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11. Surrender Your Worldliness

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11. Surrender Your Worldliness

This Bible study lesson is based on Chapter 12 of *The Abiding Room*, a book by Kevin Seacat.

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You may remember the Bible passage below from the three types of people described in chapter 2. This passage is used to describe the worldly person living in the flesh in Level II. The NIV translation uses the word “worldly,” while the ESV translation uses the word “flesh.” That’s because the words “worldly” and “flesh” are interchangeable in describing our hearts, as shown in the ESV version below.

“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-4 NIV).

“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-4 ESV).

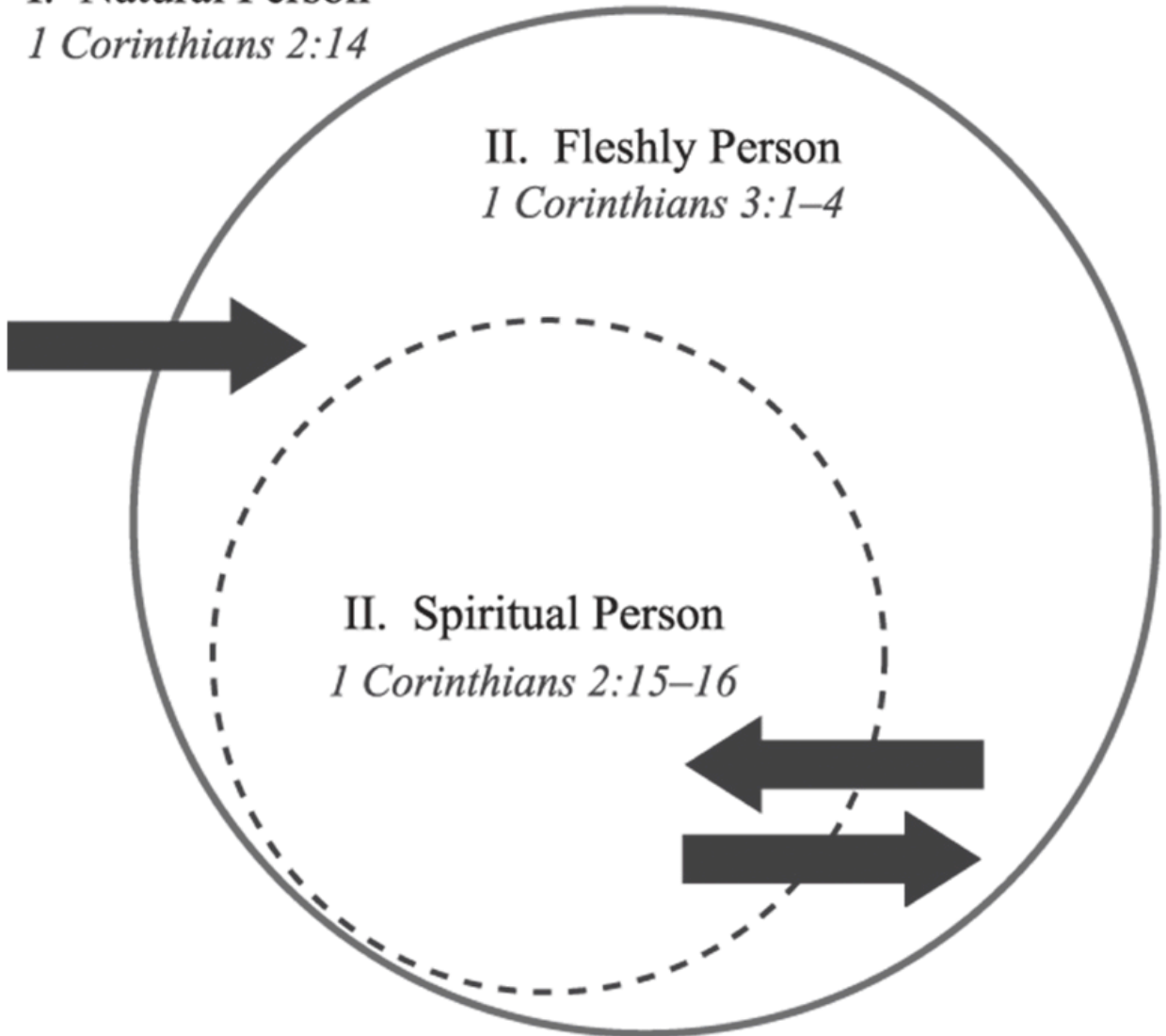
When we’re living in our no-good flesh, the behavior that flows out of our hearts is worldly. When we’re living fleshly, worldly lives, we’re choosing to live in Level II. We are wandering in the wilderness rather than thriving in the Spirit in the Abiding Room.

