

May 12

Lesson 11 (NIV)

CALLED TO LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 6:1-14

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 8

ROMANS 8:1-14

¹Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the

Spirit is life and peace. ⁷The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.



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KEY VERSE

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. — **Romans 8:1**

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Unit 3: Call to Life in Christ

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State two benefits for those who live by the Spirit.
2. Explain Paul's distinction between living by the Spirit and living by the flesh.
3. Identify a specific area where he or she is not living according to God's Spirit and make a plan to change.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Spiritual but Not Religious
 - B. Lesson Context
- I. Law of the Spirit (ROMANS 8:1–4)
 - A. Freedom from Sin (vv. 1, 2)
Guilt Without Condemnation
 - B. Weakness of the Law (vv. 3, 4)
 - II. Indwelling of the Spirit (ROMANS 8:5–11)
 - A. Life and Peace (vv. 5–8)
 - B. Four Facts (vv. 9–11)
 - III. Leading of the Spirit (ROMANS 8:12–14)
 - A. The Good Kind of Debt (vv. 12, 13)
 - B. The Right Kind of Status (v. 14)
Led by the Spirit?

Conclusion

- A. Flesh and Spirit
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Corinthians	Ko- <i>rin</i> -thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Ephesians	Ee- <i>fee</i> -zhunz.
Galatians	Guh- <i>lay</i> -shunz.
Lamentations	Lam-en- <i>tay</i> -shunz.
Pentecost	<i>Pent</i> -ih-kost.
Philippians	Fih- <i>lip</i> -ee-unz.
shalom	(<i>Hebrew</i>) shah- <i>lome</i> .
Thessalonians	<i>Thess</i> -uh- lo -nee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).

Introduction

A. Spiritual but Not Religious

For the last couple of decades, researchers have detected an increase in spiritual interest among people, but little or no increase in church affiliation or attendance. Some identify themselves as “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR). This usually means they have personal beliefs and practices that could be understood as “spiritual,” but have no desire to participate with what they see as “institutional religion.”

Some [SBNR](#) folks desire their own religious world apart from a church. This desire is not necessarily Christian in orientation, however. It often borrows spiritual practices from Eastern religions, Native American traditional religions, or ancient pagan sources. The good

news: a spiritual thirst exists out there. The bad news: the church is not being seen as the source for quenching that thirst. The insights of the apostle Paul are decisive in overturning this outlook—today’s lesson.

B. Lesson Context

The baseline for last week’s lesson from [Romans 3](#) was that all men and women are sinners. Even so, God has made a way for us to be counted righteous in his eyes.

In the texts that intervene between that lesson and this week’s, Paul went on to examine the life of the great ancestor of the Jews: Abraham. The key verse in that regard is that “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” ([Romans 4:3](#), quoting [Genesis 15:6](#); compare [Romans 4:22](#)). Abraham’s righteousness came through his faith. And that was before he was circumcised ([Genesis 17:24](#)) and long before the law was given through Moses.

Paul thereby concludes that faith (as opposed to works) is the God-established pathway to right standing with him. This pathway predates both circumcision and the law. Abraham was essentially a Gentile when God reckoned him as righteous, since Israel did not exist at the time. This fact undercuts any argument that proposes keeping the Law of Moses is the

way to earn God's favor and attain right standing with him.

In the chapters from Romans that follow, Paul discusses the three terrifying tyrants of humanity: sin, the law, and death. Sin had dominion over us, but we are freed by the grace of God ([Romans 6:14](#)). Sin held out the terror of death as its consequences ([6:16](#), [23](#)). The law enslaved us, but we have been freed to a new life ([7:6](#)).

Paul ends [Romans 7](#) with an expression of sincere gratitude for his deliverance from the bondage of sin and the law ([Romans 7:25](#)). As he does so, he prepares to address further the issue of the three tyrants.

I. Law of the Spirit ([ROMANS 8:1-4](#))

A. Freedom from Sin ([vv. 1, 2](#))

1. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

The opening *therefore* connects what follows with the now-powerless tyrants noted in the Lesson Context. The fact stated by this verse means, among other things, that the law no longer has power to judge us as requiring punishment. The punishment we have escaped *in Christ Jesus* is the sentence of eternal death due to our sin (see last week's lesson; com-

pare [Romans 5:21](#)).

