

Series: The Familiar Stranger

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Ephesians 1:17-21

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, May 24, 2026

A reading from Ephesians 1:17 through 21: “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of his glory, and his inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come,” the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Paul: All right. Good morning, Waterstone. How are we doing? Good. Before we dive in, there is a little family business I need to address, because in the last couple of weeks I have been subject to some pranks from the church, and today is an intergenerational service, which is a really good thing. It means we have a lot of our students in our kids’ ministry in here, which is really good because you all need Jesus, because here is what happened. A couple weeks ago, the Bridge had a night where they were doing a Star Wars night, and they left a giant Yoda, like a life-size Yoda in my office that when I came in Sunday morning at like 6:00 a.m., it terrified me. I thought there was a monster behind my desk, and then today I came in, and the student ministry, I think, I am still trying to figure out if they were the ones or not, but pretty confident. They left sticky notes over my entire office and created a balloon man who was sitting at my desk made of sticky notes and balloons, and again, scared me this morning. So, we are just going to set aside whatever message I have, and we are going to talk about the passage where Isaiah calls down bears, not Isaiah, Elisha calls down bears on the youth for being mean to their pastor. So, we are just going to sit with that for a second and make them feel comfortable.

No, I am just kidding. No, we are doing really well as a church, excited to be here today. Today is Pentecost Sunday. One woo. Yeah, that feels a little bit like the real response to Pentecost and the Holy Spirit, right? We are not quite sure what to do about it. If I said, “Hey, today is Christmas,” you all would be like, “What, Christmas? I love Christmas. It is amazing.” But I say, “Pentecost,” and you are like, “woo.” It is like the one, it is the one shout out. If we said it is Easter and He is risen, everybody would shout back? “He is risen.” Yeah, you get it. Now, those are two of the most important days in the life of the church, the birth of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. They have changed the trajectory of history forever, and the forgotten third day that is really critical to the life of the church is the day of Pentecost, where Jesus promised that His Spirit would descend on His followers and that the presence of God would dwell in any person who calls upon the name of Jesus, and yet I feel like for the church and for myself, when we talk about the Holy Spirit, it is just like, “Woo, yeah, that is great.” I think it is a little weird. We are not quite sure what to do.

This week at our staff meeting I asked our staff to tell me in one word what they feel like their experience has been with the Holy Spirit, and then I asked them a second question. I asked them to name what they feel like Waterstone's experience with the Holy Spirit has been, and there were a lot of really interesting answers. I want you to actually just take a moment right now and think to yourself, you do not have to share it out loud. I am not going to ask you to share it, but if you had one word to describe your relationship with the Holy Spirit, what would it be? One of our staff members, when I asked her that question, said it is complicated, which is technically two, maybe three words, depending on how you are counting, but it still counts, and it resonated. It is complicated. It is like that old Facebook status of relationship, like single or married or dating or engaged. It is complicated. We are not quite sure what to do with it.

To be honest with you, my introduction into the Holy Spirit actually came in high school. I grew up in a church that was very much, and I have shared this before, it was very much, Father, Son, and Holy Bible. We did not talk about the Holy Spirit all that much, and so actually my introduction to the Holy Spirit was the same time I was introduced to YouTube. I kid you not, and my youth pastor at the time, he was showing me YouTube clips, and this was back in the day when YouTube was not a bunch of curated, like really polished videos of people who were sharing about their life or giving commentary on what is going on in the world. This was like someone saying, "Hey, you know what? We should like upload onto the Internet is a clip of a kickboxer breaking his leg. That would be awesome, and people will watch that 500 times." It was the Wild West. Some of you know the video I am talking about, and so we were sitting in my youth pastor's office. He was just showing us these random clips on YouTube, and then one of them came up, and it was this original clip. It is like almost twenty years old now, of a pastor by the name of Benny Hinn, who is a charismatic, who would essentially like have these moments in service where people would stand, and he would slay them in the Spirit, and they would like fall over when he like sent the Holy Spirit from himself to other people, and that video footage was accompanied by when the bodies hit the floor, that song, like the heavy metal song, and that was my introduction. I was like, "I don't know what this is. I haven't really heard a lot about the Holy Spirit, but if that is what this is, I want no part of it. That is really weird. I am not a metal guy, so I don't really like that song either," and it was just like, I had no idea what to do with it, and I think if you're like me, there are probably different people in the room where you have had different experiences with the Holy Spirit that when you look at your experience or how somebody acted in the room or what a church did, it feels a little complicated. It feels a little weird.

