

Week 37 of Core 52. You probably have noticed that we've been moving through the Bible beginning to end, uncovering the basic teachings of Scripture and tying it all together as we go. The last several weeks we've spent in the four Gospels, but this morning we move into the lone book of History in New Testament. The Old Testament has 12 books of history, everything from Joshua to Esther.

The New Testament, though, has one book of history, and that is the book of Acts. That doesn't mean the other books aren't historical, but the Gospels are categorized as biography, Revelation is prophecy, and the rest of N.T. are personal letters, from Paul or Peter, or John.

Acts is a history of the early church. It is formally known as the Acts of the Apostles, but it would be more accurate to call it the Acts of the Holy Spirit, because without the Holy Spirit, none of what happens in Acts would be possible. In fact, Luke introduces his book by reminding us that Jesus has told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. Nothing could start; nothing could happen until Holy Spirit comes.

Before He ascends into heaven Jesus reaffirms this promise, in Acts 1:8 our Core Verse this week, Jesus says, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* We see this power all throughout the book of Acts and the early church.

The power of the Holy Spirit, though, isn't something reserved only for the Apostles. He is given to every believer. In a sneak peek of our Core Verse in two weeks, Acts 2:38 says, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

The Holy Spirit is not an It.

So this morning I want to give you a basic introduction to the work of the Holy Spirit. Let me begin with something very simple but very important. The Holy Spirit is not an it. The Holy Spirit is a Person.

When I was a freshman in Bible college, I did a paper on the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. And repeatedly throughout the paper I referred to the Holy Spirit as an it. I had all these red circles around all my "its" with 'He' written in big bold red letters, and I was docked a letter grade.

My professor was trying to make the point that the Holy Spirit is personal not impersonal. He is not the force like in Star Wars. He is not a magical power. He is not a feeling that overwhelms you. He is not a tingle that shoots up your spine. And let me add this in as a freebie this morning. He is not a ghost. One of the greatest disservices translators of the Bible gave us in the middle ages is the phrase "Holy Ghost." Ugh! It makes me cringe.

We are talking about the person of the Holy Spirit— the third person of the trinity— the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He's just as personal as the Father or the Son, and we don't refer

to either one of them as it. In the bible, the Spirit speaks, makes decisions and can even be grieved by what we do. He has a mind. He has plans. He has feelings. When we talk about the power or presence of the Holy Spirit, we cannot forget he is a personal power and personal presence.

The Holy Spirit Has a Role from the Beginning to the End

The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in the Bible from beginning to end. We find the Spirit at work in creation in Genesis 1 in just the second verse in the Bible where it says, *"The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."*

We find the Holy Spirit at work in the very last chapter of the Bible, as the Spirit stands side by side with the church, the bride of Christ, longing for the return of Jesus. Revelation 22:7 says, *"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let one who desires take the water of life without price."*

From cover to cover, we find God's Spirit at work in and through and for God's people. He tends to take more of a backstage role in the Old Testament, working to fulfill God's purpose behind the scenes. *Occasionally the Spirit would come upon God's chosen servant to clothe them in power to accomplish God's purpose.* The Spirit coming upon someone seems focused on one-time tasks.

- Numbers 24:2 *"And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him,"* and he began to prophesy.
- In Judges 15:14 the Spirit comes upon Samson, *"Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands."*
- The Spirit comes upon King Saul in 1 Samuel 10:10 enabling him to prophesy among the prophets.
- The spirit comes upon Azariah in 2 Chronicles 15:1 to bless king Asa.
- And again in 2 Chronicles 20:14 the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, a Levite, to reassure the nation of Judah that God would deliver them from an invading horde.

There are also a few instances in the O.T. that describe the Holy Spirit filling one of God's servants, working from the inside out, to equip them with a specific skill or attribute. This in-filling of the Spirit is more focused on ongoing callings.

- In Exodus 31, the Spirit of God fills a man by the name of Bazelel to give him skills in all sorts of craftsmanship and the wisdom and knowledge to use it. Bazelel becomes the chief artisan of the tabernacle and was in charge of building the Ark of the Covenant.

