



# HOLY SPIRIT

The Third Person of the Trinity is the most mysterious. Even Jesus said the Spirit blows where He will and can't be seen easily. But the Holy Spirit is also God at His most present to us—even inside of us. He is constantly at work in the world, in the church and in people to change things for the good. If you want to see God's power in your life, look for the movement of the Holy Spirit.

## HOLY SPIRIT • Acts 2:1–13 • Tim McConnell • June 9, 2019

Only what is visible matters. We know this from the tried and true saying, “Seeing is believing; I’ll believe it when I see it.” The only real things in this life are the visible things, the things that take up space and matter. That’s all there really is. Things like love, the soul, relationships, God. You know, the visible stuff. Funny isn’t it how we defer to the material world when it only takes a minute to remind ourselves that the invisible world is so much more important and meaningful. We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God in three Persons, blessed Trinity. Of the three Persons of the Godhead, only one is made visible. Jesus, and his incarnation, is an accommodation to our simple minds and fallen state. He only does that to save us, you see. The invisible, the unseen, is more important and more real. So, we can’t see the Holy Spirit. This is not strange. Just like we can’t see God the Father but to know Him we look to Jesus. We can’t see the Holy Spirit but to know Him we look to Jesus, and we do get to see His works. We can’t see the Holy Spirit but we can see what He does. For these four weeks we will look at what the Holy Spirit does and know Him by His actions. He is the Sanctifier—the Holy Spirit makes stuff holy. He is the Church Builder, the Life-Giver and the Baptizer.

Today is Pentecost—a Christian celebration—but it was first a Jewish festival of the gift of the Torah and one of the three pilgrimage feasts to Jerusalem. You might think it’s funny to hold a festival to celebrate Genesis-Deuteronomy, but when the Creator of the universe hands you the user’s manual, and you don’t have to stumble around wondering how things work, that’s cause for celebration. And celebrate they did. It could get pretty raucous actually. Wine, dancing, feasting, they came from all nations to celebrate at Jerusalem. But this year, this group of Jesus followers got a rush like no other. The Holy Spirit came over them with indescribable power—like a flame over their heads, like a wind rushing through their souls—and they started doing amazing things. They spoke in languages they did not grow up with. They gathered together in radical equality—women and men, Jews and Gentiles, slaves sitting next to masters and addressed as equals. Eventually, there would be healings, many wonders and signs. God made the invisible visible.

The Holy Spirit is God at work in you to make things different. If you are in Christ then the Holy Spirit is in you. Today we want to talk about the simple, most straightforward thing—the Holy Spirit makes things holy. The Holy Spirit is God at work in your life making you holy. He is the Holy-Maker, the Sanctifier. God’s character is perfectly consistent with His actions. We have some distance between our character and our actions, but with God, who God is and what God does

are perfectly aligned and in sync. So the Holy Spirit is holy, and He doesn’t just sit in holiness but the Holy Spirit makes holy. Who He is is what He does; He acts on his attributes. The Holy Spirit is God at work in you making you holy.

Let me say a word about that, because for some of you that’s already a turnoff. What is holiness? What is it to be holy? God is not out to make you prude or religious or boring or cookie-cutter-Christian; and holy doesn’t mean pleasure-less. If God hates pleasure, why does the Bible say in His right hand are pleasures evermore (Psalm 16)? It may be that the pleasures God has in store for you are much richer, more satisfying, more fun, than the crud you’ve been fiddling around with. Do not be afraid to pursue holiness. What is holy? Holy is when something is as God intends. It’s when something is right, whole and healthy. When I say the Holy Spirit is God at work in you making you holy, I’m saying the Holy Spirit is God at work in you making you who you were always meant to be. Making you, you. The real you, in all your uniqueness and beauty and distinctiveness and creativity.