So, we are not quite sure what we are supposed to do with the Holy Spirit, and that is why this series, I think, is so important for our church. So, it is based off of this book by a pastor by the name of Tyler Staton, and it is called *The Familiar Stranger*. The subheading for the book is, "Reintroducing the Holy Spirit to those in search of an experiential spirituality," and to be honest with you, I read this book a couple of years ago, and it just gripped my heart. It felt like this was my experience with the Holy Spirit, and if I am honest, it felt like it encapsulated a lot of what I have seen in our church and our relationship to the Holy Spirit. This is a summary of what Tyler Staton writes about in his book, *The Familiar Stranger* and why that title is so important. He says, "Many Christians relate to the Holy Spirit as a familiar stranger, because the Spirit is a central part to Christian belief, and it can be referenced in church language and doctrine and worship and yet remain personally unknown and experientially distant from Christian

everyday life. Christians may understand the Father as Creator and Jesus as Savior in concrete ways, but the Holy Spirit can feel vague, mysterious, or even intimidating. It can feel like someone who is talked about regularly but rarely encountered with intimacy or clarity.” In the book, he argues that this distance comes partly from confusion about experiences or the fear of emotional excess or traditions that either overemphasize dramatic manifestations or practically ignore the Spirit altogether. The result is that many believers affirm the Spirit intellectually while missing the deep friendship, guidance, empowerment, comfort, and transforming presence Jesus promised through the Spirit’s indwelling.

I think for many of us, the problem that I feel like I have had to face in my own faith journey the last few years, and something that I am wrestling with for us as a church, is I think many of us have an intellectual understanding of who the Spirit is and what the Spirit does, but when it comes to experiencing the life of the Holy Spirit within us, many of us think about the Holy Spirit not as a person to be known or a person of the Godhead to be known by, but just an impersonal force, some sort of vague spiritual energy or like a vague religious vibe that has something to do with our faith, but it is more like an electricity we need to plug into when we need it and not something that is part of our everyday experience of following Jesus. My hope in this series over the next eight weeks of just sitting with the person of the Holy Spirit is that we would begin to understand this truth for our church and for our individual lives.

This is my hope and my prayer for what we would understand and know and experience about the Spirit as we continue in this series. It is this: the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force or a fringe doctrine. I want to unpack some of that, and then I want us to believe and know and experience that the Holy Spirit is the personal presence and power of God available to ordinary believers. So, what I would like to do today is walk through a couple of those key ideas, that the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force or not a fringe doctrine. It is central to our faith, and then I want to spend the rest of our time at the end unpacking this idea that the Holy Spirit is the personal presence and power of God available to ordinary believers. So, let’s go ahead and dive straight in.

There was a study that was done in 2014, and what you need to know is so much of what I am referencing today comes from this book. You can pick this book up in the lobby, if you want to follow along with the series, but there was a study that was done in 2014 where they asked a very simple question, and they said essentially the statement was the Holy Spirit is a force, not a person, and 51% of respondents who were Christians said “true” to that statement. They said 51% of Christians said it is true that the Holy Spirit is a force, not a person. Forty-two percent said that statement is false, and 7% said “I don’t know,” and that was from twelve years ago. They did the survey again in 2022, eight years later, or four or five years from now, and they asked the exact same question, “Is the Holy Spirit a force and not a person?” and by that point, the number had grown to sixty percent of committed Christians said the Holy Spirit is a force and not a person.

Now I want to time out and pause, because you might hear that and think, “I don’t know. Is that wrong? He seems like he is saying that that is wrong, but I don’t know.” It is wrong. It is so wrong, and here is the reality. What this survey is showing us is that the majority of Christians, the people who self-identify as those who follow Jesus, think that the Holy Spirit is not a person, but is a force, and here is why this is so important to camp on for a second, because if you think the Holy Spirit is a force and not a person, it drastically impacts your relationship to the Spirit, because if you think the Holy Spirit is a force,

then a force is something you are supposed to wield. It is something you are supposed to use. If the Holy Spirit is a person, then it is something you are supposed to know and listen to and to obey. That is a very different way of relating to the Spirit.

