

TOWARDS A POWERFUL **INNER LIFE**

THE JOURNEY OF DEVELOPING
AN INTERNAL SPIRITUALITY,
WHEN OVERWHELMED
BY EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES

GRAHAM COOKE

AN INTERACTIVE JOURNAL

BOOK 6
BEING WITH GOD SERIES



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DEDICATION

I have been on a compelling spiritual journey since 1972. In the span of years since, my story has involved more friends and companions than I could ever attempt to list here. These are people with whom I have laughed and cried, suffered and persisted alongside. We have received curses against us and had blessings spoken over us. We have all been written off, yet we remain.

We are bigger, stronger, more anointed and still walking with the One who loves us magnificently.

I rejoice because there is still time to add new names to this incredible group of game changers.

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They are the best, that's why they do what they do!

INTRODUCTION

It's a statement we find easy to believe on our good days, and nearly impossible to fathom on our bad ones: God has a dream for our life. He has a plan and a goal for each of us that will be realized. God is doing something, and everything is going to be all right. It's a deep work; one that will hold us steady during our darkest days, when everything and everyone is against us. Once we accept that God is constantly and consistently working in our life, we can be at peace.

As our lives unfold, God touches area after area, bringing all of our parts under His rule. What is He working on in you right now? "Everything," we quip easily. God, however, focuses on something more particular than "everything."

Perhaps He is touching your emotions. It's easy to allow our emotions to run the show, and God wants to touch that. For others, it's our analytical mindset that wants to understand everything logically before we commit ourselves to trusting the Lord. Some people are not in the habit of activating their will, or have failed to see that the will is the prime vehicle for cooperating with the Holy Spirit. Our soul—the emotions, mind and will—can be a hurdle to an experience with God.

Whatever God is touching in you is what He wants to bring under His rule. He wants to work on a certain part of you, but it doesn't have to be a painful process. The pain depends on how you approach the task. One of my mentors once told me, "Graham, die quietly. No one wants to hear you scream." God's

touch can be a gentle caress if we will lay down our wills and agendas and let Him work.

There are two ways we can approach God's work in our lives.

"THE THIEF DOES NOT COME EXCEPT TO STEAL, AND TO KILL AND TO DESTROY. I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND THAT THEY MAY HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY."

-JESUS, JOHN 10:10

"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord," the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6:11. We can live under the idea that we need to die to everything, but that still puts the focus

on ourselves and our wills.

The second part of the verse, *"but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord,"* takes that same change in behavior and attitude and allows God to perform it. Rather than kill ourselves, we can let God live in the area that needs God's touch.

What a choice! Our very happiness depends on how we respond to God's touch. Will we kill ourselves or let God come alive? Our religious ability is so subtle in this. How can it be God's refinement if we don't feel intense pain? Without even realizing it, we have taken over the Holy Spirit's job of bringing ourselves under God's rule: *I'll* do it, we say. Our soul takes the issue, sticks it in the oven for a while, and waits until God is looking away to pull it back out again. Trying to die to it makes us preoccupied with what we are not. But living in Christ Jesus makes us preoccupied with Him. We become alive to God, which automatically makes us dead to ourselves.

Allowing God to live in us and make the changes necessary for His dream for us to come true can still be painful sometimes. The discomfort, however, is more than taken care of by God's grace and mercy for us.

As Christians, we must train our mind, emotions, and will to submit themselves to our spirit. Our spirit will have to say no to our soul from time to time, and the soul will have to grin and bear it. We must be disciplined to take our thoughts captive:

- ◆ "NO, I AM NOT THINKING THAT, I'M THINKING ABOUT PURITY AND LOVE AND GOD'S GRACE."
- ◆ "NO, I AM NOT THINKING THAT, I'M THINKING ABOUT HOW I CAN BE GENEROUS FOR THE LORD'S SAKE."
- ◆ "NO, I AM NOT THINKING THAT, I'M THINKING ABOUT HOW I CAN SHOW THAT PERSON THE LOVE OF GOD."
- ◆ "NO, I AM NOT THINKING THAT, I'M THINKING ABOUT HOW I CAN BLESS THIS PASTOR WHO HAS POURED HIS HEART INTO HIS LITTLE CHURCH."
- ◆ "NO, I AM NOT THINKING THAT, I'M THINKING ABOUT THE PEACE I'VE FOUND IN JESUS."

The same exercise must be done with our emotions, constantly bringing them back to the purity of God. Emotions are not wrong, they are, for the most part, healthy and releasing. But they are only a part of us and must not be allowed to dominate our lives. Emotions and thoughts are designed to enable us to focus on our Creator so that we may perceive people and events with His understanding.

The will is the vehicle whereby we check our feelings and perceptions with the Holy Spirit before acting on them. If our

thought life and emotions are more active than our will, the tendency is for us to break down into our carnality and not be released into our God-given spirituality.

The Holy Spirit always offers us an alternative to our current internal emotional predicament. He gives us comfort for grief; mercy instead of anger; grace rather than resentment; joy to overwhelm sadness; compassion to replace confusion; and acceptance in our loneliness.

Paul loved the life of the spirit. *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit,”* he wrote in Romans 8:1. God knows the struggle we have but He doesn’t want to condemn us for it. If you mess up for a day, do not condemn yourself for it: God doesn’t. There is always tomorrow, with fresh mercy.

Because I spend time on the road preaching, people always ask me how I slept the night before. Sometimes I sleep well, but most of the time, I’m asleep for an hour, awake for an hour, asleep for a couple more hours. There are many nights when I don’t sleep at all. On those nights, I just smile and say, “I didn’t sleep at all, but that’s okay...I’ll get another chance tonight.”

