

SPIRIT OF PRESENCE
'GOD IS' SERIES - WEEK 3
Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is so good to see you here this morning. Please turn in your Bibles to Romans Chapter 8 where we are going to be this morning. We are in a series on the Spirit of God, and this week we are talking about the Spirit of presence. Some of the great blessings my wife and I have had are the joy of educating our children in public school, home schooling and now a Christian school. So we can relate to everyone in this room, okay? We have experienced it all at certain stages of our life.

We did home school for a certain number of years, and my wife told me if we were doing this that I had to teach math. So that was my responsibility, because I was good at math in school, and it was one of my stronger subjects that I really enjoyed. After I went to Bible college I never had a chance to practice math anymore, so I was really excited to teach my kids math. But here is what I learned - just because you know how to do something doesn't mean you are going to be good at teaching that.

I remember the frustration I would feel trying to teach math to my children. There was a lot of weeping and gnashing of teeth and a lot of comforting. And then my wife would have to go help my kids and it was really hard. I felt so bad about it and wondered if my kids were going to have to go to therapy because of my math teaching skills. I don't know how many of you as parents have ever felt this way, but I have wondered if there won't be a book written someday about what I did to my kids teaching math. There was just this feeling of frustration of knowing it up here but trying to get them to understand it was just hard. Thankfully I have learned over the years though how to teach math in a better way.

And I think sometimes the way we feel about our walk with God, our relationship with God is one of incredible frustration. And I think we feel like God is just like that math teacher who says, *'Hey, you have to learn this. You have to figure this out. You have to grow in this area.'* And because of our failures, or because of our weaknesses, or because of our struggles we feel like we are letting God down when we are not getting it. Some of us in this room are still dealing with sins that we have struggled with for decades, and many times we project onto God that He is frustrated with us. And we feel like God expects us to change and to grow and mature. We feel like God has this expectation of us to live a righteous, good life, but we feel like we are not going anywhere and it is very frustrating to us. And we feel like God is frustrated as well.

And I think one of the ways that we can address this is by really understanding the way God looks at us, and in the way God works in us to change us. We are in the last Sunday of January, and I am not going to ask you to raise your hands, but how many of you are still true to your New Year resolutions? Don't raise your hands because this is a

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no judgement zone here. But it is hard. We are at the end of January and some of us were convinced that this was the year we were going to lose weight. This is the year we were going to get our finances in order. This is the year I would be able to stop biting my fingernails - and that one is mine, okay? I mean we are always doing these things and thinking that this year we are going to get things figured out.

So we work and we strive and we labor and we want God to help us. And many of us sometimes wonder why we still struggle with the same things we struggled with two decades ago. We want it to work and we cry out for help, but it hasn't worked yet. Well, I think that Romans Chapter 8 is probably the most important chapter in the Bible with regards to understanding how to live the Christian life.

In fact I would say this - Romans Chapters 5 through 8 are some of the most important chapters in the Bible. If you want to read, study, and understand what it means to follow Christ, what the implications of the gospel are, these are the chapters to read. Those chapters will help us to understand things better after we have placed our faith and trust in Christ. I believe that Romans Chapters 5 through 8 are the bedrock of understanding the theological, philosophical and practical way of how we are to live out the Christian life.

In Romans Chapter 5 Paul is writing this treatise on what it means to really live by faith and to live the Christian life. Chapter 5 is all about grace and how we have been blessed by grace. Five times in that chapter Paul tells us how much more God loves us because we are His children. It is all about the lavish grace God gives us in our lives. Romans Chapter 6 confronts us in that just because God shows us grace does not mean that we can do whatever we want. And he says, *'God forbid, because we have a new identity. We are no longer a slave to sin, but we are to be a slave to righteousness. We are now an instrument of righteousness.'* What is Paul saying? He is telling us that we now have the power because of the grace of God in our lives that we don't have to sin anymore. We have the power of God now living inside of us. We have a new identity, a new understanding, and a new nature.

In Romans Chapter 7 Paul gets into the nitty gritty by asking why we still sin, why we still struggle with sin, and the struggle is real sometimes. Paul says it is not about our learning what is right and wrong because a lot of times we think we just need to understand more about what is right and wrong. But Paul says it is not about learning the rules; there is something deeper that we have to understand. It is not about living life and battling sin in our own power; it is about understanding that there is a greater law, the law of the Spirit.

