

The Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John, pt.1

1. The Gospel of John is a personal favorite. The other Gospels cover basically the same ground – one year of Jesus’ ministry. John covers 3yrs and brings themes and ideas into play that the others do not. Why? The best guess seems to be that John was aging and seeing the generation that had personal knowledge of Jesus also age and die. It was time to lock in some of the stories that weren’t written down before (because they were well known, some stories weren’t written!).
2. John will mention the Spirit 21x. Compared to the 70x in the Book of Acts, that might not seem like a lot but, in fact, John brings us a wealth of information about the Spirit, more data and information with each mention. What the other Gospels say about the Spirit mainly involve His work with Jesus and with the universe. What John says about the Spirit applies directly to the followers of Christ.
3. John opens his book with that famous explosion of light and darkness and creation and eternity. (John 1:1-4,9,14) The coming of Jesus is crucial because the Spirit will speak through him. (John 3:34) Everything we read in scripture, everything we gather from dreams and visions, every dollar we spend, every situation that confronts us ALL must be taken to Jesus so that we can hear what the Spirit says and obey. Remember, we go to Jesus for it is He who was sent to us. We ask him and we receive the Spirit (Luke 11:13).
4. It is interesting to note that this book starts out by saying that Jesus is and was God and that He created all things that have been made...and then John introduces us to miracles that the other gospel writers left out, and every one of them shows creative power. Water is turned into wine, healing takes place immediately, walking on water, raising the dead.
5. While John speaks of the darkness of men’s hearts and the darkness that lies in the world’s way of doing things, he never mentions demons. He is so close to the light of the Spirit in Christ that he just discounts or ignores the dark realm entirely. He quotes Jesus speaking about the Spirit more than the other writers (Matthew -5, Mark and Luke -3, John -15). As Tim Woodruff has said, “when the

Spirit comes up in John, the letters are likely to be in red. This is something unique to the Fourth Gospel...and uniquely precious.”

6. In John’s Gospel, Jesus warns us that we MUST be born of water and the Spirit...and if we are, we need to buckle up because we are going to move. (John 3:3-8) When we get to the writings of Paul, we will see more of this concept of a new birth, a new self, a preview of our resurrection...but here, in John, is our first hint that something is coming and we are going to be taken where it/He goes.
7. In John 4:22-24, Jesus shows us that worship is not mountains and books and traditions and names: it is the lifting up of Jesus, the Son of God. Later, Jesus would tell his followers plainly, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.” God is not satisfied by ritual and memorized words; He wants your heart, your sincerity, and your cooperation with His Spirit.
8. When Jesus feeds the people in John 6, he warns them that feeding them is not the sign that God loves them for they will be hungry again. He tells them to live for more than food and comfort – live for what is now and what is next. (he even tells his apostles that they should be happy for him when he tells them he will be killed, for that means he is going to the Father. This life is a journey. We are not here for long and the things of the earth – food and stuff – are not why the Spirit has come through Christ)
9. The richest chapters in the Gospels – and, arguably, the entire New Testament – on the subject of the Holy Spirit are John chapters 14-16. Here, he is called the Paraclete – the one who walks alongside us, strengthens us, informs us, comforts us, and sustains us on our own journey of faith and faithfulness. Only John uses the word “paraclete” to describe and name the Spirit.
10. He also calls the Spirit other names such as the Spirit of Truth, but this is his preferred name for the third member of the Godhead, the Trinity. There are so many ways to translate “paraclete” that authors such as Tim Woodruff list them all so that we can “get” who the Spirit is: Advocate, Comforter, Counselor, Helper, Friend, Intercessor, the One Who Comes When Summoned. When I used to play tennis, when a ball went into another court, it was customary to

say “a little help” to get the other players to return the ball. When we ask God for help, He sends the Helper, the Paraclete.

11. The most common form of the word Paraclete is...a verb form. It is translated “urge, plead, comfort, encourage, teach” and more. All of them, verbs in the truest sense: they involve change and movement. (my dad’s last communication with me: are we on a ship?)
12. The Spirit of God comes to followers of God in order to help them know who they are, who God is, and how to follow God because following God can be messy, complicated, and – to borrow a phrase – new every morning. We need help, current, living, present help. And that is exactly what and Who we have.
13. When Jesus speaks of the Spirit in the final discourse, his last lesson to them before the cross, he wants them to know that they are not going to be stranded on earth without a Helper sent from God who is fully capable of leading us forward. (John 14:16-18).
14. Jesus has to help them understand that, when they see him, they have seen the Father (in response to Philip’s request to see Him). Now, they have to take this one step further...and believe that the Father is with them even when Jesus is not. Wow. That’s a huge step. Good thing we don’t have to make it alone.
15. And you already know him...because you know Jesus. That is what he says to you and that is what Jesus said to his apostles. And then he tells them that the Spirit is already with them but he, Jesus, has to leave so that the Spirit can come to them. Wha...?
16. This is a hint of the journey we are on when we are born of the Spirit. There is a then/now time concept that we have to deal with and we have to understand that, while God changes not, the plan and what it looks like DOES change. Jesus has to leave so that the Spirit moves the plan to the next stage. The training wheels have to come off. Faith has to learn to live on this side of the clouds, inside the whale, with the lights turned off.

17. But that's okay, for Jesus also tells us he is coming back for us. We will see him again. Those who live by faith, live by that promise.