

“I’ll Stop Procrastinating - Tomorrow”

John 14:15-27

Series: God Is Closer Than You Think Week 3. The Kingdom

Scott Burgess

The Woodside Church

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This is God’s word.

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be^[a] in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. - John 14:15-21, 25-27

The word of the Lord

Some of you are familiar with at least part of my Woodside history. It spans three Pastors. Reverend George Hollingshead was Pastor during my Sunday School and youth group days. I was active until around the ninth grade when I stepped away. Pastor Stephen Janssen married Michelle and me at Woodside in 1987. In 2006, after Pastor Doug officiated at my father’s memorial service, Michelle and I joined the Woodside congregation. With the exception of our wedding, my separation from God, and my faith, lasted about 33 years. There were plenty of opportunities during those years for me to step back to my faith. Blessings I ignored, invitations declined, time spent in churches not hearing the message being spoken to me. I don’t believe I ever closed my heart to God or forsook Jesus – I just wasn’t ready to renew my relationship with him in a personal way and never allowed the Holy Spirit to dwell within me.

We are on week 3 of the sermon series, *God Is Closer Than You Think*, written by John Ortberg. In week one, Doug spoke about “The Promise” and God’s great desire to be with us. Last week he discussed “The Choice”, our choice to be with Him. This week we will be touching on “The Presence”, as in The Presence of God’s Spirit within us.

Even if we don’t completely understand the Trinity, we know who makes up the Holy Trinity. As one of the guys in my growth group opens when he prays – “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” Many of us understand the Father and the Son. We talk about them all of the time. And every month we recite the Apostle’s Creed which begins, I believe in God, the Father Almighty – Maker of Heaven and Earth, And in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord. They are pretty well defined. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit isn’t really explained. The Creed

does mention him twice. The first two lines is followed by, “Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost.” And later we start the “Believe’ statements with, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.”

Who is the Holy Spirit? What is his place in our faith? Where does he fit in the timeline?

Let’s look at these individually.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

¹⁵“If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. ” John 14:15-17

This passage comes from the upper room, shortly before Judas’ betrayal, Peter’s denial, and all of us sentencing Him to death. And yet he is still willing to be our advocate before the Father. Jesus will sacrifice himself, for our sake, but the love he has for us is so great he wants to do more. He will go before the Father and ask him to send the Holy Spirit to us. Now at this time, the Holy Spirit hasn’t come to the disciples yet. After the crucifixion, when he comes back, he reminds the disciples of what he promised.

⁵ For John baptized with^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit.” - Acts 1:5

We need the Spirit in our lives. Without him, we would be lost. Think about it. The disciples walked, ate, and slept with Jesus for 3 plus years. And yet when he was missing, they were still lost. Peter went out of the boat to walk on water, But when he took his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink. Jesus feeds the 5000, yet days or weeks later they need him to remind them how to feed the 4000. Three times at Gethsemane, Jesus leaves the disciples to pray. Each time the disciples can’t stay awake without Jesus with them. Jesus is arrested and the disciples desert him, and Peter denies him. Jesus is crucified, and the disciples run and hide. Even when Jesus lived among the disciples, he wasn’t physically with them all of the time. Without the Holy Spirit, how can we who have never beheld him, follow him.

The Father above us

The Son beside us

The Holy Spirit within us.

The Spirit helps keep us from becoming lost.

What is his place in our faith?

²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. - John 14:26

I have times in my life when I take something I’ve learned, used a multitude of times, and yet a time comes when I can’t remember what to do. I blank. In those situations, it is a blessing to have somebody at your side to keep you from making a mistake. It could be a teacher, a boss, a co-worker, or a friend. For many of us guys, it is our wives who stop us from doing something stupid. It’s nice to have people like that in your life. But they aren’t always there. The Holy Spirit is.

Someone cuts in front of you in line. You’re first instinct is to give them a piece of your mind, perhaps even with a little colorful language. But then the Spirit reminds you of Matthew 15:10-

11 - ¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. ¹¹ What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

It’s your anniversary. You went out and got a nice card and maybe a present. Your husband, or wife, forgets – again. You decide you’re going to make him, or her, pay. That morning at church, Doug is speaking directly to you, again, this time from Matthew 18:21-22 - ²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

²² Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

The Holy Spirit is there to remind us of what Jesus taught. He also helps us understand the things Jesus didn’t teach, directly. There are plenty of things in the world today which just weren’t around, or a concern in Jesus’s time. There are policies at school, at work, in government, at home, and even in church, where we disagree. That is ok. We are allowed to disagree. But if we listen to what the Holy Spirit has to tell us, we can usually disagree in a civilized manner. It’s when we aren’t learning from the Spirit we fail. It has been my experience those things the Spirit continues to teach us, are simply reinforcements of what Jesus already taught us. And quite often, it is simply going back to the core basics.

