

"I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord - that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings..." Philippians 3:8-10



# Spirit Filled Parenting

By Greg Brezina

When Connie and I were raising our four sons, we struggled to appear to be what we already were – a Christian family. We relied upon self-effort many times to do what we thought were good things instead of following the Holy Spirit's leading.

At Sunday services, we looked like a Christian family. However, during the week there were outbursts of anger and shame when children did not perform "correctly". We thought we were parenting to train godly children. God had other plans. He had us parenting in order to train us to walk after the Spirit.

Our self-effort mistakes centered around striving to please God in our parenting rather than parenting because God is already pleased with us in Christ. We were trying to live the Christian life out of self-discipline to gain God's acceptance rather than living out of His acceptance of us in Christ. As Christians, we were trying to make our family life work out of our own effort. We didn't realize we were living out of what the Bible calls flesh. We were not walking after the Spirit and living out of His life within us.

About this self-effort Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing."<sup>1</sup>

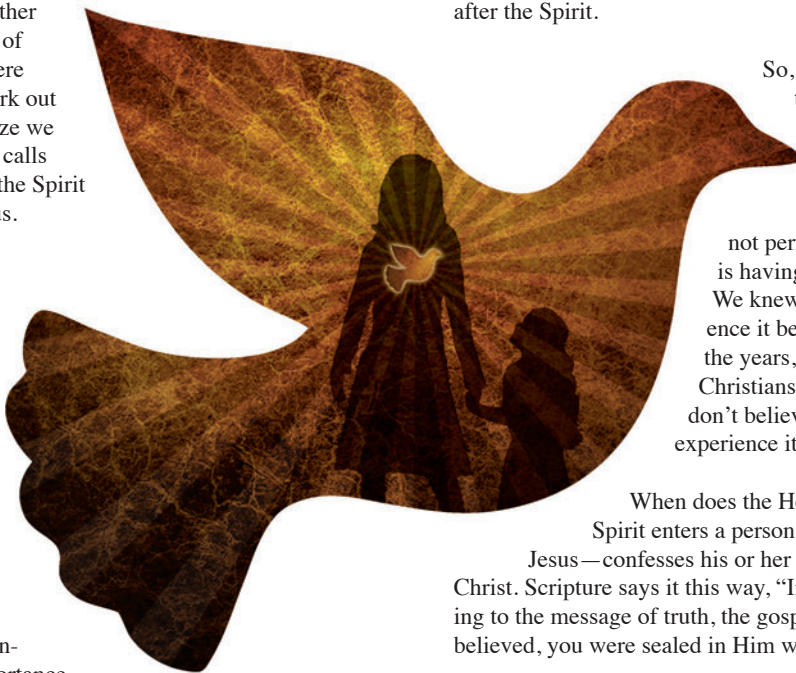
"Nothing" is a sobering word. It usually gets one's immediate attention. "Nothing" means of no importance, zero amount, not anything, something not valued or having quality. In other words, our self-effort in parenting our children without abiding in Christ and walking after the Spirit had no value to God.

Please don't misunderstand me. Connie and I taught our children Biblical truths, and we memorized books of the Bible together with them in home school. We were faithful and diligent in this. We all benefited immensely from memorizing Scripture because the Bible says that the Word of God will not return void. It will do its work. But when we relied upon our own self-effort in raising our children "for God", that independence was worth nothing to God. That, my friend, is a sobering thought. That Scripture in John got our attention and helped motivate us to learn and understand how to abide in Christ and walk after the Spirit.

So, what is abiding in Christ? Scripture describes it this way, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, abiding in Christ is not performing some religious activity. It is having the Holy Spirit living within us. We knew this truth, but we didn't experience it because we didn't believe it. Over the years, we have come across many Christians who also know this truth, but they don't believe it; and therefore, they don't experience it in their day to day parenting.

