

**Romans 8:5-17 (1984 NIV)**  
***A Fruitful Life in the Spirit***

**Introduction**

Romans 8 has been called the heartbeat of what the Bible has to say about life in the Spirit.

There are many different ways of living the Christian life (life in the Spirit). There are seminars, books and study guides aplenty—each offering a different perspective. Let me mention at least three ways of trying to live the life in the Spirit.

**I. Three Ways to Live the Life in the Spirit**

**1. By Rules**

The first way is trying to live the life in the Spirit by a set of rules. “Do this, don’t do that.” The problem of living by rules is that it can lead to legalism. And legalism can in turn lead to living the Christian life out of self-righteous obligation, not out of God-loving obedience. The outward form of religion (hardware) becomes more important than the inner faith of the heart (software).

**2. By Formula**

Second, some live the life in the Spirit by a formula. Three ways to answered prayer, four keys to Christian victory, five steps to do effective ministry. The problem with such a formulaic pattern is that it can produce mechanical Christianity. The formula becomes something sacred—“The formula is the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by the formula.”

**3. By Experience**

Third, some people live the life in the Spirit by seeking for an experience—a deeply moving, life-changing, emotional experience with God. There’s one big problem with that. Experience doesn’t last. If you try to live according to experience, you’re going to be on an emotional roller coaster. You feel great as long as you have an experience, but what happens when it runs out? You’re going to be down, discouraged, depressed, and you may even feel as if God is angry with you. So you’ll seek for another experience—and the whole cycle starts again. You’re going to be constantly going up and down. So experience alone leads to an emotional roller coaster.

But some things need to be said at this point.

- One, good rules are needed. After all, “Do not steal” is a rule. That’s a good rule to live by. “Do not bear false witness” is another rule worth living by. “Do not commit adultery”— that’s definitely a good rule to live by. So rules are not necessarily bad.
- Second, a formulaic pattern can be very helpful. You discover five ways to pray. You discover three steps to grow in your QT. That’s good. A formulaic pattern can be helpful.
- Third, experience does matter. There are times and occasions when God comes to people in tremendous emotional power.

I have a god-sister who went through a rocky marriage which eventually ended in divorce. She became the single mother of two young sons. She went through a very emotionally traumatic time.

The Lord led a Christian friend to reach out to her with care and concern. One day, this friend invited my god-sister to her church. This was perhaps the first time that she had stepped into a church worship service.

As the lyrics were flashed onto the giant screen, the congregation was singing. Being unfamiliar with Christian worship, my god-sister simply read aloud the lyrics while trying to catch the tune. And as she was reading the words that spoke of God’s love, she was suddenly arrested by the comforting touch of God’s loving hand. She was so overwhelmed that she cried uncontrollably, much to her own embarrassment as she’s one who would seldom show her emotions.

After the service, she related this experience to the Christian friend who brought her there. Her friend assured her that it was the Lord who knew her grieving heart and came to minister His comfort to her. She shared the Gospel with my god-sister who by then was prepared by the Lord not only to hear but also to respond. My god-sister prayed to receive Jesus into her life that Sunday. God gave her a powerful experience that day. More importantly, God gave her the saving Christ that day.

She told this to me when she visited my home one day. Today, she is still trusting the Lord in the ups and downs of life.

So rules, formula and experience have their place. But taken alone, they are inadequate in leading us to a fruitful Christian life. God has given us something better than rules, better than a formula, better than experience. God has given us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the secret of living the Christian life.

That leads to the obvious question: How does the Holy Spirit work in my life? Somebody said it's like the difference between a car and a tram bus (like one of those I saw in HK). A car runs on the storage principle. You put petrol in the tank and you drive it. You burn the petrol and when you're out of petrol, you stop. You get more petrol, and you run it again. You burn it, you get more petrol, and you keep on driving until you run out. You're constantly running and stopping, filling and refilling.

But unlike a car, the tram bus runs on the contact principle. You have the two rails on the ground and the electrified third rail above the tram bus. As long as the tram bus stays in contact with that third rail above it, it will go and go and never stop.

Many people think that living the life in the Spirit is like riding in a car. You get filled with the Holy Spirit and you get run down. You get filled up again and you get run down once more. So you're constantly up and down, up and down, being filled and emptied, being filled and emptied. The Holy Spirit is full-tank in you after Sunday worship. But after a few days of running through the traffic of daily life, the Holy Spirit runs low and becomes  $\frac{1}{4}$  full in you. And you go church when Sunday comes again and you pray, "God, fill up the Holy Spirit to full tank please." That's not the Christian life taught in the New Testament.

