

Sermon 2 – Living by the Spirit, Not the Flesh

Introduction

Last time, we asked: *What is Spirit? What is Flesh?* We saw that flesh is our natural, temporary life prone to corruption, and spirit is the God-breathed essence within us, awakened by the Holy Spirit.

Tonight, we ask: *How do we live by the Spirit, not the flesh?* This is the practical side. Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles all give us examples — and they show us practices that bring us back into Spirit when the flesh takes over.

1. Jesus Himself – The Foundation

John 3:5–6

“Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’”

Context: Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus, a Pharisee who believed obedience to law was enough. Jesus says the flesh can only produce flesh. To enter God’s kingdom, one must be born again — born of the Spirit.

John 6:63

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Context: After feeding the 5,000, Jesus explains that true life doesn’t come from fleshly bread but from His words, which are Spirit and life.

Matthew 26:41

“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (The Holy Spirit will always help us avoid temptation)

Context: In Gethsemane, Jesus asks His disciples to stay awake and pray, but they fall asleep. Their spirits desired loyalty, but their flesh gave in to weakness. Jesus shows that vigilance and prayer are the way to resist temptation.

2. Old Testament Foundations — God Promised Spirit Life

Ezekiel 36:26–27

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone (bitterness) from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh (able to be forgiving and compassionate). And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my laws.”

Context: Ezekiel prophesies to Israel in exile. God promises a future transformation — not by law or effort, but by His Spirit dwelling within them.

Psalms 51:10–11

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.”

Context: David’s prayer after his sin with Bathsheba. He knows external rituals can’t fix him. Only the Spirit of God can renew his heart and restore his relationship with God.

3. The Apostles' Witness

1 Peter 2:11

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” (Your life experience)

Context: Peter reminds believers that this world is not their home. Fleshly passions fight against their true identity, but as citizens of heaven, they are called to abstain and live Spirit-led lives.

James 4:5–7

“Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us’? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Context: James shows how God longs for the spirit He placed within us. But the flesh leans toward pride and selfishness. The Spirit gives grace to the humble who submit to God, while the flesh resists Him.

4. Jesus' Example - The Wilderness.

Jesus had 40 days and nights in the wilderness AFTER he was Baptized - while FULL of the Holy Spirit, was he able to resist all that Satan offers him. And just as Jesus, so to do many of us experience a pattern of “40 days” found in 4 seasons of temptation of the greatest woe of the flesh - FEAR.

1. Season of Testing - Everyone, at some point, faces temptations or choices that cut to the core of who they are. It may not be bread, kingdoms, or leaping from temples — but it's the lure of comfort, power, or pride.

Temptation: To Doubt God's Care

- “Turn these stones into bread.” (Matthew 4:3)
- When life presses hard, the temptation is to grasp at self-reliance, to fix everything by our own hands instead of trusting God to provide.
- At its root: *“If God really loved me, wouldn’t He...?”*

2. Season of Stripping Away - Just as Jesus fasted, people often find themselves in times where what they relied on is taken away — food, security, community, certainty — and they meet themselves (and God) in the emptiness.

Temptation: To Demand Proof

- “Throw yourself down, for it is written...” (Matthew 4:6)
- In emptiness, when all comfort is gone, the temptation is to force God’s hand, to demand signs, to test His promises instead of resting in them.
- At its root: *“If God is with me, He must show me now.”*

3. Season of Solitude - The wilderness is not a place of applause or recognition. It’s silence, where the voice of the accuser and the voice of God are both heard — and one must discern which is true.

Temptation: To Listen to the Wrong Voice

- In the silence, competing voices speak: one whispers peace, the other whispers lies.
- The temptation here is despair, or isolation — believing the accuser’s voice (“you are alone, forgotten, powerless”) over the still voice of truth.
- At its root: *“Am I really loved, or utterly alone?”*

4. Season of Choice - Each of these “40 days” ends with a decision: who will I serve? What will define me? Will I chase what men offer, or rest in what God has spoken?

Temptation: To Seize Power

- “All these kingdoms I will give you...” (Matthew 4:9)
- At the end, the fork in the road is clear: surrender to God’s way of humility, or take up the offer of control, glory, and domination.
- At its root: *“I can rule, or I can serve.”*

5. Paul’s Clarity — The Battle of Flesh vs. Spirit

Before we look at practices, we need to recognize this is an **ongoing battle** inside us.

Romans 8:5–6

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Context: Paul shows that this is about mindset. What you set your mind on shapes your life. Flesh-focused living leads to death; Spirit-focused living leads to life and peace.

Point: We must continually set our minds on Spirit. This is why the practices that follow are necessary — they shift our focus from flesh to Spirit.

6. Practices That Keep Us in the Spirit

When the flesh rises up, Scripture gives us practical actions that return us to Spirit.

- **1. Prayer and Watchfulness**

Matthew 26:41

“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Context: In Gethsemane, Jesus ties vigilance and prayer to spiritual strength. Prayer awakens the spirit, weakening flesh’s control.

- **2. Fasting**

Matthew 6:16–18

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Context: Jesus teaches fasting as a hidden practice between us and God. It silences fleshly cravings so the spirit can be sharpened.

- **3. Abiding in the Word**

John 6:63

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Context: Jesus identifies His own words as Spirit-filled and life-giving. Reading and meditating on His word realigns us with Spirit.

- **4. Obedience in Love**

John 14:23

“Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’”

Context: Jesus links obedience with love. Obedience in love keeps us in fellowship with Father and Son.

- **5. Serving Others**

Mark 10:45

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Context: Jesus models service as the path of greatness. Serving others breaks self-centeredness, leading us back into Spirit.

- **6. Forgiveness**

Matthew 6:14–15

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Context: Jesus makes forgiveness central. Unforgiveness feeds the flesh, but forgiveness is Spirit’s way of release.

- **7. Worship in Spirit and Truth**

John 4:24

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Context: To the Samaritan woman, Jesus explains worship is no longer about places, but Spirit and truth. Worship pulls us out of fleshly preoccupation into God’s presence.

- **8. Community and Confession**

James 5:16

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it

is working.”

Context: James ties confession and prayer in community to healing. Flesh thrives in secrecy; Spirit thrives in honesty.

- **9. Trust and Simplicity**

Matthew 6:25–27, 33

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Context: Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount shows anxiety belongs to flesh. Spirit chooses trust and simplicity, focusing on God’s kingdom.

- **10. Bearing Fruit as Evidence**

Galatians 5:22–23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

Context: These fruits are not things we force. They are evidence that Spirit, not flesh, is leading.

7. The Spirit as Our Helper

After listing practices, we might feel the weight of them. But Jesus reassures us: we do not walk this alone.

John 14:16–17

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

Context: On the night before His death, Jesus comforts His disciples. He promises the Holy Spirit — not just as a force, but as a *Helper* who dwells in us forever.

Point: Living by the Spirit is not about willpower. It's about depending on the Helper who lives in us and empowers us daily.

7. Reflection Questions

1. Where in your life do you feel the pull of flesh most strongly?
2. Which of Jesus' words — “born of the Spirit,” “the flesh is no help,” or “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” — speaks to your situation today?
3. Which of the practices (prayer, fasting, worship, service, forgiveness, etc.) most helps you return to Spirit when you find yourself drifting?
4. Do you see evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in your life? Which fruit do you want God to grow more in you?
5. How does knowing that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” change how you face temptations and struggles this week?

Closing Anchor Scripture

Galatians 5:25

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

Closing Prayer Thought:

“Lord, awaken us daily. When flesh pulls us down, lift us by Your Spirit. Teach us to walk in step with You, bearing fruit that glorifies Your name.”