

Engage with the Holy Spirit

John 16:7-14

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Eric Metaxas mentioned in a recent Breakpoint Commentary that if Americans took a theology exam, their only hopes of passing would be if God graded on a curve.

LifeWay Research released results of a survey last month in which 3,000 participants were asked a set of 47 questions about foundational Christian beliefs. Here a few highlights, or should I say, lowlights...

- 69% of Americans agree there's only one true God—one in essence, three in person: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Evangelicals, by definition, believe trusting in Jesus is the *only* way of salvation. Yet two-thirds of evangelicals—*more than Americans as a whole*—claim Heaven is a place where *all* people will ultimately be reunited with loved ones. Nearly half agreed that, *“God accepts the worship of all religions including Christianity, Judaism and Islam.”*
- But if evangelicals sometime misunderstand doctrines about Jesus, the third member of the Trinity has it much worse because 56% believe the Holy Spirit *“is a divine force but not a personal being.”*

Our topic this weekend is, “Engaging with the Holy Spirit.” As part of my preparation my mind went back to a book I read a couple years ago called, “The Forgotten God: Reversing our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit” by Francis Chan. Here's something he said: *“From my perspective, the Holy Spirit is tragically neglected and, for all practical purposes, forgotten. While no evangelical would deny His existence...there are millions of churchgoers across America who cannot confidently say they have experienced His presence or action in their lives over the past year. And many of them do not believe they can.”*

Pastor J.D. Greear believes evangelicals generally fall into one of two extremes.

- *Some seem obsessed with Him, relating to Him in strange, mystical ways. Their experiences with the Spirit seem to coincide with an emotionally ecstatic moment.*

- *Other Christians react to that perceived excess by neglecting His ministry altogether. They believe in the Holy Spirit, but they relate to Him the same way they relate to their pituitary gland: grateful it's in there; know it's essential for something; don't pay much attention to it.*

Let's be honest and admit that many Baptists fall in this second category.

There's no doubt the Holy Spirit is the most misunderstood and ignored member of the Trinity. I recognize that we cannot possibly cover everything the Bible says about Him in one message so we're going to ponder the promises that Jesus gives us in John 14-16. We'll look into four passages that will help us understand and engage with the Holy Spirit. After learning about the person of the Holy Spirit we'll conclude with ways we can live in the power of the Spirit.

Here's some brief background to put these texts into context. Jesus has just announced that He will be leaving His disciples and they are now distraught and no doubt disappointed. They are extremely unsettled and so the Savior takes three chapters to assure them that they will not be left alone.

Before we jump in, I want to draw your attention to the word ***“Helper”*** that is used to describe the Holy Spirit in all four of these passages in John 14:16; 14:26; 15:26 and 16:7. ***“Helper”*** literally means, *“One who comes forward on behalf of and as the representative of another; one who is called alongside to assist.”* Its meaning is rich and deep and can be translated with words like: *“comforter, counselor, attorney, encourager, adviser, pleader, proxy and advocate.”*

Let's start in John 14:16-17 – ***“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”***

- Notice the entire Trinity is involved here – Jesus asks the Father who gives another Helper, the Spirit of Truth. I love how God is described in our Articles of Faith – *“...That in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - equal in every divine perfection and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption.”*

- The word “**another**” means, “*one of the same kind or quality.*” The idea is that of “sameness.” Jesus is saying the Holy Spirit will be like Himself and will take His place.
- The Helper will be us forever. In the Old Testament the Spirit is mentioned nearly 100 times and came upon people to enable them to accomplish God-given tasks and then would depart. That’s why David prayed in Psalm 51:11: “***Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.***” We don’t have to worry about that now because the Holy Spirit comes in at conversion and stays forever. In John 14:18, Jesus says, “***I will not leave you as orphans.***”
- He is the Spirit of truth.
- Those who don’t know Christ cannot receive the Holy Spirit.
- Believers “**know**” Him, meaning He is personal, not just a mystical force like in *Star Wars* or an impersonal power. He’s not a power to experience but a Person to know.
- Related to this, the Holy Spirit is a “He” not an “it.” We see this grammatically. The Greek word for Spirit (pneuma) is neuter in gender, yet the Bible uses masculine pronouns “He” and “Him” to refer to the Holy Spirit. He’s not an “it,” He’s a He!
- The Holy Spirit not only dwells *with* us, He is now *in* believers. I like how one pastor puts it: “*He has always been a God who is close and present but only since Jesus returned to heaven has He taken up residence inside of us. And that makes Him closer than ever.*”

