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Series: People In Step With The Spirit
Message: Our Greatest Need

Transcribed Message
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John 6:63

It was back in 1974, 44 years ago, that Francis Schaeffer made this statement with regard to what he saw happening in the church even at that time. He said this: “The central problem of our age is not liberalism or modernism, nor the old Roman Catholicism or the new Roman Catholicism, nor the threat of communism, nor even the threat of rationalism and monolithic consensus which surrounds us, nor I would add today postmodernism or materialistic consumerism or visceral sensualism or whatever. All of these are dangerous but not the primary threat. The real problem is this: The church of the Lord Jesus Christ individually or corporately tending to do the Lord’s work in the power of the flesh rather than of the Spirit. The central problem is always in the midst of the people of God, not in the circumstances surrounding them.” There is a reason that we have John 6:63. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” I think too often as I look at my life I think it's the flesh that gives life, and the spirit? Well, He's there and if I need Him I'll call on Him.

We want to begin this morning a new series that will take us into the rest of this year called “People in Step With the Spirit”. Last year our theme was “People of the Book”. We’re not going to stop being people of the book because the only way we can be people who walk in step with the Spirit is if we are people of the book because it is obviously in this book that we learn of the ways and the work of the Holy Spirit. So we will see. We’ll go into this series beginning today. Here's our desire this morning as we look into this. This is our introductory study this morning. This is what we want to see. Our greatest need is an absolute dependency on the Holy Spirit of God. He is the source of all spiritual power. Hopefully there isn’t anybody that would disagree with that statement. Hopefully all of us can say that is something that we want, we desire for ourselves because that's where we would like to go in this series that is before us.

I want to start off and raise a question with regard to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The question assumes some things, but I think it's accurate and I think it's a fair question. That question is why is it that too often we are in fact uninformed and in some cases even misinformed about the person and the work of the Holy Spirit? Why is it if Francis Schaeffer can put his finger 44 years ago on an issue and say the problem in the church is never a problem out there? The problem rightfully is in here. It's inside of us very often. How is it that God has resourced us in the way that He has and especially in the giving us of the very Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit of God, to live and indwell within us and has told us everything that we need to know about faith and practice and how to walk with God...and yet so often we remain uninformed and often misinformed about the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at that together to start off. I would suggest and I hope that this isn't off the mark, but I think sometimes it's just a matter of neglect. It's just a matter of neglect. We have studied many books of the Bible together over all of these years. As we've gone through these different exposition of books, we have looked at many of the works of the Spirit that we're going to look at in a more specific way in this series. We have seen in whether it's Corinthians in terms of spiritual gifts or the baptism of the Spirit, whether it's in Galatians and walking in the spirit, whether it is in Ephesians being sealed with the spirit and being controlled by the spirit or filled by the spirit. All of those doctrines and truths are there but this is the first time that we've said we were going to take a dedicated study and we're going to look at the life and ministry and the person of the Holy Spirit of God.

It reminds me somewhat of the incident that is recorded for us in Acts 19. You remember as Paul left Corinth in the 18th chapter and he comes in acts 19 to the city of Ephesus. He encounters a group of people and it is not altogether clear who these people are – whether they're pre-Pentecost believers or whether they're simply followers and disciples of John the Baptist and have not yet fully embraced and understood the gospel. But the question that Paul raises to this group as he converses with them is have you yet received the Holy Spirit? Remember that classic answer that they gave back to Paul. They said well, no, we haven't and we haven't even so much as heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul obviously took the opportunity to teach them the ways of

God. I think sadly that might very well be the testimony of too many Christians. Sadly, we aren't aware of and we're not informed about and we're not mindful of what is the Spirit of God's work in our life.

How many of us could say that we're seeking daily to walk in fellowship with the Spirit of God? How many of us can say that we are desiring to walk in the power of God's Spirit? How many of us can say that we want to walk in the Spirit of grace and of mercy and of love and truth and we are praying in the Spirit? This should be our heart's desire. Paul says in Romans chapter 15 verse 13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." There's no reason for any of us to not be informed and not be aware of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. There it is. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

There are 261 references to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. 56 of them in the Gospels. 57 of them in the book of Acts. 112 in the rest of Paul's writings. 36 in the rest of the New Testament epistles. There are three books of the New Testament in which the Holy Spirit does not appear. They are all one chapter books so that narrows it down. It is the book of Philemon, the book of 2 John and the book of 3 John. Every other book of the New Testament references the work and person of the Spirit of God.

