

THE SPIRIT IS GOOD

THE GOODNESS OF GOD 6

He abides with us and dwells in us. That's good news.



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

The Spirit is Good

The Spirit is Good
The Goodness of God 6
T. M. Moore
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

Copyright, 2018 T. M. and Susie Moore
The Fellowship of Ailbe

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Spirit is Good

Contents

Welcome to <i>The Spirit is Good</i>	4
1 Merciful Instructor and Guide	5
2 The Spirit of Unity	7
3 Holy Work	9
4 A Symphony of Goodness	11
5 Becoming New Creatures	13
6 The Creative Power of God	15
7 Force for Love	17
Questions for Reflection of Discussion	19

The Spirit is Good

Welcome to *The Spirit is Good*

The supreme power for goodness dwells in the heart of everyone who believes in Jesus.

That is very good news, indeed.

The Spirit of God teaches us about goodness, shapes us for good works, and transforms and empowers us to bring love and goodness of God to light in the land of the living. We need to get to know the Spirit, and to be filled with Him and to walk in His ways.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Merciful Instructor and Guide

*Yet in Your manifold mercies
You did not forsake them in the wilderness.
The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day,
To lead them on the road;
Nor the pillar of fire by night,
To show them light,
And the way they should go.
You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,
And did not withhold Your manna from their mouth,
And gave them water for their thirst.* Nehemiah 9.19, 20

Good as God

In this series we're seeking to discover ways we can realize more of the goodness of God. Christians are a people who have been redeemed, called, equipped, and sent for good works. We should so long for the goodness of God to come to light in and through us, that this is a primary focus of all our prayers and everything we do.

But for this to happen, we need to learn about good works – what they are, what makes them good, and where we can turn to learn more about them. Good works reflect and refract the character of God by expressing His goodness in ways that bring things together, express the holiness, harmony, and order of God, nurture creative expressions of obedience, and touch others with the love of Christ. We've seen that God Himself, as revealed in His Word, should be our primary focus in discerning and learning His goodness. But the goodness of God is also revealed in creation and culture, and especially in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. By looking to these, we can, as individuals and communities of believers, plan and undertake all manner of good works that will cause the goodness of God to be seen in our lives and communities.

It makes sense to think that the Holy Spirit might also reveal the goodness of God to us. This is because He is God, and He shares with the Father and the Son all those characteristics of goodness that we so want to realize.

As we continue our quest to grow in the goodness of God, therefore, we turn to the Holy Spirit and the work He does to help us in bringing the goodness of God to light in the land of the living.

Presence, guidance, instruction, provision

In the prayer of the Levites, recorded in Nehemiah 9, we discover four primary works of the Holy Spirit which manifest the goodness of God.

First, the Holy Spirit brings the *presence* of God to us (Neh. 9.19). The Spirit has been sent to be with us, and to dwell in all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 14.15-17). Every believer has *all* the Holy Spirit living in his soul. Yet the Holy Spirit is not confined to one or even to *all* believers. Here is a mystery, one we accept by faith. Dwelling within us, the Spirit, as the *presence* of God, brings the *power* of God to transform us into the very image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

And, since, as we have seen, Jesus Christ is the very *embodiment* of the goodness of God, we shall be grateful for and rejoice as much of that transforming work that the Spirit present in and with us can do.

Second, the Spirit provides *guidance* for all who believe. He was in the fire and smoke that led Israel through the wilderness (Neh. 9.19), and He daily guides believers into all the truth of God's Word, that they might

The Spirit is Good

know how to walk the paths of goodness that Jesus walked, and glorify God (Jn. 16.13, 14; 1 Jn. 2.1-6; 1 Cor. 2.12, 13, 16). This is why it is so important to learn what it means to be filled with the Spirit and to walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh (Eph. 5.18-21; Gal. 5.16-23).

Third, the Spirit *instructed* the people of God as they journeyed through the wilderness (Neh. 9.20). He continues to be our primary Teacher today (Jn. 16.8-15). He does this work by convicting and convincing us of what is *sinful* and to be avoided; what is *righteous* and to be embraced and obeyed; and what is *threatened* in the way of judgment and discipline if we fail to learn according to how and what He teaches.

