



GPS GUIDE Grow, Pray, Serve Guide for Weekly Reflection

(adapted from United Methodist Church of the Resurrection resources: sharechurch.com)

September 29, 2024 The Presence and Power of God

Romans 8:11 (CEB), Galatians 5:22-23a (CEB), 1 Corinthians 12:1 (CEB) and Romans 8:14 (NRSV)

The Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts

MONDAY 9.30.24 Romans 5:1-5

Did You Know?

The Holy Spirit was a major subject for the apostle Paul. "In numeric terms, *rûah* refers to the Spirit of God an estimated 90 times in the Hebrew Scriptures.... In contrast *pneuma* refers to God's Spirit 112 to 115 times (depending on the understanding of some passages) in the much smaller collection of letters [by Paul]."¹ We cannot study all of those verses in six days of GPS but aim to underscore many of the apostle's major teachings about the Holy Spirit this week.

Emotions are volatile. As we follow Jesus, we don't always feel that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts." Even reformers like Martin Luther or John Wesley felt "down" at times. "The story of Scripture, Luther began to understand, is not how we make our way up the mountain by getting grace and then topping it off with love and works. Scripture is the story of how God came down to meet us—while we were yet sinners."² The apostle Paul said the Holy Spirit's presence fills our hearts with the reality of God's love, however we feel.

- Paul said the Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts. This divine presence is a gift to all believers, helping you experience God's love in a personal way. How aware are you of the Holy Spirit's work in your life? Can you recall a time when you felt particularly guided or comforted by the Spirit? How might actively seeking the Spirit's presence change your daily walk with God?
- Paul twice used forms of the Greek verb *kauchaomai* in Romans 5. In verse 2, the Common English Bible renders it "we boast in the hope of God's glory." Verse 3 reads, "We even take pride in our problems," which may be even harder to believe. In both spots, the verb implied "to rejoice, be very happy."³ Has the movement Paul described from trouble to endurance, to character, to hope ever helped lead you to trust that the Holy Spirit has "poured out" divine love in your heart?

¹ Terence P. Paige, article "Holy Spirit" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, p. 405.

² Steven Paulson, *Luther for Armchair Theologians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 62-63.

³ Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1973, p. 93.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your willingness to die for me before I was even born, and to draw my heart to you. And thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to guide me into your kind of life. Amen.

The Holy Spirit frees and helps us

TUESDAY 10.1.24 Romans 8:1-5, 22-27

Did You Know?

When the apostle Paul dictated this letter, he did not pause after Romans 7:25 and say, “Chapter 8.” “In the early 13th century, the Archbishop of Canterbury... Stephen Langton invented a new way to subdivide the books of the Bible into a more digestible format: the chapter.”⁴ Romans 8:1 was not a new subject, but the result of Jesus' salvation laid out at what we call “chapter 7:24-25.” Paul contrasted a life oriented toward self (Greek “life in the flesh”) and a life the Holy Spirit oriented toward God. “When Paul uses the word ‘flesh’... he does not intend us simply to think of the ‘physical’ world.... ‘flesh’ refers to people or things who share the corruptibility, mortality and rebellion of the world.... ‘Spirit’, by contrast, usually refers to God’s own spirit, the holy spirit.”⁵ He saw the Spirit as a constant companion, connecting us with God even when we're not sure what to say or how to pray.

- In Romans 8:3, Paul wrote that God sent “his own Son to deal with sin.” Moralistic religion often deepens guilt by implying it’s your job to “deal with sin” on your own. He also said in 8:26-27 that when you feel overwhelmed or unsure how to pray, the Spirit “pleads your case.” How might acknowledging the Holy Spirit's presence give you greater peace and confidence when you face difficult situations or moments of uncertainty in your daily life?

