

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

Water for a Thirsty Heart

Thirst. It's a natural, human drive that can make you desperate.

Of course, few of us know what it really means to be thirsty. Some of us *think* we know what thirst is. On a hot day my soon-to-be thirteen year-old earnestly begs me to buy him a soda ... as if he's hanging between life and death. His urgent pleas remind me of the time when I was about the same age. I had just mowed a neighbor's yard. The heavy heat on a humid mid-summer's day had drained me dry. Dehydration set in, requiring a day-and-a-half to recover. But on that occasion, even the tepid water from a dirty, dilapidated water hose was satisfying.

When was the last time that you were *really* thirsty?

The Bible says that all of us have deep within a thirst ... not for physical water, but for spiritual reality. And this thirst incessantly cries out to be quenched.

But part of our problem is that we don't recognize this thirst for what it is. When thirst pangs well up within, we all too quickly turn to some cheap substitute. We all too often think that this thirst can be quenched by our own strategies – albeit at times sinful strategies – of trying to find life on our own apart from God.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah states it this way: “For my people have done two evil things: They have forsaken me--the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!” Jeremiah 2:13 *NLT*

The sins of God's people in Jeremiah's day are often our sins. In our vain attempts to satisfy this thirst deep within, we look in all the wrong places. We construct for ourselves cracked cisterns that don't hold water at all. And just like cracked cisterns – our sinful strategies initially look like they'll satisfy, but by the time we're about to drink, there's nothing left.

Fortunately, Jeremiah gives us the solution to our sin: Turn back to God, the “fountain of living water.” For He alone can satisfy our deep thirst within.

Elsewhere, the Bible makes it clear that this “living water” for a thirsty heart is plentifully provided by God's Holy Spirit (John 4:13-14; 7:37-39). But here we run into a problem. For most of us, the biblical teaching on God the Father or God the Son is understandable. After all, we speak and live with those terms in our daily life.

But God the Holy Spirit? Or even worse, as the King James version states it, “God the Holy *Ghost*?” Maybe for you that conjures up images of Casper the friendly ghost or even worse those little “beggars” that knock on your door every Halloween.

A couple of weeks ago we recited together the Niceane Creed. But if we are honest, we probably should say this: “We believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and we believe in Jesus Christ his Son; ... *but we are not so sure about the Holy Spirit.*”

And I have a hunch that, because “we are not so sure about the Holy Spirit,” we are not experiencing to the fullest the many ways in which God can meet the deepest longings of our hearts.

We all long for life, peace, security, clarity, purity, help in difficult circumstances, and – in general – the satisfaction of this deep inner thirst that wells up within us. But do you recognize that the Holy Spirit is here and readily available to respond to each of these needs in your life?

Let me share with you what I mean. The Bible gives us various images of the Holy Spirit. And each of these images seems to describe a specific way in which God, through His Spirit, responds to the cry of our hearts.

The Spirit of God moves like a wind, giving life.

For example, the Holy Spirit is described in the Bible as moving like a wind, bringing life. In fact, this idea of life-giving breath is part-and-parcel of the word “spirit.” The Old Testament word *ruwach* and the New Testament word *pneuma* are variously translated “wind,” “breath,” “air,” and “spirit” depending on the context.ⁱ

We see this in the very opening verses of the Bible:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. *And the Spirit of God [ruwach, the breath of God] was hovering over the surface of the waters.*” (Gen. 1:1-2, NLT)

Because of the life-giving work of the Spirit, chaos is turned to cosmos. That which is otherwise chaotic is instilled with order and life. The hovering of God’s Spirit over the deep waters speaks of a gentle motion, like a bird over its nest, conveying vital heat to its eggs or cherishing its young. In this way, the Holy Spirit extends God’s presence into creation, bringing life to the otherwise lifeless.

The same is true in the very next chapter. “And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). Though the vocabulary is different, the image is the same. Life, both natural and spiritual, finds its origin in the work of the Holy Spirit.ⁱⁱ

But if *human* life is ultimately given by the Spirit of God, even more so new life – *spiritual* life. In John 3 Jesus is conversing with Nicodemus about the requirement for entering into the Kingdom of God. “I assure you. No one can enter the Kingdom of God,” Jesus tells him, “without being born of water and the Spirit.” He goes on to explain:

Humans can produce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, “You must be born again.” The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit. (John 4:6-8 NLT)ⁱⁱⁱ

Are you “born of the Spirit?” Some of you here today may be like Nicodemus: outwardly religious, but inwardly and spiritually dead. The Good News is that, just as literally as God gave you physical life through your natural birth, he can breathe upon you giving you spiritual life through the new birth.