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In Chapter 8 Paul goes into this understanding of what it means to really live a life that is pleasing to God, a life of power. He talks not just about right and wrong and the law and judgement. Now he is saying that we need to understand that because of the Holy Spirit inside of us, because of grace, because of the gospel, because of Christ's love for us, now it is a battle between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh is that internal thing inside of us of our desires, our worldly, earthly desires of 'it is all about me.' And the way of the Spirit is all about God.

So in this chapter Paul talks about this flow of understanding, the quintessential argument of what it means to walk the Christian walk. And if you want to know how to live the Christian life it begins with the Holy Spirit. You cannot live the Christian life, you cannot live a life of righteousness, you cannot live a life of good works without the Holy Spirit in your life. That is why this is so important when we are talking about the Spirit of presence.

Last week we talked about the Spirit of life and how He gives us new life. And the Spirit of presence means He gives us new life and He lives inside of us. Why does He do that? Do you ever wonder that? Why in the world does it say that God lives inside of us? And why did He do that? It is because He wants to change us and He knows we can't do it on our own. He knows if it was up to us and our strength and power and our strategies that we would fail every single time. And that is why He gives to us His Holy Spirit.

As we read this we need to understand that God is not just trying to change and modify our behavior; He is trying to change our desires. He is trying to change the deepest part of our heart, our mind, and our soul. It is not just about external conformity to what He wants; He is really trying to conform us into the image of Jesus.

And so let's read Romans Chapter 8 and begin in verse 8. Paul is talking about the tension between the flesh and the Spirit. Listen, we are either going to live by the flesh doing what we want to do, or we are going to live by the Spirit doing what God wants us to do. And all of us in this room, no matter where we are at in our Christian walk, we all have that struggle. I don't care if you are a pastor, or if you are a new believer. I don't care if you have been going to church for 40 years, or you have only been going to church for a week. Every single person in this room has this battle between the flesh and the Spirit. And we have to understand what the Spirit is promising us, how the Spirit is helping us to do this.

I am going to read verse 8 through verse 17. ***"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you."*** There is that word 'dwell,' okay? That means that the Spirit of God

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has taken permanent residence in our life. *“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba Father!’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.”

Wow! This is heavy, this is deep. We could spend a lifetime in Romans Chapter 8 just learning and discovering what this means. But here is the biggest thing I want you to understand this morning - God is not frustrated with you; God loves you. And the promises we just read, the promises Paul declares are what he wants us to understand and that every single day that we wake up there is a reality about the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives that we can take to the bank. You are not waking up with this sense of I have to please God again today.

No, listen, we are going to talk about two daily promises that the Spirit's presence guarantees us in our lives. We have to understand that so much of the Christian life, so much of living this out has little to do with how hard we are striving. It has more to do with understanding what God is doing in us, and are we surrendering to that.

So let's look at these two promises, because they are very important that we understand that God's Spirit is working today, that God's Spirit is doing something today. He is promising us something today, and it doesn't matter how bad you were this past week. And it doesn't matter how well you behaved this past week, or this past year. It doesn't matter what your journey has been up to this point, we just need to understand that the promises that the Spirit of God is telling us is that His presence is always true.

The first daily promise is this - He is never going to let us go. He just says over and over and over again in these verses how the Spirit of God is dwelling in us. Now we have to understand something when we read about how the Holy Spirit worked and moved in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit would come and indwell someone or come upon someone for a specific work, but there were times when the Holy Spirit would be removed from people in the Old Testament.

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But in Christ that is no longer true. When Jesus was talking to His disciples in the Upper Room, and we find this in John Chapters 14 through 17, He told them that He was going to send a helper to them, and when the Helper comes He is going to help them and guide them. He was going to do everything they could not do in their own strength and power.

So there was this promise of a new way with the Holy Spirit. And Paul is talking about how He dwells inside of us, how because of this dwelling He has now adopted us, and we are co-heirs with Christ. So what we need to understand is that when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, there is a promise that at that moment we are His, He is in us, and He will never leave us. It doesn't matter how bad we sin; it doesn't matter how many times we walk away from him; He is always going to be in us. He is never going to let us go.

