

Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit – 1. The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Job 33:4; Acts 2:17; John 14:15-17; Romans 15:13

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In 2015, I ran Grandma's Half Marathon in Duluth. This was my third and last half marathon. I had been running for about 8 years but, while I enjoyed the benefits of running and the community gatherings for running, I never really enjoyed running all that much. And I never had running a marathon on my bucket list. Not once did I finish one of those half marathons and say, *Wow, I could do that all over again right no!* 13.1 miles was more than enough for me. But I've always been in awe of those folks who have the strength, discipline, and time to do ultra competitions like the Ironman triathlons. Did you know that we have an Ironman competitor in our congregation? Benjy Spence has been competing in triathlons since 2007 because of a simple New Year's resolution to break the cycle of an unhealthy family history with a goal of life-long health. So, at the age of 30, he did his first Ironman and fell in love with the training and the discipline required to compete. That prompted him to set a goal of one triathlon a year until he turns 50. And so far, he's on track having completed 15 to date. This fall he will compete in Ironman Florida, swimming 2.4 miles in the Gulf of Mexico - where there is likely to be strong currents, riptides, and occasional marine life encounters, he will bike a fast, flat bike track that is 112 miles long and then finish by running a full marathon (26.2 miles). The bikes that they use are not ordinary bikes. They are aerodynamic and can cost upwards of \$17,000, more than some cars, although Benjy said his bike costs nowhere near that much. These bikes are top of the line. You cannot get a better bike when it comes to going as fast as you possibly can. But if anything is not working just right, even as something as small and simple as an inexpensive \$50 chain or a \$10 cable, the bike is going nowhere. This bike is built for speed and power but without that important connection you're out of the race.

That got me to thinking this week as I was preparing this message, that's a lot like our spiritual lives. God's given us an amazing gift of the Holy Spirit so that God can live in and through us but if we lose that connection to the Holy Spirit, we will live a spirit-less life instead of a spirit-filled life. So for the next three weeks, we're going to see what scripture has to say about who the Holy Spirit is, what are the gifts of the Holy Spirit and why, as followers of Jesus, we are called to live by the Spirit.

As Christians, we have been taught to think/talk about God in terms of the Trinity, God in three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I think most of us can wrap our minds around the idea of God as the Father, creator of the world and all living things. We can grasp the idea of Jesus, the Son, coming to us in human form, to die for our sins so we can be redeemed. I think we get all that, but where we struggle is around the concept of the Holy Spirit and what that means in our lives. If that's where you are, don't worry, you're not alone. Some of the smartest theologians throughout time have wrestled with this and how to help our little human brains understand it. The goal for this series and why I think it's so important for us to understand who the Holy Spirit is... is because **the key to experiencing God's presence, peace and power in our lives is the Holy Spirit.**

So, let's start today with scripture. Scripture is always the best place to start. Did you know that the Holy Spirit is mentioned over 800 times through the Bible and *the very first* reference is in the second verse of our Bibles, **Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:2]** Sometimes I think we think of the Holy Spirit first coming to us at Pentecost but we can see here that it has been present throughout all creation. In the Old Testament/the Hebrew scripture/the

Jewish people's sacred text, the word used for spirit is **RUACH**. Ruach can be translated into three different words, spirit, breath or wind. So when you see it in used scripture sometimes it is talking about the Spirit of God, sometimes the human spirit or sometimes, even an evil spirit, wind or breath. But over 100 times, in the Old Testament alone, it is talking about the Spirit of God. And then we read that God breathed breath into the first human to give life. While we are formed in our mother's womb, it is the ruach of God, the breath of God, the Spirit of God that gives us life. Listen to what Job says, **God's spirit made me; the Almighty's breath enlivens me. Job 33:4**. It is the spirit that animates us, empowers us and gives us life.

In the Old Testament, we read that the Spirit would come for specific purposes, at specific times and to a specific people. And we see the Spirit descending upon people and then departing from them. We read about it with King Saul, that the Spirit of God descended on him. We see it in King David after the incident with Bathsheba when he said, "God, don't take your spirit from me." We read that God sent his spirit to warriors of Israel so that they could win battles that they could not have won on their own. We see it when God sends the Spirit to the prophets so they can speak on God's behalf. But all that, was about to change.