Finally, the Spirit has an important role in making sure we have all the *provision* we need – of daily bread, wisdom and understanding, spiritual fruit and gifts, and power to live as witnesses for Jesus Christ (Neh. 9.20; 1 Cor. 4.20; Gal. 5.22, 23; 1 Cor. 12.7-11; Acts 1.8). All our needs, whatever they may be, are supplied for us in Jesus (Phil. 4.19); and having His Spirit, we have everything we need. He is the power of God's Kingdom, in which all the abundance of God flows to those who know, enjoy, love, and serve Him.

Seek the Spirit

Luke 11.1-13 is a most important passage for us when it comes to the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of faith. The disciples came to Jesus and asked instruction about how to pray (v. 1). Jesus happily complied by teaching them to pray what we know as the Lord's Prayer (vv. 2-4). Then He added that we must be prepared to persevere in prayer, to stay at it without growing weary (cf. Lk. 18.1), because prayer is hard work, and the answers we seek can, for a variety of very good reasons, be sometimes long in coming (vv. 5-10). He then promised that God will not fail to hear and answer our prayers (vv. 11, 12). This is all very clear, helpful, and encouraging to us who do not know how to pray as we should (Rom. 8.26).

Finally, Jesus rolled all this instruction about prayer into one omnibus petition: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (v. 13) All the good promises of God, all His good blessings, all the goodness of the Lord we could ever hope to realize in the land of the living – all this goodness is in and by the good Spirit of God.

For reflection

1. Why did the Levites refer to the Holy Spirit as "good" in their prayer? Is this how you experience the Holy Spirit?
2. Why is prayer a proper setting for realizing the goodness of God's Spirit.
3. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? What does it mean to "walk" in the Spirit?

Next steps – Preparation: How can you know when you're walking in the Spirit and are filled with Him? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.

2 The Spirit of Unity

*Teach me Your way, O LORD;
I will walk in Your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.* Psalm 86.11

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4.1-3

Keeping it together

Christians are redeemed and called to do good works. The purpose of this study of the goodness of God is to help us identify and improve in doing good, since this is how we restore a measure of God's original design to the world (Gen. 1.31; Eph. 3.2-10).

Jesus Christ is filling the world with Himself through the good works of His people (Eph. 4.8-10; Eph. 1.22, 23). He does this as believers, filled with His Spirit, discern the course and walk the path He walked. To this end, the Lord Jesus and our heavenly Father have sent the Holy Spirit to abide with and dwell within His people, that He might work within us in powerful ways to bring the goodness of God to light in the land of the living (Jn. 14.15-17; Gal. 5.22, 23).

The Spirit works within individual believers and their churches to effect a powerful unity, a unity that cannot be realized apart from Him, and that has the effect of bringing the goodness of God to light in all aspects of life and the world, and of convincing the world of the truth of the Gospel. Without the unifying work of the Spirit, nothing good would issue from us or our churches. He must unite the different aspects of a believer's soul, and the inward and outward operations of the believer's life; and He must bring together the various members of the Body of Christ for consistent service and witness to the surrounding world.

The Spirit within us is ever working to unify our souls and lives, and to bind us together as one Body so that, through us, Jesus might fill our world with His living and loving presence, beginning in our Personal Mission Fields and our local communities (Phil. 2.13). But for this to happen, we must work out this inward salvation, devoting ourselves to seeing soul and body unified in Christ, and our churches united in their mission and witness to the surrounding community and the world (Phil. 2.12; Eph. 4.3).

The unity of the Spirit, which sustains the glorious bond of peace and declares the reality of Jesus to the watching world (Jn. 17.21), does not just happen. We must work hard, as Paul explains, or this great spiritual unity and the goodness it spawns will never come to pass.

Unity in the believer

The Holy Spirit is the divine power for restoring our reconciled souls and lives to God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. Without that power, our souls fragment – heart, mind, and conscience warring against each other, each insisting that it knows best how we should will and choose. And without the power of the Spirit, soul and body do not coordinate for good works, but pursue every wanton path of self-interest that strikes our fancy.