GUILT WITHOUT CONDEMNATION

An article in the online edition of *The Washington Post* of August 26, 2017, carried this intriguing title: "Is accepting a pardon an admission of guilt?" The short answer: it's complicated.

On the one hand, the U.S. Supreme Court declared in 1915 that acceptance of a pardon carries with it a confession of guilt. A pardon therefore releases a person from penalty for a crime, but it does not change a "guilty" verdict to "not guilty."

On the other hand is the case of Keith Cooper, sentenced in 1997 to 40 years in prison for robbery. As the years passed, mounting evidence prompted the governor of Indiana to pardon Cooper in 2017 for being "innocent of that crime."

A dictionary definition of pardon is "release from the legal penalties of an offense." Consider also [Numbers 14:19](#): "Forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." Pardon and forgiveness are the same; wrongdoing is admitted, but relief from penalty is requested nevertheless. What the factually innocent Mr. Cooper should have received was not a pardon but full exoneration.

Sinners who stand before the judge of

the universe, however, cannot expect exoneration for the simple fact that we *are* guilty of sin. But Christians have the next best thing: no condemnation despite our guilt. How often does realization of this fact shake you to your core?

—R. L. N.

What Do You Think?

In what ways will you live differently in the week ahead given the realization that there is “now no condemnation” for you?

Digging Deeper

Frame your response in terms of one pattern each of behavior, speech, and thought.

2. because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

The opening *because* introduces Paul’s reasoning for the claim he makes in the previous verse. That claim is based in a contrast of two laws we see here.

Paul has used this approach before, and Bible students naturally have attempted to match them up. For example, is *the law of the Spirit who gives life [through Christ Jesus]* here the same as “the law that requires faith” in [Romans 3:27a](#)? Is *the law of sin and death* here the same as the “law that requires works” in [3:27b](#) and/or “the law of sin at work within me” in [7:23](#)?

Both *yes* and *no* conclusions are based on complicated analyses of the Greek text, and good arguments can be made in both directions. But perhaps more to Paul’s point is what we might call “realm transfer.” This idea (1) recognizes our new status as having been transferred from the realm of sin and death to the realm of life in Christ and (2) the agent of that liberation is *the Spirit*.

Some may object to this idea on the basis of seeming contradiction with the observation that Christ is the one who is the agent of liberation. To clarify, we look again at the beginning of the verse and the New Testament as a whole: the Spirit is indeed the one who gives life (see [Romans 8:10, 13](#), below; compare [Galatians 6:8](#); [Titus 3:5, 6](#)). But that work happens only within the context of the sin-penalty having been paid by Christ. So that there’s no mistaking the foundational work of Christ, Paul is quick to stress it again (next verse).

What Do You Think?

How will you witness to someone who doesn’t accept the Bible’s categories of sin and freedom from it?

Digging Deeper

How does Paul’s change of tactics between [Acts 17:2, 3](#) and [17:22–31](#) inform your response?

B. Weakness of the Law (vv. 3, 4)

3. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,

Paul has no argument with the integrity of the Jewish law. He has said it is good and holy ([Romans 7:12](#)). The weak link is in our keeping of *the law*. Our fleshly nature presents a problem not because it is inherently evil, but because it is weak. Our weakness negates any sort of saving power the law might represent (compare [7:18, 19](#)).

God's remedy for this weakness was to send *his own Son*. Our situation was dire and hopeless. The law can only condemn. No human being can overcome sin. So God provided one who *condemned sin in the flesh*, one who could live a victorious, sinless life. This is the act of the incarnation, the Son of God assuming human form according to God's plan (see [Galatians 4:4, 5](#)).

Paul chooses his words carefully. Jesus came *in the likeness of sinful flesh*—he appeared, physically, like any other man of his day. Had we seen him, we would have wrongly assumed him to be a sinner just like us. He was truly human, but without sin ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)).

Jesus had full awareness that his mission included his death as a sacrifice for sin, paying the price for our salvation ([Mark 10:45](#); [1 Timothy 2:6](#)). This price could not be paid unless Jesus died as a human (compare [Hebrews 2:14, 17](#)).

4. in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The righteous requirements of *the law* are not discarded but *fully met* through Christ. This fulfillment finds its expression *in us* because we are the beneficiaries of being justified (counted as righteous). The law maintains its righteousness without compromise while losing its power to condemn. The differences between those who [*live*] *according to the Spirit* and those who do not come next.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways we can make ourselves more open to the Spirit's influence?