When does the Holy Spirit enter a person? The Spirit enters a person whenever he or she believes in Jesus—confesses his or her sin and places his or her faith in Christ. Scripture says it this way, "In Christ, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise."<sup>3</sup>

Having the Spirit living within gives Christian parents an interpersonal relationship with God and provides them with the opportunity to have intimate fellowship with Him. Paul speaks of this intimacy when



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he says, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord - that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings..."<sup>4</sup> Out of intimate fellowship with God, believing parents can then walk after the Spirit and experience His power to train their children up in the admonition and instruction of the Lord.

Abiding in Christ, having the Spirit live within, knowing God, and having a personal relationship with Him is one thing. Having intimate fellowship with God, talking and listening to Him moment by moment, and obeying His initiatives or commands is another. In other words, we can know God, but not have intimacy with Him.

Jesus walked after the Spirit while on the earth. He says over and over, "I can do nothing on my own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of Him who sent me."<sup>5</sup> And again he says, "For I did not speak on my own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent me has given me commandment, what to say, and what to speak."<sup>6</sup>

Current Christianity sometimes equates religious duty, such as having "quiet times", etc., with intimacy. One can start their day by having intimacy with God this way, but the intimacy must continue moment by moment throughout the day if one is to walk after the Spirit. It is like the old hymn that says,

*"He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!  
He walks with me and talks with me  
Along life's narrow way.  
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!  
You ask me how I know He lives?  
He lives within my heart."*<sup>7</sup>

Now, that is intimacy!

Sometimes Jesus went off by himself to fellowship with God in the early mornings and sometimes all night. However, to know what Father God wanted him to say, how to say it and when to say it, He had to be

fellowshipping with Him moment by moment. To do that, He had to be bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Father.

To this, people have responded, "Jesus could bring every thought captive to Father because he was God."<sup>8</sup> In saying that, they are insinuating that since we are not God, we are not capable of bringing every thought under control by the Spirit. However, if Jesus did not access his deity while on earth and, therefore, lived like a normal human before sin, then you and I have great hope to do the same because Christ has cleansed us from all sin.

Therefore, in order to know how to steward God's children, we have to constantly remain in intimate fellowship with Father. As we live and move and have our being in Him, He will guide us into bringing our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, having them under control, training them to be lovers of Christ and teaching them how to educate themselves.

Having intimate fellowship with God moment by moment makes sense. Who else but God knows how a parent is to minister to each child when several are screaming for your attention at the same time? He is the only one who can give you love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and control of self in the midst of their mess, sickness, selfishness, disrespect, disobedience, temper tantrums, or rebellion.

As we listen to Him moment by moment on what to say, how to say it and when to say it to each child, the Spirit empowers us to obey God and minister His wisdom to our children. Our obedience is evidence that we are walking after the Spirit. Since nothing in the world compares to His wisdom, we can have absolute confidence in the way we parent when we follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

Sound too mystical? It isn't. It is reality. For Scripture says, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."<sup>9</sup> Eternal things are reality. If we do not believe it now, we will believe it the moment we die physically.



Connie and I are so thankful to God for teaching us this most wonderful truth. Although we missed teaching our sons this truth when they were youngsters, they are giving us another chance now. We have gone to each one and asked their forgiveness for bringing them up in a “Christian” self-effort performance based family.

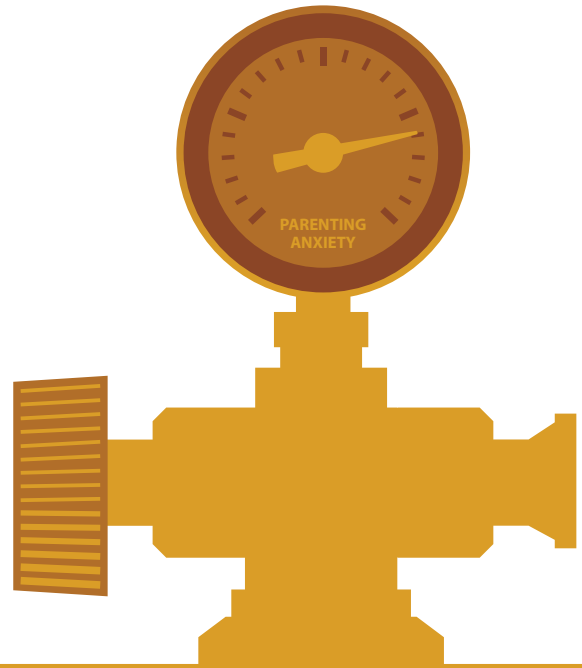
Now, by God’s grace, we are not only listening to Father in re-building our relationships with our sons, but we are also listening to Father in building healthy relationships with our 13 (soon to be 14) grandchildren. What a joy!

