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The Spirit in You Michael B. Beaugh
Galatians 5:16-26 September 28, 2008
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We are beginning a period of time in our church where in both our worship and Growth Groups we are going to turn our focus on the spiritual life. I hope it is obvious we are doing this from a Biblical and Christian perspective.

I say that because there is lots of spirituality stuff out there today. It is as if people are waking up to the realization that all of us are spiritual beings and that we ought to pay attention to it. And so you can find pop singer Madonna crying on Oprah's show as she tells how she has discovered her spiritual side. You can find clothing designer Donna Karan explaining why she supports a group called Spirituality for Kids. You can find Tom Cruise speaking openly about his brand of spirituality called Scientism.

People a lot smarter than me have interpreted this upsurge in spiritual interest as indicating a hunger for spiritual experience. There is a hunger for tapping into that side of us that intuitively senses there is more to life. People want to bump into God, or bump into something that makes them feel like "the Force is with them."

This is not all bad, except when you learn from major surveys that the church is no longer seen as a place where you find spirituality. People report that they have spiritual experiences on a nature walk, or climbing a mountain, or watching a good movie, or reading a good book, or falling in love, or having a baby, or hanging out with a group of close friends, or visiting an ancient cathedral, or going to a rock concert. In all those places, they might come closer to bumping into God than they do sitting for an hour in straight back chairs in a gym.

I, for one, believe we who are the church, who are connected by our faith in Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, who died for our sins, who was raised again from the dead, who gives us peace, purpose, and promise – we need to create more environments that increase the possibility of spiritual experience. Especially if we hope to reach younger generations. I attended a workshop recently led by the author of a book called *Turning MySpace into Sacred Space*. She told us that based on her research of ages 18 to 40, she learned that they need to experience something before they believe in it. They need to see it in us and not just hear about it from us.

I think I am beginning to understand that. But as we focus on the spiritual life from a Biblical and Christian perspective, I want us to be clear about the foundation for all our talk about spirituality and the spiritual life. *The spiritual life we are talking about is the one given to us by Jesus Christ*

through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We are not just trying to be spiritual around here. We are trying to live a Spirit-led life.

Let's look at Galatians 5 to see what it teaches us about the Spirit-led life.

In verse 16, the Apostle Paul tells the Galatian Christians to "live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." First of all, "live by the Spirit."

Now notice what Paul doesn't say. He doesn't say they need to get the Spirit. That's because they already have the Holy Spirit within them. For me, this is one of the greatest messages of the Christian faith.

When we believe in Jesus Christ and invite him in to be the Lord of our lives, he gives us the Holy Spirit. We don't have to go looking for the Spirit. In the New Testament we see that it is at the moment of baptism that we receive the Holy Spirit as a gift to sustain and guide us throughout the rest of our lives. If we don't sense the presence of the Holy Spirit, it is not because the Spirit is absent. It is because of other factors going on in our lives.

Maybe you remember what the disciples did after the crucifixion of Jesus. It says in John 20 that on the third day after the crucifixion they were hiding behind locked doors because they were afraid. They had heard some rumors that Jesus had risen from the dead. That made them even more afraid. You could see the fear in their eyes. You could hear it in their voices as they tried to make sense of what was happening. You could feel it as every noise made their jittery nerves jump and their heart rates climb. There they were, not knowing which way to turn, what to do. Some probably said they should just go back home and start fishing again or collecting taxes or whatever they did before they knew Jesus. Some probably said they should remember that Jesus told them to wait. It was like a funeral in that locked room, disciples frozen in time as their worlds shifted gears into an unknown future.

Caught up in their fear, as they were, no one noticed Jesus standing among them. How long had he been there, waiting to be seen? I wonder if he had to clear his throat. "Ahem!" Don't you hate it when you have to make yourself noticed? It's kind of the way it has always been with Jesus. So he speaks, "Peace be with you." Maybe it is Peter who recognizes that voice first. Could it be? He turns to look. Jesus is looking straight into his eyes. Peter gulps in silent amazement. Then John looks, then Andrew, and one after another the disciples turn to look at this stranger, only it is not a stranger, or is it? They hold their breaths not daring to speak or move. Can it really be Him? In the silence, Jesus shows them his hands and feet, his scars. Talk about a spiritual experience! Can't you just feel the goose bumps in that room? Almost as an understatement, the Bible says the disciples were

overjoyed when they recognized the resurrected Lord. Maybe ecstatic should be the word. Bowled over! Dizzy!

But notice what happens next. Jesus keeps talking and says, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." He gives them a mission. And then it says, with that he breathed on them . . . and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Let me ask you something. Have you received the Holy Spirit? This is a trick question. The answer is "yes". If you belong to Jesus, the Holy Spirit already lives in you. You don't have to go looking for Him. You cannot escape Him. The Spirit is within you.

The real question is this, "Are you living by the Spirit?" Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and empower your life?

In the second half of verse 16, Paul says that if we live by the Spirit who lives in us, we will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

In some Bibles, "sinful nature" gets translated as "flesh." It makes it sound like Paul is against all desires of the body, against pleasure, against sex, against good times. If you have a Bible that says "flesh", think "sinful nature." What he is talking about is the desire within us to go our own way instead of obeying God. It is this desire of our sinful nature to go our own way that leads to all the negative stuff in verses 19 through 21.

Now he is making two points here.

Look at verse 17. There is a war going on inside us between the Spirit and this sinful nature. This sinful nature is so powerful that we cannot overcome it on our own. It is so overwhelming in its pervasiveness, that we are bound to fail, unless we have help. The spiritual life is not about going to Sunday School and church and being pious and well behaved. The spiritual life is about winning the warfare that goes on daily between our sinful nature and the Spirit of God.

Are you winning the war? Just check out the list in verses 19-21 and compare it to the list in verses 22 and 23.

Here's the second thing Paul is saying. I think he is a genius at this point. He doesn't say the way to win the war is by getting rid of the bad things. It is like weeds in the yard. You can pound those suckers with chemicals. You can dig them out by hand. And they will still be there. They will come back. The best way to get rid of weeds, so I am told, is to grow healthy grass. Feed the grass. Water the grass. Mow the grass at the right height. Healthy grass crowds out the weeds. So it is with the spiritual life. We win the war by giving in to the Holy Spirit within us. Our only hope is to let the Holy Spirit have His way in our lives. To grow in us what Paul calls the fruits of the Spirit. Let these things grow and the bad things will go away.

The more we focus on the positive, the less power the negative has over us. The more we focus on our strengths, the less important are our weaknesses. The more we turn our lives to the Spirit, the greater the fruits that grow in our lives. I love it where Paul says in verse 23, somewhat tongue in cheek, "Against such things there is no law." It is the only way to overcome all the negative stuff we do that tears apart human society.

Are you winning the war?

That is the question for us as we focus on the spiritual life over the next several weeks. If you are part of a Growth Group, you will be talking about these things. You might hear about raising your sail to catch the wind of the Spirit. You will look with others at the habits of the heart that the Spirit wants to create in you. In verse 25, Paul says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Over the next several weeks, we are going to try to get in step with the Spirit. That's what disciples do who want to give their lives to make a difference in the world.