And this is the question that most of us are asking right now is - *'Why is it that sometimes I don't feel it?'* Sometimes we don't feel the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we don't feel this presence inside of us. So what we have to understand is this - in these moments we need to understand that the Spirit of God is dwelling in us. We are His. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of God does not belong to Him, but if you belong to Him you have the Spirit of God.

So what goes on sometimes? I think here is the real problem that most of us have. There is a tension that we have between our faith and our feelings, right? We have a real tension between our faith and our feelings, because there are many times we don't feel close to God. Do you know when I feel close to God? It is when I see the sun rise and I am walking on the beach. I mean if you go to the beach at sunrise and you don't feel God there is something wrong with you. (*Laughter.*)

Some of you have these moments where you just feel God. You just have times where you just feel the Spirit and the presence of God. And then there are times where you don't feel it. And the reality is this - it doesn't matter whether you feel it or not, the reality of the Holy Spirit's presence in your life is not determined by your feelings. It is on the truth and the reality of His promises.

Listen, I would love to wake up and walk on the beach and see the sunrise every single day. Can I get an amen to that? (*Amen.*) I mean that would be awesome, but that is not real life. We wake up and kids are screaming and crying. We wake up and we are not feeling good. We wake up and remember we have this huge project at work. And there are so many days we wake up to face the day and we are not feeling the Holy Spirit's presence. Instead we wake up to *'Mom! Dad!'*

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So we have a battle in our lives to understand that the reality of the Spirit's presence does not change on our behavior, it does not change with how we feel, and it does not change with the circumstances going on around us. The reality is the presence of God, His promises are true and real.

Now I am going to give you a glossary of terms, because many times when you come to church, and you hear people talk about the Holy Spirit, you will hear a lot of different terms. I am not going to share with you all of the terms that we talk about with the Holy Spirit, but there are four terms in particular that relate to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. A lot of times you may go to church and you will hear people talking about the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. They may say things like, '*You need to be filled with the Spirit.*' '*You need to be baptized with the Spirit.*' And there are just a lot of terms which to most of us make us wonder, '*What in the world do they mean by that?*'

But when it says, '*The Spirit of God dwells in you,*' in verse 9, what does that mean? It just means that God's Spirit is living inside of us. He has now taken up permanent residence in us. We see this in other passages of Scripture as well. In I Corinthians Chapter 6, and in II Corinthians Chapter 6, we read that "*our bodies are called the temple of the Holy Spirit.*" Why is Paul referring to it like that? It is because the Holy Spirit is now dwelling inside of us. When we accepted Christ, our life became the holy of holies. Think about that for a moment, okay?

Now what is the difference between the indwelling of God's Spirit and the filling of the Spirit? So we have the Holy Spirit inside of us, He is dwelling inside of us, and the filling of the Spirit is simply this - the Holy Spirit is in control of us. Here is the thing, you can have God inside of you, you can have the Spirit, but the Spirit may not have you. And so you are doing what you want to do, you are living life your way, you make a deal with God every Sunday morning. '*All right, God, here is your day.*' And if that is the way you live your life by doing your thing during the week and doing God's thing on the weekend, you are not going to feel God. The reality is this - when we are filled with the Spirit, it means that God is in control of our life. He has complete control of what we think, what we say, and what we do.

Then we have the sealing of the Spirit talked about in Ephesians Chapter 1 - what does that mean? That means that once the Holy Spirit comes inside of us, He seals us permanently. He will never let us go. You can never lose the Holy Spirit; that can never happen. You can mess up the temple, you can do all kinds of things to your body, you can rebel against God, but I promise you that His seal will never be taken away from us. This doctrine teaches us that we can never lose our salvation.

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Number four is - the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is God's Spirit coming upon us at the moment of salvation. We see this in I Corinthians Chapter 12. Now some people teach that the baptism of the Spirit is almost like a second experience with the Holy Spirit. We do not see that. We see in Scripture that when Paul is explaining that once we receive the Holy Spirit, he makes the parallel between receiving the Holy Spirit and the baptism of the Holy Spirit as one thing. Baptism simply means to be immersed in something. Just like when we were baptized with water we are baptized in the Holy Spirit, and He is now immersed inside of us. He has us and He is never letting us go.