Love ya,

Greg

1. John 15:4-5  
2. I John 4:13  
3. Ephesians 1:13  
4. Philippians 3:8-10  
5. John 5:30

6. John 12:49  
7. He Lives by Alfred H. Ackley, 1887-1960  
8. II Corinthians 10:5  
9. II Corinthians 4:18



## Peace in the Midst of Parenting Stress By Ben Brezina

In 2005, the Journal of Health and Social Behavior published a study by Ranae Evenson and Robin Simon focusing on the relationship between parenthood and depression. One of the discoveries they made through analyzing the data from the National Survey of Families and Households was a clear correlation between parenthood and depression. People who had children were more likely to be depressed than those that had none. Their bottom line: “Parents have more to worry about than other people do.”

While parenting stress may have many sources, one of the largest origins is the fearful thoughts of the parent. Parents are concerned about whether their child is learning and growing like other children. Parents are worried about their kid’s grades and become anxious when their child shows a lack of interest in school. Parents are frustrated by a child’s misbehavior and fear that he or she will act up and embarrass them in front of their friends or while they are standing in line at the grocery store. Parents strongly desire for their child to fit in and

be accepted by others, so there is internal tension when they hear stories of bullies and name calling at school. On top of all these fears are the concerns of how to pay for the child’s food, clothing, shelter and schooling.

As children get older, the opportunities for worry only increase. Parents often become anxious about who their child chooses to hang out with, whether he or she will abuse drugs, whether their teen will have a child before he or she is married. Even as children become adults, the opportunities for worrying keep coming. Will my child make wise decisions about whom to marry? Will he or she be able to find a good job, be independent and support a family? The list can go on and on.

Any time we think about the future, we are reminded that much of life is outside of our control. We are then tempted to fear. These feelings of fear can quickly lead to worry. And a mind set on problems and negative “what if” scenarios leads to sadness, despair, hopelessness, helplessness, pain and death.

So what is the solution when these temptations come? Jesus tells us to choose to trust instead of choosing to fear and worry. We can’t control the temptations to worry that come into our mind, but we can control what we choose to mentally dwell on. Instead of letting our mind abide, remain or stay on all the bad things and potentially uncomfortable scenarios in our lives, we as Christians can replace those thoughts with the truth.

What is the truth, you ask? Jesus tells us that the truth is that we have a wonderful, loving heavenly Father who already knows the exact path of our lives and the lives of our children. He has promised to cause everything that happens in life to work together for the good of those that love him and are called according to His purpose. And he can accomplish what He has promised because there is no limit to His power and ability.

The apostle Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 1:7 that “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” If we have a fearful

thought, we know that it is not from God. We can then reject that fearful thought and choose to believe the truth that God has given us power, love and a sound mind through the Holy Spirit. These gifts are the what we need when we encounter difficulties and problems in parenting.

The apostle John tells us in 1 John 4:16, 18 that “we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. . . There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear. . .”

If the pressure inside of you is building today because of events in your life or something your child has done or not done, then let the truth that you are loved and provided for sink in deep down inside you. Tell that truth to yourself over and over. When you believe the truth, it will be like opening a pressure release valve in your life. When you abide, remain and stay mentally in that love, you will experience peace despite the heat of life’s trials and parenting stresses.

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