I think many of us, because we have a misunderstanding of who the Spirit is, engage with the Spirit intellectually. We can maybe even know that the Holy Spirit is not a force. It is a person, but we engage with the Holy Spirit as if it is some sort of spiritual energy to tap into. I think for many of us that honestly comes, and I have thought a lot about this, I think it comes because we have been more catechized by Star Wars than scripture. Like honestly, because if you go back to the original Star Wars, and we have to stick with the originals, because the most recent ones are not worth watching. They are not very good. Like the originals were art house and space operas with light swords. Like, that is awesome. Then when they got into all the newer stuff, it is like, it is just not quite as good, but when it was art house and campy, it was amazing, but when you go back to the originals, and you look at Obi Wan Kenobi's relationship to Luke Skywalker, what does he say? "Use the force, Luke," right? "Use the force." It is some sort of energy that he is supposed to tap into with enough discipline and strength and awareness that the more he grows in discipline and awareness, the more power he has, and I think sometimes we have come to believe that that is our relationship with the Holy Spirit. If I can just be disciplined enough, if I can just get all of the awareness down, if I can just grow in the exercises, then that will cause me to experience the power of the Holy Spirit, and we miss that the Spirit is actually a person that we are supposed to know and be known by. It is not a power that we harness or an energy that we access. It is not your learning techniques to ultimately experience this impersonal force, and we can talk about the Holy Spirit. A lot of us can talk about the Holy Spirit in very similar ways to how Obi-Wan Kenobi approached the force, where he talks about unlocking spiritual energy or activating something within us, or tapping into power. The problem with that is that Jesus never describes the Spirit that way at all. The Spirit is **not** cosmic divine electricity. The Spirit is the personal presence and power of God, which means that the Holy Spirit is **not** something that we learn how to use, but it is something we learn how to live in relationship with.

I think Jesus is incredibly intentional about his language in John 14, where He says this. In John 14:16, He says, "and I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate," talking about the Spirit, "who will be an advocate for you." That word, "advocate," is really important. It talks about this relational knowing, this advocacy, this helper, this person who will go to battle on your behalf to help you, "and He will be with you forever," which is really fascinating, because if you were a first century Jew, and you heard Jesus talking about this, that the presence of God would be with you forever, that is categorically a shift of a dynamic in how you understood God's presence and God's Spirit.

For the entirety of history, since the fall of man in Eden, the Spirit of God, the presence of God was only available to certain people in certain places. So, for instance, it was available in the tabernacle, where God's presence came to dwell, and so it was confined to geography in a particular place. Or after the tabernacle, it moved to the temple, and God's presence was available for people to visit at the temple and experience at the temple, but it wasn't available to all believers. There are a few stories where people who followed God were especially enabled by the power of the Spirit and experienced the power of the Spirit, people like King David or different prophets, but it was always confined to a particular place and to particular people, and so Jesus saying that the presence of God will be with you forever, wherever you

go, that it is no longer confined geographically or personally, that if you call on the name of Jesus, you will have the Spirit of God with you forever, is a radical recharacterization of understanding God's presence. He calls it then, "the Spirit of truth, and the world cannot accept Him. The world cannot receive the Spirit, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you."

I think for many of us who have maybe grown up in the church, or we've heard different messages about the Holy Spirit, we can just breeze past this statement that if you are a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, lives with you, which means in every moment of your daily life, the Spirit of God is present with every single thought, every single action, every single moment of your day. Waking or sleeping, eating or working, the presence of God is with you. How many of us go through our days with that awareness in our lives? Not only is the Spirit of God with us, but Jesus promises He will be in you, and that is a moment that I think we can just all too readily breeze past.

Practically speaking, if the Holy Spirit truly dwells within believers, if you are a follower of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit dwells within you and within me, then it means a Christian never walks through life alone again. It means that God's presence is not distant or occasional or confined to a sacred place. It does not mean you just encounter God when you come to worship on a Sunday morning. If He is with his people continually, and He is in His people, it means that you have the strength and the power of God living inside of you, strength for every temptation, comfort in every suffering, conviction in every sin, guidance in every confusion, and peace in every fear. It means that as followers of Jesus, we do not merely try harder on the outside, but we have God working powerfully on the inside to reshape us into his image. If the Spirit is with believers and in believers, then He is with us and in us in hospital rooms and workplaces and lonely nights and difficult conversations and every ordinary moment of our day. What it means is that unlike the temporary experiences of God that people experienced occasionally under the Old Covenant, Jesus says the Spirit remains forever, not visiting your life occasionally, but abiding and living with you and in you constantly.