Here’s the Abiding Room diagram illustrating these verses again:

I. Natural Person
1 Corinthians 2:14

II. Fleshly Person
1 Corinthians 3:1-4

II. Spiritual Person
1 Corinthians 2:15-16



The apostle Paul laments he couldn't even talk to the Corinthian church in spiritual terms because he was too busy addressing the problems of jealousy and quarreling arising from their operating in the flesh. It seems safe to assume Paul would much rather be celebrating the spiritual victories that would have been occurring in their lives if they had been living in the Spirit.

I wonder how many pastors in churches today can relate to Paul's disappointment. They long to teach us the deeper things of Christ, but they are too occupied solving the problems caused by our fleshly, worldly hearts. If it's true that few of us are

consistently living in the Spirit, then unfortunately, it is quite likely many pastors can empathize with Paul.

How do we expect to hear from the Holy Spirit when we are choosing to live in a worldly fashion in the flesh? Just as Paul was sad that he couldn't address the deeper spiritual things to the members of this church, today the Holy Spirit is often grieved that He cannot speak to us in a deeper spiritual language because we're living in the flesh.

How, then, do we begin to get out of the rut of worldly, fleshly living? The answer once again lies in the word "surrender."

Surrendering Worldliness

In just two verses, Romans 12:1-2 packs a great deal of instruction regarding surrendering our worldliness. This includes the exciting promise that the blessing of this surrender is to know God's will:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2 NIV).

This passage instructs us to surrender our whole selves. When the apostle Paul says to offer your body as a sacrifice, he means to give God all of you—your heart, mind, and soul. But also give Him your calendar, your checkbook, your ambition, your relationships—everything. Give God your complete, absolute surrender. Surrender precedes the outpouring of the blessings of the abiding, Spirit-filled life God the Father has planned for you.

Surrendering your worldliness is an ongoing, lifelong process. It involves developing an attitude of wholehearted release of your life to God every moment of each day. Expect God to lovingly and repeatedly reveal worldly attitudes of your heart you hadn't noticed. Embrace these new moments of awareness as growth opportunities to yield your heart and your life to Jesus.

These verses instruct you to not be of the world but to be encouraged that by surrendering your life to God, you will be able to discern God's will. Note the word "then." "Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is." The word

“then” connects your surrender to the promise you will receive a greater capacity to know God’s will.

This passage explains there is a prerequisite to clearly knowing the will of God. This requirement is that you do not align your priorities with what this world says is important. The beginning of the blessing of knowing God’s will is the surrender of your worldliness.

The Message paraphrase of Romans 12:1-2 says this for us in everyday language: “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

When we let go of our desires and passions for the things of this world, we can fix our minds on the things of God. This is part of the gradual process of being “transformed” to be more like Jesus. We change from the Level II fleshly person who craves what this world has to offer to the Level III Spirit-led person whose thinking is guided by the mind of Jesus as described in 1 Corinthians 2:15-16: “The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” (NIV).

Surrendering Your Worldliness—a Recurring Biblical Theme

It’s up to us whether we live Level II lives, conformed to the world and living by the flesh, or Level III lives, transformed by God and living by the power of the Holy Spirit. At its heart, worldliness is having any worldly god rather than the one true God. Those worldly gods are idols.

God has always been serious about our choosing Him above worldly idols. In the Old Testament, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments before they entered the Holy Land, telling them He was to be their first priority.

Here are the first two commandments: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3 NIV).

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4-6 NIV).

Surrender calls on us to align our priorities with those God has for us. One of my favorite verses is a rather obscure one in the Old Testament. The prophet Jonah spoke it while inside the big fish, and it speaks of the enormous cost of loving the things of this world: “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs” (Jonah 2:8 NIV 1984).

God’s grace lavishes us with many, undeserved blessings. However, when our ambition is to love, pursue, and cling to the things of this world, such as recognition, money, and power, we miss out on many of the blessings God intends for us. But when we abandon these temporary worldly trinkets that distract us from God, He pours out His grace on us.

The apostle John describes surrendering our worldliness in the New Testament: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17 NIV).

Surrender is the remedy to worldliness. To leave behind the wilderness, you must leave behind your worldliness.

Surrender Your Worldliness—Time

Our resources of time, talent, and treasure are truly from God, and we’re blessed when we devote them to His plans and purposes. As has been said plenty of times: look at your calendar and your checkbook and you’ll know your priorities.

Let’s look at those two areas of surrender—time and money.

When you surrender your worldliness, your desire will shift from serving yourself to serving others. You will become a radiant blessing to your community. The needs of those around you are endless. Through community service, you can establish new friendships and learn to better understand the needs of others.

Serving others will broaden your perspective and contribute to your spiritual maturity. You can trust the Holy Spirit to guide you into opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus to those who don't yet know Him. If you attend church but are still not feeling connected to others, I have a simple, one-word recommendation for you—serve!

Surrendering your worldliness includes ignoring the world's message to be independent, and instead choosing to be engaged in a local church. The world tells us to live for self and make our own way, but God has chosen and gifted us to be part of a local church body.

The Bible puts it this way: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another” (Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV).