The picture I like to give here is of a rubber band. When you are separated from God, you don’t know there’s another you out there you were meant to be, or you only have a vague sense of it sometimes when your conscience is pricked. But when Jesus comes into your life, you see in His eyes this reflection of the you that you were meant to be, the redeemed, healthy, grounded, secure you God intended, who can love God and love others with empathy and respect, and not harm yourself or others, and all that. But you’re not there yet. So you live suddenly in this tension, like this rubber band, between how you live today and who you are meant to be. Each day you walk in cooperation with the Spirit that tension resolves a little bit more. That’s being made holy, what Christians call “sanctification.” That’s why the Spirit is the Holy-Maker—the Sanctifier. When God makes you holy (which is never achieved in this life, it’s always in process—God’s not finished with me yet) he is making you whole. A whole and healthy you. That’s holiness.

How does it happen? Let’s look at this passage; this only scratches the surface of what the Holy Spirit is all about, but let’s look at this passage and recognize, if this is how God the Holy Spirit starts the church it’s probably not far from how He starts us in our own individual process. How does the Spirit work? Catch this first of all, the Spirit works with the Word. Word and Spirit. It’s Pentecost, the celebration of the Word of God. The people of God are all celebrating the Word of God; it’s a huge party about how great the Bible is, they are all thinking about how great God’s Word is,

singing about how great God's Word is, talking about God's Word, and then comes a rushing wind. We know that sound around here. All of a sudden, you're running around the house shutting all the windows. It's scary. Wind is a great image of the way the Holy Spirit works. It's this untamable, rushing power that impacts everything at once. But at the same time, it is felt by each individual. Everything feels it, and you feel it too. But it can also have a quiet power. His arrival is a rushing wind.

"Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them" (Acts 2:2-3). It's a powerful wind. Is this what Jesus meant when He said to them "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" (Acts 1:8)? Before Jesus, the Spirit of God only rested on certain people to achieve certain things in certain times, but Jesus seemed to promise that same power would be present to every single believer. It was a rushing wind. It was tongues of fire. Fire is an image of the Spirit's work and power. Fire is transformative. Fire is uncontrollably powerful, an undeniable force. And the tongues of fire, they point out the individuality. The Holy Spirit is coming to each individual believer, resting on each one, penetrating each one. We'll come back to that.

Now, what happens next? Words. That's what happens. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). That just means languages here, for those who know a little about the other charismatic gifting, this just means they were suddenly able to speak lots of different languages. Why? Well, it runs through the list, and it's just spokes on a wheel spreading out from Jerusalem in every single direction. Cappadocia, Pontus, Medes and Persians, Asia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt, Lybia, Rome (I thought we hated those guys), Crete, Greece—what's happening here? The news about Jesus is not just for one people in one country in one part of the world. What's happening here is exactly what Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would do. The church is empowered by the Spirit to take the story of Jesus into every single conceivable language and people in the whole world. There's no direction the story of Jesus can't go. The global church is born.

Okay, so, as Word and Spirit have power to generate the church in the first instance, Word and Spirit have power to regenerate you today. This same pattern is how the Spirit of God is at work in you to make things different. How does He do it? He does it with the

Word. Let me be as clear as day here: if you walk away from this (the Bible), you will never know the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works by the Word. Four things the Holy Spirit did to create the church on Pentecost Sunday, four things that regenerate us inside: the Holy Spirit makes the Word of God available, comprehensible, livable and shareable.

Available. Can you imagine the experience of traveling from Libya to Jerusalem in AD 33, how out of place you would feel, how far from home, how different and alone? Then you hear someone speaking your home language in your home dialect. Your heart soars! Here's the thing. The Holy Spirit still does this with the story of Jesus. This is the difference between when you read the Bible in your 20s, cover to cover, and it meant nothing to you, but now you read five verses and have to stop to dry your tears. What is that? It's the Spirit of God accompanying the Word and making it alive to you. Pray for it.

The Spirit makes the Word of God comprehensible. "Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'" (Acts 2:7-12). Utterly amazed. Emotionally moved by the awe and power of it. Amazed and perplexed. These are people who are getting something. Something is getting through, even though they don't fully understand it. Keep going with the Word of God, the Spirit is here to help you understand and apply.