The Spirit comes to give us the *mind* of Christ, to renew our affections in the *heart* of God and His Law, and to anchor our values and priorities in the *will* of God as revealed in His Word. He works within us to transform all aspects of our soul into the image of Jesus Christ, and then to apply that renewed soul to a life of worship, obedience, and good works.

The Spirit is Good

The Spirit unites our affections – all those powerful sentiments that issue from the heart – under the fear of God, which is the most important affection, and which focuses the mind and aligns the conscience for obedience, love, and service for God. Our part is to: submit to the Spirit as He teaches and convicts us from God’s Word (Jn. 16.8-11); seek the filling of the Spirit for all aspects of life (Eph. 5.18-21); and walk in the Spirit, allowing His ways to direct all our steps, so that we become the witnesses for Christ the Lord intends (Gal 5.16-23; Acts 1.8).

Unity among the churches

Similarly, the Spirit works to create unity within and between the churches of the Lord, so that all the various members can find their place in the Body of Christ, and collaborate harmoniously in *being* that Body in the world. Our part here is to identify, develop, and employ the gifts of the Spirit for ministry, and to seek ways of joining our various congregations – in worship, service, and witness – into a larger Kingdom community within our local community, as the holy presence of Christ and a powerful source of beauty and joy for that community (Ps. 48.1-3).

When believers live in the unity of the Spirit, when their churches reflect that unity in spiritual fruit and gifts, and when churches together within a community work hard (Eph. 4.3) to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, then the world will believe that Jesus has been sent from the Father and that the dispensation of saving grace and Kingdom goodness has broken into the world (Jn. 17.21).

Believers must become better acquainted with the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, so that we might know His sanctifying and unifying power at work within us for bringing the goodness of God to light through us throughout our communities.

For reflection

1. How does the power of the Spirit work in us to enable us to do good works?
2. Paul says we have to “work hard” to maintain the unity of the Spirit, both individually and as churches. What does that entail?
3. What does it mean to submit to the Spirit? How can we know when we are filled with Him?

Next steps – Transformation: How can believers help one another know more of the transforming power of the Spirit in their lives? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.

3 Holy Work

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2.12, 13

The Spirit Old and New

The Spirit of God features prominently in the New Testament. Beginning with the baptism of Jesus, then greatly accelerating on the first Christian Pentecost, the Spirit's role in the coming of the Kingdom and the progress of the Gospel is paramount. Without the Spirit there is no Kingdom on earth as in heaven, no witness for Christ, no Church being built as the temple of the Lord, no true understanding of God's Word, and no power to save sinners or sanctify saints.

The Holy Spirit features in the Old Testament but not as prominently or intimately. The Spirit hovered over the creation, as the active agent in its coming to be. He came upon and even dwelled in saints from time to time, to empower them in various ways, most particularly, for the writing of Scripture. He superintended the work of God over all the earth during the period of the Old Testament, but from afar, as it were, rather than in a permanent, abiding sense.

The Old Testament promised that the Spirit would come one day, and when He did, hearts would change, the Kingdom of God would be established and increase on earth, and Immanuel God would be with His people in a new, more intimate, more powerful and transformative, and more permanent way. This is why Jesus referred to the Spirit as the "promise of the Father", subsuming in Him all the precious and very great promises of the Old Testament by which we are made partakers of the divine nature (Acts 1.4; 2 Pet. 1.4).

Jesus explained to His disciples (Jn. 14-16) that the pouring out of the Spirit was to establish a permanent divine presence among the followers of Christ, to instruct them in all the Word and will of God, and to empower them to do abundant good works, greater in number than those Jesus was able to do on His own during those short years of His earthly sojourn. And all that indwelling, instruction, and empowering was to be for the purpose of *holiness*. He is the *Holy* Spirit who works within the followers of Christ to bring forth the goodness of God in the land of the living.

The Spirit within

Now the Spirit has been sent to all who believe in Jesus, to open their hearts for salvation and to dwell within them unto sanctification – improving holiness in the fear of God (Gal. 4.6; Jn. 14.15-17; Ezek. 36.26, 27). The Spirit of God is sent to *work* within us, enabling us to will and do that which engages the pleasure of God. His work releases spiritual energy for transformation, so that we might be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). How does this happen?