Turn now to John 14:26 – “***But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.***”

- Notice the Trinity again – the Father sends the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus.
- One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to teach believers. He brings new truth to the disciples and also helps them remember all that Jesus has said in the past. BTW, that’s why the Holy Spirit was so involved in the inspiration of the Scriptures. We’re taught and we’re reminded as we study the Word of God. 2 Peter 1:21: “***For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.***”

Now let's look at John 15:26 – ***“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”***

- Here we see the Trinity at work again – Jesus will send the Helper who comes from the Father.
- He is the Spirit of truth – we need truth in a world filled with lies and error, don't we?
- The Helper proceeds from the Father. The Nicene Creed, written first in A.D. 325, as a response to those who denied the divinity of Christ, was revised in 381 in reaction to a heresy that denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. No doubt they had this verse in mind when these words were formulated: *“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son He is worshiped and glorified...”*
- The Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus. The Helper doesn't promote Himself but loves to point people to Christ. In John 16:14, Jesus says that ***“He will glorify me.”***

Turn now to John 16:7 - ***“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”*** The word ***“nevertheless”*** is used as a contrast or antithesis to what the disciples are feeling. Jesus then says something to get their attention: ***“I tell you the truth...”*** Jesus always told the truth but it's as if He's saying, *“Listen up guys. This is really important.”*

What He says next is shocking: ***“it is to your advantage that I go away...”*** This word means, *“useful, profitable or beneficial.”* There was no way the disciples were thinking that it was a good thing that Jesus was about to leave them. How could it be to their advantage that Jesus was going away? Of what benefit would it be for Jesus to be gone from them?

Jesus tells them why His departure would be profitable for them: ***“for if I do not go away, the Helper [there's that word again], will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.”*** Three times Jesus uses the word, ***“go”*** to help the disciples understand that He was about to leave them. But it would be to their advantage because the Helper could then arrive. His going is essential to the Spirit's coming. To ***“send”*** means, *“to dispatch and thrust out.”*

Several years ago Beth and I had the privilege of going to Israel. It was a very moving experience to walk where Jesus walked. But as great as it was, you don't have to go to the Holy Land to experience the Lord. Having the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life is better than walking with Jesus where He walked because now through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit He walks with us in our culture and context today!

Here's a good question to ponder. Would you rather have Jesus right next to you or have the Holy Spirit within you? Jesus says that's it to our benefit for Him to go away so that the Spirit could dwell inside us. I quote again from J.D. Greear: *"When Jesus was on earth, his miraculous work was contained to wherever he was at the moment. Now that he is in us, his power is wherever we are. The Spirit inside us is better than Jesus beside us..."*

I came across a very provocative quote by A.W. Tozer some time ago and have been pondering it again for the past couple weeks – *"If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."*

Now, let me be quick to say that that the Holy Spirit will never be taken from us but it's worth asking ourselves what is it that we're doing in our own power. Would you notice if the Holy Spirit was no longer in your life? The Holy Spirit will not be withdrawn but we can withdraw from Him.

The Bible says there at least two ways we can short-circuit the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

- **We can grieve the Holy Spirit.** Ephesians 4:30-31: *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."* To "grieve" means, "to make sad or sorry." We can grieve Him by holding on to gross stuff in our lives.
- **We can quench the Holy Spirit.** 1 Thessalonians 5:19: *"Do not quench the Spirit."* To "quench" means, "to put out a fire." When we ignore the Holy Spirit by continuously compromising our morals and biblical convictions, the fire of the Holy Spirit can be reduced to smoldering embers.

