

Welcome back to week three of the series we're calling, "Opening to The Holy Spirit." We're hoping to broaden and deepen our understanding and awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And, as your understanding and awareness grow, so can your desire to cooperate with the Spirit's work—moment by moment, day by day.

Brian made it clear last week that it's not possible to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit—He's the One who awakens you. There's no way to get connected with Jesus or walk with Him without the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is only possible through the active work of the Holy Spirit in you. Loving God and loving others happens because of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is critical to the Christian life. But so many Christians have almost zero understanding of the Spirit's presence or power in their lives. And, naturally, they're frustrated. They're wondering if the Jesus-life is too much or just unavailable to them.

That's why this series and our time today is so important. I want to talk about how involved the Holy Spirit *really is* in the life of a person who first gets connected with Jesus, starts to walk with Him and continues to walk with Him for a lifetime.

### **The Holy Spirit Awakens You**

From start to finish, the Holy Spirit is *the key player* in the Christian life. No one ever 'finds God' on their own...that's the Holy Spirit's work of awakening. The Bible says, "*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*" (2 Corinthians 4:4). In other words, our natural mind, heart and will need to be awakened to an understanding that we have offended our Creator by our sin. And in that awakening we understand that we need to confess our sin and receive

the forgiveness only Jesus provides. The awakening we so desperately need is only possible through the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Open your bibles to John 16:7-11 and I'll show you what I mean. Jesus is telling the disciples that He will be leaving them, and how that it's actually a good thing. Brian talked about this last week. [READ] Jesus says, "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper [*Advocate*] will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

Jesus is sharing with the disciples part of the Holy Spirit's job description. The Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. So, it's the Holy Spirit who helps people understand their sinfulness. It's the Holy Spirit who continues to illuminate our hearts and minds about what true righteousness is. And it's the Holy Spirit who reminds us that the enemy is defeated and that judgment is coming for him and all who belong to him.

You don't wake yourself up. The Holy Spirit awakens you. We don't see the light through our own effort. We don't recognize our need to be saved because of our own insight. All this comes through the consistent, loving work of the Spirit to help us get connected with Jesus and grow to love and serve Him.

"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him—<sup>10</sup> these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit."<sup>1</sup> We have no way of knowing God apart from His Spirit. We can't do it on our own. It's the Holy Spirit who enlightens and enlivens. When you decided to start

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:9-10a

going to church or that you needed to be saved or that you wanted to start living for Jesus—that was the Holy Spirit working, God Himself, stirring and revealing to you your need.

But the work of the Holy Spirit can be resisted. That's why not everyone is a Christ follower. Check out Acts 7:51. This may be a new text to some of you, so here's the context. A faithful Jesus follower, named Stephen, who was *"full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people"* (Acts 6:8) was dragged before the Jewish leadership because they didn't like what he was doing. Instead of defending himself, he talks about the good news about Jesus. He shares the remarkable history of Israel detailing the ways God had reached out to the Jewish people, ultimately leading to Jesus. At the end of his talk, Stephen boldly declares (v 51), *"<sup>51</sup>You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit...<sup>57</sup> But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.<sup>58</sup> Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him."*

The Holy Spirit doesn't force Himself on us. As one scholar writes, He doesn't "coerce or overleap or overpower human self-determination, but persuades, coaxes, challenges, pries loose, and invites freedom."<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Spirit is constantly pursuing, working behind the scenes to soften the hearts and open the eyes of the spiritually blind.

### *Application*

Some of you listening today are sensing the Holy Spirit's awakening ministry in you. That's why you're here. That's why you tuned-in online. You've been feeling like something's missing in your life: that's the Holy Spirit stirring in you. God created you to know and walk with Him. He built you for Himself and you will never feel complete, satisfied, and at peace deep in your soul until you have a genuine relationship with Him. So, if you are sensing a draw toward God, and an urgency to find out

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<sup>2</sup> Oden, Thomas C. *Life in the Spirit, Systematic Theology: Volume 3* (Prince Press, Peabody, Mass., 1998), 101.

what's going on, that's the Holy Spirit. At the end of our time today, you'll have the chance to do something about it. And I'd encourage you, don't resist Him; cooperate with Him. He's leading you to freedom and the life God created you to experience.

