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## Getting to Know the Holy Spirit

*By David Wilkerson*

November 5, 2007 Here at Times Square Church, we sing a hand-clapping song that goes this way:

*Send him on down, Lord, send him on down.*

*Lord, let the Holy Ghost come on down.*

*We need him, Lord, send him on down.*

We sing other, similar songs, pleading with the Holy Ghost to come down.

But the truth is, the Holy Spirit is already here. He came down from heaven at the Upper Room at Pentecost. And he never left!

Jesus promised, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16–17).

Consider a phrase Jesus uses here: "*But you know him.*" Recently, as I read those words for my study in preparing this message, I could not shake them off. I realized I really don't know much about the Holy Spirit.

The church talks a lot about the Spirit. We teach a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. We talk about being filled with the Spirit, walking and living in the Spirit, having the gifts of the Spirit, receiving the comfort of the Spirit.

Yet it's possible to know all the doctrines of the Holy Spirit and still not know him. If I were to ask you, "Have you received the Holy Spirit?" how would you answer?

Some might say, "Yes, I received the Spirit when Jesus saved me. It was the Holy Spirit that brought me into Christ's kingdom." Others would answer, "Yes, I have received the Spirit, because I spoke with tongues when he came into my life. I pray in the Spirit, and tongues are an evidence that I have received him."

However, to receive the Spirit is more than a one-time experience. The word "receive" means "lay hold of that which is given." In short, receiving is to desire an expanding capacity for greater knowledge of who the Spirit is and what his ministry is about. In fact, the Holy Spirit is not received by someone *until he is allowed to take full control of that person's temple.*

Paul asked the Galatians, "How did you receive the Spirit? Did you not receive him by faith?" He then declares, "You stated by faith that what you know of the Spirit you received by faith. So, has there been a continued 'ministry of the Spirit' to you by faith? Are you exercising faith to go deeper in the Spirit?"

Here is an amazing thing: God has given us the great gift of his Spirit, who sets up residence in our hearts, yet we act as though he is not here. We know the Holy Spirit is here on earth and that he has never left. We know he dwells in us, making us his abode; our bodies become his temple. Yet, much of the time we live as if the Spirit is off somewhere in the cosmos, not in our midst or within us.

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The truth here is that the Father sent us his Spirit to show us just how interested he is in every aspect of our lives. The Holy Spirit has been sent as our friend, our comforter, our guide. In view of this amazing fact, the question for each of us becomes, "How well do I know the Spirit? Do I really know him in these ways?"

Jesus makes clear the Holy Spirit is to be to us everything that Christ was to his own disciples when he was here on earth. Consider:

- Jesus revealed the Father to his followers.
- He gave the disciples all the words that God gave to him.
- He prayed for the disciples, and he kept (or protected) them.
- The glory that Jesus had, he also gave to his disciples (see John 17).

Jesus says to all who follow him, "I will not leave you comfortless." He's telling us, in other words, "I am sending you One who will defend and keep you. I won't leave you helpless or powerless, vulnerable to Satan's wiles. Rejoice, because I'm sending you One whose power is greater than every other power in the universe."

Jesus says that not only is the Spirit here, living in me. He also says that *I know him*. Therefore, I have to ask myself: *how* do I know the Spirit? What are the marks, the evidence, that cause me to know him, to acknowledge his abiding presence, to experience his nearness?

Simply put, I know the Holy Spirit by *the changes he is working in me*. I don't *know* the Spirit merely by looking at the changes he has wrought in others. I may see him reflected in my brothers and sisters, but I know the Spirit only by his work in my own life.

You see, the work that the Holy Spirit does in us is so very personal. My body is his temple, and in me he daily ministers new revelations of Christ. It is his work that has caused me to turn from evil, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to continually yearn, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Let me speak to you now about two of the primary ministries of the Spirit. When we know his ministry and believe he is working it in us, then we are able to rise above all trials and fears. His ministry allows us even to look death in the face and remain full of hope and joy.

1. Consider first the Holy Spirit's *ministry of comfort*. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "the Comforter." It is one thing to know the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. But we must also know *how* he comforts us, so we can distinguish what comfort is of flesh and what is from the Spirit.