One of the best ways to make sure we're not grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit is to keep short accounts with God and with others. When you mess up, own it. When you sin, confess it. When you've wronged someone, make it right.

One of my pastor friends posted these words this week: *"Unconfessed sin in the life of the believer is like an open wound that rots progressively and fills the air with such a pungent odor that God's presence is repelled. He waits to restore relationship...until the believer has asked him to forgive the sin, cleanse the wound, heal it, and restore the fullness of relationship."*

One of the best examples of keeping short accounts with others happened Wednesday night in the National League Championship Series when Cubs player Anthony Rizzo apologized to the home plate umpire. Apparently, Rizzo was a bit exasperated when a pitch was called a strike when he thought it was a ball. He had started to head to first base but had to return to the batter's box. When he did, he turned to the ump and said, *"My fault on that."* The umpire responded, *"You're good, bro...No worries. You're competing. I understand. Don't worry. And you know what's the best of it, you come back and you tell me that. That's how good of a guy you are. Are you kidding me? Thanks."* Is there anyone you need to go back to today?

We've *learned* about the Holy Spirit and now we must *live* by the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:25: ***"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."*** This is a military term meaning that we're to march in a straight line, taking our orders only from Him. As I yield to the Spirit I will experience His power and people should notice. I like what Francis Chan writes: *"I don't want my life to be explainable without the Holy Spirit. I want people to look at my life and know that I couldn't be doing this by my own power."*

Living by the Spirit

Here then are some ways we can keep in step with the Spirit.

1. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's so easy to fill our lives with things that don't satisfy, isn't it? Some of us are drinking deeply of substances that end up controlling us. Check out Ephesians 5:18: ***"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."*** This is a command that literally means, *"Keep on being filled with the Spirit."* I'm reminded of what the great

preacher Charles Spurgeon did before he climbed the stairs to the pulpit every time he preached. For every step he would take, he would say these words, *“I believe in the Holy Spirit.”* Ask Him to fill you every day and many times during the day.

2. Be purified by the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit should have a purifying affect in our lives. Before Christ came God’s Spirit dwelt in the tabernacle and now He dwells inside His people and within His church. If you are born again, your body is now the temple of God!

God displays His beauty and glory today through believers, and as such, we must treat our bodies carefully and make sure they are dedicated to His purposes. This is spelled out clearly in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: ***“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*** The way we live should declare to the world that the Holy Spirit is present within us. Or to say it another way, the world will learn about God based upon the way we are living. That’s a weighty responsibility and a holy charge.

God also dwells in His church according to 1 Corinthians 3:16: ***“Do you not know that you [plural] are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”***

Listen to this quote from Francis Chan: *“If it’s true that the Spirit of God dwells in us and that our bodies are the Holy Spirit’s temple, then shouldn’t there be a huge difference between the person who has the Spirit of God living inside of him or her and the person who does not?”* By the way, if you want to go deeper into living by the power of the Holy Spirit, Francis Chan has some video teaching on the “Forgotten God” on Right Now Media.

3. Serve according to the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit has given you. According to 1 Corinthians 12:7, every believer has been given at least one spiritual gift that is to be used to build up the body of Christ: ***“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*** Discover the gifts the Holy Spirit has given you and then unleash them for God’s glory and the growth of His church.

I saw some servants here on Thursday setting up for the *Parenting on Purpose* seminar (BTW, over 60 attended!). I went up to Ruth McAnally and asked, *“Were*

you just serving?” Her answer was quick, “Isn’t that what we’re supposed to do?” She got me there.

I’m told that we had over 23 babies and toddlers last weekend! Suzy Crosby, who heads up the Nursery, tells me that we’ve had a “baby boom” and there’s more babies that were just born and others still to be born that are headed to the Nursery soon. Would you consider serving in this way?

4. Demonstrate the Fruit of the Spirit. Those things that naturally flow out of us are found in Galatians 5:19-21: “...*sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy...*” Sounds like the presidential debates, doesn’t it?