## **The Holy Spirit Indwells You**

Now, here's what's cool: the moment you say 'yes' to Jesus as your Forgiver and Leader, the Spirit does several things in and for you all because He takes up residence within you—He [The Holy Spirit] indwells you.

Last week Brian walked us through Jesus' teaching regarding the Spirit's indwelling work. Jesus told his followers "the Holy Spirit will be in you" (John 14:17). In Acts 2 we see this promise fulfilled during a special Jewish feast called the Feast of Weeks. "It is celebrated seven weeks, or fifty days, after the Feast of Firstfruits, which occurs during the Passover season. This timing gives the festival its Greek name, Pentecost, meaning 'fiftieth day.'"<sup>3</sup> It's during the Feast of Weeks, Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, came in a powerful way and filled the believers, indwelt them, like never before.

When the Holy Spirit indwells you, when He takes up residence within you, He goes to work on you. And a bunch of very important things take place in you when that happens.

1. First, the Holy Spirit makes you spiritually alive. This is why we use the term 'born again.' You were born physically and now you've been born, again, spiritually. The theological word is 'regeneration.' Look at John 3:5-6 and see how Jesus talks about it. He says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* (John 3:5-6).

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<sup>3</sup> Simple explanation of the Feast of Weeks at [https://biblehub.com/topical/t/the\\_feast\\_of\\_weeks.htm](https://biblehub.com/topical/t/the_feast_of_weeks.htm)

Later, in John 7:38-39, Jesus said it this way: *"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'*

*<sup>39</sup> Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."*

Here's why this is such a big deal: The Spirit of God has made us alive to God. It's a supernatural, spiritual reality that God the Spirit makes happen in us. It's a completed and permanent thing. It means that we are spiritually alive and now it's possible for the things that are important to God to be important to us. And this new life, started by the Holy Spirit, enables us to live even when, one day, we die *physically*. Paul talks about this in Romans 8:11, *"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."* So, breathe deeply and rest knowing that this is the good work the Holy Spirit has done in you. You are spiritually alive and 'physical' you will be taken care of, too.

2. The second thing I want you to see is that every believer is placed into the body of Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There's lots of confusion about what 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' really means and it often gets misused. The Bible talks about Baptism in, of, with and by the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> Just know that there is only one baptism of the Spirit. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:13, *"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."* Simply put, the purpose of baptism of the Spirit is to supernaturally join believers to the body of Christ.

Some think that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is something else: a second work of God in our lives or an extra experience of the Holy Spirit not experienced by all believers. Those who *do* experience this second work are able to speak in tongues or languages that are not naturally

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<sup>4</sup> See Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5; 11:16

known to them, and are enabled to do other miraculous signs and wonders. Groups that believe this tend to seek "Baptism of the Spirit" almost obsessively because they think that it's the fullness of the Spirit that God intends everyone to have.

Most of this misunderstanding is based on what happened in the early church when the Spirit was first being poured out or into believers, like Acts 2. At that time, many, **but not all**, believers were able to speak in tongues or perform other signs and wonders when the Holy Spirit filled them. That was uniquely helpful as the gospel spread to the Gentiles. It powerfully demonstrated that the grace and forgiveness of Jesus was available not just to the Jewish people, but to everyone! And, when Gentiles received similar gifts, the Jewish believers recognized that the Holy Spirit was in working them, too.<sup>5</sup> Obviously, God can, and in some cases does, gift believers with tongues and other sign gifts in accordance with His divine will. We'll talk about that more later in the series. The simplest way, I think, to understand how the Bible describes it, is to recognize that it's "Through baptism by the Spirit the faithful become identified with the body of Christ, living in union with Christ's risen body."<sup>6</sup> Baptism in the Spirit connects believers into the body of Christ.