³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’^[a] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b] ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40

Where does he fit in the timeline?

Did he come later – after God and Jesus? We should remember they have all been there since the beginning – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We already talked about where the Spirit is mentioned in the Apostle’s Creed - And in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost... And when we look back to Genesis,

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² 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 1:1-2

So, we have Jesus’ life, examples, and teaching to emulate. And we are blessed with the Holy Spirit to educate us more and remind us of Jesus’ teaching.

You say you’ve accepted Jesus and want to live by his teachings – Great! And to make it better, he asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit to come into your heart and continually remind you of those teachings. Wonderful. Thank you! And what was it you told me? Oh yeah, “If you love me, keep my commands.” John 14:15. Ok. I can do that. I can love God with all my heart. I go to worship most Sundays. And sure, I can love my neighbor. Well, most of my neighbors. Ok some of them. But let’s face it. They aren’t very nice to me all of the time. Jesus couldn’t mean all of them. I’m sure he’d understand.

Of course, if I’m forced to keep all of his commands, I’m probably going to have to change my life. I’m not ready to do that yet. So, we procrastinate.

- a. Work is too busy. I have to focus on my career now. There is plenty of time later for my faith walk.

- b. I need to put my family first. There is school, family time, vacations, sports – especially soccer – by the way, we do have a Higher Ground Service almost every Sunday night,
- c. It's not really gossip, because I heard it was true.
- d. I'm just too tired. With everything else going on, I really need to relax and rest when I have time off.
- e. I know it's cheating, but I just need to get through this semester

Do you really want to act in a way which interferes with your relationship with God?

We all procrastinate to some degree. During the sermon team meeting on December 3rd, Doug told me session 3 of the study guide discussed procrastination as being a dangerous choice we make. It was a God wink moment for me. The previous Sunday, December 1st, was the day Doug asked us to finish the sentence, "I need God to be with me in..." and we were to put the slip in the manger when we came up for communion. Anybody want to guess what I wrote on my slip. Yup. My procrastination.

Procrastination can be dangerous in many situations. But to procrastinate in your relationship with God. You have to be a committed gambler or risk-taker to do that. And I'm going to let you in on a secret. The life change you are putting off is a life change which can only help you. Any time you open yourself up to any part of the Trinity, your life becomes clearer. As one of the guys in my growth group opens when he prays – "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit." I mentioned earlier how I had stopped following my faith for about 33 years. When I came back from my time playing "The Prodigal Son", I struggled with the idea of putting God before family. Until I realized placing God first in my life allowed me to be a better husband, father, friend, worker, boss, person. It didn't take away from my life – it added to it.

There are people who claim they accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But when you listen to them or watch the way they live, you have to wonder – where is the Holy Spirit in them?

A 2023 article from the Canadian Mennonite Magazine states "According to a recent study by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, 58 percent of Christians in the United States don't believe the Holy Spirit is real. Surprisingly, this number jumps to 62 percent for people who identify as born-again Christians."

How is this possible? I can understand how those who are not disciples can feel this way.

...The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." John 14:17

But for believers...? Procrastination is dangerous enough, but in the book of Romans, Paul makes it abundantly clear:

"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ." – Romans 8:9

This is really important, so I'm going to repeat it: "You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ." – Romans 8:9

I hope I'm clear - This is dangerous ground to be treading. The longer you put anything off, the harder it is to make it a part of your life.

What if we find ourselves in this position? What steps should we take?