I do not think that many of us live like that. I do not think that many of us, when it really comes down to it, believe that, and here is what I need. I need help from a student, so I am going to ask my friend Adam Pyburn, who is in the back with his dad in the booth, to come up here on stage, because it is an intergenerational service, and so we often ask kids to come and help us make a point about service. So, can you guys give it up to Adam? He is one of our first graders here. So, buddy, when I asked him if he was willing to come on stage, he was like, oh yeah, he's ready. So, Adam, can you tell us a little, what grade are you in? First? Second grade, and you just are about to finish. You are about to go to summer. What are you excited about this summer? "Camping." Camping. Awesome. You are a Colorado kid who lives in Evergreen for sure. All right, Adam. Now here is what I need you to do. I know you are really strong, okay, so don't try to embarrass me, but this is an image that I want to help people understand about our relationship with the Holy Spirit. So, can you pretend for a second to be the Holy Spirit, okay? That feels like a big ask. You ready? All right, and all you have to do, is it okay if I put my hands on your shoulders? Okay, I'm me. Adam is the Holy Spirit, okay? Adam wants to be in my life and with me in my life and with me at every moment of every day, and my relationship to Adam is a little bit like this, the Holy Spirit. Adam, can you try to walk towards me? I don't want him to embarrass me. He is really strong,

and I am having trouble here. All right, try to get to me. Try to get to me. Try to get into my life, Holy Spirit. Try to get into me, Adam. All right, good job, good job, good job, buddy. That was awesome. You are so strong. Good job. All right, you can go back to your dad in the booth. Oh, look at that. He is just going for it. Oh, that's awesome.

I feel like, for many of us, don't let the cute kid distract you from the reality, that I feel like for many of us, this is the promise that the Holy Spirit will be in us and with us, and we try to keep the Spirit at a little bit of an arm's length. Like, yeah, I want to know some things, and sure, He probably knows some things about me, but with me all the time, it is an invasion of privacy, God. Like, I am not sure I am down for that. Like, we do not want to actually surrender our lives to the presence of the Spirit within us, What is fascinating about that is it does not change the reality that the Spirit is with you and in you, but it changes your relationship to how you engage with the Spirit, because if you do not want the Spirit, if you do not make space for the Spirit, the Spirit does not force Himself upon believers very often. There are occasionally stories in scripture where it seems like the Spirit just overpowers and overwhelms us, but for the most part, unfortunately the Spirit will respect our boundaries that we create with Him.

The reason why I think we often keep the Spirit at an arm's distance like that is this. I do not think that we believe the Spirit inside of us is actually good for us or what we want. It is not the true good that we seek in life, which is fascinating, because Jesus said this in John 16: "Very truly I tell you," that is his like double emphasis. I am trying really clearly to tell you, "It is good for you that I am going away. Unless I go away, the advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send Him to you." I want you to think about what Jesus is saying at this moment. These are probably words that you are very familiar with and you have heard preached before. Tyler Staton summarizes these words of Jesus this way: "According to Jesus, and He is remarkably clear about this, the Holy Spirit is a staggering improvement to a direct face-to-face conversation with God in the flesh. God's indwelling presence through the Holy Spirit surpasses God's bodily human presence through Jesus."

Here is the reality. I do not think that we buy it. I mean, if you think about your experience with the Holy Spirit, how many of you would trade your experience with the Holy Spirit for just like one dinner face-to-face conversation with Jesus? Probably many of us, if not most of us. This is the problem. Jesus was so excited to leave and to send the Spirit to us because He said it would be better for us. This is not a fringe doctrine for the spiritual elite. It is not like the gifted and talented kids who get the better teachers. It is the actual presence of God available for every believer, and I think most of us, if we were honest with ourselves, we are a bit underwhelmed with the experience of the promise Jesus was so excited to give us. I think many of us, and I would put myself at the front of this line, is that we know that the Holy Spirit is the presence of God, and we know that God has said the Holy Spirit is with us and in us, and we still treat the Spirit like He is non-essential to our lives. Like the Holy Spirit is non-essential to functioning as a follower of Jesus, that life following Jesus is possible without the Spirit, to put it a different way. That we can understand the Spirit doctrinally, but practically we operate entirely out of our own strength, our own intellect, our own personality, our own planning, and our own willpower.

It is a little bit like having a cell phone. I mean, I remember a conversation I had with my grandma, who passed away last year at the age of ninety-two. She had seen the world change in remarkable ways. A few years ago I asked her one time what she thought the most incredible achievement or advancement

of technology that she had seen in her life was, and this was a woman who grew up without a refrigerator for food. She is going all the way back to the thirties, and she said, without hesitation, “the phone,” that having that powerful of a machine in everyone’s pocket changed the world forever. I do not think she is wrong, but I want you to imagine that most powerful machine that many of us have ever possessed or ever will possess, potentially, that you have it. It is capable of all sorts of things. I mean, you can look up things on the Internet. You can message people all the way around the world. My dad is in Africa right now. I can literally talk to him on the phone, and he is thousands of miles away. It can do so much. What happens if I take that same machine, and I put it on airplane mode, and I just leave it on airplane mode? There is no power. There is nothing that it can produce. There is nothing that it can do. It becomes very limited. It can still function in certain ways and certain things, but it is a misuse of the power that is available.

I think for us, so many of us, we have a relationship to the Spirit that is very similar to that. We have put the Holy Spirit on airplane mode, and we have essentially said like, “I have got this. I do not need the Holy Spirit. I will follow Jesus. I want to become more like Jesus,” and really Christianity then becomes some form of behavior modification or sin management. I think when I look at the life of the church, and we have life with Jesus apart from the power of the Spirit, it so often simply turns into that behavior modification and sin management, and many of us go through our Christian life, and we wonder, “Is this it? Is this the most God has for me, just trying not to look at certain things or say certain things or do certain things, just trying to manage those thoughts within me? Is that essentially it?” I think what Jesus is saying is there is something more available to us. We are simply going through faith on airplane mode.

This is what Jesus actually says about the power of the Holy Spirit within us and with us. John 14:12: “Very truly,” again, the double emphasis, which is interesting, because Jesus uses that language a lot with the Holy Spirit, as if He knows we are going to have trouble believing what He says. “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” Christians have debated for a very long time about what it means when Jesus says that they will do even greater things than these. It basically comes down to an argument two ways, quantitative or qualitative. It basically comes down to collectively, we will just do more stuff than Jesus did, and so that means greater. Or there’s another camp that said, no, when Jesus said greater, He meant greater, and so Jesus did all of these miracles, and we have the same power of the Holy Spirit within us, and so we have the power to do those miracles as well. I do not actually want to solve that debate today. I do not think I have the intellectual prowess to solve that debate, but here is what I know. Jesus said, “greater things than these,” and He said, whoever calls on Him will do greater things than these, which means two things. When He says, “greater things than these,” it cannot mean less and fewer, and He says “whoever,” which means that this again is not something for the spiritual elite.

How many of you have called upon the name of Jesus? You would count yourself in the whoever believes in Jesus and could look at your life or collectively at our church and say, “Yeah, we are living this out.” I think many of us, we come to this phrase, and this is one of the few places in scripture where we think, “I am not sure Jesus is completely right. Like, I don’t know. It seems like a little bit hyperbolic. Maybe it is one of those like parable things, where Jesus says something He doesn’t mean.” We’re not sure what to do with this, but it cannot mean less things or less great things, and it cannot mean that you who are a follower of Jesus do not have that power inside of you and the presence of God inside of you.

I think what happens is when we have put our faith on airplane mode, and we have disconnected from the Spirit. I actually don't think that for many of us that is a rebellious act. I think it is actually simply self-sufficiency. For sure there are places and people where we have disconnected from the Spirit, because we are choosing things that are not of the Spirit, and so we are ignoring the Spirit, but I think for the most part many of us are simply choosing to go through life self-sufficiently. We have what it takes, we have what we need, and we have lives that look very busy and religious and morally respectable, and we are just quietly running on our own human strength instead of divine dependence, and this is what I think that looks like when we do not believe this to be true.