First, the Spirit inclines us to God and His Word, provoking in us a desire to know the Lord (Jer. 31.31-34). Then He brings us to the Scriptures, wherein He reveals the glory of God to us. With this the Spirit works to transform our minds, so that how we think and what we think might be more in line with what God has revealed in His holy and righteous and good Law (Rom. 7.12; 8.5-9).

As we are renewed by the Spirit in our minds, our *desires* and *aspirations* begin to change, so that all the affections of our heart are united in the fear of God (Ps. 86.11).

This, in turn, causes the things of God to settle in our conscience and become the default choices and values which guide our lives. So the mind informs the heart, and the heart and mind shape the conscience, which then arbitrates between affections and thoughts to engender holy choices and actions in all our words and

The Spirit is Good

deeds. When the Spirit is working, energizing our soul with Kingdom power, this process increases and grows more beautiful and permanent.

That this is not always the case, or that our progress in holiness can be so slow, is not the Spirit's fault. We also have a role to play in working out our salvation in fear and trembling.

Working with the Spirit

Our responsibility is threefold: We must *learn* the ways of the Spirit. This means studying God's Law and all His Word, getting as much of the Lord's meaning as we can, and discerning the presence of Christ in all His Word.

Second, we must *submit* to the ways of the Spirit. As He, using God's Word and glory, convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment, we must agree with Him, embrace His teaching, and discipline our souls to think, feel, and value in line with His teaching. Whatever in our soul does not conform to the Word of God, as illuminated to us by His Spirit, must be excised and replaced with right thinking, affections, and priorities.

Finally, we must *obey* the Spirit, by being *filled* with Him and *walking* in Him throughout the course of our daily lives. Here prayer without ceasing – that continuous awareness of and communion with the Lord through His Spirit – is an indispensable aid. The more we remain in an attitude and envelope of prayer throughout the day, the more we will both *bear* the Spirit as He reminds us of the things of Christ, and *draw on His power* to live out our witness for Christ.

The Holy Spirit has been sent to us to do that holy work which transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ. Let us not quench the Spirit's work by neglect or disobedience. Instead, let us work hard to get in step with the Spirit (J. I. Packer), so that He might bring God's goodness out in us in all our ways.

For reflection

1. How can you know when the Spirit of God is working in you as God intends?
2. What are some ways we can quench the Spirit, so that His work does not go forward in us?
3. How can Christians encourage and assist one another in learning, submitting to, and obeying the ways of the Spirit?

Next steps – Transformation: What are some areas of your life where you would like to see more of God's goodness coming to light? Spend some time in prayer, turning these areas over to the Spirit, and pleading with Him to transform you into the image of Jesus.

4 A Symphony of Goodness

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1.8

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all... 1 Corinthians 12.7

Ministers all

In many churches, a misguided view of *ministry* hinders the good work of the Spirit in building the Body of Christ.

This was made graphically clear to me on one occasion when I was conducting a workshop in a church outside Philadelphia. During a break I wandered the halls, just to stretch my legs and get a bit more of the flavor of this church. On a wall outside the church offices was a poster entitled, “The Ministries of Our Church.” Under that heading, depicted in a neat and tidy organizational chart, were all the official activities sponsored in the name of *ministry* by this church, arranged by departments, committees, and teams.

I studied that poster for a while. Here were all the familiar players: Worship Committee, Christian Education Committee, Youth Team, Children’s Ministry, and so forth. Visitors and members could here discover all that was available to them within this building. And, as in many other churches, it was clear that efforts were being made to provide some kind of *ministry* for everyone.

The message was clear: *Ministry* was what this church did for its members. In this view, *ministries* are church-sponsored activities for church members, so that everyone can find a place.

But this is not the view of *ministry* which we find in the New Testament. Or at best, it’s only part of the New Testament’s understanding of *ministry*, and surely not the most important part.

A symphony of ministry

According to the apostle Paul, *ministry* is what church members do, as they are being equipped by church leaders. *Ministry* results in building the local church in unity and maturity in the Lord (Eph. 4.11-16). Churches don’t do *ministry*. Equipped church members do *ministry*. The word *ministry* originally referred to what a waiter at a banquet does, as he keeps an eye on his assigned tables. His job was to make sure that the needs of banqueters were met – clean utensils, timely drinks, and so forth. His focus was on others and their needs.

