

This I Believe: The Holy Spirit Matters- Core 52, Ch. 37

DT: The Holy Spirit wants to do amazing work in you and through you.

When I was younger, probably only like 8-9 years old, my church let the kids dress up in their Halloween costumes. This was a pretty big deal because my church growing up was a lot different than this one. Fun was not a word that I would use to describe my church. So, it was pretty exciting to be able to dress up for Halloween! But however you dressed up had to be appropriate for church. Back then, we didn't have the cool Avengers movies, so I didn't really know about Captain America, or Thor, some of the guys I probably would have dressed up as. And I couldn't decide on what I wanted to be... So, my dad came up with an idea that was church appropriate. Here's a picture of what I kind of looked like... Anybody have guesses on who I was?

The Hole-y Spirit or the Hole-y Ghost. I wanted to share that story with you, 1) so you could all laugh at me. But 2) because it introduces us to who we will be talking about today. Today we are going to continue going through our *Core 52* book and some of the foundational beliefs we have as a Church. And today our topic is going to focus on The Holy Spirit, because we believe the Holy Spirit Matters. In fact, it is one of our seven core values here so if you go into the fellowship hall you will see a big sign that says, "We value the ministry of the Holy Spirit." But why? Why does He matter?

Before we answer that question, we need to talk a little bit more about God. Now we have talked about who God is before, but just for a brief overview, we believe that God is 3 in 1, also called the Trinity. I asked Philip to teach me this in sign language once, and I want you to do this with me (show in sign language). God is Father, Son, and the Spirit. He is 3 distinct Persons, but one Being. If you are confused that's okay because Christians have been wrestling with how to explain that for 2000 years.

Here's a helpful picture (show Trinity shield). The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy spirit is God. But the Father is NOT the Son or the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father or the Son, and the Son is not the Father or the Spirit! 3 distinct Persons, yet One being. Confused yet?!

But typically, when we talk about God, we talk a lot about the Father. That's typically who people are talking about when they say God, when they pray to God, they are typically talking about the Father... We also talk a lot about the Son: Jesus! We will unapologetically tell you more and more and more about Jesus because He is our King and our Savior and our Redeemer, and He shows us how to truly live! But we often forget, or at

least neglect, to talk about the Holy Spirit. That's why one author wrote a book on the Holy Spirit called *The Forgotten God*. The Holy Spirit is often the forgotten God... we forget about Him.

But here's why that's crazy! From the very beginning of the Bible to the very end of the Bible, we see that the Holy Spirit is present, and He is working. Genesis 1.1-2 says, ***"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 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."*** From the very beginning of the Bible, through the rest of the Bible we see that Spirit is present and is playing an important role in the story of God because He is God.

But why does this matter? Why do we need to talk about the Holy Spirit? I think the Holy Spirit helps us answer three of the most important questions we will ever ask ourselves: am I loved? Can I change? Do I have a purpose?

1. Am I loved?

The Holy Spirit answers this question with an emphatic yes! Yes, you are loved by God. And actually, the Holy Spirit is the one who helps us know, truly know, deep down that we are loved. He helps us experience the Father's love.

Turn your Bibles to Romans 5. Romans is written by Paul to the church in Rome, and at this point in the story, Romans 5, there's this beautiful passage that begins by talking about how we have been justified through faith in Jesus. When we trust Jesus, we now have peace with God.. ***"Romans 5:1-2 (NIV) — 1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God"***.

What Paul is saying is that when we trust in Jesus, we have an amazing change of status! No longer are we God's enemies but we have access to Him. Later in Romans 8.14-17, Paul will talk about how the Holy Spirit confirms to us that we are children of God and now have access to Him as our loving Father. Not a distant, abusive father, not a father who only criticizes you, not a father who is always away on business trips, but a Father who loves you deeply and is always present for you to come and talk to Him. He's always available to you.

Paul continues in verse 3 and he changes the topic slightly, and he begins to talk about suffering. **Romans 5:3–4 (NIV) — 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.**” So what Paul is saying here is that there’s this grittiness to Christians, that because of the hope we have in Jesus, our sufferings are not pointless— just like Jesus’ sufferings were not pointless on the cross, they saved us— our sufferings are not pointless because they transform us, and help us to develop character, and perseverance, and hope!

And then listen to this next verse, which honestly, always confused me until recently... it says, **“Romans 5:5 (NIV) — 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”** This is the first mention of God’s love in the whole book of Romans... and Paul tells us God’s Spirit pours out God’s love into our hearts... why? Because as His children we don’t need to live in shame anymore.

