

# LIVING EACH DAY IN THE SPIRIT

I hope you listened to the words of our sermon hymn today as you sang it.

It's one of my favorite hymns—in fact I sing it every morning.

It sounds great in the shower!

Anyway, today I'm going to invoke an old Lutheran custom (it's the custom that's old—not the Lutheran) and preach on this hymn, because it contains some of the best advice I've ever encountered about how to be guided by the Spirit of God each and every day of your life.

The first lines are: *Awake my soul and with the sun,  
Your daily stage of duty run; Shake off dull sloth and  
joyful rise, to pay your morning sacrifice.*

Now as good Lutherans we know that we are saved because God chose us and not because we chose Him, but we **can** choose to begin each day of our lives by inviting the Spirit of God that dwells in us to guide and inspire us during the day.

“Rouse me to action, Lord!” “Work miracles through me today!” “Help me to work out my *salvation with*

*fear and trembling!” “Help me to will and to act according to Your good purpose!”*

So if you've ever wondered what there is that you can do to activate God in your life, let the first thing you do every single morning—even before your feet hit the floor—is to invite God into your day.

Offer your body, your mind and your spirit up to his control as your morning sacrifice and you will be in good hands!

As Paul wrote: *“...I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices...”*

So whether you're young and healthy or old and decrepit, let your first conscious thoughts soar up to God every morning and He will help you begin your day.

The second verse begins: *“All praise to you who have kept and have refreshed me while I slept.”*

These simple words contain a key principle for living in the Spirit: begin each new day with praise and thanksgiving—NO MATTER WHAT!

However rotten your circumstances are, however bleak your prospects may seem, however foreboding

your tasks may be—you have an incredible amount to be thankful for and to praise God for.

For openers, the God who created you has just created one more day for you to live and breathe and receive His blessings.

*Paul writes: “Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be evident to all. Do not be anxious about anything, but, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God that transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:4-7)*

It’s so easy to fall into the habit of focusing on the negatives, on everything that’s wrong with the world and with your particular situation.

The glass seems half empty and things are going to pot.

If Murphy’s Law has become your 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment, you might want to think about Paul’s words.

When anxiety is the problem, praise and thanksgiving are the solution.

*“Grant, Lord, when I from death shall wake I may in endless light partake.”*

These words—combined with a thankful prayer—open up a window in our minds and allow the light of eternity to shine into our souls and give us perspective.

Just as we awaken each morning to the light of the sun, one day we are going to awaken to the light of glory.

This verse reminds us that for believers, death is but the dawn of eternal day—and that fact puts today's problems in their proper perspective.

*“Lord, I my vows to you renew...”*

I struggled with these words for a long time.

What vows?

Not vows of poverty, chastity and obedience—those came from St. Francis, not from Jesus.

Then what vows?

Well, vows have to do with obedience and obedience has to do with the law and Jesus said that all the law is summed up in two commands: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength,”* and *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

So I decided that I would pray each and every morning: “God please help me to love you with all my heart and soul and mind and strength and to love my neighbor as myself.

Now to be perfectly honest, even as I prayed those words I doubted that I would follow up on them.

So, for a time I rationalized, what good was there in praying for God to help me do something I probably couldn’t—or at least wouldn’t—do.

Wouldn’t that be hypocritical?

And then I listened to the very next phrase: “*Disperse my sins as morning dew*”—and I realized that in God’s eyes my past failures had evaporated like morning dew from the grass.

It didn’t matter that I had failed in the past or that I might fail in the future: the point was to continually ask to help me and to trust Him to do so.

All he expected of me was to try—and He would do the rest.

And so this was a way that I could remind myself every morning that each day is truly a NEW day in God’s grace and that I was starting out with a clean heart, an upright spirit, and a brand new hope.

And with that thought in mind I could pray the next words with all my heart and soul: *“Guard my first springs of thought and will and with Yourself my spirit fill.”*

Fill me **today** with your Holy Spirit Lord!

Govern my actions, permeate my thoughts, guide my lips!