Listen to what the prophet Joel says as he prophesied about the future, **After that I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. Joel 2:28** This is a new picture of the Holy Spirit coming to everyone and that would happen as a result of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

We see that Spirit comes to Jesus on his baptism, the Spirit leads him into the wilderness, the Spirit anoints him to preach good news and Paul tells us that it is that same Spirit that resurrects Jesus from the grave. On the night before Jesus was crucified, he gathered his disciples around a table to share a holy meal and tells them that *"the same spirit that is upon me is going to come to you."* You know how the story unfolds from here, Jesus dies on the cross, is dead and is buried. On the third day, he is risen from the grave and spends a little more time here on earth before he ascends into heaven. But before he departs, he tells his disciples to go to Jerusalem and that Holy Spirit will come to them there. And that's exactly what happened. That's what we celebrate on Pentecost Sunday. The HS came down on ALL believers and as they wandered the streets, they began speaking in languages that they did not know so that everyone could hear about Jesus. The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to do supernatural things in a natural world. And as a follower of Jesus, the spirit is in you too.

Maybe you're thinking, wouldn't it have just been easier if Jesus never left the earth in the first place? The Holy Spirit wouldn't have to come at all. To some degree, you may be right. Like, if you were ever feeling sick or injured, you could just say, Jesus, will you heal me please? And poof, you'd be healed. Or if you were eating a Panera salad and noticed others around you had nothing to eat, you could just say, hey Jesus, can you help us here? And poof, everyone would have plenty to eat. In some respects, that'd be great but because Jesus was fully divine and fully human, he was constrained to the limitations of a human body so he could not be everywhere at once. So, Jesus tells his followers, hey, it's better for you that I go and send the Holy Spirit to you because ... ***If I don't go away, the Companion won't come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7***

God wants to live in and through us by the Holy Spirit but rather than living a spirit-led life, too often, we lose that connection (or never make that connection to begin with) and instead, live a spirit-less life. And I think there are three main reasons for this.

The first reason is that sometimes we are **not even aware of the Holy Spirit**. As I said, I think we understand God the Father and Jesus the son, but the concept of the Holy Spirit... is hard to grasp and can be kind of fuzzy. Some people in the first century felt the same way. They didn't understand it either. Here's what we read in Acts, chapter 19; ***While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'*** Acts 19:1-2 These folks were obviously not present at Pentecost and while they understood how and why to worship God, they understood who Jesus is but what in the world was the Holy Spirit? Maybe that's where you are today too.

Thanksgiving 2021, most of our kids and their families traveled to San Diego so that we could spend the holiday with my mother. Our youngest daughter, Emily and her then-fiancé, Mike (now her husband) traveled with Jerry and me from Minneapolis to San Diego. As you might imagine, the airport around that time of the year is very crowded with long lines for everything, there's pushing and shoving and an electric anxiety in the air. After clearing the long security line, Jerry and I headed to our gate only to learn that Mike has privileges in the Delta Sky Lounge, because his father is a Delta pilot. So he and Emily headed off to the Delta Sky Lounge. The Delta Sky Lounge. Doesn't that just sound lovely? I'm told it's quiet and there's room to relax and spread out. There are clean bathrooms with no waiting and maybe most importantly, free food. I didn't even know this place existed. Jerry and I were out there in the crowd where it was miserable. I think that is how it is a lot of times with the Holy Spirit. We are just completely unaware and that leads us to live spirit-less lives.

A second reason that we live without the Holy Spirit is because sometimes **we resist** the Holy Spirit. In the past few months, we talked about how God gives us free will to respond (or not to respond) to that still small voice in our lives, that voice that is nudging us to respond in one way or another. And over time, if this continues our hearts become hardened, so hard that eventually we just don't hear that voice at all.

Stephen, before he was stoned to death tells the religious leaders: ***"You stubborn people! In your thoughts and hearing, you are like those who have had no part in God's covenant! You continuously set yourself against the Holy Spirit, just like your ancestors did. Acts 7:51***

You may be thinking, I don't remember ever feeling the nudge of the Holy Spirit or hearing that still, small voice you're talking about. But the Holy Spirit is there, and as we grow in our faith journey, we grow more aware of it. So how can you tell the difference between your thoughts and the prompting of the Holy Spirit? One way is that *our thoughts* are usually selfish thoughts. What's best for me? What's easiest for me? What will make me most comfortable? What's in it for me? But when the Holy Spirit is prompting your thoughts, you're going to be asking what's best for others? How can I make life better for other people? The more we walk with Christ, the more we feel the promptings but if you keep denying them or going in the opposite directions (Jonah last week's message) your heart will become hardened until you don't feel or hear it anymore.