All that we’re going to say about the Spirit’s ability to quench our deepest thirst *does not* apply to you unless you have the Spirit of God in your life. For as Paul says, “If you do not have the Spirit of Christ, you do not belong to him.”

Or maybe you already possess God’s Spirit, but somehow you *feel* more dead than alive. Maybe the harsh circumstances of life have brought about a numbing deadness that won’t go away. God’s Spirit, the life-giving spirit, is there for you.

The Spirit of God descends like a dove, bringing peace and rest.

Not only is the Spirit of God like a wind, bringing life. He is also pictured as a dove bringing peace and rest.

The story is told of a Japanese convert struggling to grasp the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. “Honorable Father, very good,” he says to his missionary teacher. “Honorable Son, very good. But Honorable Bird, I do not understand at all.”^{iv}

And yet the Spirit of God *is* pictured as a bird, specifically a dove in the Bible. And while this is one of the most well-known images of the Spirit, it is rarely used in the Bible and is one of the most misunderstood.

Probably the best known passage describing the Spirit as a dove is found in each of the four gospels.^v The Apostle John describes it this way:

"I saw the Holy Spirit descending *like a dove* from heaven and resting upon him. I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' John 1:32-33 NLT

But where does John (as well as the other Gospel writers) get his image of the Holy Spirit as a dove? We’ve already seen in Genesis 1 that the Spirit of God “hovered” (like a bird) over the waters, serving as God’s creative link between chaos and cosmos.

And when we come to Genesis 8, we once again find the image of a bird. Following the destruction of the flood, Noah first sends out of the ark a raven – a scavenger bird that is content to find a resting place on the back of any old carcass. But not so with the bird Noah sends out next. The dove, not being a scavenger and looking for the first signs of life, returns to the ark without finding food. But then, after seven days, the dove is sent out again and this time returns with an olive leaf – the first sign of a renewed earth. And finally, the dove is sent out and never returns, having discovered life sustenance in the new earth cleansed by the flood.

And so the dove, I suspect, speaks of the peace and rest in the new heavens and the new earth.^{vi} Those who have the dove, the Spirit, have their minds and hearts fixed on the ultimate peace and rest that will characterize God's new creation. And they will not settle for less.

The great Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen was the first to discover the magnetic meridian of the North Pole. On one of his trips, he took a homing pigeon with him. When he had finally reached the top of the world, he opened the bird's cage and set it free. You can imagine the delight on his wife's face back in Norway when she saw that pigeon circling in the sky. "He's alive! My husband is alive."

When Jesus ascended – the One on whom the dove had descended – the disciples clung to His promise that he would send them the Holy Spirit. And what joy they had when he came at Pentecost. And that dove, the Holy Spirit, was the continual reminder to them and to us that Jesus is alive and will one day return to establish his Kingdom of peace and rest on which we have set our hopes.^{vii}

Are you longing for peace and rest in your life? The Holy Spirit can give that.

The Spirit of God guarantees like a deposit, providing security.

But until that day comes, the Spirit of God is also pictured as a deposit, providing security. Paul puts it this way:

He has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us. 2 Corinthians 1:22 *NLT*

That word translated "first installment" is a word used in Paul's day of money given in a pledge to the fact that the full amount would be paid. And that is what God has done for you and for me. His Holy Spirit is the pledge that all he has promised he will perform.

In modern Greek, the word is used for an engagement ring. But the difference is this. An engagement ring promises marriage, but is not part of the marriage itself. In contrast, the Holy Spirit is himself the first installment of what is to come. It's like money put down that both promises full payment in the future as well as gives partial payment in the present.

Do you sense the need of security in your life? The Holy Spirit can give that.

The Spirit of God anoints like oil, giving understanding.

In the very same passage where Paul speaks of the Spirit as a deposit and a seal, he also speaks of the Spirit "anointing" believers. Notice what he says in 2 Corinthians 1:21 – "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. *He anointed us...*" (NIV).

The Apostle John adds this: "But you have received the Holy Spirit [literally, "the anointing"], and you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know" (1 John 2:27).