Prayer just becomes routine instead of desperate. Obedience becomes selective in something you choose. Sin becomes easier to tolerate. Your love for Jesus slowly grows cold, and you might still be a person who attends church and knows scripture and serves faithfully, but there is very little spiritual vitality or boldness or joy or conviction or transformation, and you are simply living attached to Jesus like the vine that has been cut from the branch, and it can have leaves and fruit and stay green for a little while, but eventually the absence of connection reveals itself in the absence of fruit and joy and boldness. I believe this very deeply. I think many of us in this room, and again, I am putting myself at the front of the line, that I think many of us, we believe Christianity is about persevering and preserving our faith, and that Jesus never meant for ordinary people to live with the active presence and power of the Spirit flowing through them for the good of our faith and for the good of the world, and so we live very stagnant lives.

This is something I am coming to believe and growing in myself, and this is a statement that I wholeheartedly want to believe for our church. The church was never meant to become a museum for preserving stories about power. It was meant to be a living organism filled with the power and presence of God today. This is why Paul says in Ephesians 1:17, which is where we began today and what we read. He says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ," this is Paul's prayer for the church, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." He is talking about the Holy Spirit and how He works in our lives, "to provide wisdom," which is truth, "and revelation," supernatural understanding about who God is and what He has said, "so that you may know and experience God better." That is the purpose of the Spirit, to help us know and experience life with God better, and he says that his prayer for that is, "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, in order that you may know and experience the hope to which He has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."

The power and presence of the Holy Spirit is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and is the same Spirit that is alive within you. How many of us live like that is true? How many of us believe that is true? Paul here is stunned by the possibility that believers could live a spiritually unaware existence, where they are unaware of the power that already lives inside them, and he is desperately praying that they would experience that power and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, for the good of their faith and for the good of their world. You might hear that and think, "Okay, Paul, Holy Spirit, got it, a person, not a force, the presence of God in my life, and I could even get behind this idea that it is the power that rose Jesus from the dead, and you're saying that it is inside of me. I don't know what that

looks like, because all I've seen is," or "Yeah, what about this?" Or "What about the times that this does not happen?" I promise you we will deal with all of those things in the coming week, whatever that skepticism is inside of you that causes you to pause, but here is my question for you for the moment. I think when we hear about the Spirit, we can become so skeptical, and what is fascinating to me is in circles like ours, circles that I grew up in, in churches like Waterstone, where we are so committed to scripture, and I am not moving an inch from my commitment to the truth of scripture, but we can look at the Holy Spirit in a skeptical way, saying, "Yeah, you just got to be careful, because that is all experience," and we are not quite sure what to do with that. Like you just need to go to God's word and trust that. People have abused the Spirit, so you cannot trust the Spirit, and my simple rebuttal to that was, yes, absolutely the Spirit has been abused. Absolutely, but hasn't the word of God been abused too, and do we not caution people against abuse of the word of God? Yet when it comes to the Spirit, it is like a free pass to be skeptical, that anything someone maybe says about the Spirit is not worth listening to, because that is something we are not sure we can trust.

Here is what I am coming to believe and what I am growing in and I am praying for our church. It is that maybe we would stop sounding like polite religious people who are just going about a routine and start sounding like we have the power of God within us. Maybe fear would loosen its grip on our hearts, that maybe we would believe freedom from sin is possible, that forgiveness is powerful, that healing can happen, that reconciliation can take place, that courage can rise, and that dead things in our lives can absolutely not be beyond resurrection, because the power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive within us. The resurrection power of the Spirit does not turn believers into celebrities or superheroes. It turns fearful, skeptical people into bold witnesses, where people who have been bitter learn to forgive, where broken people are healed, and where ordinary people learn to live in the evidence that Jesus Christ is still alive. I think that terrifies us, because here is what I think. I think many of us are fearful of that reality taking place in our lives, because we know it means we would have to lose control, and not controlling like a chaotic, like things are just running rampant, and people are running around here like with snakes in their hands and like yelling things, like not that. We would have to give up the control that we so desperately want to hang onto in our lives and surrender to the power of the Spirit.

