

When we speak of the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God, we are speaking of God's active work in our lives; leading us, guiding us, forming and shaping us as we just sang in *Spirit Song*. It's the power and presence of God to comfort and encourage us, and to make us into the people He wants us to be. The Spirit is the voice of God whispering, wooing, and beckoning us to a personal relationship with God.

The word "Spirit" appears about 500 times in the Bible. There are eighty to ninety references to the Spirit of God in the Old Testament, depending upon how one translates the Hebrew word for spirit. In some cases, the Spirit of God is said to be what gives each human being life. In other cases it is the source of creative and artistic gifts. Sometimes the Old Testament teaches that the Spirit is the source of superhuman strength, wisdom and leadership.

But while the Spirit is often described as empowering and giving special gifts and abilities, the Spirit's most frequent work in the Old Testament is in ensuring that God's voice is heard so that God's purpose and will can be conveyed. One of the most famous references to the Spirit is found in Isaiah 61:1 which Jesus quoted when He preached in His hometown of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the oppressed." The Old Testament shows God's Spirit working primarily through the leaders and prophets—guiding, influencing, and speaking through them as they pursue God's will. Whereas in the New Testament, the words of the prophet Joel concerning the Spirit are fulfilled: "I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions." At Pentecost this became a reality when the Spirit descended on all who believed in Jesus Christ.

While there are limited references to the Spirit in the Old Testament, the impact of the Spirit is seen throughout the New Testament. This morning, let's look at one from the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, verses 15-26, where Jesus tells His disciples that He would be leaving them soon, but He is sending the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort them.

Read John 14:15-26

Now if you were one of the disciples hearing this, how would you have interpreted what Jesus was saying? Who is this Spirit? How would you define the Holy Spirit; how would you describe the Spirit? Growing up in the Methodist Church in the Bible Belt of the South in the 1950s and 1960s, I didn't hear much about the Holy Spirit. I don't know about you, but the Spirit was not even mentioned or discussed in Sunday School lessons or sermons. The only reference to the Spirit was in the Apostles' Creed and the Doxology. The church was basically not using the power of the Spirit; it was as if we had the firewood, but no fire – the fire being the Holy Spirit.

Then for some reason, the church fortunately started emphasizing the Spirit again in the late 1960s.

The Bible always pictures the Spirit as a person and not merely as an impersonal force. According to the Bible, the Spirit convinces the world of sin, of righteousness and of justice. He comforts, sustains, and empowers those who believe in Jesus Christ and guides them to all truth. Jesus and God come into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. I like to think of the Spirit as the conscience of a Christian; you know that little voice within each of us that tells us right from wrong. Someone once said that you might as well try to hear without ears, or breathe without lungs, as try to live a Christian life without the Spirit in your heart.

Depending on which translation of the Bible you use, there are many names by which the Holy Spirit is known. Verse 16 in our text states: "I will ask the Father, and He will send another Advocate, who will be with you forever." Instead of Advocate, other translations use the terms Counselor, Companion, Friend, Helper, and Comforter. Each of these names describes how the Spirit ministers to us and works within this world. As an old highway engineer, I would add another name to this list – Traffic Sign. Just like the signs along the Interstate and streets give us directions to where we are going and how to get there, so does the Holy Spirit provide guidance to Christians on how to live as God wants us to, so that someday we will reach our final destination – heaven.

Romans 8:26 tells us that when we are praying and we can't come up with the right words, the Spirit intercedes for us. Maybe you have experienced times when the right words came to you out of nowhere. I remember when Judy and I lived in Atlanta, and attended Mt Pisgah UMC, we had a worship service with different people giving personal testimonies. A twelve year old boy got up and gave one of the most moving testimonies that I have ever heard. When he finished his mother turned to Judy amazed and said: "That's not what he practiced;" he had been led by the Spirit.

Of course, this does not work all the time, especially if you don't properly prepare. A preacher got so busy one week that he decided to trust what Romans 8:26 says and didn't work on his sermon; he believed that the Spirit would tell him what to say. So on Sunday morning when he got up to preach, he whispered: "O Lord, let your Spirit give me the right words." To which the Lord replied: "Brother, you should have prepared; you are on your own!"

It is the Spirit who equips us for ministry. Jesus Himself received the Spirit as He began His ministry here on earth. For thirty years Jesus had lived in Nazareth growing up and working in the carpenter's shop caring for His mother and step-brothers and step-sisters. However, with the emergence of John the Baptist from the wilderness, Jesus knew that the time had come to

begin His ministry and His destiny with the cross. So He left His mother and family and went to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist.

Each of the four gospels records this event with a few different details. Listen to Luke's account from the third chapter: "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist testified stating: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him." The key word here is "remain." The Spirit was with Jesus throughout His ministry here on earth, equipping Him.