The New Testament tells us that the Holy Spirit is always here. Our job is to stay in contact with Him. When we stay in contact with the Holy Spirit, He continuously provides the power we need to live a fruitful life in the Spirit.

How do we stay in contact with a person? We do that by connecting with that person and by doing things with that person. In the same way, we are connecting with the Person of the Holy Spirit as we seek God in His Word and in prayer. We are doing things with the Person of the Holy Spirit as we obey God in His promptings.

We now turn to Romans 8:5-17 where we discover three gifts of the Holy Spirit that are given to every believer. We are told not to seek them but to realize that we have them, and to live on the basis of the fact that they've been given to us.

## II. Three Gifts of the Spirit

### 1. A New Mind (vv. 5-8)

5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

We can live according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. As our text makes clear, these two ways of living are opposed to each other. The flesh is on one side, the Spirit on the other. When we live in accordance with the Spirit, we then have our minds set on what the Spirit desires.

The truth here is this—when we have the Holy Spirit in us, we have a new mind. There are two implications of this truth.

- *First implication: The new mind means the Holy Spirit gives us a new way of thinking.*

There are basically two ways of looking at life. There is the humanistic view in which man is seen as the centre of all things. And there is the biblical view which sees God as the centre of all things. There's a biblical way of thinking, there's a biblical way of speaking, there's a biblical way of acting, there's a biblical way of approaching the problems of life. God has given us a new mind by the Holy Spirit so that we can develop a thoroughly biblical way of looking at life.

How does that happen? One way by which this can come about is to be filled with the Word of God. Spiritual reshaping of the mind takes place by the intentional, repeated, thorough study of the Bible. God gave us His Word so it would be a spiritual change agent in our mind. As we study the Bible, God wants to use it to change the way we think. And as our thinking changes, so will be our life. We study the Word not only to understand it, but more importantly, to stand under it—yielding and submitting to its authority.

- *Second implication: The new mind means the Holy Spirit calls us to make a difference with our changed lives.*

I remember that time when I went with a mission team to the island of Batam in Indonesia. The team was scheduled to visit a village on one of the Riau islands on Monday. And I wanted to take a look at the ministry there as I had not been there before.

So I decided to take the trip to Batam immediately after church service on Sunday to join up with the team. When Monday morning came, I was looking forward to visiting the villagers house to house.

But as we reached that village by boat, we got news that a three-year-old girl on another island had died after a few days of sickness. The parents were Christians and they wanted a Christian burial for the dead girl. It was the custom there to bury the dead on the same day itself. It happened that the pastor of the church in Batam was away. I was asked if I could conduct the burial.

Before I went over to Batam, I had asked the Lord to help me adapt and adjust to abrupt changes to plans and schedules on a mission trip like this. But when it finally happened, I remember saying, "Lord, I thought you brought me here to open my eyes to your work among the villagers on this island. I have not expected myself to be here to conduct a burial. Lord, what a change and I am not sure if I like that!"

But I eventually decided to conduct that burial as a way of ministering God's love and comfort to that family and their predominantly non-Christian community.

Changes often bring about inconvenience. That's why many believers struggle with a changed life. The human tendency is to resist change, even God-directed change.

But if we know Jesus Christ, it ought to make a difference in every area of life—the way we speak, the way we relate, and the way we make decisions.

We need more than just teachers who happen to be Christian; we need truly Christian teachers who will touch their students with the love of Jesus Christ. We need truly Christian doctors who treat patients differently because they know Christ. We need truly Christian businessmen who will let their faith in Christ shape every decision they make.

If we who have been given new minds are too ready to leave them at the door (so to speak) as we leave church on Sunday, then we will have very little impact on our world for the next six days regardless how high we may feel in church on Sunday. If that happens, the world is little impressed with our Christianity. They've never seen the real thing in action. Indeed, it will make a great difference if we begin to think and act "Christianly" as we step back into the world this new week to come.

We are given a new mind so we can make a difference for God. He has given us a new mind so we can each be a difference-maker for His Kingdom's sake.

The year 2003 was a very anxious time for my family. It was the year when SARS hit Singapore. Tan Tock Seng Hospital was designated as the centre for treatment of SARS patients. My wife was working there at the Travellers' Clinic. At the height of the battle with SARS, she was told that should the situation deteriorate, she would be called to the frontline. It was a time when the commitment of every health care professional to save human lives was put to the test.