The Holy Spirit makes the Word of God livable. Let me issue a loving warning. Do not try to live any single verse of Scripture out without the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power of God at work in you to allow you, by grace, to live out His Word. These followers of Jesus received power to do what they did. The people were amazed at the power they received. The Holy Spirit is a power pack. I've got a battery-powered edge trimmer. Trying to live out the way of life outlined in the Bible without the power of the Spirit of God within you is like trying to trim your lawn with a trimmer that has no battery pack in it. The definition of frustration. You'll give up or kill yourself trying.

Finally, the Spirit of God makes the Word of God shareable. Every language. Every culture. Every people. "I don't speak Phrygian! I don't know what it's like to be Libyan. I can't connect with a Cretan or a Roman or an Egyptian." Right. You don't and you can't. But



would you look at the church Jesus has built around the world? Glory to God! How beautiful it is in all its diversity and songs and languages and colors. The Spirit of God makes the story of Jesus shareable. You know what that means for you? It means the Spirit of God makes the story of Jesus shareable with your neighbor, your friend, your coworker, your cousin. Maybe this sounds strange, but instead of taking out your legal pad and preparing an argument, sometimes ask the Spirit what to say—even in the moment, in the conversation, “Holy Spirit is there something you want me to say? Jesus, do you have a word for me to share? I’ll say it, no matter how foolish it sounds.”

It may sound foolish. Jesus said the Holy Spirit, in all its fullness and beauty and wholeness for believers, will also be unseen and misunderstood by others. “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—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 in you” (John 14:16-17). “You’re drunk,” says the crowd. “Oh, he’s drunk. She’s lost it.” In a world that is sick, health seems strange. But just remember, it isn’t abnormal. It’s health. It’s wholeness. The Holy Spirit is God at work in you making things different, and when He works to make you holy, He is making you whole.

Now, I know most of you don’t struggle with this, but for me I sometimes get frustrated at the pace of this whole operation. You’re all pretty much finished, polished up and holy, but God’s still got a lot of work to do on me. You know First Pres has this reputation, that we’ve got it all together, and you better get it all together first if you want to go to First Pres. I’m not sure how to bust that up, but boy we’ve got to figure it out, don’t we? We don’t have it all together. And I wish the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, the Holy-Maker, I wish He’d hurry it up sometimes. But I can report, and I hope you can too sometimes, He’s doing it, and the more I walk with Him and cooperate, the more the tension releases, the more me I become, the more whole I become, the more healthy I become. I’m not what I ought to be, but praise God I’m not what I once was. So I pray this prayer sometimes, and maybe it will help you. Let’s close with this prayer: “Thank you God for the me I get to be today. I’m not yet what I will be, but I’m not what I was. Thank you for the grace in me that lets me be more fully me in your sight, and help me, Holy Spirit, to become every bit of the beauty and uniqueness you intended when you formed me.”

## STUDY GUIDE

### HOLY SPIRIT • “Sanctifier”

#### Acts 2:1–13

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Acts 2:1-13.

- 1) Reread verses 2-3. What do you imagine this was like for the disciples? If you had been there, what would you have been thinking?
- 2) What positive, confusing or negative experiences have you had in the past with the way you’ve heard people talk about the Holy Spirit?
- 3) What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from these verses?
- 4) Reread verses 4-6. The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in languages they had not studied, eliminating, in effect, a major obstacle to belief in Jesus for those in attendance. What are some of the obstacles to faith that exist for the people in your life?
- 5) What implications are there in this passage about how the Spirit continues to move today?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Take time to pray for the people you were thinking about when you discussed question 4. Pray that these obstacles to faith would be removed.

#### **IN:** Connect with Each Other

Close with this ancient prayer of the church:

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.*

*And kindle in them the fire of your love.*

*Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.*

*And you will renew the face of the earth.*

*Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit*

*you have taught the hearts of your faithful.*

*In the same Spirit help us to relish what is right*

*and always rejoice in your consolation.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen*