

Heroes of the Faith Series

The Holy Spirit and You

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The Holy Spirit and You

The Holy Spirit not only *brings* the presence of God, but *is* His real presence. He empowers us to live as God wants us to in building His Church and developing His Kingdom on Earth. In this overview of some of the ways in which He works – and it makes no attempt to be comprehensive – the real subject is as much *you* as the Holy Spirit. In case you have never thought of it this way before, *you* are the hero of faith at the centre of this edition.

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God is so big

There is a beautiful e mail travelling the world at the moment in which a photograph of the Earth is shown in relation to the size of Jupiter. Our planet is so small! Then came a photo of the Sun towering above Jupiter, followed by Arcturus, which is many times bigger than the sun – and then the still more massive giants that populate God’s incredible universe.

For whatever situation we are facing, the Holy Spirit is God’s ‘executive’ agent. He can bring whatever touch, strength, anointing or word of power that is required. Nothing is too hard for Him, and nothing too small (cf Jdges. 3:10). Ask Him now to bless and lead in some seemingly ‘impossible’ situation that either you or someone known to cluster members is currently facing.

The Holy Spirit sustains us

After Jesus was filled with the Spirit, He was *led* (some versions say *driven*) into the wilderness before He emerged *in the power of the Spirit*. (Luke 4:1,14). The sequence is significant. Real spiritual growth often occurs through severe testings (cf John 16:33). God may be doing more than we realise at the time to refine and cleanse us. Never underestimate His Spirit’s ability to sustain us through times of trial.

It would be nice to assume that being ‘led by the Spirit’ always meant being led ‘beside quiet waters.’ In reality, the Lord often leads us into the zone of maximum conflict, exactly as He did His own Son. Sometimes this is the result of our own sinfulness or recklessness – in which case we must face our own shortcomings. In many other instances, however, our sinfulness is not the primary factor – in which case, we must continue to trust God to lead and strengthen us through this particular time of testing.

Neither can we afford to forget that we are caught up in a strong spiritual battle. The enemy targets those who pose a particular danger to the kingdom of darkness. It is important that we do not inadvertently give the devil a foothold in our lives through the choices that we make. Take Galatians 5:16 to heart: *Walk by the Spirit and do not seek to gratify the flesh*. It is so important to keep feeding our spirits by a regular spiritual diet during times when the pressure is really on. The Holy Spirit sustains us not just to stop us from giving up and falling, but because He has clear aims and objectives in view.

- ❖ Pause and pray into the issues raised in this section. Jesus promises that when we are under extreme pressure, the Spirit of our Father will speak through us (Matt. 10:20-21). Have you experienced this?

Jesus also promised that *The Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth* (John 16:13). This is not so much a matter of getting our doctrine straight (important though that is) but about being led by His Spirit. *The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.* (John 3:8) The Holy Spirit works in entirely unpredictable ways, according to His own wisdom and understanding. It is tragic when we try to control everything (either as individuals or as churches or organisations).

For discussion as a cluster, or in small groups:

- Look back and see how He has led you. Are there are things that you know and are doing now, that would once have seemed impossible. God loves to see us trusting Him!
- What experiences have you had of God's wonderful unpredictability? How did you handle these times?

Spend some time praying this prayer:

Lead us by your Spirit, Lord, into the things that are most on Your heart for us. Lead us to the people, places, tasks, materials that will best advance Your work through us.

Keep us away from everything that is wrong or merely second best. Bring people to our consciousness so that we can pray for them, write to them, or go and visit them. And may Your Spirit bring things to mind that will help us to make sense of what is going on.

The Holy Spirit encourages us to share our resources

How much of your substance and yourselves are you really prepared to put into the extension of the Kingdom? Put it another way, how much do you still look on things as being yours than the Lord's?

- What is your particular gifting? Hospitality? Preaching? Sharing? Don't follow the western way of everyone for themselves, but keep an eye out for each other's needs. Part of the work of the Spirit is to inspire generosity in the hearts of His people. Don't wait to be told about a need – people often keep their deepest feelings and predicaments to themselves. Is there anything that either you or someone you know could do to come alongside?