Then there's a third reason we might live a spirit-less life at that is **because we sin**. When we allow things like anger, greed, jealousy to enter our lives, they start to consume us and take us over. And before we know it, these sins have become addictions, addictions to alcohol or gambling or gossip or pornography. Maybe it's an obsession with having more possessions or wealth. Maybe it's anger or rage or envy that makes us push away the Holy Spirit. God has

given us this amazing power with which to live, to allow it to empower us, guide us and shape us, if we will accept it.

So how does the holy spirit actually minister to us in our daily lives? I think there are three ways that this happens. But to best understand it, let's take a look at Jesus' words to his disciples the night before he died. He tells them that he is going to be going soon to prepare a mansion for them in heaven. And he says, ***I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can't receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you. John 14:16-17***

Now Jesus spoke in Aramaic and John, the writer of this gospel spoke was Greek. The word that Jesus used for Holy Spirit translated into Greek is **paraklete**. This comes from two Greek words. The first "para" means **alongside** and "kletos" means **called to**. So, the Holy Spirit is **called to come alongside us**. It was also used to refer to a helper and a counselor. So, understanding the full meaning of this word *paraklete* gives us a richer, fuller understanding of how the Holy Spirit ministers to us today.

The first way is that the Holy Spirit ministers to us is by **comforting us**. You may be in a really tough season of life right now and it seems that there is no way out of your current circumstances. But yet, somehow, you still feel God's presence with you and have a sense of peace about your situation. How do you feel that sense of peace, it's the power of the Holy Spirit, that comfort of peace that passes all our human understandings.

The second way the Holy Spirit ministers to us is by **counseling us**, that is, giving us wisdom, discernment and pointing us in the right direction. Here's what Jesus said, ***However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won't speak on his own but will say whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come. John 16:13***. When you don't know what to do, listen and pray for guidance that the Holy Spirit will guide you and counsel you step by step.

And the third way the Holy Spirit ministers to us is by **convicting us**. I love these words from the prophet Isaiah, ***Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." Isaiah 30:21***. He's talking about the Holy Spirit here. Is there something in your life right now that you know you need to get rid of? Something you need to walk away from? Is there something in your life that is making you a slave to sin. See it and acknowledge it because the Holy Spirit is convicting you to recognize that its wrong and inviting you to a spirit-filled life.

Or perhaps you are here today but you're not a follower of Jesus... and yet, something has drawn you here today. I think that's the Holy Spirit convicting you to explore scripture a little bit more, to hear the stories of Jesus and to understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus. If you feel the Spirit nudging you like that today, I encourage you to not ignore it because the Spirit is calling you to live a spirit-filled life.

So to end, Paul gives us this prayer, ***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13*** and who wouldn't love to have joy and peace and overflow with hope in their life? If you are feeling hopeless or afraid, burdened or lost, then tap into the power of the Holy Spirit that is within you. And how do you do that, its pretty simple, you just ask. So I invite you this week is to pray this simple prayer,

Let's pray, "Come, holy Spirit, come. Give me eyes to see and ears to hear. Help me to understand the way to go and make me more like Jesus. May I never lose the connection with the Holy Spirit so I can experience the joy of walking with you and feeling your presence with me on every step of life's journey. Amen."

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 2, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Merciful God, grant me the grace of your presence. I need to be reminded that I am not alone. I long to feel your Spirit and to hear your still, small voice whisper in my ear. Feed me with the spiritual food which only you can give, because you alone can satisfy the deepest needs of the soul. Amen.

Monday, July 3

Scripture: Genesis 1:2, 26-27; Psalm 33:6-9

The earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God's wind swept over the waters—

Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

God created humanity in God's own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them.

The skies were made by the LORD's word,
all their starry multitude by the breath of his mouth.
He gathered the ocean waters into a heap;
he put the deep seas into storerooms.
All the earth honors the LORD;
all the earth's inhabitants stand in awe of him.
Because when he spoke, it happened!
When he commanded, there it was!