- In Romans 8:23 Paul called the Holy Spirit the “first crop of the harvest.” Elsewhere he called the Holy Spirit the Greek word *arrabōn* (“down payment”). “When God anoints someone with the spirit, Paul declares, this is the first part of the gift which will be completed in the resurrection itself. If the Christian hope is founded on Jesus’ own resurrection, that hope becomes a real possession within us through God’s gift of the spirit.”⁶ Can you trust that every good life change the Spirit brings is a “down payment” on your eternal resurrection life with God?

Prayer: Gracious God, how I look forward to eternity with you. Thank you that your presence with me in the Holy Spirit lets me begin to “taste” what that glorious eternity will be like. Amen.

The Holy Spirit makes the church graciously inclusive

WEDNESDAY 10.2.24 Romans 14:13-19, 15:7-16

⁴ From <https://www.biblegateway.com/learn/bible-101/bible-verses-and-chapters/>.

⁵ Wright, N. T., Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 14). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Ibid

Examine what various congregations list in their “What We Believe” statements (easy on the Internet). You’ll usually find lists at least 8 to 15 items long. Yet in Romans, sent to a group of smaller “house churches” in Rome (cf. Romans 16:5, 10, 15), Paul named the central truth of God’s kingdom in just a 3 part phrase: “God’s kingdom is... about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” God’s kingdom is about living in peace and lifting each other up, not about winning arguments.

- We may not debate food laws or Sabbath observance today, but we DO differ, often strongly, about abortion, immigration, how God views varied sexual orientations, what “the Bible is inspired” means, and maybe even church music! Paul said, “Stop judging each other.” Was that a “low” rule, one even a woman taken in adultery or a thief on a cross could pass, or in fact a tough, “high” standard? Which challenges you more: the “height” or the “lowness” of Paul’s standard?
- As God’s people focus their spiritual walk on “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit,” Paul said they can stop sniping at one another. In 14:14-16, he asked the “progressives” (like him) “to recognize that there are [some] occasions when they need to hold back from this freedom for the sake of those whose Christian faith would be irreparably damaged by such behavior.”⁷ How can you use your God-given freedom in ways that bless others, not just to enhance your own life?

Prayer: Lord God, only you are wise enough to judge each person’s thoughts and heart intentions. Help me release the urge to judge others, and instead to seek to show all people your peace and love. Amen.

The Holy Spirit makes your body a temple

THURSDAY 10.3.24 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

In the apostle Paul’s day, the Greek city of Corinth was very rich and VERY immoral. Scholar William Barclay wrote “the very word *Korinthiazesthai*, to live like a Corinthian, had become a part of the Greek language, and meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery.”⁸ * Paul told believers there that saving sex for committed relationships (which Greeks and Romans seldom did) was a worthy aim.⁹ He based that on a principle that involved much more than sex: “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you.”

⁷ Wright, N.T., Paul for Everyone, Romans Part Two: Chapters 9-16 (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 107). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

⁸ William Barclay, The Letters to the Corinthians (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 2.

⁹ The Greek New Testament never used the Greek word *eros*. This was likely due to the immoral overtones the Greeks and Romans gave the word. Instead, a scholarly guide for translators referred to “the euphemisms that Paul uses in referring to sexual matters.” (from Paul Ellingworth and Howard A. Hatton, A Handbook on Paul’s First Letter

- Every night in Corinth, “sacred” prostitutes (historians estimate 100 to 1000) from Aphrodite’s Temple (Greek goddess of “love”) sold sexual favors. There are clear differences, but how are today’s culture and views like Corinth’s? Paul then taught that in a sexual relationship, each person should actively seek their partner’s good, not just their own pleasure (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1- 9). How can the Holy Spirit guide you to live God’s way, even when the world around you pulls in different directions?

- The image of your body being a temple of the Holy Spirit is both empowering and challenging. It invites you to seriously consider how you live in and through your physical self. What's one area of your life where you could more fully honor God with your body? In what ways can knowing that God desires to dwell in you and guide you all the time help you think more clearly about your body, and make better choices about what you do with it?