- In Deut. 34:9, the Spirit fills Joshua to give him wisdom as he takes leadership of the people after the death of Moses.

Then, something incredible happens in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit steps from the backstage to center stage. He becomes a universal presence and power in God's people. He dwells within each and every believer to work for them, in them, and through them to accomplish all that God desires.

And yet there is, perhaps, nothing that has led to greater confusion and misunderstanding in the church than the role and work of the Holy Spirit. Some churches seem to obsess over the Holy Spirit putting him in the driver's seat while making Jesus ride in the backseat. Other churches, however, completely ignore the Spirit locking him in the trunk, and if he starts making too much noise back there we weave the church back and forth a few times until he shuts up.

So, what does the Holy Spirit mean for you? We're going to look at this on three levels this morning. This is really a whole sermon series, but I'm giving you a crash course this morning. Let's look at how the Holy Spirit works **FOR** you, and how the Spirit works **IN** you, and also how the Holy Spirit works **THROUGH** you. The Spirit does all three. He works for, in and through you.

I. The Holy Spirit Works For You

This is his most universal work, work He does on behalf of all people or all Christians just the same. First, as we've already seen. **The Holy Spirit played a crucial role in creation**, in bringing order out of the chaos. So, every time you enjoy the beach, a vase of spring flowers, a spectacular sunset, or majestic mountain grandeur, you are enjoying, in part, the work of the Holy Spirit.

Another thing the Spirit has done for all people, although not everyone appreciates it for what it is, is that **He inspired the Bible**. The Bible is the work of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts doesn't just reflect the mind of Luke. The letters of Paul don't just tell us the mind of Paul. Numbers doesn't just tell us what Moses was thinking. They also reflect the mind of God. Inspiration was the process by which the Bible's human authors were sure to write what God wanted them to write. The Holy Spirit was instrumental in this process.

2 Peter 1:20b-21 says, *"no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

A couple of other things the Holy Spirit does for all believers. Ephesians 2:18 says **we have access to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit**. This access to the Father is one of the things that separate us from believers under the Old Covenant. They did not have direct access to the Father, but in part because of the coming of the Holy Spirit, we do.

The Spirit also unifies all believers, no matter their differences or disagreements. He gives us an essential unity and oneness, what Ephesians 4:3 calls the unity of the Spirit. There is something about the presence and the power of the Spirit that binds us all together.

This is all work the Spirit does for you. The Spirit has done all this before He has ever stepped one foot in your life. He has done anything in you yet.

II. The Holy Spirit Works In You

What makes the promise of the Holy Spirit so Amazing, though, is that we are told He will dwell within us, and He works within us to bring about God's purpose in our lives. Romans 8:9 tells us that if you belong to Christ, the Spirit dwells within you. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit within you. Your life is not just a condominium for the Spirit of God, it is a temple, a shrine, a place made so that God's Spirit will be magnified there. Your life is a showcase for who God is. That's pretty cool. It's also kind of scary when you think about it.

One of the things the Holy Spirit does inside of you is that **he seals you in Christ.** Ephesians 1:13 says when you heard the word of the gospel and believed in Jesus, you were "*sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*" The word there does mean that you were superglued to Jesus or packed in some sort of divine Tupperware. The word sealed points back to the signet rings worn by kings and queens and people of power and wealth. Anything stamped with their seal, was marked by their identity and power.

You have been marked with the stamp of God's approval and acceptance. The Spirit in your life is God saying, "This one's mine. She belongs to me. I accept him. He's one of my own." Ephesians 1:14 goes on to say the Spirit is a deposit, a "*guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.*" It's that assurance we were talking about last week. We know our salvation is real, because God's already given us His Spirit.

The Spirit does more than just mark you as one of God's own. **The Spirit also transforms you** into what God made you to be. The Holy Spirit is like one of those home remodeling shows on HGTV on spiritual level. He comes in strips out everything that shouldn't be there. Everything that is out of date is ripped out. Everything that is rotting is removed. Everything ugly is stripped away, and it is all replaced with what is pure and true and beautiful and holy.

There are a ton of verses that speak to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. He teaches you. He refines you. He tests you. He reveals truth to you. He gives you the power to resist evil. He generates new desires within you. He helps you know what to pray. I would need a whole sermon just to cover them all. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that through the Spirit we are transformed into the glory of the Lord.