3. Here's the third incredible work the Spirit accomplishes when you give your life to Jesus: He seals you in Christ. [The Holy Spirit seals you in Christ.] Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 1:13-14.

[READ] *"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."*

Paul says it this way in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22: [READ]

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<sup>5</sup> Consider Peter in Acts 10.

<sup>6</sup> Oden, p 182

*"And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."*

The word 'sealed' means "to set a seal upon, mark with a seal." We often think about seals like this as being in wax or clay or some kind of impression made with a ring. Seals were like signatures or engravings. In the Bible, a seal has significant symbolic meaning. In the Bible, a seal represents...

- Completion.<sup>7</sup> Like signing a deed document—it's complete and ready for delivery. Nothing is left outstanding.
- Possession/Ownership.<sup>8</sup> It's got my seal on it: 'dibs,' that belongs to me. The seal prevents any argument about to whom the item belongs.
- Security.<sup>9</sup> Documents were sealed along the closure so the only way to read the document was to break the seal. Only the authorized person was allowed to that.

"Sealing is closely tied with the teaching of the assurance of salvation...The Spirit pledges that all that has been promised will ultimately be fulfilled."<sup>10</sup>

### *Application*

This amazing work of the Spirit is one more reason for us to take a deep breath and let the truth wash over us: It's a done deal. It's complete. You belong to God. He's got you covered and He's not changing His mind. Resting in this reality can calm our weary hearts & minds in those times when we wonder if we're ever going to live up to what God's called us to and promised for us; when we wonder if God is still *for us* because we've blown it so many times. You're sealed. It's done. The Holy Spirit lives

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<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 32:9-10; Matthew 27:66; Revelation 20:3

<sup>8</sup> Song of Solomon 8:6; Jeremiah 32:11-12; 2 Timothy 2:19; Revelation 7:2-3, 9:4

<sup>9</sup> Esther 8:8; Daniel 6:17; Ephesians 4:30

<sup>10</sup> Wuest, K. S. *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English reader* (Eph 1:13) (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997).

inside you and He's the guarantee that what God has promised will be fulfilled. It's all about Him. You're His. Rest in that.

I want to share one more remarkable thing that happens when the Holy Spirit indwells you.

4. The Holy Spirit [He] assures you that you are God's child. Paul talks about in Romans 8:15-16. I've put it in your notes.

*"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..."*

When you admit that you need the forgiveness of Jesus and you trust Him as your Forgiver and Leader, you become a child of God. You don't cower like a fearful slave. You're a child of the King of the Universe with all the rights and privileges that go with it. Jesus-follower, you are a child of God. You are an heir to the Kingdom. You're not second-class, second-string, or a second thought. Because you have trusted Jesus and what God has accomplished through Him, your relationship with God has officially changed. You're no longer a slave to sin, but you're free to live in peace with God. You've been invited into unearned, undeserved intimacy and you get to call God your *Father*. You can come close whenever you like. Just like Brian mentioned last week with his kids or grandkids just walking into his office unannounced. You are *welcomed* into the Father's presence and He's happy to see you! We no longer scrape by on our own, trying to be good enough, fast enough and smart enough. Now, we have the Holy Spirit of God living within us to give us all we need to live, love and serve like He wants us to. And He reminds us: 'You are God's kid!' This is the abundant life that Jesus said He came to give.

Please don't misunderstand. Being God's child Christ does *not* mean that you get whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want, in the color you want. That's not up to you. As God's kid, you're in line to receive all that He has for you—and that might even include suffering—just like it



did for Jesus (v 17). *But* you'll never have to walk through it alone. God will provide all you need according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). You're His and He's got you; now and forever. And in case you forgot...the best is still to come.

