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We Believe | Spirit

Hi, my name is Tim Nelson. On behalf of the elders and staff at Ada Bible, it's my privilege to be able to bring you this teaching on the Holy Spirit.

Let me start by saying that in the church world, the Holy Spirit is the least understood member of the Trinity. Many authors have called the Spirit the "silent member of the Trinity" simply because many churches don't mention, or even refer to, the Spirit in their services. Based on the biblical record, that is a sad reality. Furthermore, if you desire greater spiritual growth, it may have more to do with a lack of understanding of the Spirit's role in your life than it has to do with your determination or willpower to change. As we dive into this topic, my prayer is that you will not only discover more about who God is, but also what is available to you on your spiritual journey.

As we look at the topic of the Holy Spirit together, our time will break down into two parts. The first deals with the question, "Who is the Holy Spirit?" (His identity); and the longer, second part will address the question, "What does the Holy Spirit do?" (His ministries in the world and in our lives).

So, who is the Holy Spirit? In the second verse of the Bible, Genesis 1.2 (as God creates all things) we read that "*the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*" Later, in Judges 3.10, it says "*the Spirit of the LORD came upon*" certain individuals. If we were to take the time to look at all the things the Spirit does in the Old Testament we would notice that the Spirit is virtually indistinguishable from God himself. In fact, the Spirit is God, so when God acts, the Spirit is present and powerful to accomplish his will.

As we move to the New Testament, there is a direct connection between Jesus and the Spirit as well. Although Luke distinguishes between Jesus and the Holy Spirit [in the story of Jesus' baptism where the Spirit descends on Jesus (Luke 3.22)], later in Acts 16.7, Luke writes that "*the Spirit of Jesus would not allow*" the apostles to enter certain regions as they sought to spread his message. The very same Spirit, the Spirit of the LORD, is referred to here as the "Spirit of Jesus." Elsewhere, he is referred to the "Spirit of Christ."

What's the point here? Whenever we talk about the Holy Spirit we must begin with a very important concept, something vital for understanding who God is—the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible shows us that God is what we call a community of persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are not identical, but they are unified in the fullest sense of the word. Together, they are the one true God, and the names, *Spirit of God*, *Spirit of the LORD*, and *Spirit of Jesus*, point us in this direction. So, the Spirit is fully God. He is not a "force," an inclination or Mother Nature or Yoda or a ghost. The Holy Spirit is fully God.

Each person of the Trinity has different roles to fill as God accomplishes his will; but that in no way compromises the reality of the Trinity. Jesus himself links the three persons of the Trinity so directly he leaves no room for doubt that they are all part of what we call "the godhead." In the Great Commission

(Matthew 28:19), Jesus says "therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This very clearly points to the Trinity. We cannot be baptized in anyone's name other than God's! Paul does the same thing as he closes his second letter to the Corinthians.

Now, we would expect that if the Spirit really is God, he would have the same characteristics or attributes as God does. After all, God is perfect and infinite in all his attributes, but can the same be said for the Spirit? We believe so. In various ways, the Spirit is described as eternal, omniscient (or knowing all things), omnipotent (being all powerful), and omnipresent (existing in all places at the same time). These can only be true of God himself.

Since the Holy Spirit really is God, we'd expect him to act like God, which is exactly what the biblical record reveals. The Spirit was present at creation and instrumental in it. He was involved in the virgin birth of Christ. He descended upon Jesus at his baptism and anointed him for ministry. According to Hebrews 9:14, it was the Spirit who empowered Jesus to remain sinless and completely obedient to the Father.

Finally, the Spirit is the One who spoke through the prophets in the Old Testament and helped the apostles in the New Testament remember the details of Jesus' ministry. It was through the Spirit that human beings faithfully recorded God's Word in the Scriptures. These things could only have been accomplished by God, himself, so they show that the Spirit is in fact God's Spirit, a co-equal member of the Triune God.

All right...so that's the identity of Spirit. When someone asks, "Who or what is the Holy Spirit?" we answer, "The Holy Spirit is God, the third member of the Trinity, the power behind all that God does." But, what does the Spirit really do? Is the Spirit still active today? How can we expect the Spirit to work in our lives? First, it's safe to say the Spirit is extremely active in the life of a follower of Jesus. After all, we don't admit our sin or surrender our lives to God naturally. We can't cover everything the Bible tells us about this work, but we can get a strong sense of it.

To do that, let's divide the Spirit's ministries into two categories: first, what the Spirit does as a person moves from being a non-believer to a believer, and, secondly, what the Spirit continues to do for the rest of a believer's life. The first batch—the things he does at the time of salvation—come packaged with some theological words which I'll try to explain as I use them. The concepts behind the words are very important and foundational for our lives.