Before Jesus could begin His ministry, He needed to be equipped with the Holy Spirit. In both his gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, Luke has the Holy Spirit playing a prominent role. For Luke baptism represented a sign of the empowerment of the Spirit. Jesus could do what He did, in Luke's mind, because He was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Like our Lord and Savior, our baptism both commissions and equips us for service to God. The Holy Spirit is like the fuel that powers our cars; the most powerful automobile cannot go anywhere without gasoline or now of days, an electrical charge. Each of us is equipped with the Spirit when we accept Jesus Christ into our hearts. Then all we have to do is turn on the ignition and press the accelerator, and go where God leads us.

In verses 16-18 in our text, Jesus promised: "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to 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. I will not leave you as orphans." Note the keywords – the Spirit will be forever and will dwell in you. When we accept Jesus Christ into our hearts, the Spirit comes to dwell within us – to guide and comfort us through the trials of life – to be our constant companion.

Have you ever given the concept of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you much thought? We love Jesus, trust in Him, and try to do His will, but have you accepted the fact that as a Christian the Spirit dwells within you; is a constant part of your life. One way that we can be assured that we are following the guidance of the Spirit is by how we relate to God and each other; how we live our daily lives. In Galatians 5:22, the Apostle Paul identifies the fruits of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Are these qualities present in our lives; do we exhibit them in our daily life; can others see the influence of the Spirit in our lives? Are we Spirit filled?

As the Spirit descended on Jesus and went with Him throughout His ministry here on earth, so the Spirit is with us right now. However, many Christians never accept the equipping power of the Spirit or the opportunity to make a difference for the Lord in this world. A. W. Tozer noted

that “though every believer has the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit does not have every believer.” Many Christians go through life thinking only of themselves and never heeding the call of God to service.

Many churches are also guilty of this. A man was visiting a church and was so moved by the sermon and the music that he stood up in the middle of the service and started shouting: “Amen! Alleluia!” One of the ushers rushed over and told him to sit down and be quiet. “We don’t do that in this church,” the usher said. But the visitor replied: “But I’ve got the Spirit.” To which the usher said: “Well, you didn’t get it here; so be quiet.” I hope that is never said in High Desert.

The 1850s in America marked a decline in religion in the United States. The discovery of gold in California, as well as several other developments, had turned the minds and hearts of the people away from religion and toward material things. The political debate and division within the country occupied the public attention. A severe financial panic in the late 1850s led to even greater concern about material things.

In September 1857 a businessman named Jeremiah Lanphier decided to invite other businessmen to join him in a noonday prayer meeting once a week, praying for the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. He distributed hundreds of handbills advertising the meeting, but on the first day only half a dozen showed up. However, two weeks later there were forty, and within six months some ten thousand were gathered daily for prayer in New York City alone. Awakening swept the country, and within two years an estimated one million people professed faith in Jesus Christ.

The effects of the awakening were profound, both in individual lives and in society. Tragically, the awakening was too late to avoid the Civil War that threatened the very life of the nation. But untold good came from the awakening, including many movements for evangelism and social betterment.

And based on what is happening in our country and the Church today, I personally believe that we are desperately in need of another spiritual awakening. The greatest need within the Christian Church throughout the world today is to experience the touch of the Holy Spirit, bringing true “revival” and “renewal” to the lives of countless Christians. Our world needs to be touched by Christians who are Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, and Spirit-empowered.

Dr. Samuel Johnson used to wear a watch on which was engraved the words from John 9:4 – “The Night Cometh.” In this verse, Jesus states: “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” I wonder how many of us will look back over a lifetime of wasted opportunities and ineffective witness and weep because we did not allow God to use us as He wanted. If we are ever to study the Scriptures, if we are ever to

spend time in prayer, if we are ever to win souls for Christ, if we are ever to invest our resources for His kingdom – it must be now.

It is no accident that some of the great awakenings in history have begun in prayer. A prayer meeting under a haystack in a rainstorm in 1806 led to the first large-scale American missionary efforts. In 1930 some thirty thousand people were converted in Rochester, New York, under the ministry of Charles Finney; later Finney said the reason was the faithful praying of one man who never attended the meetings but gave himself to prayer. In 1872 the American evangelist Dwight L. Moody began a campaign in London, England, that was used by God to touch countless lives. Later Moody discovered that a humble bedridden girl had been praying. The list could go on and on. There is power in prayer.

Are you praying for a revival, both in your life and in the life of the church? The greatest need in our country, community and church today is for fully committed Christians. Join me starting today to pray each and every day over the coming weeks and during Lent for the Holy Spirit to re-ignite us as a congregation, church, and country for the service of the Lord. I don't know if we will have another awakening, but it's worth a try. There is power in the Spirit and we need to take it off shelf and use all of it we can to make a difference for the Lord here in Rio Rancho and New Mexico. I hope and pray that you join me in this effort. Let's awaken High Desert and Rio Rancho for the Lord. Let's see what the Spirit can do! Amen