In today's world of technology, there are plenty of opportunities to fool ourselves into thinking we can be part of a church solely through online worship. But God intends us to be interrelated. When we gather together, we're able to encourage each other, sharpen each other spiritually, and join together in fellowship and service to bless others using our gifts within and outside of the church.

A wonderful part of being connected to Jesus and living the abiding, Spirit-filled life is enjoying all the blessings that arise from fellowship in Jesus' body, the local church. Colossians 1:18 tells us Jesus is the head of the church: “And he is the head of the body, the church” (NIV).

Some of the most significant experiences of seeing the Holy Spirit at work are when He empowers you in your service within the church. When we're operating in the flesh, we think like the world, asking, *What's in it for me?* On the other hand, when we're living lives surrendered to the Lord, we're looking for ways to serve others, which is what Jesus modeled for us in His earthly ministry.

When our children were young, the temptation for Juli and I was to attend church to be served. After a long week, it can be a challenge just to get everyone fed, dressed, and out the door. But as we relinquished our rights for a leisurely Sunday and began

-serving, we were blessed in ways we couldn't have predicted. There is no end to how God will bless you in your involvement in serving in small groups, in children's ministries, and other areas within your church. A surrendered heart is a selfless, serving heart, and a prerequisite for experiencing the fullness of the abiding, Spirit-filled life.

Spirit-filled, Level III followers of Christ are fully engaged in their local church. Regardless of your age, the number of years you've been following Jesus, or your biblical knowledge, God's plan is to utilize the gifts He has given you to bless others. How has God gifted you? Ask your local church leaders how you can identify and utilize your gifts to serve others in your church.

Now, having said all of that, it's entirely possible to serve others in the flesh. The real evidence of being filled, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit is when your life displays the fruit of the Spirit. It isn't so much that service to others is evidence you are experiencing the abiding, Spirit-filled life, but an unwillingness to serve may be a sign that you're not.

Surrender Your Worldliness—Finances

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it" (Malachi 3:10 NIV).

It has been said this verse is the only time in the Bible that God says we should test Him. God challenges you to relinquish control of your finances to Him, and then watch Him keep His promises as He blesses you.

Is this a guarantee against job loss or that the investments in your retirement plan will soar in value? Not at all. It is a statement intended to encourage you to trust God and release your finances to Him so you can experience Him and the blessings He gives you with your finances.

Everything you have is God's: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1 NIV). But He has entrusted His resources to you to manage faithfully. And the point is clear—what you do with your finances reveals your priorities. How you use or invest your finances is an accurate picture of what you truly treasure.

The Bible gives this guidance as to the attitude of your heart concerning giving when it says: “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:7-8 NIV).

Jim Elliot was a young man when he and four other missionaries were killed while taking the gospel to a remote village in Ecuador.

After his death, an entry was found in his journal, written several years earlier. It presented a crystal-clear picture of what surrendering our worldliness for eternal purposes looks like. It read: *He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.* Jim’s life illustrated this principle and serves as a dependable reminder that we are wise to invest our temporary resources of time and money in what is eternal.

When it comes to wisely utilizing the resources God has entrusted to us for kingdom purposes, the term “investing” rather than “giving” is preferable. The funds you invest in your church and in ministries are stored for eternity in heaven. As a follower of Jesus, it is healthy and appropriate to have an Eternal Kingdom Portfolio mindset. That is, just as you may have (or plan on having) personal investments such as a 401k or IRA for earthly purposes, you can set your mind on investing for eternal purposes. God invites you to join Him in His kingdom work so you can experience the joy of participating in activities that will last for eternity.

When you support your church financially, you are part of everything God is doing there. What you do with your finances matters. God wants you to both be blessed and be a blessing. “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38 NIV).

Let’s be clear, however, we can be generous givers while still in the flesh. It’s possible to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. The real evidence of the abiding, Spirit-filled life is, once again, when your life exhibits the fruit of the Spirit. It isn’t so much that generous giving is evidence you are experiencing the abiding, Spirit-filled life, but an unwillingness to fully release your finances to God is a pretty good sign that you’re not.

Surrender, Not Checklists

As we finish these three lessons on surrender, it's possible you are beginning to think this sounds like a checklist of requirements to experience Level III living. There is a fine line between making sure our relationship with Jesus is where it should be and falling into the trap of turning our walk with Him into trying to keep a list of dos and don'ts. Following a list of rules is just legalism and religion.

Abiding in Jesus is not about checklists; it's about the condition of your heart. Your heart's condition, as revealed by your attitudes and actions, is of utmost importance so you can experience the abiding, Spirit-filled life in all its fullness. When your heart is fully surrendered to Jesus, the actions we've mentioned flow naturally from it. Moreover, you experience joy and peace from being wholly yielded to God.

ABIDING TRUTH: To experience the fullest blessings of the Spirit-filled life, surrender your worldliness.

Reflection Question

Reread Romans 12:1-2. What stands out to you?

Write down your answer to the box below ("Your Response or Question") and send it to us. It will appear in Messages.