Digging Deeper

How do [John 14:15-18](#); [Galatians 5:16-26](#); [Ephesians 4:29-32](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:19](#); and [1 John 4:1](#) inform your response?

II. Indwelling of the Spirit ([ROMANS 8:5-11](#))

A. Life and Peace (vv. 5-8)

5a. Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires;

Paul gives examples of *what the flesh desires* in [Galatians 5:19–21](#). Those whose “god is their stomach” are focused on “earthly things” ([Philippians 3:19](#)). Such people existed in the Old Testament era (example: [Isaiah 56:11, 12](#)), and, as we know all too well, they still exist today.

5b. but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

The word *those* does not refer to people who are so spiritual as to ignore bodily needs such as food, sleep, and clothing. It refers, rather, to those who are not controlled by such desires. Their primary focus is achieving spiritual intimacy with God. They find ways to do his will rather than their own. Paul gives examples in [Galatians 5:22–25](#).

6a. The mind governed by the flesh is death,

Having a *mind governed by the flesh* is to focus on the bodily impulses of the moment. Paul has previously noted that “those things result in death” ([Romans 6:21](#)). The wording in the text before us is even stronger: it equates being controlled by the flesh with *death* itself.

6b. but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

By contrast, those who have a *mind*

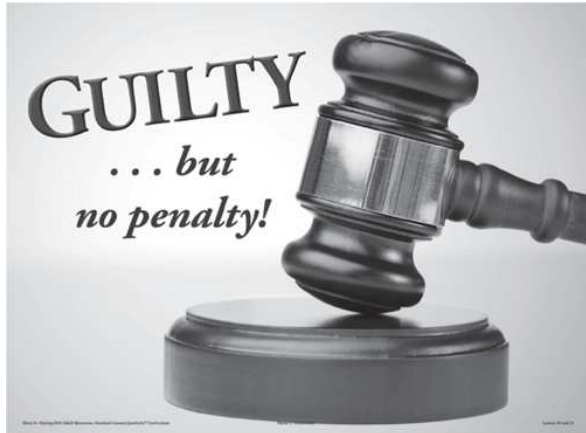
governed by the Spirit have a certain kind of *life and peace* that the fleshly minded do not. Paul expands on what he means by life in [Galatians 6:8](#): “Whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (compare [Romans 8:13](#), below). This kind of life removes our fear of death. That, in turn, results in us having peace about our future.

The way Paul uses the Greek word translated *peace* carries a significant difference from how the pagan world of his day uses it. For pagans, the word points primarily to outward peace, as in the absence of war or civil unrest. But Paul uses the word in terms of how the Greek Old Testament translates *shalom*, from the Hebrew Old Testament. In this sense, peace is more than the absence of strife. One who has the *shalom* kind of peace has inner contentment that results from having the blessings of God ([Isaiah 48:18](#); etc.). Those who live by the Spirit have such peace.

7a. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law,

With this verse, Paul moves from describing *what is so* to explaining *why it is so*. As we examine the two phrases *the mind governed by the flesh* and *hostile to God*, we notice that Paul does not say that one results in the other (contrast [Romans 6:21, 22](#)). Rather, he simply equates the

two; to be one is to be the other. [James 4:4](#) is quite similar in equating “friendship with the world” with “enmity against God.”



Visual for Lesson 10 & 11. Use this visual as a backdrop to comparing and contrasting the words condemn, pardon, forgiveness, and exoneration.

God’s law plays a defining role in all this. For the law to have been nailed to the cross ([Colossians 2:14](#)) means for Christians that our penalty for breaking the law has already been paid. But the law doesn’t disappear as a standard of conduct. For example, the sin of partiality or favoritism under the old covenant ([Exodus 23:3](#); [Leviticus 19:15](#)) is still sinful law-breaking under the new covenant ([James 2:1, 9](#)).

To live by the principles of the world is to live as if God’s law and the sin it defines do not exist. To live in such a way is to attempt to be a law unto oneself (compare [Romans 10:3](#); [2 Corinthians](#)

[10:2, 12](#)). And a focus on self is idolatry.

7b, 8. nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

The phrase *nor can it do so* concludes an inability to relate to the law as just discussed. Pleasing God is the only reasonable choice we can make (compare [Galatians 1:10](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:4](#); [4:1](#)). If we reject the way of faith, we will never please God (see [Hebrews 11:6](#)). What we do with this freewill choice is the most critical decision one can make ([Matthew 23:37](#); [John 3:16](#); etc.).