The *works of ministry* for which God’s people are to be equipped are similar to this. Each believer is assigned a Personal Mission Field made up of people and places throughout the local community. We have been sent to this world as Jesus was sent (Jn. 20.21), to bring near, by words and deeds, the reality of the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit.

Ministry requires the Spirit to bring forth spiritual fruit in each believer, and to provide the instruction, gifts and skills, and power to serve others for Jesus’ sake. Such *ministry* includes what we do for one another in the local church, but it is by no means limited to this. Most of us spend the large bulk of our time out in our Personal Mission Field, and we are called to do whatever *works of ministry* will enable us to show the love of Jesus to the people in our lives.

As the Spirit of God works in local congregations, cultivating fruit, distributing gifts for ministry, and sending out the saints into their Personal Mission Fields, a veritable *symphony of ministry* plays out in the community, bringing the glorious melodies and harmonies of God’s grace and truth to light in all the relationships, roles, and responsibilities of the saints of God. It is the work of the Spirit, through and in local churches, to bring

The Spirit is Good

these joyous, Good News tones to every niche, nook, and neighbor of the local community, moving and empowering God's people for good works in ways appropriate to the needs and situations before them.

This is the *ministry* the Spirit uses to cause the goodness of God to abound within a local community.

The *ministry* of the local church is only partly that which church leaders provide for members within the walls of the local building. More importantly, *ministry* is what the Spirit does, bringing forth His fruit, exercising His gifts, and distributing His power throughout local communities as equipped church members go as Kingdom ambassadors into their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, marketplaces, and schools as Kingdom salt, light, and leaven. When this work of the Spirit is properly pursued, then the grace of Jesus Christ becomes visible, and people can see and experience the reality of the Kingdom not of this world (Acts 11.22, 23).

Seek the greatest gifts

Local communities are a network of relationships of various kinds. God's mission for His churches is that their members should be the Body of Christ throughout their local community, and not just as they are assembled together in their preferred building.

We must seek the gifts of the Spirit, and especially the gift of love (1 Cor. 14.1). People from every walk of life should continually brush up against and have interaction with Christians from various local churches. As those Christians, filled with the Spirit and wielding His many different gifts – reach out in the *power* of the Spirit to the people they interact with each day, a fragrance of Christ spreads throughout the community, and a symphony of grace and truth arises in the many and harmonious good works of God's *ministers* in every place, bringing the love of Jesus and the hope of glory to the lost world.

This work of bringing God's goodness to our communities is the work of God's Spirit, and it flows through the *ministries* of all those who are united in Jesus in His Body.

For reflection

1. How is the word *ministry* used in your church? How does your church equip its members for *ministry*?
2. Our Personal Mission Field is simply the sphere of influence we travel in within our community. Have you identified your Personal Mission Field? How might the Spirit of God bring His goodness to light through your *ministry* there? Watch this brief video ([click here](#)), then download the worksheet, map out your Personal Mission Field, and let the Spirit work His goodness through you day by day.
3. What are some of the most common opportunities for showing the grace and speaking the truth of Jesus that you encounter in your Personal Mission Field each week? How can the Holy Spirit help you to be a more consistent source of God's goodness there?

Next steps – Transformation: Meditate on Psalm 90.12, 16, 17. Give thanks to the Lord for the people in your Personal Mission Field. Ask the Spirit to show you what you can do today to play your part in His symphony of grace and truth.

5 Becoming New Creatures

*You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;
And You renew the face of the earth.* Psalm 104.30

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Galatians 4.6

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5.17

Ordo salutis

The work of the Spirit of God is unto salvation, sanctification, and glorification in all those who believe. When God sends forth His Spirit into a person's heart, the Spirit tears out the heart of stone and implants a heart of flesh – a new and living heart, open and eager to embrace God and His rule (Ezek. 36.26, 27). From that point forward, those in whom the Spirit dwells and is working become increasingly new creations in Christ Jesus, as they are transformed from glory to glory into the very image of the Lord (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

The process by which this happens in people – delivering us from sin and shame to forgiveness and freedom in Christ – is an orderly process. It is a mystery how this works, especially to think of the Spirit of God, as Paul indicates, engaging our mouths with His own power to cry out to God, "Abba, Father!" We can understand the Spirit's work, but not entirely (Eccl. 3.11).