I think many of us, when it comes to the Spirit, have the relationship with the spirit where it is like going on a beach vacation, and a lot of beach vacations, the hotel will have a pool, and then the ocean is like fifty yards away. When you are in the hotel pool, everything is controlled. It is temperature controlled. It is not chaotic. It is not wavy. It is not dangerous. You can see the bottom. You can see the boundaries. Many of us have a faith that wants to stay in the pool, where we can stay in control, and we can know the things that we need to do with our lives. Fifty yards away is the ocean, which is the Spirit, and it is deep, and you can't control it, and it is powerful, and it scares us, because we are not sure that if we actually surrendered our lives to the Spirit, what He might do with our lives. We are not sure what might happen, and so we stay in the pool, and this is the invitation for us today. It is that I think many of us are afraid of the ocean, but what we have to understand is the Holy Spirit is not trying to destroy us or to drown us. He is not inviting us into chaos or manipulation or emotional hype. The Spirit is the presence of God drawing you deeper into the life of God Himself, into communion, into transformation, into joy, into holiness, into power and comfort and truth.

So, the invitation to surrender to the Spirit is not to stand safely on the edge forever, to just dip your toes in the water when things are convenient. The invitation is to trust the goodness of God enough to go deeper with Him, to discover that the same Spirit who hovered over the waters in Genesis and who filled the tabernacle and who illuminated the temple, who raised Jesus from the dead, is now given to ordinary believers like you and like me, to dwell within us, and to empower us for the work of God in the world. Billy Graham, who was by no means a charismatic, and I have shared this quote before, but he said this after he observed the church for many years all over the world. This is what he said: “Everywhere I go, I find that God’s people lack something. They’re hungry for something more. Their Christian experience is not all that they had expected, and they often have reoccurring defeat in their lives, but Christians today are hungry for spiritual fulfillment. The desperate need of the nation today is that the men and women who profess Jesus be filled with the Holy Spirit.” That is what the world needs, and that is what you and I need, and so here is our closing moment today.

I am going to invite you right now to just stand, and as you stand, I want you to simply extend your hands and open your hands. There is nothing miraculous about this posture. It is an ancient posture of prayer that simply says to God, “I have nothing to bring to you, and I need you,” and then I want you to pray with me a very simple ancient prayer. The words, “Come, Holy Spirit.” This is one of the most ancient prayers in all of Christianity, and the wording can be a little confusing, because to pray for the Holy Spirit to come is not inviting the Holy Spirit to embody something that He has not already embodied or to bring his presence somewhere that his presence is not already. It is a prayer of aligning our heart, our will, our mind, our spirit to what He is already doing in and amongst us, and so I am going to just say a simple prayer, and when I say that, I want you to just remain in silence and say the prayer with me and see if the Holy Spirit has something to say to you today. So, hold out your hands, and please pray with me, “Come, Holy Spirit.”

Heavenly Father, you are holy, and you are good, and you have invited us into deeper communion with you through the power of the Holy Spirit. God, may Waterstone be a church where we do not simply know that to be true, but we experience the reality of you. May you change our hearts. May you transform our patterns. May you shift the ways that we have been asleep. May you wake us up to the reality of who you are. God, would you wake us up to the reality that there is more, that there is more available to us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ who makes these things possible, amen.

I just want to invite you, if you would like, throughout this series, we are going to be creating space after the end of each service where you can just stay to pray. We will have prayer ministers around here to pray with you. If you would like, you don’t even have to share what is going on. They will just simply pray over you that God would continue doing whatever He is doing in your life. If you are newer to our church, and you would like to hear more about who we are as a church, we have a meet and greet right after service today. If you just go through these doors, and it will be on our north patio, through the glass doors that are on the north side of the building. We would love to hear a little bit about your story, share a little bit about who we are. It is pretty informal. It only takes a few minutes, but we would love for you to swing by and say hello, so we can get to know you. Let me now pray the benediction over us as we go today.

Heavenly Father, God, may we the people of Waterstone, Lord, may we experience this week that there is more. May we make ourselves available to the Spirit in a new way. God, may we recognize that the Holy Spirit is your presence alive within us, equipping us, empowering us, comforting us, convicting us, so that we might become like Jesus and live for others, and it is in Jesus' name that we pray these things and that we go, amen. You may go in peace.

45:04 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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