B. Four Facts (vv. 9–11)

9. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

The phrases *not in the realm of the flesh but ... in the realm of the Spirit* reflects Paul’s assumption that those to whom he writes have “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” ([Galatians 5:24](#)). The dominion concept in commentary to [Romans 8:2](#), above, presents itself again. A person is either within the dominion of the flesh or that of the Spirit. There is no in between, and four facts are important.

Fact 1 is that *the Spirit of God* indwells the Christian. This is spiritual language,

but that does not take away from its reality. The Holy Spirit cannot be detectable by scientific instruments, but is present nonetheless as a constant influence. While we may be able to quench the Spirit and dull its influence (1 [Thessalonians 5:19](#)), our faith guarantees the Spirit's presence (see 2 [Corinthians 1:22](#); [5:5](#)). Paul also calls God's Spirit *the Spirit of Christ*. This is not a different person. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit and Christ's Spirit.

Fact 2 is that the lack of the Holy Spirit's presence means those persons *do not belong to Christ*. The Holy Spirit is God's mark of his chosen ([Ephesians 1:14](#)). There is no such thing as a Christian believer without the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit; that would be a contradiction in terms.

10. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

Fact 3 is that we can have a living, vibrant relationship with God in the here and now. This is possible despite the fact that our bodies are *dead because of sin* ([Romans 5:12](#)). What makes such a relationship possible is the imputed righteousness Christians have by means of Christ's death ([3:21-26](#)). *The Spirit gives life!*

Interestingly, Paul makes no difference between the Holy Spirit's indwelling a believer and *Christ being in you*. To have

the constant presence of the Holy Spirit is to have the presence of Christ in a real way. There is one God in three persons (see [Matthew 28:19](#)).

11. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Fact 4 is that the presence of God's Spirit assures Christians of resurrection life, life beyond the day our current *mortal bodies* expire. The only way this happens is through *the Spirit of him that raised Jesus from the dead* (compare [John 5:21](#)). Eternal life is not mentioned here as such, but it is implied. After all, what point would there be in being raised from the dead only to die yet again later?

III. Leading of the Spirit ([ROMANS 8:12-14](#))

A. The Good Kind of Debt (vv. [12](#), [13](#))

12, 13. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Paul stresses a choice, a choice sharpened by his reference to those who *have*

an obligation. This word can refer to financial obligations (as in [Matthew 18:24](#)). But Paul uses it in the sense of moral obligations (compare [Romans 1:14; 15:27; Galatians 5:3](#)). His readers, *brothers and sisters* in Christ, indeed have such an obligation. Since that obligation is *not to the flesh, to live according to it*, then it must be to the only other choice: *the Spirit*. That obligation is to kill *the misdeeds of the body*. This is Paul's great plea. Life in *the Spirit* must include rejecting self-centered impulses approved by the world (compare [Colossians 2:20-23](#)). Those who do fail to do so are aptly described by Paul's list in [2 Timothy 3:1-8](#).

This self-mortification is not easy. It is a complete reorientation of our priorities with God as the focus. We could never do this by our own willpower. It must happen *by the Spirit*. God does not expect us to live the spiritually pleasing life without giving us the resource we need to be successful. Through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we are able truly to live and produce the deeds of a godly life ([Galatians 5:22-25](#)).

What Do You Think?

What warning signs should we be alert to that indicate a fellow believer is slipping back into the deadness of life before the Spirit?

Digging Deeper

Under what circumstances should a

church's intervention to help reverse the problem give way to disfellowshipping to protect the congregation as a whole? Consider in your response [Matthew 7:1-5, 15-20; 18:15-17; Romans 2:1-4; 14:1-15:2; 16:17, 18; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15; 1 Timothy 6:3, 4; and Titus 3:10](#).

B. The Right Kind of Status (v. 14)

14. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

To "live by the Spirit" or "walk in the Spirit" is to be *led by the Spirit of God*. We live to serve God according to his direction, not according to our own desires. Then we are *children of God*, with all the privileges a child of the king may expect. We are heirs ([Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7](#)).

We remind ourselves that by the phrase "the flesh" Paul is referring not just to self-centered lusts, etc. He is also referring more broadly to the "world" as he uses that word in [Colossians 2:8](#).

LED BY THE SPIRIT?