Symbols of the Spirit

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, the disciples were all with one accord in one place. [The Greek literally says they were 'together together – that is "together in purpose as well as together in one place"']. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. (Acts 2:1-2)

Fire and wind. What powerful symbols these are. They are often used to represent the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

- It was prophesied of the Lord Jesus that He would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Matt. 3:11) A Bible study on the word 'fire' reveals what an important biblical theme this is. Fire reflects the passion burning in the heart of God. What else do you understand by it?
- The work of God through His Spirit is often likened in Scripture to the wind (eg John 3:8) Praise God that there are powerful winds of revival blowing around the world at this time. What other kinds of winds are mentioned in Scripture?

Such references to fire and wind remind us that we are to humble ourselves before a holy God. Another powerful symbol for the Holy Spirit in Scripture is water. How do you understand this concept?

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit. (John 7:37-39).

One of the most beautiful ‘symbols’ in Scripture is when the Holy Spirit is portrayed as a dove. (John 1:32).

‘And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.’ Doves are sensitive and easily disturbed.

In *The Sensitivity of the Spirit*, (Hodder and Stoughton), RT Kendall writes about the difference between two birds that at first sight might appear to be similar: pigeons and doves. Pigeons are territorial and combative, whereas doves are extremely sensitive. Kendall details many of the ways by which we can revert from doing things ‘by the Spirit’ to our own natural gifting. It is all too easy to do this – without even realizing that we are doing so.

- We behave in a ‘pigeon-like’ way when, through ignorance, prejudice or downright envy and malice, we badmouth what the Holy Spirit is doing, and are cross with each other.
- If we are frequently touchy and defensive – or over eager for praise – or inclined to talk too much and run others down, then beware: we risk driving the Dove away. Repent and get back into God’s presence!

Otherwise all we may be left with are the residue of our own efforts and perspectives – which lead to irritability and self-pity and ever decreasing fruitfulness.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Eph. 4:30)

Selective Deafness

It is all too easy to blank out challenging words (whether from Scripture or from others). Pray to catch yourself whenever you find yourself ignoring such words – or putting them on the ‘too difficult to deal with now’ pile.

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to open our ears to godly challenges. We are in danger of heading for a fall whenever we imagine ourselves to be exceptions to them.
- The Holy Spirit is implacably opposed to all forms of pretence, manipulation and control. An extreme example of grieving the Holy Spirit is when Ananias and Sapphira bent the truth in the way they described what they had done. Peter said, *Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?* (Acts 5:3). Pray for the Lord to keep integrity uppermost in your life and such a spirit will never taint you!
- One warning sign that someone may be going off course is when they reject the help of trusted friends and counsellors and go in search of other people, who have less knowledge and experience of them. When they in turn ‘dare’ to ask probing questions, trusted friends are likely to find themselves suddenly excluded too.
- All too many of us feel ‘justified’ in holding certain grudges because of the way that we have been let down or abused. The Scriptures warn us not to allow a foothold to bitterness rage and anger. (See Eph. 4:30-32). There is nothing optional about this.

Stay flexible to the Spirit's leading

If there is one quality that we need above all others to remain ‘in step’ with the Spirit it is flexibility – closely followed by courage. Too much ‘preprogramming’ can cause us to miss out on where the Holy Spirit may be wanting to lead us. Our aim is to share the Father’s heart and to be in the ‘mode’ that He is in. This will determine whether our response should be primarily one of joy and praise, or of profound mourning – and of everything in between!

A student preacher who loved to preach came speak at the church in which he was doing a placement. He had spent hours preparing his message, but when he saw the power of the worship and intercession that was developing, he wisely recognised that this was where the Spirit was moving and willingly stood aside to allow more room for the prayer to continue. That is a good example of the sort of flexibility we may occasionally need to demonstrate if we are to keep in step with the Spirit. We learn to sense when the Holy Spirit wants us to speak, and either

Speak out ourselves, or encourage others to do share what they are feeling. Or we sense the Spirit ‘alighting’ on particular people, and encourage them to contribute. It makes for much more exciting meetings!