Living in the Spirit means being led by the Spirit and if you want to be led by the Spirit, *then ask Him to lead you—not just once, but every single morning!*

And do it before other spirits start to dominate your thoughts.

There are a bunch of those spirits that hover around you every day.

The “glass half empty” spirit and the “things are going to pot” spirit and the “Why make vows I can’t keep anyway?” spirit that excuses us from even trying.

The spirit that cynically says, “Murphy was an optimist.”

The Holy Spirit is stronger than all those other spirits put together and He is willing to help you vanquish them.

But He will not force himself on you: *you need to ask Him to do so!*

The next verse is, *“Let all my converse be sincere; my conscience as the noonday clear. Think how the all-seeing God my ways and all my secret thoughts surveys.”*

At first, all these words conjured up in my mind was the specter of a Divine Auditor who pried into my sinful thoughts all day long and just kept shaking his head in disappointment if not outright disgust at what He found there.

Then it occurred to me that perhaps that was the whole point of the verse.

Since I wasn't capable of keeping my inward thoughts pure and God-pleasing, and since I was all too inclined to just give up and go along with my sinful thoughts, maybe I **should** invite God to enter into my mind and take control.

I knew that there was no such thing as neutral ground—spiritually speaking—and that when I wasn't seeking the counsel of the Holy Spirit I was probably listening to the suggestions of my sin nature.

Maybe if I made a concentrated effort each morning to seek the advice of the Holy Spirit, He would drown out the voice of my sin nature along with the drone of

the negative spirits that kept knocking at the door of my consciousness.

Jesus said to the Pharisees: *“First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”*

God didn't send His Spirit into our hearts only to show us how dirty they are; he also sent Him to help us clean them up.

And now, the grand finale of our morning prayer for the day: *“Direct, control, suggest this day all I design or do or say.”*

Oh how I love those words.

Lord, move me, lead me, control me, incline me in the direction you would have me go.

Let everything I do today be pleasing to You.

Motivate me by Your Spirit: if I'm a boat, be the wind that propels me and the rudder which directs my course.

I can pray those words with a sincere heart.

But for a long time the next words have always been a problem for me: *“That all my powers with all their might in YOUR sole glory may unite.”*



Every time I sing these words, I realize that my heart isn't completely in them.

I might be seeking to glorify the Lord, but I also want a little glory for myself.

Maybe even more than a little.

The ugly face of vanity keeps peeking up at me through all those layers of piety I've accumulated over the years.

*"That all my powers with all their might in YOUR sole glory may unite?"*

How about ME?.

I want a REWARD for working in the vineyard!

I want to be KNOWN as a Godly man!

I want people to think of me as someone who makes God proud rather than as someone He's had to bail out time and time again.

And every time I confront this ugly truth ***it reminds me that I am a vain and selfish person who is incapable of loving God and my neighbor more than I do myself.***

Vanity! Vanity! All is vanity!

My friends, in our sinful flesh we are bonfires of vanities who are going to burn until death finally puts out the flames once and for all.

We're never going to train or discipline our sinful nature into complete submission.

We can let the Holy Spirit subdue it and silence it and finally kill it—but we can't reform it.

We all know deep down that even the very best things we do are tainted by the desire we have for some kind of reward.

In this life we are never going to completely eliminate the temptations of our sinful nature, and the reason is simple: our sinful nature is part of us and we can't kill what we ARE.

But we are also temples of the Holy Spirit of God!

And by the power of this Spirit we *can* love God and our neighbor.

So you see we are two things at the same time.

We are sinful flesh and we are spiritual newborns.

We are saint and we are sinner.

We are spiritual schizophrenics!

We can't explain it and we can't even understand it but we know it's true because God has said that it is true and we experience it every day.

God knows what we are ***but he He loves us just the same.***

He forgives us, not because we deserve it—He knows that we don't—but because God IS love and we are His beloved children.

And in the face of this great and wonderful mystery all we can do is rejoice and end our hymn:

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above ye heavenly host'  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Amen.