It’s important to distinguish between the *gift* of the Spirit which happens at salvation; the *gifts* of the Spirit, which have to do with service; and the *graces* of the Spirit, which relate to Christian character. Unfortunately we have sometimes elevated the gifts of the Spirit over the graces of the Spirit. Building Christian character must take precedence over displaying special abilities.

Is the Fruit of the Spirit ripening in your life right now? Galatians 5:22-23: “***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.***”

5. Pray in the Holy Spirit. Before you get nervous and think I’m talking about something that only charismatics practice, consider Ephesians 6:18: “***Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.***” To pray in the Spirit means to follow His lead and to pray in His power.

I was very moved recently when I received an email from Pastor Kyle that he sent to the staff and to the deacons. I have his permission to share it. The heading is, “*Can’t sleep.*” Here’s what he wrote: “*Hey all, I woke up a little after 2 this morning and I couldn’t go back to bed. I began to pray for the church and students in particular that God would reveal Himself and pour out His Spirit on them. With the high school retreat coming up, I threw out some of the other ideas I had and prayed for what God wanted to share. I feel like He showed me Psalm 24 that focuses on a generation seeking after Him. He also showed me the connection with Psalm 51 and how this begins with confession. I need to understand this first and foremost and I desperately want students and singles to understand this as*

well.

Would you prayerfully consider fasting and praying for the next few weeks up until and during the retreat that God would come down and reveal Himself to students, especially on the retreat? There are different things we can fast from. I will fast from food one day a week and any social media that is not connected to work or ministry in order to have more focused prayer. If anything, please just pray with me.”

The students are having (had) an “Exile Night” on Saturday in which they put themselves in the place of persecuted Christians. They learned what it’s like to live knowing you could be killed for your faith at any time.

6. Go with the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s fascinating to me that Jesus held his disciples back from witnessing until they had the Holy Spirit. We see this in Luke 24:48-49: ***“You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father [the Holy Spirit] upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”***

The cool thing is that when we witness, the Holy Spirit is at work. When we proclaim Christ, we do so with the power the Holy Spirit gives us.

Invitation

Could you bow your heads? I want to speak to two different groups of people.

1. Christians who need to surrender. If you’re saved, you have all of the Holy Spirit. But here’s a question: *“Does the Holy Spirit have all of you?”* Have you been living in your own might and do you think you’re always right? Have you been saved by grace but now you’re trying to do everything in your own grit or through your own wit? Paul addressed this in Galatians 3:3: ***“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”***

Surrender everything to Him right now.

2. Non-Christians who need to get saved. If you’re not saved, you are in a very precarious position. There *will be* a final exam one day and you will fail it if you don’t put your faith in Jesus Christ. Listen to what the Holy Spirit is doing right now according to John 16:8-11 and be open to respond to Him: ***“And when he***

comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” The word “*convict*” means to prove one is wrong and He does it in three main areas.

- **Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.** Admit you are a sinner. According to this verse, the biggest sin is to not believe in Christ.
- **Concerning righteousness, because I go the Father.** Jesus is our standard for righteousness. Admit that you are unrighteous.
- **Concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.** Where sin and unrighteousness meet, judgment follows. If you do not believe in and receive Jesus Christ, you will be judged forever in a place called Hell.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ paid the price for all of your sins and when you repent and receive Him into your life you will be declared righteous and will avoid the judgment you deserve.

God doesn't grade on a curve but He does grade on Christ. He aced the exam and when you accept Him, His score of perfect righteousness will be credited to your report card. How cool is that?

Listen to these words of Jesus from John 3 – *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God...That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”*

Ask Jesus to save you right now so you can be born again of the Spirit.

Lead in Prayer of Salvation.

If you surrendered or were saved just now, would you raise your hand so we can rejoice with you?

Doxology - The word *doxology* comes from the Greek *doxa*, (“glory” or “splendor”) and *logos*, (“word” or “speaking”). We're going to conclude by declaring a doxology to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Benediction – *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”* (2 Corinthians 13:14)