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Dear God, we stand together with our sister in faith on behalf of Cindy Irwin. We are confident, God, that her plans were carried out exactly as they had been designed, and she is back home safely, back where she needs to be safely. If not, we are confident that you have never left her side and she has not departed from your will or your plan for her. We praise you and we thank you that she is right where you want her to be and you are standing right there with her. We thank you that we don't always know how it's going to work out and what's going to happen but we can always be confident in your promises that you will never leave us or forsake us. Please now, again, direct my words and help everyone to hear whatever the message is from you and not from me. Guard their hearts against anything that is not truth and not from you. In Jesus' name, amen. Alright. So today I'm going to be talking about making provision for the flesh. I was thinking about calling it one of our little foxes, but it's such a big thing that I don't think I can call it little. That phrase provision from the flesh comes from Romans 13-14 which I think is on the front of your bulletin. "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts." God created us to be in relationship with him and with each other. We've talked about that a lot. When humanity sinned, humanity was separated from God. Through Christ, we are reunited with God. However, just as a kid can live in his parents' house and yet ignore and avoid his parents, we can ignore and avoid the God who is with us. To live moment by moment with the God who is near us and within us is what it means to walk in the spirit. But the flesh, which is the sin that dwells in our bodies, it hates the spirit and it hates you walking in the spirit. Your own body has an enemy living within it, trying to sabotage your life. There's some other verses about this that I'm going to read. Romans 8-1, "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." Galatians 5-16, "I say then, 'Walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.'" Galatians 5-25, "If we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit." So today what I'd like to do is just talk about some examples about walking in the flesh versus walking in the spirit and hopefully as I compare and contrast them you will start to see the patterns of what it looks like when someone's walking in the flesh and what it looks like when someone's walking in the spirit. Then once you kind of identify those patterns then maybe you can look at your life and say, "Oh, that's an area I need to work on." That sort of thing. I have a pretty big list here and I probably won't get through them all. We'll just go for it. We'll see what happens. To walk in the flesh, to walk in the flesh looks like you want to be around people but you want to be guarded and untrusting. I think a fantastic example of this is anytime if you've ever walked into a Starbucks and you see people who have left their house, they've bought expensive cups of coffee all so they could go out into public and sit there on their laptops with their headphones in their ears. We all have this hunger and this desire for intimacy with one another. We want these heart connections and yet our flesh says, "No, no, you're going to be hurt. Don't do that. Don't open yourself up." So what we see in response to this is people who are drawn by this craving out into public and yet once they're out in public they're in this little cocoon of isolation. They don't want to interact with people. That's what walking in the flesh looks like. Walking in the spirit is when you are open and honest and vulnerable with people. You have true heart connections and you trust. You get hurt because you can't open yourself up without opening yourself up to hurt but you make that risk because you know that that's what your heart craves and you work for it. In Christ with one another, when God has repaired our hearts and repaired our relationships, we can be open and vulnerable with one another and in an area where there is structure and guidelines for how to deal when inevitably one of us hurts one another. You see stuff like that in Matthew 18 with conflict resolution and so on. To walk in the spirit is a person who is open, who actually connects with you, who when they say, "Hi, how are you doing?" It's not just a phrase that they're actually interested in. How are you? How are you doing? A person walking in the flesh wants to hear sins, hear other people's sins, but does not want to share their own. It's what keeps gossip flowing. It's what keeps tabloids and soap operas and all these other things flowing. We want that intimacy. When intimacy occurs between two people, there is a sharing of weakness. When you open up and you rely on another. We want those people to share their weaknesses with us, but we don't want to do it in return because that would make us vulnerable. Someone in the spirit, contrary to that, knows, recognizes that prayer is the strongest power and it desires strength and healing for itself and for others. It realizes that it cannot carry those burdens and those weights alone and that that road of keeping your weaknesses to yourself and not relying on someone to be your strength leads down a road to destruction. Walking in the flesh wants to be given love without giving love in return. Actually I kind of had a bit of an epiphany. That's actually what's behind the drive for people who want to go be a star in Hollywood or who want to be a rock and roll star or whatever. They want people to love them without loving in return. They want to, instead of that equal exchange that God has designed, love for love, they want love for talent or love for work or love for service. That's perverting the way God does things. God says it's love for love. You walk in the spirit, not only do you want to have that true exchange of love for love, but