So why is it so important that we understand these terms? It is because a lot of times we have knowledge of this stuff, but we don't have the faith to believe that this is true. We live our lives and we say, *'Yeah, I know that is true, but I just don't feel it.'* So what do we do in those moments when we don't feel it? That is when we need to go back to this and ask ourselves if we are going to believe this today. Are we going to believe that we are His child, and that He has adopted us?

Do you understand what the term adoption means? Adoption in Scripture meant this - that He is never going to let us go. In the Roman culture you could actually renounce a biological child if they displeased you. You could renounce your own biological child. But once you adopted a child you could never renounce them. So an adopted child was almost a higher form of belonging in a family. A family could have four or five kids biologically and if the father said, *'None of you really look like the one I want to pass my name, my authority, and my wealth to, so I am going to adopt someone that will represent me better.'*

And that would happen a lot in the Roman culture. Can you imagine it? So when Scripture talks about the adoption of sons, He is saying, *'You don't understand the privilege I am giving you. I can never renounce my claim on you.'* And that is the love that Christ gives us.

I think one of the biggest problems we have that I have dealt with a lot over the years when it comes to discipleship, is when we talk about being co-heirs with Christ and being adopted as sons. The problem many can have with that is many times they project onto God their earthly experiences with their own parents. And they think God is distant because they may have had a dad that was distant. Or they think God is like this because their mom was like this. I have never met a person that struggles with this reality of understanding and believing in the presence of God that at some point did not have a parent in their life that was absent or distant from them. It is a very real struggle for them.

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But one of the things that we have to remember, and this is something that God has been teaching me, is that it is so powerful how God speaks over us every single day as His son or as His daughter. I have been meditating on this for a while and I want to share it with you. I want you to think about the first thing that Jesus did publicly, the first moment of Jesus' public ministry? Do you remember what it was? It was His baptism. Jesus' baptism was His first public expression of who He was. And it was at His baptism that there was this amazing moment where as John the Baptist is baptising Jesus, He is coming up out of the water and the Spirit descends on Him like a dove. And God the Father speaks these words over Him. He says, "***This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.***"

Think about that for a moment. Why is that so significant? Why are those words so important? This is before Jesus performed any miracles, before He taught any of the teachings, before He faced the temptations of the devil, before He went to the cross, before He did anything that we would consider worthy of fame or recognition, God the Father spoke these words, "***This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.***" Before Jesus had done anything in the power of His Father, God spoke those words.

When we think about that we realize that for most of us as we live our lives, we do our deeds, we try to please God because at the end of the day we want to hear God say those words over us. We want to hear, "***You are my beloved Son (or daughter) with whom I am well pleased.***" We want to hear God say that we have lived a good life today and that He is pleased with us. Most of us are waiting to hear that from God at the end of the day.

But what does the narrative of Scripture tell us? It tells us that if we are co-heirs with Christ, if we have been adopted as sons, that whatever is privileged in our relationship with God the Son and God the Father has now been given to us. Do you realize that every single day you wake up if you are in Christ and His Spirit dwells in you God is speaking these words to you every single morning, '*You are my beloved Son.*' But do we live like that? Do we understand that God is never going to let us go? I think one of the biggest problems we have in our battle to become more like Jesus and our sanctification is that most of us are working and yearning to try to please a God that we are just not sure likes us. But what the gospel teaches us is that His love is secure.

I want to give you a couple of things that I think will help us do that, to battle the faith and the tension between the faith and the feelings. Number one - we have to pray our feelings and then we have to pray our reality. It is okay to talk to God when you don't feel Him. I have been there. I have had some dark times in my life. I have had some very hard moments where I felt like God was absent, God was distant and God was not

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there. And in those moments one of the things that helped me the most was when I could actually be honest with God. Sometimes we are afraid to tell God the truth, we are afraid to tell Him how we are really feeling. *'God, I don't feel you right now.'*

And here is the thing, God wants us to be real with Him, He wants us to be honest with Him, so that He can remind us of our true reality. So not only do I need to pray my feelings to God, but then I need to remind myself that I am His son and He is never going to let me go. And many times what we have to do is pray our reality, we have to pray the truth that we know is real. So I can pray my feelings, but when I pray the reality of the truth and not just what I am feeling, then my faith informs my feelings of the truth.