Secondly I would offer this. The Holy Spirit is not said to be an object of faith as is the Father and the Son. In my reading this morning, this is what I read in Psalm 25: "To You, oh Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in You I trust." We are told repeatedly in Scripture that we're to put our faith and trust in the Father and our faith and trust in the Son, but we're not told to put our faith and trust in the Holy Spirit. I think the result of that is again we begin to think of the Holy Spirit in a little bit of a different way. As we look in the Old Testament, we see that primarily who was the focus of the Old Testament? God the Father. When we read in Genesis 56, Abraham believed God Abraham trusted God and it was counted to him for righteousness. In other words, he experienced salvation because his faith was directed to Jehovah, to the Father. So when you get to the New Testament, who is the object of faith and trust in the New Testament? It is obviously Jesus. In the Old Testament, we're waiting, we're anticipating. In the New Testament and the gospels, He's here. He is manifest. We read

all through the New Testament and the Gospels that Jesus is the object of our faith directed to Him for our salvation. We're not told to put our faith and trust in the Holy Spirit in that same way for salvation. I think we begin to think in a different way about the Holy Spirit. Hopefully as we grow in our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit, we'll begin to see clearly what God's plan is in that regard.

Thirdly, I think the Son and the Father are most often associated with each other. The Father and the Son are in a relationship that we understand. This is especially true again in the Gospels. The Gospels represent 2/5 of all of the New Testament. In the Gospels, we see this relationship. Jesus speaks of having been sent by the Father. He speaks of coming to do the will of the Father. He says the words that He is speaking are the words that the Father has given Him to speak. The father in turn speaks of being well pleased with the Son. It is the Father who says of the Son that He is pronouncing His blessing upon Him, that He is the one who will raise Jesus from the dead. Again, it seems that the Holy Spirit gets left out of this equation.

Here's the last thing I want us to look at and I want to go into this one in a little more detail. The Holy Spirit is the easiest person of the Godhead to depersonalize. The Holy Spirit is the easiest member of the Godhead, Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to think of as somehow being less than the Father and the Son. I mentioned a couple weeks ago that movie and that book *Heaven is for Real*. This is not round two of taking that book down, but this is a perfect illustration of the point. You remember the little boy goes to heaven and he comes back and he reports in incredible detail things that he has seen. He speaks about Jesus and he speaks about His rainbow colored horse. He speaks about sitting on Jesus's lap. He speaks about the fact that Jesus has bluish, sea-green eyes. He even remembers the color of Jesus's eyes. He speaks of Gabriel and does so in vivid detail. He speaks of the Father. He speaks of God the Father. His remembrance of God the Father, at least in part, is that the Father has blue eyes. When he mentions the Holy Spirit, do you know what he says? When he is describing the Holy Spirit he says that He is kind of hard to see and bluish. My point is simply this. Even in that context, there is vivid description and details about the Father, about the Son, but when it comes to the Holy Spirit...hard to see and a little bluish in color. It seems to me that's kind of oftentimes a little bit of a snapshot of how we see the Trinity. We have a

sense of clarity about the Father and a sense of clarity about the Son. we have a lot of confusion sometimes about the Holy Spirit. I think in part that is because of the very mystery of the Trinity. In part it is the very mystery that we're dealing with. We're talking about something with regard to the Trinity in terms of the revelation that God has given to us. It's very clear that the Bible speaks of God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. But there is an incomprehensibility as well. Another is the degree of difficulty that we have to acknowledge and it is simply a part of that equation. I think it lends itself to what we're talking about here.

Secondly, I think the reality of our experience is we know what a father-son relationship looks like. We see that. We experience that. It is something that is visualized to us. But the spirit again creates a bit of a difficulty, a bit of a challenge. We have more revelation in the Bible about the Holy Spirit's mission than we do about His Person. I think that also contributes to somewhat to this issue.

Then lastly, we can wrongly infer that the Holy Spirit's role then is somehow less than that of the Father and that of the Son. Jesus taught us that when the Holy Spirit comes that He will direct attention to Him. Jesus spoke of the fact that the Holy Spirit would be pointing to Him, that He would be lifting up Christ. He said He would bear witness of Him and He said He would not speak of Himself. He didn't mean He wouldn't say anything about Himself because obviously He has told us in at least 261 places in the New Testament something about Himself.