For thought and prayer

How open is your cluster to the Spirit's leading? Do we expect Him to move when we meet? Have we fallen into ‘predictable’ patterns?

The Holy Spirit is both vocal and visual

The Holy Spirit has spoken through the prophets, and it is always exciting when the Holy Spirit speaks to and through us. He loves to communicate with His children today. Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear My voice.’ How do you hear? This should increasingly be a natural part of our lives – though the ways in which He chooses to speak vary enormously. Robert's book *The Still Small Voice* looks at a number of these ways.

- Hearing from the Lord is all-important, but knowing what to do with what we hear is almost equally as important. We can get the first part right but get the application wrong. (See ‘Inspired by the Spirit’ <http://ruachministries.org/pilgrim.htm>)
- God’s timing is always perfect timing – but many of the difficulties most of us have in matters of guidance come down to this matter that we find so difficult. ‘Calls’ come from the heart of eternity – where things happen outside of time as we know it. The amazing thing is the way in which the Lord intermeshes His callings with our timescale with perfect precision. Keep praying. There may well come a time when breakthrough occurs, or when the Lord opens our minds so that we can understand something has been puzzling us. (cf Luke 24:45)

Whatever subject you specialise in you can discover more of God. He is a mathematician, a scientist, a geologist, a biologist, an anatomist – and every bit as much an artist as an author, speaker and linguist! Often He chooses to speak to us by His Spirit through visions and visual impressions in our spirits. These are the equivalent of the still small voice in picture format.

- Do a Bible study on visions. It will reveal the important place they play in conveying God's heart and mind. (e.g. Acts 16:9)
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to turn 'sight into insight', just as Jesus did in His teaching parables. Can you think of times when you have experienced this?
- The Holy Spirit often uses dreams to point us to things that are important for us to ponder. More often than not they are a pointer
 - a) to things that may be out of balance in our lives,
 - b) to situations we need to pray about, or
 - c) to people we need to get in touch with. Occasionally they may contain explicit leading, as they often did in the Bible – and continue to do to this day, for instance when Muslims are led through them to accept Christ.

The Holy Spirit gives specific commands and warnings

Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. (Acts 16:6-7)

Why did the Holy Spirit tell the disciples to take a detour and go in seemingly the wrong way and not go into Bithynia? We will never know, but when the Holy Spirit prompts us in such ways, it is important not to argue but just to obey! If we always knew the reason why He spoke, we would become prescriptive and self-reliant. If we ignore His promptings, potentially important opportunities will be missed and we risk His voice becoming increasingly inaudible to us.

Hint: Many of God's best words are short and simple words that lead to major ramifications. (cf Acts 13:2)

Whilst it is lovely if we can sit down and enjoy a full four-course meal with the Lord, we are blessed if the Holy Spirit sends us simple nudges in the course of a busy schedule to keep us on track.

- When the Lord speaks by His Spirit, it is always significant. When He directs or warns us about something, it is vital that we do our best to obey Him – even if it is not what we expected Him to say. He always knows best! What examples can you call to mind of this?

- I love the interchange between God’s Spirit and our thinking processes that the verse *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us* (Acts 15:28) implies. If we are not immediately able to sense which course of action to pursue, try ‘loading’ the question one way or another. ‘Lord, it seems sensible to me to do this. Please show me if this is not right, because otherwise this is what I will do.’ If we are in danger of going seriously wrong, we can expect the Spirit to warn us. (Is.30:21)

The gifts of the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Cor. 12:4-11)

We are not going to look at this important theme in great detail here, but what place do the gifts of the Holy Spirit play:

- a) in your cluster, and
- b) in your own personal walk with the Lord?