My cousin, a minister himself, tells of a preacher friend who was invited to speak at a church that had no fixed order of worship. Instead, what happened in a worship service depended on when and how the participants "felt the Spirit

how the participants “felt the Spirit moving.”

The service began with everyone sitting quietly. Eventually, someone began to sing a hymn, and the congregation joined in. More silence followed. Then someone prayed. More silence. Another hymn. Then came a very long silence followed by a prayer offered by the man who had issued the invitation to the guest speaker. It was obvious that this prayer was a benediction.

After the “amen,” the congregation filed out. The would-be speaker approached the man who had invited him to speak and said, “I thought I was supposed to speak.” The response: “I thought so too. But finally I decided you didn’t feel the Spirit leading you to speak!”

There is a lot more to being “led by the Spirit” than whether one is moved to pray or sing or speak in a worship service. In fact, if our Sunday morning conduct doesn’t match that of our daily conduct, something is wrong. Here’s a hint: it’s not the Holy Spirit who is leading you to live a double life!

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What guardrails can we erect to ensure that our living by the Spirit doesn’t become a “holier than thou” hindrance to our witness?

Digging Deeper

How should Paul’s stance of being “all things to all men” in order to “save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22) inform your response, if at all?

Conclusion

A. Flesh or Spirit?

Living above the principles of the world is not easy. A media-saturated society surrounds us with opportunities to gratify the flesh. Hungry? Gluttons are welcome at the all-you-can-eat buffet. Sexually anxious? Check out the Internet with your private web browser turned on. Need money for a luxury car? Play the lottery.

Some enticements may not be sinful in and of themselves. But they all can appeal to a persuadable (weak?) part of our nature. They tempt us to take our eyes off God. They have no view of eternity. Let us walk by the Spirit, not the flesh.

B. Prayer

Father, strengthen us this day to live by your Spirit and nothing else. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the one who died for us. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Yield control to God's Spirit.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

*Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible
Student*

Into the Lesson

Write the following on the board for learners to consider as they arrive:

Guilt—the gift that keeps on giving.

Discuss the quip as you ask how class members have experienced its truth; jot responses on the board. (*Possible responses among many*: sleep disturbance; indigestion; damaged relationships.)

At appropriate points, pose the following questions individually, allowing for responses before asking the next one:

1-What are some things that someone might feel guilty about but should not?

2-What are some things that *should* inspire a degree of guilt?

3-What happens when we do not deal with guilt?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Syllables” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work in pairs or groups to piece together the answers to the clues and discover the possible cause of the maladies found there.

After either activity say, “Feelings of guilt can haunt us, destroy relationships,

and even compromise our health! Paul describes a life free of guilt and condemnation.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups (larger classes can form six or nine groups). Designate these as *Flesh Group*, *Mind Group*, and *Spirit Group*. Give each group handouts (you create) that reproduce the text of the lesson. Instruct groups to read the lesson text and underline every instance of the word for which their group is named. Each group should then summarize in one or more rhyming couplets how the text uses its key word. Some examples follow. Reveal these only as learners seem stuck.

Flesh Group

Flesh is too weak to keep God’s law.
Making one’s efforts worth nothing at all.

Mind Group

A carnal mind will cause life to cease,
But a mind set on Jesus brings eternal peace.

Spirit Group

Since the Holy Spirit lives always in me,
From law’s condemnation I’m forever free.

As groups work, move among them to offer help as necessary. When group

work is complete, allow groups to share and explain their couplets.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Just Because” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work in groups to paraphrase key ideas from Paul’s arguments.

After either activity say, “It is possible to live a life free of guilt and condemnation. But it is something done by divine power, not by human effort. Our life can be transformed, putting our flesh-controlled life to death and allowing God’s Spirit to direct our path. We no longer must earn God’s approval, but rather accept his leading. Could there be a step you can take this week to give the Spirit more control of your life? Let’s see.”

Into Life

Write *Step Forward / Step Back* as two column headings on the board. Ask the class to complete these columns by naming things a person can do to “step forward” in his or her walk in the Spirit and things a person can do to “step back” from a flesh-driven habit. When columns have several answers each, ask the class to consider silently which steps would be appropriate for them to take personally in the coming week.

Option. As learners depart, give each a novelty item that will be a tangible reminder to walk in the Spirit daily. Ideal

would be a pendant or sticker of a shoe or footprint. These can be purchased inexpensively from “dollar stores,” etc.