

Church in the Wild Pastor's Devotional
December 31, 2017
Galatians 5:16-26

Last Tuesday a headline announced that over \$5 billion worth of Christmas gifts would be returned or trashed. Many more gifts will hang in closets or be stashed in storage, never to be worn or used. So what will you do with the Greatest of Gifts?

Knowing Jesus surpasses anything anyone ever gave you! Our focus on Galatians 4:4-6 has given us a deeper grasp of the Triune God's behind-the-scenes work. By embedding His Son as an embodied person, the Father unveiled His mission. On Christmas Eve, we celebrated God's determination to "redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." Though people are paupers, Prince Jesus' life "outside the Castle" can elevate anyone to being a son or daughter of the Almighty King—not only a child but also an heir to infinite treasure!

Heirs don't just inherit treasure. Heirs are invited to be partners in the family business. In ordinary commerce, the status of partnership provides heirs with access to bank accounts plus secret passwords for intimate communication. To incorporate us into the Triune Family's business, our Christmas Gift comes with the promise of personal access to God: "Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts..." (Galatians 4:6). The Spirit of Jesus lives in us, working for our healing and empowerment.

Gifts often come with operating instructions. I'll admit that like most men, I prefer to skip reading the instructions. But even the most stubborn male would read the instructions if his new headphones didn't connect to Bluetooth! (guess what I got for Christmas?)

If we are to have the greatest benefit from our Christmas Gift, we do well to maintain a connection to our spiritual network. The network provided by the Spirit of Jesus never "goes down," yet if we aren't vigilant, our connection is spotty. If you haven't yet read them, please check out the instructions provided in scripture (**Read Galatians 5:16-26**).

There are two outcomes in life. We can "live by the Spirit," or we can live to "gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Gratifying the sinful nature might yield scandalous behavior, but it can also produce self-righteous church people. Yuck! The great news is that the remnant of our sinful nature need not dominate us. The Spirit of Jesus living within, trying to make us more like Christ. Paul calls this "the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (v. 22). As fruit naturally appears on trees, the character of Jesus naturally grows in disciples who have "the Spirit of the Son in their hearts."

Yet it's undeniable that our choices affect whether our spiritual harvest is abundant or puny, which is why Paul urges us to "live by the Spirit." The original Greek word for "live" also means "walk." In verse 25, he declares that "since we live by the Spirit, let keep in step with the Spirit." To live by the Spirit involves listening for the Spirit's leadings so you can heed those leadings.

Just last week I sensed a strong leading from the Spirit. One of our neighbors has felt far from God because of terrible hurt in her life. As she has shared meals with us, we have been careful not to push our faith on her. Yet I sensed a strong leading that it was time to invite her to the Christmas Eve gathering. To our delight, she showed up! Afterwards she thanked me warmly.

Of all the new year's resolutions that we might make, striving to develop habits that strengthen our connection to the Spirit of the Son would have the greatest impact—for us and others. Make time to read scripture and enjoy unrushed prayer. Choose the time and place that works best for you. Put post-note reminders on your bathroom mirror. It takes 3 weeks to start a new habit, so strive to stick with it. Don't just talk to God, listen for God's voice as you are silent. Give thanks for the ways that God is working within you, then invite God to work thru you. And when you hear those leadings, try to keep in step!