Life in the spirit is a little bit like that. God doesn’t beat us up over missing it one day. In fact, His love bubbles over for us: “I know the struggle you’re having; it’s a good fight. I promise, it’s a good fight you can win. Just stop condemning yourself for it. If we don’t win today, we’ll win tomorrow. Every day is a new day, by My mercy.”

The next morning we wake up and God says, “Okay, it’s a new day. I’ve gotten rid of yesterday; let’s not carry anything forward into today. Let’s have a fresh crack at it, together. I refuse to allow you to beat yourself up over what happened yesterday.”

“HE SENT HIS SON WITH POWER TO SAVE FROM GUILT AND DARKNESS AND THE GRAVE: WONDERS OF GRACE TO GOD BELONG; REPEAT HIS MERCIES IN YOUR SONG.”
-ISAAC WATTS & JOHN HATTON

Paul’s instructions in Romans 8:1–6 should be at the forefront of our mind at all times:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

The New Living Translation of the Bible puts verse six even more clearly: “If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and

peace.” Our joy, every day, is to come to God anew, “*having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus*” (Hebrews 10:19). We are welcome to approach His throne. We can—and must—enter His presence every day, with confidence, to see His dreams unfold in our lives. This is our call and our privilege.

Graham Cooke

TOWARDS A POWERFUL
INNER LIFE

SOUL VERSUS SPIRIT

We are beings at war with ourselves. Inside each of us are two parts in conflict: a soul—otherwise known as the outer man—and a spirit—also known as the inner man. These two pieces of the whole strive for complete control of who you are. Each desperately wants to run the show, but only one can. In Romans 7:14–25, the Apostle Paul wrote about the battle of these two halves, using the word “spiritual” to describe the inner man, and the word “carnal” to describe the outer man:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me

into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

God has called us to be ruled by our spirit, to submit our outer man (our soul) to that inner man. As Paul wrote, we must begin warring against ourselves, subjecting our soul—our mind, emotions, and will—to our spirit—that part of us which connects with God. Before we were Christians, we did what we wanted, we went where we pleased, we ruled our own life. But with salvation came a call from a different king: our soul must bow its knee to the reign of God.

This can be quite a battle. The spirit, which hears the whisper of God, exerts pressure on the soulish will to change its behavior. The soul, conversely, is more in love with the *idea* of God than with God *Himself*. The soul drags its heels, trying desperately to avoid surrendering to the spirit. It manifests itself in willful displays, deluded thinking, and odd emotional behavior. Our soul refuses to surrender easily to our spirit because it wants to be number one. It will rule us to the point of ruining us. For example, the soul believes in self-gratification: it resists God. The spirit, on the other hand, knows the power and satisfaction of God.

Our soul is quite the creation. It does not, because of our finiteness, understand the ways of God. It cannot fathom why He does what He does. Our minds are just too limited by time

“TO BE TAKEN WITH LOVE FOR A SOUL, GOD DOES NOT LOOK UPON ITS GREATNESS, BUT THE GREATNESS OF ITS HUMILITY.”
-ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

and space to see the richness of the Lord’s activities. When we find ourselves in trouble, our soul knows what it wants from God: “Get me out of here! Lift me up out of this

mess!” It tries its best to avoid entering the process of submitting to the spirit.

Souls hate being weak; they would much rather flex their intellectual, willful, or emotional muscles to prove their strength. Our soul does not want to surrender control because it seems illogical to.

Yet soul power must be broken or we cannot serve God effectively. Our soul needs to recognize that it will only be truly happy when we have no authority, but have taken the attitude of serving what God has placed within us: our spirit. The soul will only find peace and fulfillment and full expression when it is a vehicle for our spirit to operate.

Left unconquered, the soul keeps us open and vulnerable to external pressures and attacks. Learning how to live in the spirit gives us the opportunity, because of our devotion and submission to God, to reverse all of the activity of the enemy and render his schemes useless. With the soul in control, the enemy is free to buffet us and leave us in the grip of the very pain we were called to put on him. If we can learn to submit our outer man to our inner man, nothing from the outside world will be able to shake who we are in Christ.

The story of sisters Mary and Martha, found in Luke 10:38–42, is a perfect example of one person living under the power of her soul, and one living under the power of her spirit. Mary, whose spirit was drawn and electrified by the spirit of God, sat at Jesus’ feet and listened as He spoke and taught. *“Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her,”* Jesus said. Martha, on the other hand, had too many preparations on her mind and fell into an emotional outburst to try and get Mary to serve her agenda. *“Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things,”* Jesus said. *“But one thing is needed.”* The issue here is primacy. Martha’s concerns were, in fact, legitimate. However, in the context of placing soul under spirit, she had made *doing* more important than *being*. When that happens, we are not living from the inside out, but from the opposite dimension. We must place real value on the presence of God above all other concerns—no matter how pressing.

There are times when we have to work and times when we have to rest; the book of Ecclesiastes makes that clear. We don’t always get to sit at the feet of Jesus and do nothing. This story,

“HOW HAPPY I AM TO SEE MYSELF IMPERFECT AND BE IN NEED OF GOD’S MERCY.”
-ST. THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS AND THE HOLY FACE

however, is an illustration of what we have given power, when push comes to shove. Does the presence of God have primacy in our life? Have we allowed our spirit to sit at the feet of Jesus? Or are we constantly thinking about our temporal concerns? It seems paradoxical, but if we can learn to rest at Jesus’ feet, we will find we can do the temporal things properly.

GRAHAM COOKE

When we live in our spirit, we don't need reassurance. We have a built-in testimony: the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.