

## Life in the Spirit: Presence and Absence

Text: John 14:16

4.30.17



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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*“Have you found it more challenging to understand the Holy Spirit and his role, as opposed to seeing God as Father, or in the person of Jesus? In light of your own spiritual formation, would you say that the Holy Spirit was frequently referenced and honored, or most often marginalized and absent?”*

*“What do you think of when you think of the Holy Spirit? Have those images proven helpful in your pursuit of interacting with the Holy Spirit? Have they been harmful?”*

*“Where, in your own life, have you been able to point to something and say, ‘That was God!’? If not, would you attribute that to a lack of awareness or a lack of experience?”*

*“Are there some things in your life that seem dead, but that you continue to attempt to resurrect? Are you certain they are worth resurrecting? Are you confident that they are able to house/carry life?”*

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### Teaching Notes...

#### **“Results not typical”...**

This statement is usually offered to us in a (4)-font, (3)-second glance, amidst a litany of disclaimers and potential risks, by ‘actor portrayals’... but in the context of a barrage of images, each meant to appeal to a deeper desire for something that we have yet to experience.

#### **God is always holding before us the “After” picture.**

God is always saying to us, in any number of ways and with a variety of metaphors, *“Here’s who you are. Here’s who I see you becoming. Now grow into this!”*

*“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago”* (Ephesians 2:10).

I launch into this teaching based on my desire for us all to have an experience of life which is developing “into” the vision of God, the “artisan”. A life which results, not just in the temporary and sensational displays of power, but in sustained- commitment to healing and wholeness in all dimensions of our lives.

**God will always be bigger than your knowledge of him.**

“Irreverence” is the outcome of standing before something/someone who no longer inspires awe and wonder. Something you can fully explain. Boredom.

**None of us is currently experiencing the fullest life possible. There's always “more”.**

**You're not “merely human”** (2 Peter 1:4)

*“There is one God, who is infinitely perfect, existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”.*

*“The Holy Spirit is a divine person sent to dwell, guide, teach, empower the believer, and convince the world of sin, or righteousness, and of judgment”.*

These are “*creedal*” statements (Latin, ‘credo’, meaning “I believe”) They are widely accepted in orthodox (“conventional”: claim to hold to the traditional beliefs and customs of the early church), Christian circles as means of helping to clarify and condense what distinguishes a faith, and a means of describing--- without attempting to define--- God.

So, when we make such statements, we are confessing that this is the way in which we have come to understand God, based on the ways that he has chosen to reveal himself to us (e.g. creation, historical interaction, and--- most completely, in Jesus).

Realizing, in this process, not only the challenges that God faces (the infinite describing himself to the finite), but the ones unique to us, as humans (God is always subject to our interpretations).

Amidst the aftermath of the cross and resurrection, the “*Messiah formerly known as dead*”, appears to his followers and commands them to stay in Jerusalem and “*wait*” for the promised Holy Spirit who is said to, “*fill them with power from heaven*” (Luke 24).

Their experiences of Jesus, no matter how euphoric or motivational, would not be enough to sustain them. Jesus must somehow be able to transfer his ‘passion’ (the life inside of him; his heart) into his followers. The Spirit, the vital life of Jesus, would be “*with*” them and “*in*” them (John 14:16). He will re-direct their passions and re-orient their mission, so that they are not simply adept at taking orders, but that they share his heart.

**We spend a great deal of time attempting to explain the Holy Spirit without actually experiencing/encountering him. The early followers of Jesus developed in their understanding by their encounter of him.**

The Holy Spirit is like the person in the room who becomes the focus of the conversation without ever being acknowledged or engaged. It's the awkwardness of referring to one who is present as if they are not privy to your conversation.

**If we have, and rightly so, kept our primary focus on Jesus, as the Christ, I think we are less sure about the Holy Spirit.**

If we are honest, our framework for an understanding of the Spirit is more directly-linked to our formation, than a clear, biblical understanding of God, as Father, Son, and Spirit.

Some faith expressions seem to ignore him. There is very little discussion about the Spirit because of the fear/hesitation which surrounds our lack of understanding or, because his role has

been so downplayed that he is almost not simply the **“third person”**, but the **“third wheel”** of the Trinity!

Some faith expressions give little attention to the Spirit because of what they have perceived as some misrepresentations or abuses associated with the Spirit. **Things got a bit weird!** There a great deal of bizarre (disorderly, unattractive) or seemingly rather ‘extreme’ behaviors, all attributed to the **“Spirit falling on us”** (*anointing*), or **“overtaking us”**.

- The Holy Spirit shows up, in less than dramatic fashion, in the second verse of the Story. Simply stated: **“... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”** (1:2).

Genesis 1:1, in very unassuming, yet profound ways, makes a statement, upon which our entire biblical paradigm is founded: the One, True Creator-God is responsible for everything we see and can’t see around us. Everything **IS** because of God.

- Creation, in its earliest stages, is described as being, **“chaotic and dark”**. All of the raw materials are there, but it presently lacks order and form. It has yet to be shaped into something beautiful and functional. It has yet to “become”.

The Holy Spirit is described as **“hovering”** over it. It’s a word rarely used in Scripture, but used to describe a bird, hovering (Deuteronomy 32) over its nest, over its young.

The Spirit is always depicted as entering into those places of darkness and shedding light; of loneliness and bringing presence; of chaos and establishing order; of death and bringing life.

Psalm 104:27-30 **“When you send your Spirit, ... you renew the face of the earth”**.

### **My hopes for us...**

**1) Expect an encounter with God. Anything less would be inhuman.**

**2) Establish an environment which is conducive to such an encounter--- where God can be himself.**

God always more freely expresses himself in places where he is “welcomed” and feels “unrestrained”. Where he is not bound by the limitations we place upon him through either our unresponsiveness or our prejudice (pre-judgments).

**3) Steward the encounter without trying to confine or prescribe his interactions with us.**

If what we are experiencing in our lives is always within the range of our own capacity for explanation and management (control), we are likely failing to properly encounter the God who is both knowable and mysterious; both reliable, but never domesticated.

Let me be clear that I do not function under the assumption that what we need is some return to the “glory days” of the church in the first century (certain that’s not even possible). I think, in the process, we run the risk of becoming increasingly irrelevant, as our faith becomes more historical than it does contemporary. Something that is “time-honored”, but not a “time-honored practice”.

What I desire is that we somehow allow the Holy Spirit to leap off of the pages of our creeds and into the experiential life of the believing community. As we do, I believe that...

**\_the Holy Spirit will breathe life into our present theologies.**

*“Can these dry bones live? Only you know...”* (Ezekiel 37:1-14) Ezekiel watches as the Spirit brings life into the deadness of the present condition.

I'm assuming that there are some “bones” that we need not attempt to resurrect.

God doesn't start with “new/different set of bones”. The modality was sufficient; it simply lacked alignment... life. Our “humanity” is not inherently an impediment to the experience of the Spirit. In fact, it is our humanness that actually makes such dynamic interaction a possibility... a necessity. We were created for God; for life.

**\_ the Holy Spirit will re-invigorate the “charismata” (gifts/graces) in order to build up the community and equip them for life in the world.** We will continue to understand ourselves (our faith/salvation) communally, not individually.

**\_ Holy Spirit will allow us to share, “not only the good news, but our very lives, too” (1 Thessalonians 2).** Our task is not simply to announce the good news, but to portray it as enlivening and empowering our own reality.

*“If you don't personally go with us, don't make us leave this place. How will anyone know that you look favorably on your people, if you don't go with us? For your presence among us sets us apart from all other people on the earth”. Exodus 33:15-16*