communication with God.

Previously, I strove for intensity in my prayers. This was my way of demonstrating to God the earnestness of my request. It was as if I needed to convince God to do something good. My prayers didn't have to be all night (though some were), but they had to be long enough not to appear flippant. There was a certain heaviness about my prayers that made offering them a little taxing. The most ardent prayers were brought on by some difficulty or challenge. They were couched in words of distress and deficiency. In hard times, my prayers, though heavy, provided a momentary escape from the circumstances.

Once when I was alone and still, I was prompted to ask myself two questions. The first was whether a wise and loving God would have to be talked into doing something merciful and kind. The second question was from what kind of faith were my prayers being offered if I was worried and distressed at all, let alone while conscious of God in the very act of prayer?

Addressing those questions with an accurate view of God and the perspective of a cherished child of His has made all the difference. Now my prayers are full of acknowledgments of God's unsolicited kindness and generosity. I make simple one-time requests for his intervention, and spend any other time on the matter expressing thanks to God for answering my prayer and seeking the spiritual eyes to recognize the blessing when He has placed it in front of me. The transformation I just described happened fairly quickly. Figuring out how to make the change and uproot inaccurate beliefs without playing mind games, going into denial, or pretending not to feel what I really felt took years to discover.

How about you? Could your prayer life stand a bit of remodeling? Could you benefit from a lighter, more refreshing outlook? The Spirit stands prepared to lift and unburden, to remove obstacles and light the way.