Observation

In Biblical Hebrew, the word *rûaḥ* meant spirit, wind, and/or breath. "In the OT the spirit (*rûaḥ*) of Yahweh is God's power in action. Yahweh's spirit is God himself present and at work, as are his 'hand' and his 'arm'....A term for both breath blown out and wind blowing (wind is viewed as God's breath, Is. 40:7; Ezk. 37:9), *rûaḥ* has vivid and awesome associations when used of God's energy let loose. It is so used in nearly 100 of its nearly 400 OT appearances. Yahweh's spirit is said to...shape creation, animate animals and mankind, and direct nature and history (Gen. 1:2, 2:7; Jb. 33:4; Ps. 33:6, 104:29–30; Is. 34:16)." Long before anyone had thought about the word "Trinity," Genesis 1's poetic creation liturgy said the one God created humans in "our" image, made to be like "us" in character. It described God's *rûaḥ* (see note above on this Hebrew word) moving over the waters of primordial chaos. Psalm 33 was a later passage that also portrayed God's spirit as fully involved in the work of creation. Like Jesus (John 1:1-3), the Holy Spirit already was, at the very beginning of the Bible's big story.

Application

We sometimes think the Holy Spirit didn't show up (or maybe even exist) until the day of Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:2-4). However, the Bible described God's Spirit existing before, and at work during the creation of the world. Open your heart and ask God to guide your reading this week, expanding and deepening your understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, you are the spiritual air I breathe. Help me to grow more aware of the inner strength and vitality you offer me as I make you the "oxygen" of my life with God. Amen.

Tuesday, July 4

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Zechariah 4:6

The LORD's power overcame me, and while I was in the LORD's spirit, he led me out and set me down in the middle of a certain valley. It was full of bones. He led me through them all around, and I saw that there were a great many of them on the valley floor, and they were very dry. He asked me, "Human one, can these bones live again?" I said, "LORD God, only you know." He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, Dry bones, hear the LORD's word! The LORD God proclaims to these bones: I am about to put breath in you, and you will live again. I will put sinews on you, place flesh on you, and cover you with skin. When I put breath in you, and you come to life, you will know that I am the LORD." I prophesied just as I was commanded. There was a great noise as I was prophesying, then a great quaking, and the bones came together, bone by bone. When I looked, suddenly there were sinews on them. The flesh appeared, and then they were covered over with skin. But there was still no breath in them. He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, human one! Say to the breath, The LORD God proclaims: Come from the four winds, breath! Breathe into these dead bodies and let them live." I prophesied just as he commanded me. When the breath entered them, they came to life and stood on their feet, an extraordinarily large company. He said to me, "Human one, these bones are the entire house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely finished.' So now, prophesy and say to them, The LORD God proclaims: I'm opening your graves! I will raise you up from your graves, my people, and I will bring you to Israel's fertile land. You will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and raise you up from your graves, my people. I will put my breath in you, and you will live. I will plant you on your fertile land, and you will know that I am the LORD. I've spoken, and I will do it. This is what the LORD says."

He answered me:

"This is the LORD's word to Zerubbabel:
Neither by power, nor by strength,
but by my spirit, says the LORD of heavenly forces."

Observation

Ezekiel's "dry bones" vision wasn't as much about bones as about God's power to bring life even to hopeless exiled Israel through the divine "spirit" or "breath." Scholar N. T. Wright noted, "The words for 'wind', 'breath' and 'spirit' are the same (this is true in both Hebrew and Greek). This wind is the healing breath of God's spirit, come to undo the long effects of primal rebellion." Today's readings (and other prophetic verses like Joel 2:27-29) showed how Israel's prophets honored God's life-giving Spirit.

Application

Ezekiel, speaking to Israelites in exile with their nation destroyed and helpless, reported a vision showing that God offers hope even in situations that look hopeless to our human eyes. When have you seen God bring life to a situation or person that seemed beyond hope? Who do you know who needs hope? How can you carry the news of God's life-giving hope to them?

Prayer

Lord God, through your Spirit give me the courage and responsiveness to make the world better in whatever ways, large or small, you call me to. Amen.

Wednesday, July 5

Scripture: John 7:37-39; Matthew 28:18-20

On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted, "All who are thirsty should come to me!

All who believe in me should drink!

As the scriptures said concerning me,

Rivers of living water will flow out from within him."

Jesus said this concerning the Spirit. Those who believed in him would soon receive the Spirit, but they hadn't experienced the Spirit yet since Jesus hadn't yet been glorified.

Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

Observation

At the yearly Festival of Tabernacles, priests drew water daily at the Pool of Siloam and poured it out in the Temple, reciting Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." It was against that backdrop that Jesus dramatically invited all who believe in him to drink "living water." Lest anyone miss the point, John directly pointed out that Jesus' words showed the Spirit's life-giving power, not only for the spiritually barren places in Jesus' day but for all time.

