

Romans 8:5-11
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Psalm 130

Introduction

Have you ever tried to change something in your life, and for a while it seems like it's working, you do pretty well for a couple days or weeks... but then you slowly drift back into your old habits?

It can be something simple, like waking up earlier, studying a little bit harder, or something deeper, like trying to pray and read your bible more often. You make a decision, you put in effort, and for a little while it feels like you're making amazing progress. But over time, things start to slip, and you find yourself back where you started or somewhere similar.

This is something I'm sure all of us have experienced and still experience in different ways. There's a sense that we should be able to do better, to live differently but there's also still something within us that resists that change.

The Bible explains this by showing that there are two ways of living. One way is according to the flesh, and the other way is according to the Spirit. What we see in our readings for today is that God doesn't just help us manage our old way of living. Instead, God gives us a completely new life through His Spirit.

Living without the Spirit

In Romans chapter 8, the author Paul is writing to Christians in Rome, a city that was the centre of power, culture, and influence in the ancient world. Many believers back then were surrounded by pressure to conform to the world around them, whether by giving in to the ways of the world or just treating their faith like an old comfortable routine to check off the list.

Paul explains that people who are living according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires. When he talks about the 'flesh,' he's not just talking about obvious sin. He's also talking about living life our own way, apart from God."

He goes on to say that the mind set on the flesh is death and is hostile to God. This is pretty harsh language. It shows that the issue isn't just our behaviour, but the direction and intention of our hearts and minds.

Someone can appear outwardly moral or disciplined, have everything together and still be living in a way that is apart from God.

This is why Paul is saying that those in the flesh cannot please God. AND he's not just saying that it's a very difficult task NO... he's saying it is impossible. Even actions that seem good can fall short if they're not grounded in a relationship with Him.

For us, this could look like doing the right things but without a real dependence on God. Singing the loud during church but with the intention of being heard by others rather than by God. It can look like going through the motions of faith while our thoughts, priorities, and decisions are shaped more by what the people around us say than by God's word.

I'm not sure how many of you are familiar with the Bible app. If not, I'll give you a little run down - it's an app where you can read the Bible in different versions and languages, and you can complete daily devotionals.

It also has a feature where you can add your friends, share what you're doing, and keep up with what they're doing like highlighting verses, completing devotionals, leaving notes.

In one of those times in my life where I was letting my heart be led by things other than God,

I added my friends on the bible app, and saw what they were doing.

Suddenly I was highlighting and completing devotionals like it was the Premier's Reading Challenge without stopping to digest what I was reading. Not because I wanted to learn (even though at the time I really thought I had the right idea), but I later came to realise it was because I wanted people to see what I had accomplished. My heart was following the approval of others instead of the Spirit. And this is just one example of what living life apart from God could look like.

A helpful way to reflect on this is to ask ourselves where our minds are set. What do we think about the most often?

What shapes our decisions when no one is watching?

Our answers to these questions can show us whether we're being led by ourselves or by God.

New life given by the Spirit

Paul then says in verse 9, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you."

This would've been specifically significant to the church back then because in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God would come upon certain people for specific purposes, like prophets or kings. But now, Paul is saying that through Christ, the Spirit is given to all believers.

This means that the Christian life is not about trying to improve ourselves through our own efforts. It's about God Himself dwelling within us. The Spirit is a real presence that brings life.

Paul explains that although our bodies are still subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. This can refer to both our spiritual life right now and also the promise of our future resurrection when Jesus comes again.

It's important to understand that your walk with Christ is not just about just doing the right thing or following a set of rules. It's about having a new identity and a new kind of life. The Holy Spirit works inside us, shaping what we want, how we think, and how we act.

Here's a simple way to think about it. Just look at our own bodies. Sin is like bacteria that causes weakness and disease. If it's left untreated, it stops your body from functioning the way it's meant to and keeps you from living in full health.

Sin works in a similar way. It gets in the way of the full, abundant life that God has for us.

Now we all know there's bacteria all around us and even in us. So why aren't we constantly sick? It's because God designed our bodies with an immune system that fights for us. We don't have to switch it on or tell it what to do. It just works in the background, protecting us and keeping us healthy.

The only thing we need to do is not work against it by avoiding things that damage it or weaken it.

In the same way, God has given us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works in us, fighting against sin and leading us toward life. It's not about trying to fix everything on your own. It's about allowing the Holy Spirit to do His work in

you.

That means giving Him space in your life and not holding on to the things you know pull you away from Him. Paul makes it clear that the Christian life is meant to be led by the Spirit - and it will be, when we let go of our own desires and allow the Spirit to take the lead.

In other words, let go and let God.

God's response to our sin and need

The Psalm that we heard today shows us what it looks like to cry out to God from a place of real need. The Psalm was one of the Songs of Ascents, sung by Israelites travelling to Jerusalem for worship. It's about being honest with God, admitting our sin, and waiting for His help.

It starts with "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord" and says "If You, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?". The psalm reminds us that our sin is serious but God's forgiveness is bigger. Verse 4 says "But with you there is forgiveness" showing that God's mercy is real and always available.

Because of this, the psalmist (and us) can wait for God with hope.

Waiting doesn't mean that we sit around helpless doing nothing - it means trusting God, looking to His promises, and depending on Him to act.

Death to life by the Power of God

Ezekiel 37 gives a picture of God bringing life where there seems to be none, through a vision. To understand this, we need to remember the situation Ezekiel was in. He was a prophet during the Babylonian exile, around 600 years before Jesus.

The people of Israel had been taken from their land, their home, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and their temple was burned. They felt hopeless, and their spirits were completely lifeless.

As Ezekiel speaks God's words, the bones come together, tendons and flesh appear, and skin covers them. But they still don't have life. They're complete with bones, muscles, tendons, skin but still lifeless.

Only when God breathes His Spirit into them do they live and stand as an army. The key point is that no matter how complete or organised the bones are, they cannot come to life on their own.

True life can only come from God's Spirit. The Spirit is the key and without it, there is no real life or renewal.

This idea connects to John chapter 11, when Jesus raises Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead for four days. In Jewish culture, after three days, death was considered final and the people believed the soul had left the body permanently.

But Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life," and calls Lazarus out of the tomb. Lazarus coming back to life shows that life does not come from humans or tradition, but from God alone.

For us today, this helps us see that when parts of our lives feel dry, stuck, or hopeless whether it's our motivation, relationships, or even our faith, God's Spirit can bring life where we think nothing can change. Real transformation doesn't come from our effort alone; it comes from God, breathing life into us and renewing us from the inside out.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for giving us new life through Your Spirit. Help us to follow You, trust You, and let You lead every part of our lives. Breathe Your life into the areas that feel dry or stuck, and help us walk in the hope and peace You give. In Jesus' name, Amen.