But so often we do live in shame because we try to find love in all the wrong places... I know too many friends who have tried to find love through sexual satisfaction... they go from person to person to feel loved... and they come up empty... I know other friends who try and find love by just following their feelings. If I just do what feels right in the moment, then I will feel loved and happy... But still, they feel empty. My method to feel loved is to try and achieve, to succeed, to accomplish and then people will love me... but there’s always going to be failure. And it comes up empty. Each of these coping mechanisms, each of these ways to try and earn love, always results in shame and emptiness, not love... But what the Holy Spirit wants to do, is help you and me experience and internalize God’s love. To go from knowing about God’s love intellectually to feeling it down deep in our bones.

I love what Dane Ortlund says in his book, *Gentle and Lowly*. He says, “The Spirit makes the heart of Christ real to us: not just heard, but seen; not just seen, but felt; not just felt, but enjoyed” (pg. 122). The Holy Spirit wants us to feel and enjoy God’s love.

I don’t think it’s a coincidence that as Romans 5 continues, Paul talks about how we know God loves us. He says this 3 verses later, **“Romans 5:8 (NIV) — 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** The Holy Spirit wants to remind you over and over and over again that this is true. You are loved.

You are valuable. You are worthy. And if you don't believe it just look to the cross.

I don't normally hear God speak audibly. I don't hear this booming voice from heaven that tells me stuff. For me, it's normally little nudging... Go talk to this person, go invite that person for dinner, pray for this person. God normally speaks very subtly. But when I quiet myself, and actually give myself space to listen for his voice, I constantly hear 3 words, "I love you." And I truly believe that the Holy Spirit wants to speak that to you too if you will be silent for just a moment and listen.

I'm reminded of the story of John Wesley. John Wesley was a young man in the 1700s, who attended Oxford, and he founded a Holy Club there, a club where they promised daily Bible study, visiting prisoners, and other steps of devotion. He decided to go be a missionary to the Native Americans. But after a couple years of unsuccessful ministry and illnesses, he came back to London disheartened and discouraged. So, he decided to go seek counsel from a Moravian pastor. And this pastor surprised him by asking him one question, "Do you know that Jesus died for you and saved you?" This took Wesley aback... he was a priest at the time, a former missionary, and the founder of a campus ministry. But did he know that Christ had died for him personally? Wesley wasn't sure! So, Wesley wrestled with this question for a while until one day, he went to a Bible study on the book of Romans. And as they were reading about the work of Jesus on the cross, here's what Wesley said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Because of the Holy Spirit, Wesley finally felt God's love and it changed his life. He ended up playing a prominent role in founding what became known as the Methodist Church.

Some of you this morning, just need to take time and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with God's love. Am I loved? The Holy Spirit emphatically responds with a yes today, a yes tomorrow, and a yes forever! Through the Holy Spirit, you are sealed and secured, adopted and assured that God loves you.

2. Can I change?

The Holy Spirit answers this question with an emphatic "Yes! You can change." I truly believe that deep down, we all have a desire to change. To be better, to be good. Even the people who say, "I don't care what anyone thinks about me! I'm stuck in my ways." Really, you don't want to change?!

I've been to a decent amount of funerals in my life, and I enjoy listening to the conversations people have about the person. People tell different stories, and they laugh, they cry, they grieve, they give thanks. They reflect and honor the person they have lost.

But never have I listened to a conversation at a funeral where someone said, "Yeah ole John Smith. He was a terrible human being. But that's all he ever wanted to do. He just wanted to be stuck in his ways and be bad human being. And by golly, he did it! He was horrible!" I've never heard something like that at a funeral. And I think it is because we all long to be someone better, to be good, to live the Good life. We just might not know how to do it well.

That's where the Holy Spirit comes into play. He helps us to change, to experience life.

2 Corinthians 3:17–18 (NIV) — 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Paul is saying that as Christians, there is no longer a veil between us and God. We can look at him face to face when we look at the face of Jesus. We can now have access to experience his glory! And when we do come to him, when we do draw near, when we look to Jesus, the Holy Spirit changes us.

I think it's important here to recognize what we do and what the Holy Spirit does. What do we do according to these verses? Well, we are the ones who contemplate... that word for contemplate was used in the Greco-Roman world for someone who looked into a mirror and saw their reflection... I'm reminded of Greek Mythology and the story of Narcissus (show Leonardo Davinci pic). One day, Narcissus was walking by a body of water, and he saw his reflection. He was so enamored by his own reflection, by seeing himself, that he spent the rest of his life looking into his own reflection... That is NOT what Paul means. Paul doesn't want us to spend most of our time looking at ourselves... No, he wants us to look at, to meditate on, to contemplate the glory of God, which we see most clearly in the person of Jesus. I think Paul would agree with the poet William Blake, "We become what we behold." In world that is so self-centered and narcissistic like ours, what we need is to spend a little less time looking in a mirror and a lot more time looking at Jesus...