Application

Israel was observing an annual public ritual, which could become just "going through the motions." But Jesus' call was personal. "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me ..." Are you personally drinking the water of eternal life Jesus offers by keeping your life open to the Spirit's presence? If not, what is blocking you from accepting Jesus' offer?

Prayer

God in three persons, blessed Trinity, I am grateful for all the ways you reveal yourself. You save and forgive me, quench my inner thirst and guide me in all my steps. Amen.

Thursday, July 6

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:3-6

You show that you are Christ's letter, delivered by us. You weren't written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. You weren't written on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. This is the confidence that we have through Christ in the presence of God. It isn't that we

ourselves are qualified to claim that anything came from us. No, our qualification is from God. He has qualified us as ministers of a new covenant, not based on what is written but on the Spirit, because what is written kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Observation

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to a group of Christians almost all of whom had come to faith through his preaching of Jesus. Yet he made it clear that something far beyond his power had been at work. As scholar William Barclay put it, “the work of the Spirit changes a [person’s] very heart...only the Spirit can change human nature.” Paul said the Holy Spirit is the divine being who makes real the new covenant promise found in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Application

In Roman times, you couldn’t Google a stranger, or call someone in a distant city who knew the person. So, people would carry written letters of introduction with them. Paul made the remarkable, challenging claim that the Spirit made Christ-followers like living letters of introduction for Jesus. In what ways do those who know you learn an accurate, appealing image of Jesus from you? Are there any ways in which you want the Spirit to shape you to better represent your Lord?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, it’s a new day, and again today I bear your name into a world that urgently needs to know you. Fill me with your Spirit, that I may show others your goodness and glory. Amen.

Friday, July 7

Scripture: John 14:16-18, 26-27

I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you. “I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you.

The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you. “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid.

Observation

In Biblical Greek, the word *paraklētos* (like the Hebrew *rûaḥ*) had multiple English equivalents. There is no single English equivalent to the Greek word *paraklētos*...a variety of English words are used to translate John’s use of “Paraclete” when referring to the Holy Spirit, which reflects the elasticity of the Greek term. English translators most commonly use the words Helper, Advocate, Comforter and Counselor. It is rendered as “Companion” in the Common English Bible, with “Advocate” a footnoted alternative. The disciples had been with Jesus for three years. It must have been impossible to imagine Jesus’ ministry going on without him present. But Jesus stressed that he was not abandoning the disciples. He promised them the Holy Spirit as the “paraclete” (see note above), a Companion who would fill the role Jesus had filled, different yet the same. The Spirit’s presence would bring Jesus’ peace to their hearts.

Application

Jesus did not forget or desert his first disciples or us. He promised to be with us constantly through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not replace Jesus, but rather, in a way beyond our full understanding, is Jesus’ presence with us, now and until the end of time and space as we

know it (“forever”—verse 16). What word or phrase in today’s verses about the Holy Spirit speaks most to your heart? When have you most sensed Jesus’ presence with you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you promised, “I won’t leave you as orphans, I will come to you.” Thank you for always being my Companion and Comforter, even when my circumstances seem the hardest. Amen.

Saturday, July 8

Scripture: John 16:12-15

“I have much more to say to you, but you can’t handle it now. However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won’t speak on his own, but will say whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and proclaim it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine. That’s why I said that the Spirit takes what is mine and will proclaim it to you.

Observation

John recorded Jesus’ teaching about “the Father,” himself and “the Spirit,” not as three separate beings, but one God in three persons. The greatest theologians can’t articulate this concept in ways that the human imagination can process. The three persons of the Trinity are close in a manner that goes beyond the closest human relationships we know. The Holy Spirit is the third person (which in no way means inferior or subordinate to the first and second person) of the Trinity, who functions as God’s continual presence on Earth, especially after Jesus’ ascension to heaven. The Holy Spirit resides in us, sustaining, nudging, rebuking, and reshaping our humanity.

Application

Jesus was direct with the disciples: “I have much more to say to you, but you can’t handle it now.” However, the Holy Spirit would continue his work of teaching them (John 16:13). Have you faced times when you weren’t ready to handle the full truth of a medical, relational, or spiritual situation? Are you grateful that God doesn’t insist on “cramming” the whole truth down our throat when we’re not ready, but that the Spirit works patiently with us as we learn and grow?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, guide me by your Spirit each day. I ask for a teachable spirit to know more about you and your will for me. Thank you for being patient with me. Amen.