

Reaching Up –week 3: The Holy Spirit

Jesus said the Holy Spirit was given to fill a need in our lives. With Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, continuing His work would be a task far too great for mere man. The Holy Spirit plays an essential role in our lives both to grow in our relationship with God – our ability to love Him – and our relationship with others – our ability to love our neighbor. There is much to learn about this much neglected subject, and this week’s devotions really only scratch the surface. My hope is at the very least, you will come to appreciate the necessity and power of the Spirit in our lives.

–Pastor Mike

Day 1: Reaching Up and Through the Holy Spirit

What are some truths you learned from last Sunday’s message? How can it make a difference this week?

Day 2: The Counselor, the Spirit of Truth

Read John 14:15-18.

The Holy Spirit as Counselor; He is given in response to our love of and subsequent obedience to God (v. 15). And out of God’s love for us, he does not leave us alone (*“I will not leave you as orphans”* – v. 18). Our love relationship with God – both our love for Him and His love for us – is the basis for the Holy Spirit’s presence with us.

In a narrow sense, the term “Counselor” (Grk. *parakletos*) carries the idea of pleading for one’s defense as in the legal sense of the word. In a wider sense, it refers to one who helps or assists others. The picture of the Holy Spirit as One who stands by us out of an abiding relationship with the Father means we never have to go it alone. The Holy Spirit is not given for mere legal support. He is also given to help us navigate life in *relationship with the Father*. He is the One who keeps us connected with the Father. He is the One who keeps us from being orphans in this dark world.

How does the Holy Spirit help us? As His children, the Holy Spirit enables us to understand truth (hence, the title “Spirit of truth” in v. 17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:13 – Note: in every use of the title “Counselor”, reference is made to the “Spirit of truth” or to His teaching ministry; see also 1Cor. 2:10-14), which we have seen in previous weeks is essential to abiding in Christ (see John 15:7, 9-10; 17:7).

Personal thought:

I was personally surprised at the emphasis of “truth” and “teaching” in relation to the Holy Spirit as Counselor. Combined with the obvious care of God for His children, particularly the concern of abandonment, I see God wanting a relationship with us by building it on truth and the teachings of Christ. Not surprising then is Jesus’ declaration that true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). The Holy Spirit’s role to guide and teach us the truth is a key to building a healthy relationship with the Father.

Furthermore, Jesus was so concerned about the relational that He chose to leave His disciples. Yes, He chose to leave His disciples. Isn’t that a contradiction? Not at all. Christ could have chosen to stay with His disciples after His resurrection, but said it was better to leave so the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, could come. In so doing, it is remarkable that better than having restricted access to Jesus in physical form, there is now unlimited access to Jesus through the Holy Spirit as He indwells every believer through every generation. Ingenious!

To consider:

How has the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, worked in your life as you have learned more about God through reading the Word, through teaching, through meditating on the truth? What have you learned lately about God that has impacted your love for Him?

Day 3: Being Filled With the Spirit

Read Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16-17.

There is much confusion around the command to be filled with the Spirit. Because it is a command, it seems fitting that we understand what it means. Some see this as a command to “receive” the Holy Spirit – a second work of the Holy Spirit after salvation. Others see this to mean asking for the Spirit to fill us with the subsequent assurance that anything done from that point forward (apart from sin) is done with the enablement of the Spirit and within God’s will. The phrase “spiritual breathing” has been penned in regard to this understanding. I would suggest this command is defined within the Scriptures itself.

The letters of Ephesians and Colossians are often called “sister” or “companion” letters because so much of their content is shared or duplicated in both letters. A brief examination of chapters 3-4 in Colossians and 5-6 in Ephesians reveals their similarities. The reading for today is one instance where Scripture clarifies Scripture. To be brief, the command to “*be filled with the Spirit*” in Ephesians parallels the command to “let the word of Christ *dwell in you richly*”. Both are followed with the results of obedience to the command: speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing and making music in our hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks for everything.

What does it mean to be “filled with the Spirit”? It is a willful act of continually walking and yielding to the Spirit in our relationship with Christ, a relationship nourished by the Word of Christ (the Scriptures). It is choosing to live in the fullness of Christ as His Word dwells in us richly (John 15:7). It is allowing the Word of God to permeate every aspect of our lives. It goes without saying that walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) cannot be done without engaging the mind in the Word.

Personal thought:

To my surprise (again!), I found a strong connection between the Holy Spirit’s work and the Word of God. The connection was not what I had expected. It was not my intent to focus on the Word (as in last week’s devotions), but the Scriptures kept directing me back to it. It has reaffirmed and reinforced a commitment to God’s Word in my life.