There is a great line in verse 16 of Romans Chapter 8 that says, ***"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God."*** What does that mean 'the Spirit of God bears witness with our Spirit?' It means that the Spirit of God is going to help us know whether or not we are His child. And there are times when we don't feel it, and that is when we need to express our faith, and our faith will turn into feelings. But we don't start with our feelings and hope to get to faith; we start with our faith and let our faith speak to our feelings.

If you are sitting here this morning thinking, *'But God feels so distant,'* you need to let Him know. And you need to believe. You need to ask yourself what you are not believing about the reality that God has said. If what He has said here is true and the Spirit of God is dwelling in me, that He has adopted me, that He is working inside of me, why am I not believing? So it is not a matter of how much God needs to keep doing for me; He has already done it. He is already here.

And that brings me to my second point - God's presence promises that not only will He never let us go but He is always working in us. I love this. Look at verse 10 where it says, ***"But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness."*** He is talking about this word 'life.' See how many times Paul uses the word 'life' and 'living' in the next couple of verses. Verse 11, ***"If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."***

What does that mean 'to give life?' This word 'life' is not the *'I'm breathing life,'* this is the Spiritual life. This is the abundant life. This is the eternal life. When you walk into our building you will see in etched stone, John 10:10, where Jesus said, ***"I have come that you may have life, and life abundantly."*** What does He mean by life abundantly? It is life the way that God has always intended for us to live. Not the life that we want to live, but the life that He wants us to live.

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And if ever there is a disconnect between the life that we want to live and the life God wants us to live that is where we feel like this tension of, *'I'm just not sensing God's presence. I don't know what God is doing.'* And there is a disconnect between what we are sensing from God in our lives. But we see here that God is saying, *'I am working in you. The same Spirit who rose Jesus from the dead is working in you.'* Do you believe that? There is this promise that He is always going to work in us.

Look at verse 12 where it says, ***"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God,"*** and here is the key right there, ***"For all who are led by the Spirit of God."*** Here is the second tension. We have one tension between our feelings and our faith. But if this is true that God is always working inside of us we have another tension inside of us. And the tension is between control and power.

What do I mean by that? I mean when we try to exercise control of our lives, we reject the Spirit's power working inside of us. What we are saying is, *'God, I want to control most of my life, but I also want you to make me better. God, I want to be in control of my life, but I also want you to help me overcome these sins. God, I want to be in control of my reputation, but God I want your help to overcome these problems I have.'* And what Paul is saying is, *'If you want to receive the fullness of the Spirit's power, if the Holy Spirit is living inside of me, the same Spirit that rose Jesus from the death is living inside of me. And you are saying, 'but I am not seeing it. I am not experiencing this power in my life.'*

If that is you then I promise you that the issue is not with God; it is with you, because what you are really saying is, *'I still want to control my life.'* Here is what we have to understand - the Spirit of God is always working inside of us, but some of us are saying, *'Well, I am not seeing any life change.'* And what I would tell you this morning is that the Spirit of God is working to control you. He is going to work to humble you and to get you to the place where you are saying, *'I have to give that up. I have to release that. I am not going to hold onto this any longer.'*

And if we want to make the most of the power that is available to us, we have to be led by the Spirit. And do you know what that requires? It requires surrender. It means saying, *'God, you can have your way. I totally want what you want. You have complete control over my life to do with me as you will.'*

I had a friend a number of years ago who was trying to lose weight. He had hired a personal trainer to help him, and he was working really hard but he wasn't losing weight. So he was really frustrated. He said, *'I hired this personal trainer and I am still*

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not losing weight. Come to find out after doing a little digging that even though he was hiring a personal trainer to work out with him three times a week, he was still poring half and half over his cereal every morning. And here is the deal, you either want to lose weight or you don't want to lose weight. Sometimes I think that is what we do. We say we are working so hard, we are doing this and that, but don't you take my half and half.

'I want you to change me, God, but I am not willing to give you this piece of my life. I want you to work in me, God, but I am not willing to let you do this part of me.' And we need to understand that the way that God works is if we want the power of the Spirit, if we want to see the true transformation of our lives, we have to be led by the Spirit. And to be led by the Spirit two things have to happen. Number one we have to get desperate. It says in verse 16, ***"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear."***

The reason why some of us are fighting giving God control of our lives is because we are very fearful of what will happen if we do. I have been there. I have thought if I gave God complete control, and He tells me to do everything He asks me to do that means I am going to have to confess, I am going to have to be open, I am going to have to be honest. I am no longer going to be living two different lives, one in church and one outside of church, one in secret and one in public. It means I would have to confront, and to expose some things, and turn over my life to Him.