For example, consider the brother or sister in Christ who is overcome with loneliness. This person prays for the comfort of the Holy Spirit and expects that comfort to come as a feeling. He imagines it as a kind of sudden breath from heaven, like a spiritual sedative to his soul. In his thinking, comfort comes as a sweet dulling of the mind, bringing a few hours of relief.

But the next morning, the feeling of peace is gone. As a result, he starts to believe the Holy Ghost has refused his request. No, never! The Holy Spirit doesn't comfort us by manipulating our feelings. His way of comforting is vastly different and is outlined clearly in Scripture. No matter what the problem, trial or need, his ministry of comfort is accomplished by *bringing truth*: "[The] comforter...even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16).

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The fact is, our comfort springs from what we know, not what we feel. Only truth overrules feelings. And the comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit begins with this foundational truth: *God is not mad at you. He loves you.*

“Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5). The Greek meaning here is even stronger than the translation suggests. It says that the love of God is caused to “gush forth” in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The image here is of a heart that is overburdened. An unbearable burden may be caused by fear, shame, sorrow, afflictions, temptations, discouragement. Yet, no matter what the cause, comfort is needed.

Now, suddenly, a voice is heard, echoing through every corridor of the soul. It is the voice of the Holy Spirit, declaring to that soul, “Nothing can separate you from the love of God.”

This truth — once you believe it — quickly becomes a gusher of living water, sweeping away every stumbling block. “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, *he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*” (John 14:26, my italics).

In this way, the Holy Spirit plays a central part in our sonship to the Father. The Spirit is our teacher in our everyday walk with Christ, and we are his students. And he teaches us that we are adopted. We are God’s family, his sons and daughters.

How does the Spirit bring this truth to our remembrance? He recalls to us the most glorious proclamation ever spoken by Jesus: “I am the Son of God. I have a Father in heaven. And my Father loves me.”

Jesus’ words here become our words, as we are adopted into the Father’s family, being made brothers and sisters of Christ. “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6).

It is the Holy Spirit who cries out in us, “Remember what Jesus said: you are a son, a daughter of the almighty God. You have a Father in heaven who loves you. So, remember who you are. You are not alone. Keep in mind the words of Jesus: ‘God has loved you, just as he loved me.’”

This truth that the Spirit of sonship abides in me has become a great source of peace and comfort in my walk with the Lord. The enemy may come in like a flood upon me, bringing me under fear, guilt or stress. But I can immediately invoke this prayer: “Holy Spirit, minister to me now, teach me, recall to me. Remind me of Jesus’ promises about my security as a son of God.”

The Spirit then cries out in me, “Remember Abba, your Father. You are justified, and you have access to him. Now, cry out from your soul this proclamation: ‘I am a son of God. I walk now in the Spirit of sonship!’”

“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

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Likewise, Paul tells us that as God's sons and daughters, we are given the same Spirit that was in Christ: "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11).

Do you see how important this role of the Spirit is? At times I may feel spiritually dead. I might feel cold at heart, lifeless, as if the fire in me is only a spark now, a flickering flame. But the reality is, there is a life-force always at work in me.

If I believe God's Word, and I trust in Christ, then no matter how I feel — no matter how I may judge myself or feel condemned — the Spirit of Christ in me is still breathing life into my soul. God is still loving me, and the Spirit is still at work.

Think for a moment about a precious loved one you know, someone who is perhaps suffering or on his deathbed. That loved one's mortal body is wasting away. But we know that all who are in Christ are in the process of resurrection. Indeed, the very same Spirit that invaded Christ's temple in the tomb also comes to raise up your precious one into everlasting life. At the point of deepest suffering, the Spirit cries this comforting truth in him: "You are going to Abba Father."

Another source of comfort is to know and believe the Holy Spirit has come to wage war against the lusts and enticements of our flesh. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:17).

An inner war still rages within us. Every Christian can say, "I know God loves me. I know him as my Father, and I know I am his child. I know I am made righteous in God's eyes, and I have access to my Lord. But there is still a war going on inside of me. I still fight against fleshly thoughts, against awful temptations. And this war never seems to end."