To consider:

Being filled with the Spirit produces an inner joy and peace (Col. 3:15) that results in, among other things, a thankful heart. Paul says in Ephesians to give thanks to God for everything; in Colossians he says whatever we do, whether in word or deed, give thanks to God. If a thankful heart is a product of being filled with the Spirit, how are you doing in your walk with the Spirit? Are you quarter full, half full, completely full of the Spirit’s influence? Do you see any correlation between time spent meditating on His Word and a thankful attitude?

Day 4: Living By the Spirit

Read Galatians 5:16-26.

In today’s passage, living by the Spirit is contrasted with living according to the flesh (NIV – *sinful nature*). The battle to gratify the desires of the flesh (and note that those desires seek gratification meaning there is a strong draw) is won by living by the Spirit. The flesh and Spirit are in conflict with one another, and the passage indicates that we are only able to stand up to the temptation (i.e. “so that you do not do what you want”) by the power of the Spirit. Trying to defeat the flesh’s power in our own strength in the spirit of the law (i.e. trying to live a do’s and don’ts kind of life) is not the answer. The answer is found in living by the Spirit. Paul expands this thought in Romans 8:5-6. I encourage you take 30 seconds and read the passage.

Living by the Spirit means setting our minds on what the Spirit desires (Rom. 8:5). Rather than fighting off the flesh’s thoughts and temptations (this, giving our attention to the flesh), we are to turn our thoughts toward what is godly and pleasing to God (turning our attention to the Spirit). With our minds continually turned toward the things of God, the desires of the flesh are transported away – the desire for gratification gone.

Personal thought:

What sounds simple is not always easy. Keeping our minds on the things of God can be a struggle with our eyes and ears constantly bombarded with the immoral. The fast pace of life overcrowded with activities can add stress to an already stressful life of work. I recently saw a television commercial that encouraged teenagers to “pause” before jumping in to something regrettable. That is practical advice when we are tempted to gratify the impulses of the flesh. Pausing and taking a breath and turning our thoughts to God may help. Ultimately, though, we need to develop a continual awareness of God’s presence and live with Him moment by moment. That is a process that will take time and effort. The combination of knowing what pleases God through Scripture, the prompting of the Holy Spirit on our heart and conscience working through that knowledge, our desire to set our minds on the things of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to live in step with the Spirit, helps us develop more and more fruit.

To consider:

Galatians 5:19-23 reveals the difference between the flesh and the Spirit. In looking at the list of fleshly acts, are there some areas that you struggle with? In those struggles, what do you believe “setting our minds on what the Spirit desires” looks like practically for you in relation to that struggle?

Gal. 5:22-23 lists the fruit of a life lived in the Spirit. Here, they are not given as goals to pursue, but the product of a Spirit-led life. Looking at the list of fruit, how is your Spirit-led life progressing?

Day 5: The Work of the Holy Spirit

Read John 15:26-27; 16:5-11.

For the last several days, we have seen the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of God’s children. But what about those who do not know Christ, those who have turned a blind eye to God?

Our passage today reveals the Holy Spirit’s work in the unbeliever:

- He testifies to Christ (15:26)
- He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8)

In the Spirit’s testimony, the Holy Spirit’s power confirmed the truth of the gospel (see Acts 2:43; 3:6-16; 14:3). Jesus commanded the disciples to testify as well since they had been with Him from the beginning and could not be accused of creating a fictional account. Together their testimony would carry the gospel to the ends of the earth (see Acts 1:8). As one commentator has noted, “Without the witness of the Spirit, the disciples’ witness would be powerless; without the disciples’ witness, the Spirit would be restricted in his means of expression.” (EBCNT)

Personal thought:

As we continue the work of testifying of Christ, how much more we need the testimony of the Spirit today for us who were not present with Christ from the beginning! God continues to work in ways we may not see to validate the truth of the gospel. That is clear from the convicting work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). It is encouraging to know that as we share the gospel, we are not alone. We have a Helper who does the harder work of convicting people of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Our responsibility is to merely testify of the gospel from the words of Christ (Scripture) and from our own experience (just as the early disciples did). Our responsibility is not to guilt people into believing – that convicting work is accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

To consider:

How does knowing the Holy Spirit works in collaboration with your efforts affect your attitude and approach to sharing Christ? In hindsight, how have you seen the Spirit work behind-the-scenes in your efforts to share Christ?

Day 6: Review

Look over your notes from the past week. What one or two things did God impress upon you this week?