

Anyone can experience an inner struggle over conflicting desires to do what is right and wrong. But the believer will often experience this struggle more intensely. For the believer, it is not simply a matter of obeying the conscience or some rule. It involves our genuine desire to please our new Master which conflicts with the old ways we pleased ourselves. It can also involve a conflict between our desire to experience the life God wants to give us and the desire to live life our own way. The good news is that experiencing these struggles is evidence of a genuine change in our lives as a result of our new relationship with Christ.



LIFE CONCEPT

STEPPING
FROM
BEING

UNPREPARED

TO

EQUIPPED

I. COMPARING OUR STORIES

The Christian life isn't struggle-free. Yet most Christians are unprepared for the inner struggles they will experience.

MY EXPERIENCE ...

YOUR EXPERIENCE ...

Since receiving Christ, to what degree have you experienced an inner struggle over conflicting desires—that is, wanting to please yourself versus wanting to please Christ?

2. CONSIDERING OUR STRUGGLES

Why do you think most believers are unprepared for these inner struggles?

HOW do people feel when they are faced with a significant challenge for which they are not prepared?

FOR EXAMPLE, HOW would you feel if you were enrolled in an upper level language course for a language in which you had never learned the basics?

In a similar way, we must master the basics of the Christian life to prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.



GALATIANS 5:16-26.

⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. ¹⁹The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

STEPPING FROM

BEING UNPREPARED TO EQUIPPED

3. EXPLORING THE SOLUTION

Paul wrote this letter to a group of believers who were also facing this struggle. They were being told by others that the solution was to try harder at doing what was right by following the Law—the written commandments explaining what is right and wrong. But Paul wanted them to realize they did not have the power in themselves to do what was right or follow the Law. Neither do we.

THE CONFLICT (5:16-18)

Who are the opponents?

The word flesh is used for sinful nature in some translations. When used in this way, it does not refer to the physical aspect of people. Rather, it is that aspect within people which leads them to live independent of God, in opposition to Him and His ways. Compare Romans 8:5-8.

THE CONSEQUENCES (5:19-23)

The source of our desires will determine the nature of what is produced.

What happens when the desires of the sinful nature go unchecked? (5:19-21)

What is produced when we walk by the Spirit? (5:22-23)

Notice that the Spirit always leads us to do what is right, never to do what is wrong. (5:23)

THE CONCLUSION (5:24-25)

According to verse 24, how has our relationship to the sinful nature changed?

Since we now live by the Spirit, what should characterize our relationship with the Spirit? (5:25)

SUMMARY

What the Bible explains, we should believe. What is true about yourself?

What the Bible commands, we should do. What are you commanded to do?