Another way the Spirit works in you is **the Spirit guides you.** As we grow in Jesus we learn to follow the leading and the direction of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes that leading comes as a still

small voice or as an inner tap on the shoulder. Other times in is an overwhelming urge to do something not of our own leading. This sometimes gets abused, but there is no doubt that God's Spirit guides us.

Real quick let me give you three ways the Spirit guides us. 1. **He guides us to the truth.** In a world filled with lies, He guides us to the truth. In John 16:13 Jesus promises the disciples, *"However, when He, the Spirit of Truth has come, He will guide you into all truth."*

2. **He guides us away from sin.** Sins that used to be an irresistible temptation become overcomeable when we follow the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says, *"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."*

3. **He guides us to the will of God.** The more we follow the Spirit of God, the more we will know the will of God. We will quit seeking the easy way, or just the self-satisfying way, but we will learn to want what God wants. David prays in Psalm 143:10, *"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground."* This isn't so much about which house you're supposed to buy, or which job you're supposed to take, or whom you're supposed to marry. It's about doing what is right in your life.

III. The Holy Spirit Works Through You

The work of the Holy Spirit in your life isn't all about you though. I think one of the big mistakes people and churches make with the Holy Spirit is that it becomes all about them. Hey, look at me. Look at what I can do. The Holy Spirit's work in your life should never be about getting people to notice you. It should be about getting people to see God.

In fact, one of the primary reasons the Spirit does things FOR you and IN you is so that He can do things THROUGH you. He wants to use you as His instrument to bring God's love and grace to a lost and hurting world.

Here are two primary ways the Holy Spirit desires to work through your life to touch the lives of others. **First, He gives you spiritual gifts.** The Bible teaches that every believer is gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit for some area or type of ministry for the building up of the body. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, *"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."* 1 Peter 4:10 says, *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."* God has gifted you so that you could be plugged in to the church in some way to serve others.

The Bible mentions all sorts of gifts teaching, leading, serving, encouraging, and these gifts are all focused on blessing, benefiting and building up others. None of them are self-focused.

Even the miraculous gifts, the ones that we tend to argue about and debate like healings and the gift of languages are all to benefit someone else. They are all designed to build up the body of Christ in some way.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit works through you by empowering you for evangelism. This is the primary point of our Core Verse this morning. This was the whole reason the disciples were to wait for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses,” and if you will permit me some pastoral leeway here, “you will be my witnesses in Marshfield and Springfield and in all of Missouri and throughout the United States, and you witness will have an impact on the other side of the World.”

The whole reason we need the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit is so that we can be more effective witnesses. So many Christians wonder, “How come I never experience the power of the Holy Spirit?” May I dare to suggest that maybe it’s because you are never a witness. God has put His Spirit inside of you so that He can show His love, His grace, His power, His truth to everyone in your life. If we want to experience the power the Spirit in our lives, then we need to throw the switch of this primary conduit of God’s power in our lives.

(Last Slide) Let me tie this all up with this. There’s an interesting feature of language. In both Hebrew and in Greek the word for Spirit is a homonym. That is the same word that can refer to two different things. In the O.T. the Hebrew word for Spirit is also the same word for breath. You know which is intended by the context.

This comes into play in Genesis 2 when God creates Adam. Verse 7 says, “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” This could also be translated “God breathed into his nostrils the spirit of life.” So, is it breath or spirit? Maybe both.

In the N.T. the Greek word for spirit is the same as word for wind. And Jesus engages in some wordplay while he’s talking to Nicodemus in John 3, “*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*”

Jesus says the Spirit is like the wind. You can’t see it. You don’t know where it comes from, or where it is going, but you can definitely feel its power. You know it’s real.

Every time I fly somewhere, and the plane is taxiing down the runway, I look out the window and watch those wings as the plane takes off. I know the science. I’ve seen the diagrams of how wings work. I’ve built models that fly, but I am still amazed every time I fly at what the power of wind can do.

This sermon is your invitation to put out your wings and see what the power of the Spirit can do.