One of them was Dr. Alex Chao, a Christian consultant vascular surgeon at Singapore General Hospital. While attending to a SARS patient, he fell sick with fever one day. He isolated himself away from his family to make sure that they didn't get sick as well. He moved to his god-brother's home, remained isolated with his meals sent to his room. He wore mask whenever he left the house.

On 15 April 2003, he was admitted to hospital when his condition didn't improve. Before that, he wanted to see his two little girls. So he went by his house, stayed in his car and waved to them as they acknowledged him at a distance in their room. That was the last time these little girls saw their father alive.

He was treated for dengue fever. He had no problems with his lungs. But along the way, he developed rashes, back pains, and a drop in his platelet count—all consistent with dengue fever. A week later, Dr. Alex Chao died of SARS at the age of 39.

Indeed, Dr. Chao was true to his calling to save human lives as a doctor. Before he was ill, he fought to save

lives of people from SARS. When he was ill, he fought to shield lives in his own family from SARS.

In 2004 (one year after his death), the Society for Vascular Ultrasound based in the US created an annual award. This award was named after him and called “The Alex Chao Young Investigator’s Award” for excellence in scientific research in vascular technology.

As Paul would have said it, “Alex Chao did not lose the fight but he had fought the good fight.” He had stood out as a difference-maker for the Lord at a time when Singapore and the world were trying to come to terms with the SARS crisis. And we thank our gracious and merciful God that being a difference-maker does not always call us to end up in death.

(<http://www.angelfire.com/pro/chinese-paradise/chao>)

## 2. A New Nature (vv. 9-11)

9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Verse 9 tells us that a true Christian is one who has the Spirit of God living in him. When you say, “Lord Jesus, I want you as my Saviour,” the Holy Spirit answers that prayer by coming into your life.

When we have the Holy Spirit in us, we have a new nature. There are two implications of this truth.

- *First implication: The new nature means we actually have a brand-new life.*

That’s the meaning of the phrase in v. 10—“your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.” Your physical flesh is slowly wasting away. Yet God has placed life on the inside through the Holy Spirit. We are dying on the outside, yet we have new life on the inside. We die, yet we live. We waste away, yet we live forever.

- *Second implication: The new nature means we have the promise of future resurrection.*

The Spirit who raised up Christ will one day raise up our mortal body out of the grave. Verse 11 is an explicit promise of future resurrection from the dead. The Holy Spirit who presently lives in a believer is like a “down payment” on God’s future deliverance.

Do Christians die? Yes, we die like everyone else. But death for us is not the end. When my body is laid to rest, my spirit goes to be with Jesus. That’s not the end! When Jesus returns, my body will be raised from the dead (and be united with my spirit who is already with Jesus)—immortal, incorruptible, eternal, never more to die, never more to decay, never more to waste away.

I was talking with a lady recently. She belongs to a church that believes God does miraculous healings every time, any time, all the time. She said, “Be not anxious of any illness but pray and God will heal.”

I replied, “In that case, it seems that we are as good as imperishable and immortal here on earth. But I think we are told not to be anxious not because God will heal every time, any time, and all the time. But we are told not to be anxious because this perishable and mortal body will one day put on the imperishable and immortal in our future resurrection.”

There’s an important difference between being anxious and being concerned about living here on earth. To be anxious is to be so paralyzed that it undermines our trust in God and it weakens our ability to function while time is still with us. On the other hand, to be concerned is to acknowledge that we are like a passing mist here on earth, and so we must resolve to live responsibly and do that which is right before God while time is still with us. So God says to us, “Be not anxious about life on earth, but be concerned about how you live life on earth.”

### 3. A New Identity (vv. 14-17)

14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a Spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our



spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Paul uses two different phrases to describe believers. He calls us “sons of God” and “God's children”. There is a slight difference although sons are children.

- Sonship refers to our official status within God's family. It speaks of our privileged position.
- The term “child of God” speaks more of our endearing relationship with God as our Father (“Abba”). A little child calls his father as “Daddy”. Because we are God's children, we can speak to God the same way little children speak to their earthly fathers. And the Heavenly Father hears even the faintest cry of His children.

That's our new identity in Christ—we are now a son/daughter of God. We are no longer in the flesh; we are now in the Spirit. We no longer live according to the world; we now live according to the Word.