I think it is like this. When you picture in your mind for instance in Washington DC some of our monuments, some of our historic buildings, and the floodlights are shining on those buildings at night. Very few people are drawn to the lightbulb itself, right? You probably don't go up and look at the fixture and the bulb. What are you doing? You're looking at what it is that light has flooded. You're looking at what is that that light is exalting. You're looking at what it is that light is bringing to our attention. What we know about the work of the Holy Spirit is somewhat appropriate to that picture. When the Holy Spirit is doing His work, the darkness of our world gets pushed back because He is magnifying, He's bringing the light to that situation. We know that when the Holy Spirit is at work, Jesus is lifted up, He is exalted, and His name is honored. It's the work that the Holy Spirit has been given to do.

So what we want to do in the coming weeks and months is we want to focus on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We want to grow in our understanding of what the Spirit of God has come to do, what His ministry is in our life. We want to grow in our dependence on the Holy Spirit so that it is true of us that we are wanting to walk daily mindful of the Holy Spirit's ministry and presence in our life. We want to walk in the Spirit of grace and mercy and truth. We want to pray in the power of God's Spirit. All of these things what we want is we want to honor the Holy Spirit in our life. I would suggest to you that if that is our heart's desire, if our desire is to honor the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit will certainly do His work in our life. So here's what we're going to do for the majority of our remaining time. We're going to do a 30,000-foot flyover and we might feel like we're going 30,000 miles an hour too. I want to just give you a sense of the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. What is it that the Holy Spirit has been commissioned to do? And what is it that He has done? I'm going to give six major categories.

Let's begin by looking at the Holy Spirit and Scripture. The Holy Spirit and Scripture. What is the Holy Spirit's relationship to the Bible? In one word, you would say it is what? He is the author. He is the author. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. 2 Timothy 3. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. That tells us something about the product we have before us. The Bible is inspired by God. In 2 Peter chapter 1, we learn a little bit about the process. Peter says that there isn't any Scripture that has come to us by means of private interpretation. To maybe understand that better, there is no Scripture that has come to us by the will of man. Nobody sat under a tree and thought up some great stuff and put it in to the Word of God. But rather Peter says holy men of God, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, gave us God's Word. It is the Holy Spirit who is designated as being the author of Scripture. Men of God were moved along by the Holy Spirit. If that is all the Holy Spirit did, if the only thing He did was to give us the Word of God, would be a huge thing. This is the revelation of God to us. This is how it is that we live life successfully and well. It's all right here. The Holy Spirit is said to be the author of Scripture.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit and creation. Holy Spirit and creation. You read your Bible and at various points as you read your Bible, you realize that the Bible describes

the work of creation as being something the Father has done, something that the Son is involved in, and something that the Holy Spirit is a part of. All three members of the Godhead are given attribution for the work of creation. But when you open your Bible to the very first page and it says in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form and void and darkness covered the face of the deep and then you read what? And the spirit of God hovered over the waters. And then the creative work begins. I think in a very specific way we can say based on that Genesis report that it is the Holy Spirit who is involved in this work of creating our magnificent and amazing world. He not only gives us the Bible but the Holy Spirit is involved in creating our world.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit and the person of Christ. The Holy Spirit and the person of Christ. Both Matthew and Luke begin their gospels by bringing us to a place of understanding what the Holy Spirit did at the very beginning of the life of Christ. Both of them speak of the Holy Spirit as the one who came to Mary and told her that something incredible was going to happen. We call it the virgin birth. It is really the virgin conception. It is the Holy Spirit who is said to be the one who will bring this pregnancy about in Mary. The beginning of the life of our Lord. Again it is the Holy Spirit's involvement. In the baptism of Christ. It is the Spirit of God who descends from heaven like a dove. It is then the voice of the Father who says this is my beloved Son, but it's the Holy Spirit who comes down at the baptism of our Lord. In that same gospel, Luke 4 and the temptation experience of Christ, we read that Jesus full of the Holy Spirit was led out into the wilderness. The Holy Spirit was there initiating that very experience in the life of our Lord. Luke also says at the beginning of Jesus's ministry that Jesus began His ministry in the power of the Spirit.

The truth of the matter is that every moment of every day of Jesus's life on earth, He was indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. The works, the miracles, the teaching all are attributed to the Holy Spirit. here's an interesting thing. The work on the cross and the matter of resurrection. There is no clear reference to the Holy Spirit's involvement in either of those situations. Perhaps one of the future Sundays when I'm gone, one of the other guys will answer the question as to why that is. The life of our Lord is dominated by the work of the Holy Spirit. We look at the life of Christ and what

do we see? We see a life of one who lived perfectly within the will of God because the Holy Spirit of God was directing every word, every step, every decision in the life of our Lord.