Beloved, this war is a reality for every Christian. We think thoughts that are unworthy of Christ. We look at things we ought not to, we are tempted by things we shouldn't be tempted by, we listen to talk we shouldn't give ear to. And it all makes us feel unworthy and unclean.

These battles can be so intense and so ongoing, at times we feel we're losing the war. Even the apostle Paul felt this way, crying out in anguish: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

Yet in response to our cries, the Holy Spirit comes with truth that brings comfort: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In short, Paul says, you are fighting the same warfare being experienced by godly saints all over the world. Your trial isn't something peculiar or specific to you. The apostle Peter assures us as well: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12).

God says there is a power in me that is greater than my flesh. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

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The reason your flesh has risen up — the reason Satan has enflamed you — is because you have invited the Spirit to move in and take control. It is that simple: you're being tempted because the Spirit has been doing wonderful things in you. And his work has aroused Satan's wrath.

True, your flesh is enmity against the Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is more than conqueror over your flesh. We simply have to realize this battle is never going to end in our lifetime. That's why Paul gives us these words: "(God) will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Here again is truth from the Holy Spirit that brings us comfort: *We have an escape from any fear of being defeated.*

This truth shows us three important things, things we are to ask the Spirit to recall to us:

- "My inner war is a struggle common to everyone. Therefore, I am not going to buy the lie that I am a strange, unclean son of God."
- "I must always be conscious — I must maintain a continual sense — that God so loves me he has given me his own Spirit. He is so tender and concerned about me, he has sent the Holy Ghost to fight my wars. The Spirit hasn't come as some spy, searching me just to find iniquity. He has only my good, my benefit, in mind."
- "I must cast off all condemnation. I have to ask the Spirit to recall to my mind Paul's words: 'For there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (Romans 8:1)."

Now consider another aspect of the Holy Spirit's ministry.

2. The Holy Ghost has come to lead us into a life of prayer. "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26).

Consider what Paul is saying here about the Holy Spirit's role in our prayer life. We get so confused about prayer, making it seem so complicated. If you go into any Christian bookstore, you'll find many books on the subject, with detailed formulas on how to pray.

These multitudes of theories can bring confusion, raising all kinds of questions about prayer: "When does prayer become intercession? Is intercession measured by fervency, or loudness, or the amount of time I spend on my knees? I'm instructed to pray according to God's will, but how do I know his will? And how do I go about praying? Do mental prayers count? What, exactly, do I pray for?"

Such confusion can be so overwhelming, it causes few to pray. Yet there has never been a time when the prayers of God's people are needed more than now. We live in a world gone mad. Even in his ancient time, Paul said of the earth, "All of creation now groans."

Ecologists are telling us the world's ice caps are melting, that floods will inundate New York City and much of the East Coast. In the future, we are told, global warming will kill off all plant life. It is predicted the earth will become desolate, utterly uninhabitable.

The stress-loads caused by such reports are now overwhelming people worldwide. And Christians are not exempt from the stress. Paul says, "Even we who have the Spirit groan, waiting to be delivered from this shaking world. We long now for our redemption."

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As global events worsen, conspiring to rob people of peace, societies everywhere are looking for a source of comfort. But they're not finding it in psychotherapy, in dead religion, in causes, even in charity.

Our only resource for such a time is the prayer of faith. The Bible has told us, "The world does not know Christ. And they will not receive him. *But you know him.*"

At this stage of my life and ministry, one of my greatest concerns has to be that I maintain my prayer life. When I neglect prayer, I grieve the Spirit of God in me. Yes, it is possible for us to grieve the Holy Spirit. Paul writes as much when he says, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30).

Indeed, the Spirit shares God's grief over his people's unbelief and prayerlessness. Consider just these few powerful ways the Holy Spirit plays a role in our prayers:

- It is in prayer that the Holy Ghost manifests the presence of Christ in us.
- It is in prayer the Spirit seals God's promises in our hearts.
- It is in prayer the Comforter speaks hope to us.
- It is in prayer the Spirit releases his rivers of comfort, peace and rest in our souls.

These days, my prayer is this: "Holy Spirit, keep me in close communion with Jesus. Do not let me neglect my alone time with the One my soul loves. Keep me on my knees. Then I will know your comfort."

I urge you: make this your prayer, too.

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