So, what are some of the ways the Spirit is involved when we take the step to commit our lives to Jesus as our Lord and Savior? Well, to start, you've probably heard the term "born again" Christian, right? Jesus, himself, taught in John 3:3 that "*no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*" The idea is that all people who repent of their sin and come to faith in Jesus Christ are, technically, born again. They experience what Jesus refers to as a second or new birth. We have all been born physically, but we also need to be born spiritually. Paul described it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*"

A term scholars use to refer to this rebirth is the word 'regeneration.' God regenerates—or we might say revives or resuscitates—a person who repents and believes the gospel of Jesus Christ. And guess who it is that performs this regeneration? You guessed it—the Holy Spirit. Hear the words of Titus 3:4-6: "*[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.*" So just as the Spirit was involved in creation, he is also the One who recreates us. He brings us new life in Jesus Christ.

Another thing that happens when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, is we are “indwelt” by the Holy Spirit. To be “indwelt by the Spirit” means the Holy Spirit literally takes up residence within the believer. Paul speaks directly of this when he writes, “*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*” (1 Corinthians 3.16). God's Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, lives in every genuine follower of Jesus Christ. Have you ever felt alone, as though God was distant or didn't care? Nothing could be further from the truth. He literally resides within to counsel, guide, and strengthen you. If you've trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you're never alone. God is with you even when you don't feel it.

This permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit is closely linked to another event that occurs when we give our lives to Christ, namely “adoption.” This is an amazing truth you'll want to hold onto with both hands. It's the kind of teaching that will radically change your perspective on God and yourself. The new believer is adopted by God and placed into his family, the church. All true Jesus followers have moved from being outside God's family—spiritual orphans—to being inside God's family. We are now his fully loved sons and daughters.

Listen to the way Paul links the Spirit's indwelling with the believer's adoption. He writes, “*You...are controlled...by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*” (Romans 8.9). Then, just a few verses later he writes, “*those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God... you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father”The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*” (Romans 8.14-16). Our adoption into God's family and the indwelling of the believer by the Spirit are very closely linked. We might say without God's Spirit in our lives, we would still be spiritual orphans—helpless and hopeless.

Now you might be wondering, “Even though I'm adopted as God's child, how do I know I am still God's child if I struggle to change? How do I know the Spirit is still living in me?” This leads us to a concept we call “sealing.” When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. God uses the Spirit to permanently mark (or seal) his children, guaranteeing that he will complete our salvation.

Listen to these amazing words from Ephesians 1.13 and 14: “*Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.*” This is a bedrock truth that should give us great comfort now and hope for the future. If you have truly trusted and committed your life to Jesus Christ, God has sealed you with the Holy Spirit. You cannot be misplaced, confused for another, redirected, diverted, stolen away, rejected, relabeled or lost. You belong to Christ, the Spirit has sealed you, and God guarantees your salvation. It simply doesn't get any better than that.

Okay, so the Spirit regenerates us, or gives us new life. He indwells us, or comes to live inside us. He adopts us into his family, and he seals us, marking us as his. All of that happens by the work of God's Spirit the moment we come to faith in Christ. Before faith we are dead in our sins, helpless orphans, separated from God, and without hope. After faith—because of what God's Spirit does in us—we are reborn and spiritually alive, God's Spirit lives in us, and we are adopted by God as his fully loved children. If that doesn't move us to worship and praise our Lord with reckless abandon, nothing will.

But there's more. We haven't even discussed what the Spirit is doing in our lives as we seek to live as followers of Jesus. That's our last topic—the second group of things the Spirit is doing in our lives, his ministries that are ongoing. These ministries fall under what we call “sanctification” or “spiritual formation,” the process of being formed into people who reflect the character of Jesus Christ.

This process of spiritual formation is a lifelong pursuit empowered by the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “*And we...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Did you hear the connection between the Spirit and our ongoing transformation? Let me read it again. “*And we...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”**

Let me make this as clear as possible: All of us who believe in Jesus Christ are being transformed—we are being made more like Jesus in our hearts, our character, and our actions—and this transformation comes from the Spirit of God who lives in us!

Let’s explore a little bit how this works and what it looks like. First, we know that at conversion, God gives us new life. He “regenerates” us. This does not mean he makes us immune to sin. We are still susceptible to temptation and can still sin. However, God indwells us with his Spirit to help us defeat sin and live lives that are pleasing to God. We can’t defeat the power of sin by our own strength; we defeat the power of sin by God’s strength. God has given us his Spirit to help us in the battle. You’ll be happy to know that the Spirit is more powerful than you and more powerful than the Enemy who tries to tempt you.

The apostle John wrote, “*the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world*” (1 John 4.4). John is referring to the forces of evil that line up against God’s children. But the Spirit of God, who is in you, is stronger than they are. This is what allows us to drive sin out of our lives over time and pursue the fruits of the Spirit.