Because there are many counterfeits around, it is important to test the spirits to see if they come from God (1 John 4:1). Anything that is truly of the Holy Spirit will always point away from outward phenomena to give the glory to Jesus. God will always confirm anything that is really important in more than one way – but once His call is confirmed, don’t hold back: co-operate! Remember: the Holy Spirit recognises giftings in people before they become visible with the naked eye. Dare to follow any sign of His leading.

The Holy Spirit is not impulsive

I believe the message of this section is particularly important to understand. The Holy Spirit sometimes moves quickly and urgently, but this is always by the Father's clear purpose and never by random impulse.

In other words, whilst it is vital that we are ready to heed the Lord's promptings, we must also beware the falsely insistent. A good rule of thumb to bear in mind is that, whereas the Holy Spirit *leads*, the Butcher *drives*. The powers of darkness delight in goading believers to do things that God cannot own, and which He may even have to dismantle.

- Events such as the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost were too far 'outside the box' for the staid Pharisees to acknowledge them as coming from God. The Lord's perspective on the matter, of course, was quite different. There was a perfect confluence of people coming together from as far away as Persia and Rome and North Africa. What stories they would have to tell when they returned home, all of which would serve to make it known throughout the world what God had done for mankind in sending Jesus.

The events of Pentecost began to fulfil the important prophecy in Joel 2:28-32. Praise God that although Jesus is the same yesterday today, and forever, the Holy Spirit is raising up a new generation to do church in ways that will impact our contemporary culture that has moved so far from its Judeo-Christian roots. Much of what God does in our generation will look, feel and sound very different from that which has gone before. May we have eyes to discern what God has raised up by His Spirit, and to lend it our willing support.

What happens when we don't like somebody or something?

Most of us know 'strong' Christians who we simply don't feel comfortable to be around, even if they appear to be being used by the Lord. This may be because they are aggressive characters, or just because they see things, and minister, in a very different way from ourselves.

As someone delightfully put it, 'God has an annoying habit of laying His hand on the wrong person!' He almost seems to delight in using people we feel decidedly ambivalent about! May the Lord help us to separate out personal preferences from authentic doubts about someone.

Jesus came full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Some people are so full of zeal and truth that they appear remarkably short of grace. Others may be

exceedingly courteous, but are lacking in any real cutting edge. God wants us to reflect *all* of His heart.

Gentleness is a wonderful foundation for this, even though we may sometimes be called to express righteous indignation in the power of the Holy Spirit, not against other *people*, but against spiritual strongholds that are holding people and situations down.

For thought and prayer

- ❖ **It is almost impossible to resent someone you are also praying for. Pray (silently!) now for someone you find ‘difficult’.**
- ❖ **Don’t be quick to speak against others just because you do not instinctively like or understand their emphases. The Lord seems to be quite happy to work through highly fallible vessels – like you and me! Praise God for the times when others have shown you grace and mercy that you did not deserve.**
- ❖ **There is undoubtedly a place for righteous indignation, as Jesus demonstrated when He cleansed the Temple (John 2:14-17). A pastor once lamented that far too much church activity is characterized by an abrasiveness that owes nothing to the gentleness of the Holy Spirit. Pray that our ‘churching together’ may truly glorify the Lord, so that people feel secure in their walk with the Lord, and are drawn by the warmth of His love shining through us.**
- ❖ **All of us see things that purport to be of the Holy Spirit but which we find off putting. Try not to allow immature and unhelpful examples (of charismania for example) to cause you to pull back from letting the Holy Spirit speak and work through you. If we hold back on the gifts that God has given us, we may well be in danger of quenching the Spirit. Are there areas you need to be healed of so that you can return safely to the fray?**

How can we best cultivate the presence of the Holy Spirit?

Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. (1 Thess. 1:5)

Elijah discovered that the Lord comes not only in fire and storm and wind but also in the still small voice – and that it is one touch from God can achieve far more than anything else. For those who are eager to increase their hunger and thirst to seek His face, you may find Robert’s book *Intimacy and Eternity* helpful. (See <http://ruachministries.org/intimacyandeternity.htm>)

- ❖ What ‘floats your boat’ and helps to develop the life of the Spirit in you?
- ❖ It is good to go to places of stillness that will help us tune into God’s Holy Spirit: both places that have long been prayed into, and out into God’s countryside, close to creation.
- ❖ In all this we are seeking to become more attentive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is good to do so from the moment that we wake up. He is the Helper! The Holy Spirit often has important nudges to impart during those precious waking moments, when we hover between sleep and wakefulness.

Be filled with the Spirit

And when Jesus had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:22).

There is nothing accidental about what, where or who we are. Long before we recognised Him, the Spirit was already at work overruling in our lives, preparing the way ahead and drawing us ever closer to Himself. May we not hold back, but press in to receive the gifts God is offering us by His Holy Spirit. Many will be impacted by our being filled with the Spirit.

For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:39)

A great deal depends on our hunger to be used by Him, as well as on our capacity to receive Him. We will need to make real sacrifices of time in order to seek God's face and to find the Holy Spirit’s best leading for our lives.

It is worth being aware that there are often barriers to break through as we sit in God’s presence when we move beyond distraction into the richness of His presence and the clarity of His leading.

There is no age restriction for receiving the the fulness of the Holy Spirit. Neither is there any ‘social’ favouritism: God is as concerned to reach the yuppie as the hippie. Nevertheless, you are, perhaps, more likely to find the Holy Spirit at work in power in needy circumstances, such as rubbish tips in Mozambique or Mexico, than where people’s hearts are choked by material considerations. Can you identify with this assumption that where needs are greatest, God works in most power?

We do not need to beat ourselves up because we do not get the results of a Billy Graham when we have received neither His calling nor His anointing. *A man can receive only what he receives from on high.* (John 3: 27). This verse is a great comfort – but it is not meant to be an excuse for not pressing in to receive all that God has for us. After all – remember the theme – *we are ‘heroes of the faith!’*

Are there specific things you would like to ask the Holy Spirit God to develop in you?

Holy Spirit, I open my heart wide now to receive Your empowering and Your direction. By Your mercy I have already received much – and you are not going to abandon me now. Come now, Lord, and fill me with a fresh infilling of Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Appendix: Wisdom from Isaiah

Isaiah 11:2 When the Spirit of the Lord rests on us, He brings wisdom, understanding, knowledge and the fear of the Lord

32:15 When the Spirit is poured out from on high, desert places become fertile.

34:16 The Spirit of the Lord gathers the right people together to fulfil His purposes.

40:13 The Holy Spirit is full of wisdom. He is God's master counsellor (the word 'mind' can also be translated 'spirit') Get away from any thought of the Holy Spirit being an impersonal force, such as electricity. There is nothing of the 'automate' about Him. He is one of the three persons of the Trinity, possessing all the attributes we would expect from the most brilliant mind in the Universe (Rom. 8:27).

If the Holy Spirit whispers to you as He did to Ezekiel "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you" (Ezek. 2:2) then do not hold back. He does not speak lightly!

42:1 When the Spirit comes on us, we are empowered to pursue the bringing of justice to nations. God is not only concerned about spiritual matters, but about the way that people and nations relate to each other and administrate their affairs.

44:3-5 There are wonderful promises of God's Spirit being poured out on our offspring. Press in to obtain these blessings!

48:16 The Lord sends us to places by His Spirit to proclaim what is on His heart.

63:9-10 As we have seen, God, By His Spirit, identifies with us completely. When we are distressed He too is distressed, and He sends 'the angel of His presence' to save and succour us.

When we refuse to seek God, or to do what is right, He allows us to suffer the consequences of our foolish choices. God's power may be infinite, but He effectively limits His power if we chose not to honour Him. (See Eph. 4:29-32 for other examples of how we can either grieve or bless the Holy Spirit).

63:14 This verse contains a wonderful promise that the Spirit of the Lord gives rest. It is part of the deep peace of the Lord that Jesus promises, and that we need so badly. (John 14:27; 16:33; 20:19,21,26)