And I am telling you that one of the greatest ways in which the enemy keeps us in bondage is through fear. It says that right there, we are not to fall back into a Spirit of slavery because we are afraid of what people are going to think. We are afraid of the consequences of when we let people know this is what is really going on in our lives. Fear keeps us in bondage. And one of the reasons that some of us are not seeing the Spirit of God produce the resurrected life, the life of power and presence in our lives is because we are still trying to gain control.

And here is the reality - we are not really in control. We think we are in control but that is a false sense of control. What is really controlling us when we make that decision is fear and it is sin. But it gives us a false sense of really being in control. And when we live our life in fear, we will try to control and manipulate parts of our lives, moving our lives like we are on a chess board to make sure that what we are doing is not going to be found out. If that is you I promise you this - you are living a life in shifting sand. And one day a hole is going to open because no one can control their lives with enough ability to thwart the working of the Holy Spirit.

If we want to be led by the Spirit we have to confront this issue of fear in our lives. ***"For you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have***

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received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba Father!'" This is the most basic cry of a child, "*Abba Father!*" We need to be like a child crying to our Father. We need to be desperate enough to say, '*God, I don't care what you do with my life. I don't care what I need to confess. I don't care who knows everything about me. I am just so desperate, God.*'

I have met with people who have a struggle against sin. I sit across from them and they know what it is going to take in order to really address their sin in their lives. But I realize that most of them are still not desperate enough to do whatever it takes to say, '*God, you lead me. I will say whatever you want me to say. I will do whatever you want me to do. I will go wherever you want me to go. I will confess whatever you want me to confess. I will reveal whatever you want me to reveal because I am sick and tired of the sin and the power of sin in my life. I just want you.*'

So we have to be desperate, and then the other thing we have to understand is we can't ignore the struggle. We are not going to read this entire passage but skip down to verse 23 in Romans 8 because here is where we understand that the struggle is real. It says, "***And not only the creation, but we ourselves,***" and this is talking about our struggle with sin, "***who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.***"

What does Paul mean by that? He just said that we have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, and now he is saying we are waiting eagerly for the adoption of sons. What does he mean by that? He means that there is going to be the fulfilment of the promise that God is going to make us, conform us to the image of Jesus. That is a promise. He is speaking words of truth and saying that no matter where we are at right now, He will conform us to the image of Jesus. No matter what your struggle is right now, He will conform us to the image of Jesus. And if takes your entire life it doesn't matter, He is going to continue to work in us.

I have shared this with you a little bit before, but I bite my fingernails. And I hate it. I hate even sharing this. It was one of the things that started when I was five years old. Sometimes you may see me just biting my fingernails. And I can't tell you how many times I have started and stopped biting my fingernails. It drives me nuts. I was looking through some old journals the other day and I read something there from years ago that said, '*I am going to try and stop biting my fingernails today.*' And in moments like that don't we just feel defeated because I am still struggling with this?

But do you know what gives me hope? That even though I still have struggles today at 43 years of age, I can look back to my life and I can also see the power of God. There are things that used to put me in bondage, things that used to just wreck my soul

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but God has given me victory over them. I want to share with you a passage of Scripture which is one of my favorite passages. It is in II Corinthians Chapter 3 and verses 17 and 18, and it is the hope that we have. ***“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all,”*** stop right there. If you are a part of ‘all’ raise your hand. Some of you are not raising your hand so we may need to have a psychological conversation afterwards. *(Laughter.)*

When the Bible says ‘all,’ it means all of us, and this verse is so applicable right now. ***“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,”*** beholding the fullness of who He is, ***“are being transformed into the same image,”*** the image of Christ, ***“from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*** Take that to the bank. Listen, this is a matter between control and power. And this is what the Spirit of God wants you to understand - He is never going to stop working on us. And He just changes from one degree of glory to the next as He is working in you today. He is confronting those issues today. He is saying, *‘Don’t give up. Don’t lose heart. I am still working.’* He is never going to let us go. He is never going to leave us. And He is always working.