Once we walked in darkness, now we walk in the light. Once we followed our own desires, now we live to please God. Once we were dead, now we are alive. That's a radical change. It is supernatural because only God could do something like that. It is far-reaching because it touches every aspect of our life.

There are four privileges we have as a child of God:

- One, we have the Holy Spirit as our Personal Guide (v. 14).

To be “led” by the Spirit is a very personal term. It means to be led by the hand, like a father holding the hand of his little child as they cross a busy road. When you are perplexed, you have the right as God's child to ask, “Father, please lead me and show me what to do by your Spirit.”

- Two, we have freedom from fear (v. 15).

No more slavery, no more bondage, no more fear, no more living in terror. All of that is gone because we have received the “Spirit of sonship”. You can ask Him to drive away your fear today.

- Three, we have inward assurance (v. 16).

We as believers can expect that the Holy Spirit will give us inner assurance that we belong to Jesus Christ. Is that important? Yes, because Satan would like nothing better than to pull us down by causing us to doubt our own salvation. He accuses us and makes us think we aren't really born again. He says to us, "You sorrowful wreck. You go to church and call yourself a Christian. Yet look at how you live. You're nothing but a fake. You're all bad and nothing good!"

But the Holy Spirit comes along and says, "You're not perfect, but Jesus paid for all your sins. You are a child of God. You can overcome in the Spirit and you need not have to stay the way you are." When the devil whispers into our ear, the Holy Spirit speaks from deep within our heart to testify that we are indeed a child of God.

- Four, we have the right of heirship in God's family (v. 17).

We are an "heir" of God. He wants the riches of heaven to go to the members of His family. When we trust Christ, He writes us into His will, so to speak. Not that God will ever die—He won't!—but we are included in God's family fortune because as a child of God, we now share in the family wealth that includes all the heavenly riches. So, we can be thankful, grateful, and content with what we already have in our hands because we will have it all in heaven to come.

So we have three great gifts of the Spirit—a new mind, a new nature, and a new identity. That leaves us with one great obligation.

### **III. One Great Obligation (vv. 12-13)**

12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

These verses tell us two things about this one great obligation:

1. We owe nothing to the flesh (v. 12).

Why? One, it is because we've been set free from the power of the flesh. We are no longer "in the flesh" but "in the Spirit". We don't have to remain in the old life of the flesh unless we want to. Two, it is because the flesh works to bring about sin in our lives:

- It tempts us to do evil.
- It pulls us away from God.
- It fights continually against the Holy Spirit.

We don't have to live in the flesh anymore because we don't owe our flesh anything.

## 2. We owe everything to the Holy Spirit (v. 13).

Spiritual growth comes when we do our part as we rely upon the Holy Spirit's enablement. True spirituality is neither entirely passive ("Just let God") nor entirely active ("I've got to do this all by myself"). This verse balances a moment-by-moment dependence upon the Spirit with a tough-minded attitude towards the flesh.

Is the spiritual life dependent upon God or upon me? The answer is: "I cannot do it without God enabling, and God will not do it without me persevering."

## Conclusion

Romans 8 makes one thing clear: A fruitful life in the Spirit does not come about automatically. It doesn't happen by chance. A decision is required.

- The flesh and the Spirit are at war.
- The flesh has desires for you.
- The Spirit has desires for you.
- They are moving in opposite directions.
- But they have this in common—both want to control your life!

Decision Day for you and me is today. How would you decide? How would God want us to decide to live as His children? Simply this:

- "Yes" to the Holy Spirit.
- "No" to the flesh.

By the power of God's Spirit in us, we can say a loud "YES" to ...

- Forgiving people who have hurt us.
- Loving people who are difficult.
- Going the second mile.
- Keeping personal purity.
- Exercising a gentle spirit.
- Sharing Christ boldly with lost people.

- Conquering our fears.
- You can add on to the list.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Spirit in us and His power with us. So, we don't have to live in the flesh. We can live in the Spirit. And by saying "yes" to the Spirit and "no" to the flesh, you and I are already taking a step towards living a fruitful life in the Spirit.

What is the Spirit calling you to say "yes" to today and right now?

#### Benediction

May the Spirit of God who lives in you enable you to think more like Christ, speak more like Christ, act more like Christ, and feel more like Christ so that the way, work and will of God's Kingdom can be done more and more in and through you from now and till our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. Amen!