Fourthly, the Holy Spirit and salvation. When you think of the great plan of redemption and you think of the rescue that came about, we know that as the Scriptures unfold this marvelous plan that we have in the Old Testament, primarily again who is at the forefront? The Father. We see the Father in the Old Testament really laying out this plan and giving us a picture in the Old Testament of what this plan is to look like. As we have all this typology, all the pictures leading up to something. Then when you get to the New Testament, who is at front and center? The Lord Jesus. We have the Lord Jesus carrying out and accomplishing this plan. So you can say that it is planned by the Father, it is accomplished by the Son and then what happens? The Holy Spirit is the one who applies the work of Christ to our life, to our heart. From Pentecost to the present day, we call this the age of the Spirit. So in the Old Testament, the Father dominates. In the Gospels, it is the Lord Jesus Christ. Then when we get from Pentecost into our present day, it's the work of the Holy Spirit. When we think of God's work in salvation, Titus chapter 3 verse 5, not by works of righteousness which you have done, but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus encountered Nicodemus on that night in John 3. What did he say to Nicodemus? You've got to be born again. How does that happen? You've got to be born of water and of the Spirit. The Word is going to have to come into your life and wash over you and the Holy Spirit is to be the one who brings regeneration, new birth, redemption into your life. It is that work of God in salvation that the Father plans, the Son accomplishes and the Holy Spirit applies to our life.

The next point. The Holy Spirit and sanctification. Salvation just gets us started. It is the work of sanctification. What is sanctification? It's being set apart. It is our daily walk. How is it that you grow in this new faith? You've experienced the new birth. You've experienced regeneration. How is it that you grow? If you're not growing in your Christian life, there is something wrong with your relationship to the Holy Spirit. If you're not growing in your Christian life, your relationship to the Holy Spirit is not what it needs

to be. It is not what it should be. Remember what Jesus said in John 17? Father, sanctify them in the truth. Your Word is truth. So we had the Word. We have the teacher of the Word, the author of the Word, the applier of the Word who is the Holy Spirit. Jesus said furthermore when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. So there's the answer. This matter of sanctification, this matter of growing in our walk with God is vitally linked to the Word of God and is vitally linked to the Spirit of God.

If all you have is the Word of God without the Spirit of God you can quickly end up in dead orthodoxy and formalism. If all you have is the Spirit of God and you leave out the Word of God, you can quickly have a subjective emotionalism. What God wants to do is He wants to perfectly wed together the Word and the Spirit because it is the truth Jesus said that would change us and sanctify us. It is the Spirit of truth who would come and do that work of guiding us into all truth.

Listen to what John Owen said about this matter: "All the actings of grace, all good duties are ascribed to the Spirit of God." All the actings of grace. All the good duties are ascribed to the Spirit of God. Do you know what he's saying? He's simply saying if there's something that is pleasing to God going on in your life, and hopefully there are many things, that is a direct result of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. It's the Holy Spirit who is producing that. It's the Holy Spirit who is bringing that about. It is the Holy Spirit who has called us to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5) and we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Next point. The Holy Spirit and service. The Holy Spirit and service. We've been saved. We are being sanctified and we're called to serve. What we're going to discover is that at salvation we receive the gift of the Spirit. Singular gift. We receive the gift of the Spirit. We're baptized into the body of Christ. We're sealed until the day of redemption. We are indwelt permanently by the Holy Spirit of God. All of that happens instantaneously at the point of faith. Do you know what else happens at the point of faith? It's not that you just get the gift of the Spirit but you get the gifts of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit. All of us have a spiritual gift or may very well have a number of spiritual gifts. Who is it that gives those gifts? 1 Corinthians 12 Paul says it is the Holy Spirit of God who bestows these gifts sovereignly just as He wills. The gift that you have been given, whether you know it or not it, and hopefully you know what your spiritual

gifts are, but those spiritual gifts have been given to you at salvation by the Holy Spirit of God. He has given you those gifts to use in service to Him. We have the gift of the Spirit and we have the gifts of the Spirit.