But while this process is a mystery, it is orderly, and can be known and shared with others. The order of God's saving events in a person's life – what theologians refer to as the *ordo salutis* – reaches all the way back to before the beginning of creation (cf. Eph. 1.4), and unfolds in an orderly progress that includes election, redemption in Jesus Christ, calling, regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption into God's household, sanctification, persevering in Christ, and glorification. And at each stage of the process, and within each of its several steps, the Spirit of God is working in an orderly and understandable manner to bring forth the good fruit of the Gospel in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is the Life-giver, the Maker of every new creation. He works with the Word of God to unpack the new life of salvation in all who believe (Jn. 6.63), bringing forth in them the good works of God (Eph. 2.8-10).

Our responsibility, knowing that God the Spirit is at work within us, is to get in step with His orderly way of working, so that the goodness of God's saving work in our lives become increasingly evident (Phil. 2.12, 13).

The Spirit works with the Word

First, therefore, we must understand that *the Spirit of God works with the Word of God* to bring forth the goodness of God in those who believe.

We will not increase in God's goodness until we embrace this most fundamental aspect of the Spirit's working. They who neglect reading and study of God's Word, or who merely dabble in the Word, or attend to it only while it is being preached or taught will *never* know the full and growing presence of the Spirit, bringing forth fruit and equipping us with gifts for ministry.

Beginning with daily grounding in the Law of God and the things of Christ (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Jn. 16.14, 15), and within that framework, coursing regularly through all the counsel of God in Scripture (2 Tim. 3.15-17; Acts 20.26, 27), we must nurture the daily discipline of reading and meditating in God's Word. The Spirit will

The Spirit is Good

not bypass this first and most important step. If we want to know His power and goodness working through us, we must queue up with the Word day by day, so that the Spirit can feed us the spiritual food of the Lord.

The Spirit works through prayer

Likewise, the Spirit works through *prayer*. We do not know how to pray as we should, so the Spirit stands ready to help us, enabling our prayers in mysterious ways, so that we may have the requests we make of our Father in Jesus' Name (Rom. 8.26, 27). If we will not pray, or if our prayers are merely occasional or perfunctory or incomplete, or if we ask amiss in prayer because we want only what we consider to be best for us (Jms. 4.2, 3), we will not be able to tap the Spirit's power for the goodness of God.

We must learn to pray the way God insists we should. Here we can do no better than to let the Lord's Prayer be a guide for us as we pray, supplementing its several sections with the words God has provided us elsewhere in Scripture, especially in the psalms.

Jesus said we must pray always, and not grow weary. Jesus understood that prayer is a crucial component of the Spirit's good work in our lives.

The Spirit works in daily obedience

Finally, the Spirit works through daily obedience (Gal. 5.16-23). He fills us, directs our steps, and teaches us what is sinful and righteous (Jn. 16.8-11). He leads us in the paths of righteousness; and He empowers us as we obey, to bear His fruit and live as witnesses for Christ.

There is clear order to the working of the Holy Spirit. He is working to unpack the good salvation of the Lord in our lives, and we can expect to know that great boon, increasingly and joyfully, to the extent that we submit to the Spirit's orderly working in all aspects of our lives.

For reflection

1. What do we mean by an "order of salvation"? Why does it matter that this is an *orderly* process?
2. What are the greatest hindrances to your spending more time in God's Word and prayer? How can you overcome these?
3. What can believers do to encourage one another to keep in step with the Holy Spirit?

Next steps – Transformation: What's one thing you could do to improve your time in God's Word and prayer?

6 The Creative Power of God

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3.18

The being indoors

The great Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo is reported to have said of sculpting, “Every block of stone has a statute inside it, and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.” Michelangelo was able to see in a block of stone *more* than just a block of stone. By fixing his mind on the image he intended, then chipping, sanding, smoothing, and polishing the stone, he was able to create some of the most magnificent sculptures the world as ever seen.