There's one other major activity of the Spirit that I want to get you thinking about today, but we'll unpack more thoroughly later in the series. *After awakening you and indwelling you, the Holy Spirit begins transforming you.*

### **The Holy Spirit Transforms You**

When we began this morning, I talked about how integral the Holy Spirit is in the life of a Christian—from beginning to end. Later this summer, we're going to look at Galatians 5 which teaches us that the Spirit is working to *transform us* from lives that reflect the sinful, natural heart and mind to lives that overflow with the fruit of the Spirit. This doesn't happen accidentally. This happens as we walk by the Spirit and stay in step with Him consciously choosing to cooperate with Him moment by moment throughout our days.<sup>11</sup> Don't resist His nudges. Don't push Him away when He tries to take you in an unexpected direction. Doing that contradicts who you are now that you've been sealed. We have to cooperate with His leading.

### **Illustration**

Author Ken Sande illustrates this so well in one of his books. He writes, "One day during my morning run I noticed a blind woman walking on the other side of the street with her Seeing Eye dog, a beautiful golden retriever. As I was about to pass them, I noticed a car blocking a driveway a few paces ahead of them. At that moment the dog paused and gently pressed his shoulder against the woman's leg, signaling her to turn aside so they could get around the car.

I'm sure she normally followed his lead, but that day she didn't seem to

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<sup>11</sup> Galatians 5:16ff; Romans 8:1-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; Ephesians 4:30

trust him. She had probably walked this route many times before and knew this was not the normal place to make a turn. Whatever the cause, she wouldn't move to the side and instead gave him the signal to move ahead. He again pressed his shoulder against her leg, trying to guide her on a safe path. She angrily ordered [the dog] to go forward. When he again declined, her temper flared.

I was about to speak up ... when the dog once more put his shoulder gently against her leg. Sure enough, she kicked him...and then she impulsively stepped forward—and bumped square into a car. Reaching out to feel the shape in front of her, she immediately realized what had happened. Dropping to her knees, she threw her arms around the dog, and spoke sobbing words into his ear.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Think about what could happen if you dropped to your knees, embraced the Holy Spirit and resolved to cooperate more fully with His leanings in your life. That's what we hope this series will do in all of us.

Last Sunday, Brian encouraged us to take time and reflect on the ways the Holy Spirit, our Advocate, helps us. Hopefully you've been able to make that reflection part of your rhythm this week. No guilt if you've missed a few days, just keep working to build that discipline into your life. Find a quiet place to get alone with God. Take time to focus on the ways the Holy Spirit wants to work in you. Ask Him to fill and equip you. And invite Him to remind you of His presence and work in you as you go through your day. God has not called you to Himself so you can try to make it on your own. He's awakened you. He's indwelt you. And He wants to transform you. Your job—my job—is to say, 'Yes!'

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<sup>12</sup> Sande, Ken. *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (Baker Books, 2011) 99-100.

### *Opportunity to trust Christ*

I mentioned earlier that some of you may be sensing the Spirit stirring in you, calling you to give your life to Jesus, and that you'd have an opportunity to do something about it. This is it. If you have never asked Jesus to be your Forgiver and Leader, but you are sensing the Spirit awakening you to your need to do that, let's do it. I want to invite you to pray. Just talk to God. There are no magic words. You could pray something like this:

Jesus, I think the Spirit is working in me because I realize that I need You to be my Savior. I know I am a sinner who has offended You. I also know that You died for me so I could be forgiven. I need You. I turn away from my old ways of living and I invite You to lead my life in every way. You are my Forgiver and You are my Leader from now on. Fill me with Your Spirit and help me to live the life You want me to live.

When you give your life to Jesus and ask Him to do this in you, all the amazing works of the Spirit that we've talked about this morning happen in you, too. [Indwelling you, making you spiritually alive, knitting you into the Body, sealing, assuring and beginning to transform you]

### **Wrap**

God is so good to us. He loves us and wants us to be in relationship with Him. And He does all the work! Think about it: by His Spirit, He awakens us, He indwells us, and He transforms us. Our job: cooperate moment by moment. Don't resist Him. Let Him lead and pay attention to the little leanings along the way. Next week we're going to dig a little deeper and talk more specifically about what it looks like to live by the Spirit.