Look over those six things. The six works of the Spirit are listed there and you can see in just that quick review how important the ministry and the person of the Holy Spirit is. You can see how vital it is to both our salvation and our walk with God for us to be in a grown-up relationship with the Holy Spirit. I want us to see one more thing and that is the Holy Spirit and you. The Holy Spirit and me. The Holy Spirit and us. The Holy Spirit and CCC. I come back to where we started in John 6:63. It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

We just came out of the Sermon on the Mount. We just came out of probably the most compelling set of teachings that Jesus gives anywhere in Scripture. We entitled that living like Christ. We were challenged week after week how it is that we could ever possibly live this life. Yet Jesus would call to us and say if you seek after this with all your heart, if you seek after these things as you are seeking after the things of the kingdom of God, everything else will take care of itself if you seek that first. Here is the word of Jesus to us. If you want to live a life of influence, if you want to live a life of impact, if you want to live as Paul said in Romans 15 a life of joy then it is only going to happen if you are in a right relationship with the Holy Spirit of God. The good news is this: it's not up to you to pull this off. It's not up to me to make this happen. The pressure is not on us to somehow produce this Christlike life. The reality is we could never do that. Every week we were decimated as we walked through the Sermon on the Mount. We can't do that. How can we ever possibly? And here is the answer to all of that. It is up to the Holy Spirit to give life. The flesh is no help at all. The words that Jesus has spoken to us are the words of Spirit and life.

We are called to do God's work in God's way. Ray Ortlund made a wonderful observation. He said: "Very often we think that there is the Lord's work and the Lord's way, and then there's the devil's way." None of us want to be on the wrong side of that equation. None of us want to be doing the devil's work. We all want to be doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way. But he said there's a piece missing to that equation. The reality is there is another way. The other way is you can do the Lord's work in the Lord's

way, but you can also do the Lord's work in your own way, in your own strength, in your own energy, in your own power. Or you can do the devil's work. He said the gap is not so much between one and three, while there is a big gap there, his point was we need to realize that there is an even greater gap between one and two, doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way or doing the Lord's work in our own way, trying to live out the Christian life in the power of the flesh.

Do you remember in that amazing interchange that we referenced again just a couple weeks ago of Jesus and Peter in Matthew 16? Peter makes that wonderful declaration about Christ being the Son of God. Jesus says to him, Peter, you didn't even think of that on your own. The Holy Spirit is the one who gave you that revelation. Do you know what happens just a couple of verses after that? Jesus begins to talk to the disciples about the cross. He begins to tell them what is awaiting him. You remember what Peter does? Peter draws our Lord aside and it actually says he rebuked Jesus for this idea that He needed to go to the cross. He was suggesting to Jesus that there is another way to do this. You do not have to go the path of suffering. I would suggest to you that Peter would never have said I want to do the devil's work. But in our Lord's gentle rebuke back to Peter, He was saying Peter, you're trying to accomplish the things of God in the energy of the flesh. When you do that, you just as certainly align yourself with the work of the enemy.

What a strong reminder that is to us as we think in terms of what we want God to do in this regard. What is the greatest need in our life? What is the greatest need in our church? What is the greatest need within our marriages, within our family? It is that we would submit ourselves to doing the things that God has called us to do in the power and energy of God's Spirit. For apart from that there is no conviction. Apart from that there is no conversion. Apart from that there is no spiritual growth. There certainly is no power, no impact, no joy. My friends, it is the Spirit of God who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. The words I have spoken to you – they are spirit and life. Let's be a people, let's be a church walking in the power of God's Spirit and in step with the Spirit.

What can we take away this morning as we introduce this series? Let's think in these terms. Learning to walk in step with the Spirit is one of the most important truths that we can learn if we want to live a life that is pleasing to God. I hope your prayer will

be as we go forward God, just teach me more of what it means to walk in fellowship with Your Spirit. Teach me what it means to know the work of Your Spirit in my life. Give me, Father, the ability to moment by moment, walk in total dependency upon You and awareness of Your Spirit in my life. When Paul said in that Romans 15:13 passage: may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Our desire as the people of God is to do the things of God in the power of God's Spirit and not in our flesh. Let's ask God to help us with that.

Let's pray. Father God, we are excited about learning more about the work of the Spirit of God in our life. We want to ask that You would use these truths that You will bring before us in the weeks ahead and the months ahead to actually bring life change and transformation into our lives as we submit ourselves to the work of Your Spirit. Father, grow us in Your grace. Cause us to see the truth and the reality that any impact, any influence, any joy that we might have will be only as a result of the Holy Spirit of God dominating and controlling our lives as we walk in dependence on Him. We ask these things in Jesus's name, Amen.