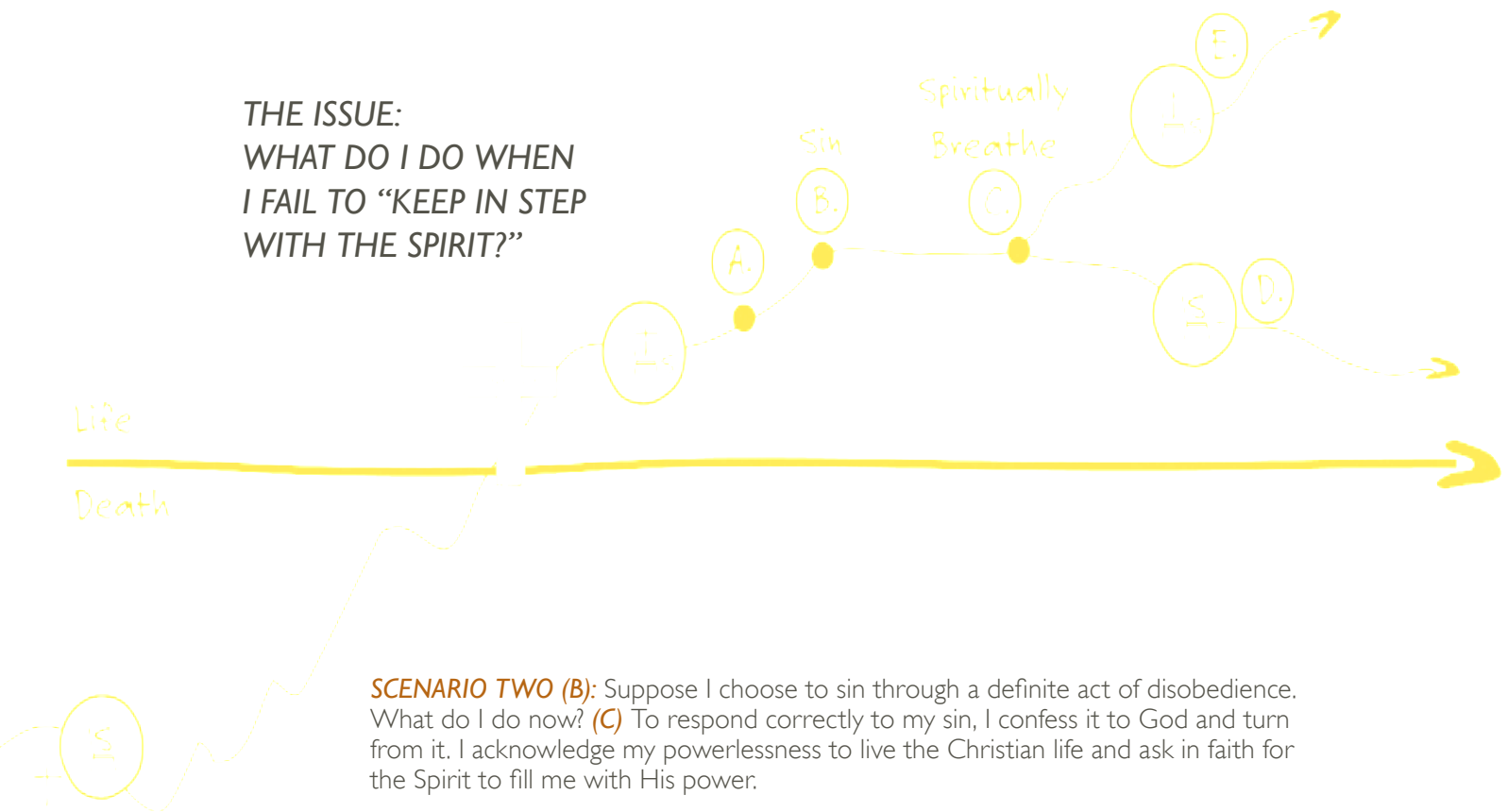
What the Bible promises, we should expect. What are the results in my life?

4. EXAMINING THE SKETCH

As I grow in my relationship with God, there are two common scenarios.

SCENARIO ONE (A): Though I sincerely desire to please God, sometimes I become aware of an area of my life that is displeasing to Him, either an attitude or an action. I am not intending to disobey. It's just that I am learning more about what God is like and becoming more aware of sin. What do I do? I simply thank God that He has already forgiven my sins, claim His love and forgiveness by faith and trust Him for the power to change in that area. This allows me to continue enjoying fellowship with Him.

THE ISSUE:
WHAT DO I DO WHEN
I FAIL TO "KEEP IN STEP
WITH THE SPIRIT?"



SCENARIO TWO (B): Suppose I choose to sin through a definite act of disobedience. What do I do now? (C) To respond correctly to my sin, I confess it to God and turn from it. I acknowledge my powerlessness to live the Christian life and ask in faith for the Spirit to fill me with His power.

A simple way to remember this is by using the word picture of "spiritual breathing." Physically, we exhale impure air and inhale the pure. Spiritually, I exhale by confessing my sin (1 John 1:9) and inhale by claiming the Spirit's power (Ephesians 5:18).

What would happen if I refused to deal with my sin? (D) Over time, I would find myself becoming more and more worldly, like the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). But as I deal with my sin and rely upon the Spirit (E), I will become more spiritually mature and see the fruit of the Spirit produced within me (Galatians 5:22-23).

As you look at this sketch, where do you see yourself in this process?

5. TAKING STEPS

Four steps can help us put these truths into action:

RECOGNIZE the conflict.

REMEMBER the source of the conflict—the Spirit's desires versus the desires of the sinful nature.

REJECT the desires of the sinful nature.

RELY on the Spirit's power to produce His fruit in our lives.

Consider an example. Suppose your roommate does something wrong to you:

RECOGNIZE the conflict between your desire to be mad and get even and the Spirit's desire to forgive and restore the relationship.

REMEMBER the source of this inner struggle is between the sin nature and the Spirit.

REJECT the desires of the sinful nature to be mad or get even.

RELY on the Spirit's power to produce genuine love and forgiveness and provide wisdom in how to respond.

Is there an area where you are currently struggling? How would you apply these steps?

NEXT CONCEPT

FROM UNCERTAINTY TO CONFIDENCE

FROM FEELINGS OF UNWORTHINESS TO FORGIVENESS

FROM BEING UNABLE TO EMPOWERED

FROM BEING UNPREPARED TO EQUIPPED

FROM BEING UNDEVELOPED TO MATURITY