you want to give more love than you receive because you want to bless and love the people around you. Walking in the flesh expects forgiveness without confession. That's the attitude of, "Well, you're a Christian so you just need to forgive me." That's wrong. Sorry. You shouldn't demand forgiveness without confession, without repentance. Someone who walks in the spirit endeavors to go and sin no more. They want to leave that life of sin behind. They want to confess and repent of it. Repent means to turn away from that lifestyle, not just to say, "I'm sorry I did this." That's confession, but repentance is to actually turn away from that. They will do anything for forgiveness because they want this pure heart-to-heart relationship that God has designed us to have with each other and with our spouses and our children. So I'm going to talk a little bit about what walking in the flesh looks like in the church. I'm nervous. Walking in the flesh in the church looks like hiring clergy so you can remain laity. Walking in the flesh in the church means putting off the work of relationship with God to someone else. Let that person spend time in prayer for me. Let them seek God to find what God is trying to tell me. I spent 33 years in pews and I spent 33 years doing that. I didn't want to. It's uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable in its work and yet it's walking in the flesh. To walk in the Spirit means to pursue God on your own, to know that He wants direct relationship with you, to know that the same Spirit that is within each of us is the same Spirit that authored the holy scriptures of the Bible. We have been given direct access to God. We don't need anyone. And this was God's greatest joy, His ultimate plan since the beginning of time was to have direct relationship with each one of us and to not have gatekeepers. You can think on that one. When Craig left, when Craig left our ministering council board, which you might know as the spiritual life board, felt really strongly that we shouldn't put together a search committee. I was in one of those meetings and I felt it too. It was really strong. It was this very strong leading that God was saying, "Hang on, don't do that." They weren't permitted to do that. I really wonder, I'm excited that Keith is coming here and I look forward to what he's going to bring, but I just can't help but wonder what might have happened if we had pursued that. I don't know. We'll see. I don't think we can really just rail God. I think that God is God and I think He's got great things in store and I'm really excited about Keith and Mark. Walking in the flesh looks like reading a quick devotional in the morning and just checking off the verse, the passage, the prayer, the thought for the day, trying to get through it, get it done so you can get on with it, get on with your life. And the spirit is you sit down and you endeavor to meet with God. You endeavor to wait on Him and to be led by Him and to hear what He has to say. Maybe you've got that part figured out and maybe you do have really good quiet times, but flesh does not give up so easily. Maybe for you, your personal prayer time is great. For you, walking in the flesh, it stops right there and you don't pursue corporate prayer and worship time. I mean, you come to Sunday morning and you sing the songs and everything, but you avoid getting together in a group and praying for people and really having those heart connections on a group level. Maybe you go to a small group and you're just quiet, you sit there and you share as little as possible. But to walk in the spirit means to realize that we are not islands, we are parts of a body. None of us is the entire body of Christ on our own. You cannot exist on your own in the spirit any more than a finger can exist without the rest of the body. And so you seek God, you pray out to God and say, "Show me what part of the body I am. Maybe I'm the part that gets up and preaches or maybe I'm a part that helps lead worship or maybe I'm a part that prays for people or maybe I'm a part that writes birthday cards to people or helps turn off the lights and lock up the doors after church like Ray. Maybe it's service, maybe it's prayer, maybe it's... And nowhere in scripture does it say that there should just be a pastor. It uses plural word pastors. So maybe you've been called to watch over a person or a group of people or something, but to walk in the spirit means to find your place in the body and to operate in it. The spiritual gifts, and when it talks about spiritual gifts in the Bible, it says that we are given these gifts in order to build up and edify the church. So pray about what your gifts are and what role you're supposed to be playing in the church. I mean you have to be official on the board or on the worship team or something, but somehow you need to be pouring out into these people something that God has given you. God's giving you something for these people. Seek out and pray what that is. In the flesh wants you to stay busy. And I think the perfect example of that is the story about Martha and Mary. Jesus comes over to Martha and Mary's house and Mary just comes down and sits down at Jesus' feet and just enjoys time with Jesus. And Martha is in the kitchen busy. She's cooking food, she's preparing, there's going to be people here, she's working. She's like, Jesus has got a small group coming tonight and we need to be ready, we need to have all of the lesson notes photocopied. I don't really know what she was doing. And then Jesus says, Martha, Martha, you've busy yourself. And Martha says, Jesus, tell my lazy sister, you're sitting at your feet to get over here and help me. And Jesus says, Martha, Martha, you have busy yourself with so many things, but Mary has chosen the best thing and it will not be taken from her. Martha was walking in the flesh and Mary was walking in the spirit. It's the perfect example. Flesh just wants you to do anything