1. Acceptance – Accept the gift which has been given to you. We understand Jesus. We know he is fully God, yet he came down here to live among us – as a human. He taught us and helped us understand the relationship God wants to have with us. He then sacrificed his own life for us. He then defeated death, came back from the grave, spent time with us – again, and then went home to the Father. If you accept this, how can you not understand and believe he would want to give us more.
18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” John 14:18-21. The Holy Spirit resides in you. Open up your heart to him and allow Him to be a part of your daily life.
2. Communicate – It is possible to have a relationship with someone without communicating with them. It is NOT possible to have a GOOD relationship with somebody whom you don't communicate with. Think about that. Whether it is your parents, your friends, spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, boss, worker, neighbor – I could go on, but I think you see where I'm going. We converse with God. We converse with Jesus. Why would we not want to communicate with the Holy Spirit?
 - a. Listening – We already acknowledged we listen to the Holy Spirit: 25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. - John 14:25-26. He is teaching us, and reminding us. It's probably a good idea to Listen to him.
 - b. Speaking – Communicating is a two-way street. We listen and we speak. Actually, we usually spend too much time on the second action. Most of us, me included, talk too much. But in this case, I think we might not speak to the Spirit enough. I wondered about that, so I asked Mr. Google if the bible tells us whether we should speak with the Holy Spirit or not. You may have heard this scripture verse before. In fact Dawn/Jane/Janessa will be sharing it at the end of the last song/hymn - 14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14 – The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, or friendship. Paul is saying we have a friendship with the Holy Spirit. Of course we should be speaking with him.
3. Yield – Talk to him. Listen to him. And in the end, you will realize how much wiser he is than you. Which means yielding to him only makes sense. He wants what is best for you. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. Romans 8:9-11

Yielding, or surrendering, is usually the most difficult of the three. I spoke earlier about having a relationship with him. If we put it in those terms perhaps it will define it more clearly. Accepting the Spirit is kind of like an introduction. Think about when you meet someone for the first time. That person is now someone you know. And if you trust the one who makes the introduction, the person is validated for you. The next time you see a new acquaintance; you now have something in common. This leads to step two, communication. This is our opportunity to get to know him better. Of course, unlike other new friends, the Holy Spirit already knows all about you. But this is how we get to understand him better, and learn to trust him. Once you have a relationship with the Spirit, and have learned to trust him, it is easier to accept suggestions. The big difference in this relationship is Jesus. Because Jesus is the one who made the introduction, it is easy to trust him, thus easier to surrender.

I get the fact the world cannot accept The Holy Spirit. If you are not a disciple of Jesus, there is nobody making the introduction. On the surface it baffles me to hear other Christians don't believe. And yet, I look at my own walk. Even in my time away from faith, I never stopped believing in God, and always accepted Jesus was real. I admit, it took a return on my part to truly accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit took longer. For me it wasn't doubt, it seemed more a lack of understanding. In my younger days I don't remember learning much about him. And then, even after professing my faith in Jesus in October 2006, I still didn't have a relationship with the Holy Spirit. Then, in the beginning of 2007, Michelle and I signed up for the Alpha course. We wanted to learn more and find out what growth groups were all about. Alpha is a great resource for new believers, those who are looking to learn more about our faith, or just to get a taste of what growth groups are all about. Come and see what Alpha is all about! There will be a special session Sunday Feb 2nd, from 4:30 - 6:00 pm with dinner and discussion. Find a weekly small group that works for you.

Anyway, the Alpha Course helped me to better understand my faith. Even though I had become a weekly Worship Service attendee, there were still a lot of questions in the back of my mind, some which I didn't even recognize having them. I remember speaking with somebody at work one day. Somehow the subject of Sunday services came up. The person asked me why I was attending services. Why did I believe in Jesus. I realized I didn't have any answers. I just believed. That bothered me. Alpha helped me begin to ask questions, to want to learn. Don't get me wrong, Faith is important. But it doesn't mean we should stop learning. THE Friday Morning Men's Group is studying C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity right now. The accompanying study guide corroborates that.

"He does not ask us to shut down our minds and simply accept something by faith. Nor does he ask us to believe merely because we feel it is right. Instead of asking us to think less, Lewis actually pushes us to think more than we normally do, to think more carefully, more deeply, and with less prejudice than we have in the past."

The Alpha course includes a Holy Spirit weekend. This was not only a powerful time of learning, worship, prayer, and reflection, it was also when I opened my heart to the Holy Spirit. After the Alpha course, my Faith really began to grow. I joined growth groups – both a couple's group and a men's group – and have been a part of at least one group continually since. I began volunteering for various ministries, choosing the ones I felt a passion for and organizing new opportunities, such as the Quarterly Recovery Worship Service, The monthly Recovery Café – now at the Philly Dream Center in Port Richmond. And we continue to hold our annual backyard Patio Worship Service and BBQ every June.

Sometimes I wish I never stepped away from my faith. Part of me regrets not spending those 33 years with Jesus. But I don't dwell on it. For one thing, I can't change that. But more importantly, if I had not lived the way I did, I might never have met Michelle. We probably never would have had our wonderful daughter, Lizz. And I wouldn't be able to call so many of you, my friends.

For those of you who continue to procrastinate and haven't yet opened up your heart to the Holy Spirit, I'd like to end with some wise words from CS Lewis - "You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending,"

Please pray with me.