But notice in vs. 18, what the Holy Spirit's role is. The Holy does what he does best. He is the one who transforms us into the image of God. He is the one who changes us from the inside out. Throughout the Bible we see the Holy Spirit do this in many ways. He regenerates our dead hearts so that we can truly live. And then he comes and lives inside of us. And he convicts us of sin and provides comfort in times of distress. He guides us in what to do and leads us in what to say. He cultivates in us love, joy, peace, patient, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Holy Spirit does the work of transforming us. In a self-help, pull yourself up by the bootstraps culture like ours, we need to hear this. It is by his grace that he changes us. The Holy Spirit answers the question, yes! Change is possible.

But we do have a slight role to play. The Holy Spirit will do the changing, but we must continue contemplating. I think this understanding of transformation takes the pressure off of us and allows us to live in the freedom that the Spirit provides, rather than bondage that we all place on ourselves.

So, I want to encourage you to contemplate and meditate on Jesus this week. And I want to invite you to pray this one prayer every single day and just see what happens. It's a pretty simple prayer that one of my professors taught me at Ozark Christian College, and it always helps me reorient my life towards Jesus. Here's the prayer: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I give you permission to enter into every area of my life." To enter into my marriage, to enter into my finances, to enter into my friendships, to enter into my parenting, to enter into my past. "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I give you permission to enter into every area of my life." Will you pray that prayer with me and see what amazing changes God might want to make in you.

3. Do I have a purpose?

The Holy Spirit answers this question with an emphatic, "Yes! You do have a purpose." And according to the book of Acts, that purpose is to be a Jesus' witnesses all over the world. To live our lives following him wherever he calls us to go and whatever he calls us to do; to make Jesus' name famous. Francis Chan says it this way, "The point of life is to point to him." And the only way we can do that is by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here's what Acts 1.8 says, this is just before Jesus will ascend into heaven and take his rightful place at the right hand of the Father. He says to his followers, "***Acts 1:8 (NIV) — 8 But you will receive power when***

the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The disciples were promised power in the Holy Spirit so that they could accomplish their purpose, to be Jesus' witnesses. And if you read the book of Acts, that's exactly what happens! In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit comes powerfully upon Jesus' followers. And they are given a boldness and power to share about him all over the world. From Acts 2-7, the gospel is spread in Jerusalem. Then from Acts 8-11, the gospel is spread in Judea and Samaria, and then in Acts 12-28 the gospel is spread throughout the rest of the world. And this is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit!

But this promise of power from the Holy is not just for Jesus' earliest disciples. It's a promise for us too. It's a promise for you and for me that we will receive power to be Jesus witnesses in our homes, at our jobs, in our schools, with our friends. We will receive power to be bold for Jesus.

And what we learn later in the NT is that the Holy Spirit gives each one of us special gifts to help make this mission possible. Paul says this in 1 Cor. 12.7, ***“1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV) — 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”*** He's saying that the Spirit gives each of us gifts to help build one another up so that we can complete our mission to make Jesus famous.

I think often when we think about spiritual gifts and the people who really matter when we come to our mission and purpose of pointing to Jesus, we think about the people in the public eyes. The people who are the preachers and teachers like Paul and Peter, and me and Warren. But we forget about the other people in the story who play a huge role in the spreading of the gospel. We see this in the book of Acts. There are men like Philip. He probably had the gift of evangelism, but also had a heart to help the poor and the widowed. Men like Barnabas, who was always an encouragement to be around and always spoke a word of peace. Or women like Priscilla, who with her husband, taught people about how to follow Jesus. Or Lydia, who probably had the gift of hospitality and generosity, and opened her home to followers of Jesus. Every single one of them had a special role to play in the mission of Jesus.

And you and I, we each have a special role to play too. You and I have been uniquely designed and gifted by the Holy Spirit to be Jesus' witnesses in the world.

In 1961, JFK became the youngest person to ever be elected president of the United States (if you want to learn more about him, talk to Jack Knappmeyer). On January 20, that cold, 20-degree, snow covered day, JFK would give his inaugural speech. And he wanted it to be short (probably because it was freezing cold). And out of those 1,355 words he spoke came some of the most memorable words a president has ever said to encourage his people to service and sacrifice. JFK said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

I think that's a question we should ask ourselves in the context of the C Church. The question is not, what can the Church do for me... but what can I do for the Church? What can I do to uniquely contribute to the mission of making Jesus famous?

Is it welcoming in a neighbor for a meal? Is it praying for a powerful movement of the H.S. here in central IL? Is it to help design this building to be as welcoming to outsiders as possible? Is it mentoring young teenagers in the faith? Is it mowing a widow's yard for her? How is the Holy Spirit working in your heart right now to use your unique gifts to make Jesus famous?

Here's the main idea for today, boiled down into one sentence: **The Holy Spirit wants to do amazing work in you and through you.** Will you give him permission to do that work?