Gerard Manly Hopkins, that great 19th century poet, took Michelangelo’s observation further, and pondered the uniqueness of each creature, its “being indoors”, what it is within, and thus how it expresses itself:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

But he went further still, and claimed for human beings a divine “being indoors” that, by the grace of God, takes an infinite variety of forms:

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God’s eyes what in God’s eye he is –
Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.

In these ideas, Michelangelo and Gerard Manley Hopkins captured the essence of what the Spirit of God does in each one who believes in Jesus.

Do you know who you are?

My late father-in-law, Dr. Lane Adams, once told me of an interview he saw with the famous actor Kirk Douglas. It seems Mr. Douglas was driving the coastal highway on one occasion, when he passed a sailor, lugging a duffle bag and thumbing for a ride. Driving past the man, Douglas pulled over, and motioned for him to come on. The sailor ran up to the car, threw his duffle bag into the back seat and sat down in the front. He looked at Douglas, then looked again and said, in astonishment, “Do you know who you are?”

Every Christian should ask himself the same question: Do you know who you are? Or rather, do you know who you are *in the eyes of the Holy Spirit of God?*

We might think of ourselves as nobody special, but the Spirit sees Jesus in us. On the other hand, our view of ourselves might be more exalted than is justified; but even then, no matter how high and overblown our self-image, Jesus is greater, and Jesus is alive within us, straining to come forth.

The Spirit of God is transforming each of us who believes in Jesus *into the very image of Jesus*, without any of us losing that distinctive “being indoors” that is uniquely us. In every believer, the Spirit “does one thing and the same”: He transforms us into the image of Jesus, “Deals out that being indoors” which is Jesus in us. But He

The Spirit is Good

does it in “ten thousand places”, indeed, in ten thousand times ten thousand places, shining and refracting Jesus through our limbs and eyes and faces, in all our words and deeds.

We are children of God, adopted in Jesus Christ, indwelt by the Spirit of God, and in the process of being transformed from blockheads to blessings under the sculpting power of the Holy Spirit.

We have a part

And we have a part in this. The Spirit is working out the Lord’s salvation in us as He exposes us to the glory of the Lord in all the various places and ways God is making Himself known. The radiance of God’s presence, the beauty of His holiness, the enormity of His goodness, and the unwavering and uninterrupted power of His love bathe us with divine glory, reaching to the depths of our soul – heart, mind, and conscience.

From there, the glory revealed *to* us strains to boil up and flow over *through* us, as we submit to the Spirit and walk in His paths, fixing our eyes on Jesus and stepping into every situation ready to go beyond our own strength into the strength of the Spirit, for the glory of God the Father.

Do you know who you are? You’re not the blockhead you think. You have a Being indoors, within your soul, Who stretches and strains to come to expression in all your words and deeds. Seek the Lord and His glory. Let the Spirit open the Word and world of God to you, so that the goodness and beauty of the Lord break forth upon you, and let Him chip and sand and polish your soul so that you are transformed, step by step, attitude by attitude, gesture by gesture, situation by situation, day by day, glory by glory into the unique expression of Jesus, percolating within you.

Thus the goodness of the Lord will come forth in you, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

For reflection

1. How can you know that the Spirit of God is working within you to transform you into the image of Jesus Christ?
2. What prevents us from growing more consistently in Jesus? How can we overcome these hindrances?
3. What can believers do for one another to participate in the Spirit’s work of shaping us into the image of Jesus Christ?

Next steps – Conversation: Can you feel Jesus being formed in you? Can you see Jesus being formed in your fellow believers? Share your thoughts about this with some Christian friends.

7 Force for Love

But the fruit of the Spirit is love... Galatians 5.22

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. Ephesians 5.1, 2

No argument here

Advance the proposition in polite conversation that love is a good thing, and you're not likely to meet with many objections.

We may define love differently, and seek it along divergent avenues, but we know it when we see it, and we'd all like to see more of it than we do.

People have always known that love is a good thing. Great works of art and literature enshrine the importance of love. In our lifetime, love has been the driving force of pop culture. Think of the lines from songs: "What the world needs now is love, sweet love." "All you need is love." "Don't you want somebody to love?" "Love makes the world go 'round." Love factors into the themes of widely-acclaimed films and the most popular television programs. Consider the many ways advertisers use love to sell products.