other than spend time with God and walk in the spirit. Walking in the flesh wants you to, if you get something right in your spiritual life, in your walk, it wants you to put it in a box, put it in a manual and guidelines and photocopy it and put it in a framework and a structure and repeat it over and over and over again. That's what the flesh wants you to do. But to walk in the spirit is to wait on the Lord and to realize that what worked yesterday may not work today. Just trying to decide how much trouble I want to get in. So the Quaker church was formed in the late 1600s during a time when people completely disregarded a holy life and righteousness and just assumed that if they punched their card at the church services and if they were baptized and took communion that they were saved. And so in response to that, George Fox said, "You know what? We're going to do things a little bit differently. We're going to point out that baptism doesn't save you by not water-baptizing. We're going to point out that physical communion doesn't save you by not taking physical communion. And we're just going to meet in house to house and we're going to be led by the spirit." And that was great, you know? But nowadays, most people, if you talk to them, most denominations, they still water-baptize, but very few of them actually think that water-baptism saves you. That belief is not there anymore. Most denominations, at least in America, do emphasize holiness and righteousness and relationship with God. And yet we're still afraid of water-baptism because that was our box. That was what worked for us. We put ourselves into that. And I'm not, in case you think I'm going where I'm going, I'm not going to suggest that we rewrite faith in practice or anything like that. But maybe we just need to stop being so terrified of stuff like that, communion and water-baptism. It's just a symbol. It's funny because I'll see people walking around with a fish on their car or a Christian bumper sticker or a Christian t-shirt. And we have all of these symbols we use to proclaim our faith. And yet this one symbol of water-baptism, we're terrified of that symbol. But we'll do any other symbol. The Bible talks about how God has new wine for us, but He can't put it into old wineskins. And as I think back, I think that was one of the first messages I ever gave here. Walking by the Spirit means, however we did things yesterday may not be how God wants us to do them today. It means not assuming that. It means walking in the Spirit. It means saying, "Okay, God, what are we doing today? How are we doing it today?" So to that end, I am going to propose something. I had this idea this week, and when I had it, it just tingled my brain. And I was like, "Yeah, that's a great idea." And then I started thinking about it, and I'm like, "A lot of people are going to hate that idea." I'm going to suggest it. It's not mandatory, but we're going to talk about it. I would like, in three weeks' time, to not meet here on Sunday morning. I would like us to divide up for a few volunteers to open up their homes, and we will just go to each other's houses, and we will have church in each other's houses. There's nothing in the Bible that says church has to take place on Sunday morning. There's nothing in the Bible that says it has to be between 10.30 and 11.30, or it has to be in this or that building. And as Quakers, we know that that's true. We say, "Of course, yeah, we are the church. This is our meeting house." And yet here we are, Sunday after Sunday, and 30 to 11.30, pretending, acting like we don't really believe what we say. And so I'm thinking, "Let's actually act like we believe what we say we believe." And so I want you to think about it. Like I said, nothing's in stone yet, but I want you to think about, would you be willing to meet in... We're not going to all be at one person's house. We're going to divide up into groups. We'll have people who volunteer open up my house, and you can come, and we'll have... I can hold 10 people or whatever, and then we'll announce who's opening up their houses, and then each of you can say, "I'll be at your house on Sunday," or, "I'll come to your house on Sunday." And then you'll just be led by the Spirit, and there won't be programmed worship. There won't be an official speaker. There won't be an official leader. The person who opens up their house has no responsibility other than just to say, "Here is where Christians are meeting on Sunday, and anyone is welcome." You don't get to pick and choose who comes. Anyone who wants to come is invited. And we'll have spirit-led church just one time, three weeks from now. Think about that. Come talk to me. If you think it's a good idea or a bad idea, you won't hurt my feelings. But if enough people say it's a good idea, then we'll start making plans, and yeah, we'll see what happens. All right, let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank You again that You are God who is here with us, and You are in us. We thank You that You want to lead us day by day, moment by moment, and that You have wonderful, beautiful things for us to do. That You have such interesting plans for us. We thank You that You want us to be involved with us, and that the walk that You're leading us down is amazing and inspiring and fulfilling. So we ask God that You please show us the places in our lives where we are walking in the flesh. Please help us to kill the flesh in those areas of our lives. Help us to walk in the Spirit instead. I ask that in Jesus' name, and I'm going to close with a Bible verse. I looked this up before. This is from Matthew 7. This is Jesus talking. "Many will say to me, 'In that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I, being Jesus, will declare to them, 'I never knew You, depart from Me, You who practice lawlessness.'" It's not enough to go through the motions. We have to actually know Jesus and have a relationship with Him and walk in the Spirit.