Do you believe that today, that you live like that today? He is never going to let you go, and He is always working. Is that reflected in your life? No matter what you are struggling with today, God wants us to have hope, and to understand that He is not leaving us. He wants us to have hope that He is working inside of us no matter what the struggle is, and no matter how long you have had it, His love for us is secure and true.

I have a couple of questions I want to leave you with and then we are done. Number one - are you trusting in your feelings or in the reality of His presence? What are you trusting in this morning? Are you trusting in the indwelling presence of the Spirit? Are you trusting that He is there not because you behaved this past week or because of the reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ? What are you believing in? Where is your faith or it is just knowledge with you?

Number two - are you working against God’s Spirit, or are you working with Him? What level of control would you say you have on your life right now? Are you willing to give God control at twenty-five percent, or fifty percent? Listen, when we see God work the greatest and best is when He has a hundred percent of us. God doesn’t work, He doesn’t deal with ninety-nine percent. Listen, I have wrestled with God; and He always wins the battle. And the sooner you understand that will be when you can see the power of God working in your life.

The last question is this - what is He asking you to put to death today? Verse 13 says this, ***“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put***

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to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” We talked a little bit about praying our feelings to God and then praying our reality to Him. One of the things that I have learned to do is to actively declare what I am putting to death every single day. I learned this practice about four years ago. So every day when I wake up I don't say, *'God, help me to put this and this to death today.'* No, I don't ask Him to help me to do this, I just do it.

See a lot of times we don't claim the reality of the power that we have. So when I wake up every morning I say, *'God, I am putting to death Ben Rudolph today.'* And that is because I know me, I know my desires, I know my will, and I don't want this. I know what life is like when I am in control. I know what life is like when I get my way and it is bad and it is ugly. So I put to death daily a list of all these things. And then I pray, *'God, I want you to resurrect Christ in me, and the hope of glory. Make me the Ben Rudolph that would look like Christ is in control of me.'* That is one of the most powerful things that I have learned to do in my Christian walk.

What are you putting to death today? What is God asking you to put to death today and to give Him control of your life? Let's bow our heads and close our eyes. This is the time of response. For some of you what God is asking you to do is simply believe this morning, to rest in His goodness, to rest in the promises that He has given us. Some of you have been walking without the joy of salvation for so long; what is it that God wants you to believe?

Maybe some of you are in this room and there are some things that you need to confront, that you need to confess, and that you need to turn over control of a particular issue to God. I can't tell you what that looks like, but I promise you if you go to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to tell you what that looks like, I promise you He will let you know. Just stop fighting it and walk in the power of the Spirit giving Him control of your life.

We are going to stand and sing in a moment. I am going to ask each of you to pray and seek the Lord. One of the prayers I have been challenging you to pray since the first Sunday of January is this: *'God, help me to hear from you today through your Spirit and through your word.'* I would like each of us to pray that prayer this morning, and as you pray if the Spirit is calling you to come forward and talk to someone there will be a pastor up here in the front.

Maybe you need to talk to someone or you want to go to the prayer room in the lobby to the right, then go seek the counsel and help that you need. Do not leave today with questions and doubts and discouragement. Maybe there is something going on relationally that you just need prayer for. Maybe there is something going on financially, or with your job, and you need prayer. Maybe there is something health-wise you need

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prayer for. If God is calling you to pray with someone and get the encouragement you need, please do that. Be bold and step forward.

There are stations around the room with the Lord's Supper. If you sense the need to worship Him and to reflect on the Spirit of what He has done in you, you can partake of the Lord's Supper. Maybe you want to come down and pray at one of the crosses. Let's believe, walk in faith, and give the Spirit of presence the control in our lives.

Father, I am praying right now over every single one of us in this room. God, you know our hearts, you know the strongholds of the enemy. God, you know where each of us is in our journey of transforming from one degree of glory to the next. And God, I just want to thank you and praise you for your love. God, you are speaking over this room this morning because we are your beloved children with whom you are well pleased. And in that love, and in that security, may we have the boldness to confront the strongholds of sin that have captivated us for so long. God, may we live lives of vulnerability and repentance to come to you when we need you most. God, we don't want to live a façade, we don't want to live to protect a reputation that is not real. God, work in this church that we might be resilient disciples that reflect the glory of Jesus Christ in this world. God, I believe you are working now and you will continue to work. Have your way in us we pray. We pray this in the powerful name of Jesus and in the presence of your Spirit. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.