People don't all agree on what they *mean* by the term, or how love ought to be *expressed*, or for what, but most people will concur with the proposition that love is a good thing.

The problem, of course, is that love, in its purest and most urgently needed form, is a rare fruit, and it does not grow naturally on the branches of human nature.

The fruit of the Spirit

The reason love is listed *first* of the fruit of the Spirit is because God Himself is love, and He understands our need for love. Through most of our lives we waste the desire for love by consuming it upon ourselves. Love as we know it naturally is mere self-love, and all the various other forms of love we practice are made to serve this basic form.

The kind of love that *denies* self and seeks the edification and wellbeing of others is most rare, and most needed. It grows on branches which blossom from beyond this world, and beyond our own natures.

And this is what makes the Holy Spirit so good as a manifestation of the goodness of God. For the fruit of the Spirit is love, and when we walk in the Spirit, we find the power from beyond our *selves* to know and express the love this world so desperately needs.

The Spirit empowers us to love

Love – the love which Christ embodies and communicates – is the great need of our day, the greatest expression of the goodness of God. God has sent His Spirit to abide with us and to dwell in us so that He might bring forth the fruit of divine love in us, and thus unlock the power of grace to restore all things to the Father.

How does the Spirit accomplish this work within us? How does He bear His fruit of love for the life of the world?

First, the Spirit *teaches us the true nature of love*. Throughout the Word of God, the Spirit provides examples of love, definitions of love, parables designed to illustrate love, songs and prayers to express love, and, above all,

The Spirit is Good

the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ to embody love. We cannot know true love apart from being taught by the Spirit. Love is what God does, and what the Spirit empowers us to do in imitation of Jesus Christ. All other forms of love must line behind this Spirit-taught form, or else they will corrupt into just another form of natural self-love. Our duty is to read and study the Bible with a view to learning love as God defines it, and not just as we might think it should be.

Second, the Spirit allows us to *see others with the mind of Christ*. That is, He works in us so that we think about the needs of others (Phil. 2.1-11), pay attention to their troubles and trials, and prepare for the opportunities the Spirit will give us for showing love (Eph. 5.15-17; Ps. 90.12, 16, 17). Our duty here is to wait on the Spirit in prayer, that He may search us, nurturing His love in our minds and hearts, and leading us to prepare for the day ahead, and even the next moment, so that we are ready to love.

Third, the Spirit *directs us to the next step of love* when opportunities for love arise, and He *empowers us to take that step*, even though it may be unfamiliar or risky. If we are truly walking in the Spirit, maintaining communion with Him according to His Word, then when He wants us to reach out to someone in love, and He piques or provokes us to take some step of obedience, we will hear Him, and we can call on Him to empower us for that step, which we take in obedient faith.

Finally, the Spirit *firms up the presence of love in our soul with every act of obedient love*, so that we become more like Christ, and are more inclined to love *by our new nature* rather by the old nature which seeks only the self.

We often hear people say that we are made for love. That's true: We are made to know the love of God in Jesus Christ, and to live in that love by His always-present Spirit. But not only are we made *for* love; we are made *to* love, and we will not fulfill this purpose unless we are indwelt by and filled with the Spirit of God to walk in His ways. For the Spirit of God is the key to love, that most precious gem of God's goodness.

For reflection

1. How do people use the word *love* in our day? Is this a good thing? Why or why not? What seems to be the standard meaning people are defaulting to when they *love*?
2. Why is love the most needed aspect of the goodness of God?
3. How can you rely more consistently on the Spirit of God to bring forth His fruit of love in your life?

Next steps – Conversation: What are the greatest obstacles to knowing and expressing more of God's love? How can Christians help one another overcome these? Talk with some Christian friends about this.

The Spirit is Good

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What does the Holy Spirit do to bring us to faith in Christ and new life in His love?
2. How does the Spirit work in us to make us new creatures in Christ Jesus?
3. How does the Spirit work in a local church to help it become the Body of Christ more truly?
4. Why must we have the Spirit of God, and walk in the Spirit of God, if we are to love as God intends?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.