What are some of the specific ways the Spirit helps us progress in the Christian life? Well, a partial list of the ways he helps might include these things:

- He strengthens us with power—that is, he strengthens our faith and our resolve to live out our faith when we feel weak. Ephesians 3.16
- He convinces us of the truth of God’s Word. John 16.13
- He convicts us of sin and helps us defeat it. John 16.7-9, Romans 8.13
- He helps us pray—in fact, he prays for us when we don’t know how! Romans 8.26-27
- He gives us spiritual gifts to build up and edify the church. 1 Corinthians 12.4
- He counsels us when we lean on him in times of need. Acts 16.6
- He fills us with joy in our journey with God. Acts 13.52
- He gives us peace and makes us righteous. Romans 14.17

This is quite a list, but the beautiful thing is we don’t need to fully understand them all for them to be true. All we need is to remain open to the Spirit’s lead, obey as best we can, and pursue God with great abandon. It really is that simple. Sure, learning more of what these things mean will help, but you don’t need to know it all to get started.

Now, related to the Spirit’s ongoing ministry in our lives, we should touch on one last topic as well. Have you ever heard someone mention being filled with the Spirit? We know from passages like Ephesians 1.18, that the Spirit comes to live in us the moment we trust Christ for salvation. However, four chapters later in Ephesians 5.18, Paul says we are to be “filled with the Spirit.” What is Paul talking about here? If we need to be filled with the Spirit, evidently he—or more specifically, his activity or influence over our lives—can be depleted. It seems that the power of the Spirit in our lives can ebb and flow a bit. It’s not that we get more or less Spirit, it’s that our lives are more or less shaped by him.

So you may be asking, “How do we become filled by the Spirit?” Great question! Perhaps the simplest way to put it is this: we walk in the Spirit, or as Galatians says, “keep in step with the spirit.” This means that we increasingly trust him and submit to his promptings. We strive to pay attention to what the Spirit wants, and we obey in everything. The more we live according to his will (remember, he is God) – the more power we receive to continue being transformed. Our obedience fuels our transformation. We gain momentum in our spiritual journeys only as we submit to God’s will and obey what he asks. But when we resist God’s will or we don’t obey, we are left to our own power to follow Christ, and the results are dismal at best.

However, as we walk in the Spirit, God will produce more and more of what Paul labels the “fruit” of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5.22). This is spiritual formation into Christlikeness. We become less hateful and more loving, less cynical and more joyful, less anxious and more at peace, less impatient, and so on.

So you see, in our spiritual journeys, we’re not left to our own willpower or determination to change. God has come to live in each of us by his Spirit in order to change us from the inside out—which happens, not as we work harder to follow rules, but as we open ourselves to the Spirit’s movement, pay attention to his guidance, and follow his lead.

Okay, that was a lot of information on the Spirit. So, let me ask you a few questions: First, who is the Holy Spirit? Well, he is God himself, the third person of the Trinity, the power and presence of God throughout history— starting with creation and ending with our re-creation as children of God. We know this because the Bible reveals the Spirit in just this way. He is called the “Spirit of God,” the “Spirit of the Lord,” and the “Spirit of Jesus.” He has all the characteristics or attributes of God.

Second, what does the Holy Spirit do? We talked about two categories of the Holy Spirit’s ministries in our lives: the things he does the moment we come to faith, and the things he does as we seek to live out our faith. The moment we come to faith, the Spirit gives us new life. We are reborn, which we call regeneration, so that we are new creatures before God. He indwells us, he adopts us into God’s family, and he seals us with God’s mark, assuring our salvation.

After we come to faith in Christ—as we seek to live out that faith—he is our Comforter or Counselor. He transforms us spiritually into Christlikeness—he makes us more and more like Jesus in our character and our actions, by showing us our sin, helping us defeat the power of sin, and producing in our lives the fruits of the Spirit—the very characteristics of Jesus himself. And when we struggle, he is more powerful than our enemy and wants to help us live lives pleasing to God.

Why is all this important? Well, whenever we talk about the great things God has done to redeem us or to save our souls, it’s the Spirit who made most of them happen. He is in you and is your great ally in helping you reject sin and live worthy of your calling as a Jesus follower. You can pray to him as you pray to God the Father and to Jesus. Ask him to fill you, to convict you of sin in your life, to help you understand Scripture and teach you the Truth of God’s Word. He’s available, he’s anxious to help, and he’s powerful enough to make it all happen if you will let him.

So as we close, I want to thank you for your time and I hope this has been a helpful few minutes considering the things of the Holy Spirit. As Paul writes in Romans 15.13: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen and God bless you.