Prayer: King Jesus, make all of me—body, mind and heart—a temple where your Holy Spirit dwells. Remodel me from the inside out in your beautiful holy image. Amen.

The Holy Spirit leads the community to holy oneness

FRIDAY 10.4.24 Ephesians 4:1-6

First century or twenty-first, every group deals with tension and conflict for one simple reason: we are different. Today’s passage didn’t ignore differences (cf. Ephesians 4:11-13). It did say that as different as we are, we can find and preserve “the unity of the Spirit.” It listed no fewer than seven “ones” that unite God’s people, and then ended in verse 6 with three “alls.” Unity isn't an optional convenience achieved by human effort, but an essential gift from God through the Holy Spirit.

- Can you see the ways that the differences between people, when valued and respected, bring depth and strength (even when they pose challenges)? How can valuing and celebrating the strength that grows from differences help to keep you from building relationship-destroying walls of separation? The passage said one key to helping each other grow is “speaking the truth in love.” Which do you find harder with others: speaking the truth at all, or doing so in love?
- It takes “effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit leads, not forces. We read about “suppressing the Spirit;” and you can “brush off” Spirit-inspired messages (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20). Destroying unity makes the Spirit “unhappy” (cf. Ephesians 4:29-31). “The Spirit is unhappy when believers speak destructive words about others and when people

to the Corinthians. New York: United Bible Societies, 1993, p. 143.) In his letters, Paul used the Greek word agape (self-giving love) over and over.

divide against one another.”¹⁰ How can you value and preserve the Holy Spirit’s gift of unity in all your contacts?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, make me the kind of person who always speaks the truth, but who only speaks it in love. Guide me to listen in that spirit as well as speak, to preserve your precious gift of unity. Amen.

The Holy Spirit bears “fruit” in your life

SATURDAY 10.5.24 Galatians 5:16-24

In the first-century Roman Empire, many believed a good life meant “do whatever feels good at the moment.” They viewed the actions and qualities the apostle Paul listed in Galatians 5:19-21 as part of, or at least side-effects of, having “fun.” They called it “hedonism”—“a general term for all theories of conduct in which the criterion is pleasure of one kind or another.”¹¹ * It’s still popular today. The apostle Paul rebuffed hedonism, but also rejected the idea of other philosophers and religious teachers who said the key to a good life was a kind of self-righteous “goodness” (“all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse,” he said in Galatians 3:6-11). The real key, he said, is not following a set of laws, but the Holy Spirit working within you. The Holy Spirit, rather than your own selfish wishes (literally “flesh” in Greek), will direct and shape your life. He expressed the results of the Spirit’s guidance with the metaphor of “fruit” borne from inner reality, not outward effort.

- Compare the qualities listed as the results of following “your selfish desires” in verses 19-21 with the “fruit of the Spirit” in verses 22-23. Do you agree that the fruit of the Spirit produces a better quality of life than the preceding list? If so, remember: “The nine qualities Paul lists in verses 22–23 are not things which, if we try hard enough, we could simply do without help, without the spirit.”¹² ** Which of the traits the Holy Spirit offers to grow in you are already most present? Which of them do you most want the Spirit’s power to grow in you? With gentle irony (and deep seriousness) Paul followed his list of the fruit of the Spirit with the phrase, “There is no law against things like this.” Why would God (or you) make a law against qualities that make life so much better? When have you let go of your own agenda, and found that the Holy Spirit gives you something better, deeper and more freeing than the things you used to think you wanted?

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, by your gentle, powerful presence grow your beautiful fruit to fill and guide me to that wonderful life against which there is no law. Amen.

¹⁰ Timothy G. Gombis, study note on Ephesians 4:30 in The CEB Study Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 369 NT.

¹¹From <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hedonism>.

¹² Wright, N.T., Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians (The New Testament for Everyone), (p. 72). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.