In the Old Testament tabernacle, the pure olive oil kept the lamps continually burning in the holy place (Exodus 27:20-21). Here's how Moses describes it:

"Tell the people of Israel to bring you pure olive oil for the lampstand, so it can be kept burning continually. The lampstand will be placed outside the inner curtain of the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle. Aaron and his sons will keep the lamps burning in the LORD's presence day and night. This is a permanent law for the people of Israel, and it must be kept by all future generations. *NLT*

But why did those lamps continually burn? They pointed the way to the showbread, which spoke of Christ himself. And that, believer, is the primary role of the Holy Spirit in your life...He points the way to Christ. And the Holy Spirit does this in our lives through the ministry of revelation and illumination, pointing the way to Christ. You don't have to consult learned Ph.D's to understand the Bible. The Holy Spirit ministers to all believers alike.^{viii}

Do you need understanding, enlightenment along the way? Do you need a new vision of Christ's sufficiency in your life? The Holy Spirit is there to provide that.

The Holy Spirit burns like a fire, bringing purity.

But not only does the Spirit of God guarantee like a deposit, providing security and anoint like oil, bringing clarity. He also burns like a fire, bringing purity.

Throughout the Bible, fire is typical of the judgment of sin and the sanctification (or cleansing) of the believer.^{ix} Moses approaches a burning bush, and is told to slip off his sandals, for the ground where he stood was holy. Later, in Deuteronomy 5, Moses reminds the people that God has spoken to them face to face out of fire on the mountain.

At Pentecost, as the believers experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he's depicted as coming with tongues of fire, again speaking of his purifying work. And later, as Paul writes to the Corinthian church, he says, "Everyone's work will be put through the fire to see whether or not it keeps its value" (1 Corinthians 3:13).

But probably the clearest picture we have of the Holy Spirit as fire is in Revelation 4:5-6:

From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God.

Some translations read "the seven spirits of God." But the translation of the New Living Translation is best: "the sevenfold Spirit of God." This title speaks of the perfection and holiness of the Spirit of God. And his perfection and holiness is further seen in the image of fire which cleanses and purifies. It's no wonder that elsewhere Paul writes of the paradox of claiming to have the Spirit of God and yet at the same time leading an immoral lifestyle (1 Corinthians 6:12-20). The two are diametrically opposed.

Do you sense the need for refining and cleansing in your life? The Spirit as the fire of God wants to do just that.

The Spirit of God helps like a friend, giving aid.

In all of these images the Spirit of God is like a friend, who gives help in difficult circumstances. Jesus promised his disciples in John 14:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Encourager, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit...

Our "Encourager" is like a friend, who gives aid in time of need. In the language of the New Testament, the word is *parakletos*, literally meaning "one called alongside" for the purpose of helping. From this we get the idea of comforter, counselor or advocate.^x

The Karre language of equatorial Africa proved to be difficult for the translators of the New Testament, especially when it came to the word *paraclete*. How could they describe the Holy Spirit?

One day the translators came across a group of porters going off into the bush carrying bundles on their heads. They noticed that in the line of porters there was always one who didn't carry anything, and they assumed he was the boss, there to make sure that the others did their work. However, they discovered he wasn't the boss; he had a special job. He was there should anyone fall over with exhaustion; he would come and pick up the man's load and carry it for him. This porter was known in the Karre language as "the one who falls down beside us."

Is your heart yearning for someone to come alongside and give you strength in time of need? The Holy Spirit, the Advocate, is there for you.

The Holy Spirit satisfies like water, quenching our thirst.

Yes, we all have within us a deep thirst that longs to be quenched. A thousand times a day I face the same question: "Will I dig my own broken cisterns, or will I turn to the true fountain of life?" And so do you.

In the New Testament, Jesus picks up on the imagery provided by Jeremiah the prophet. Here's what we read in John 7:

On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "If you are thirsty, come to me! If you believe in me, come and drink! For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water will flow out from within." (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.) John 7:37-39 *NLT*

The occasion is the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. It was customary at this festival for the priests to lead a procession of people who would fill pitchers of water at the Pool of Siloam. The water would then be poured out at the Temple court symbolizing the time when the Israelites drank water from the rock (Exodus 17:5-7). Paul later adds that the Israelites drank from that rock which is Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).^{xi} And you can too.

How? How do we know more of Christ's sufficiency through the ministry of His Holy Spirit? It may be that the answer is so obvious we pass over it. Elsewhere, Jesus says: "If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." (Luke 11:13).

- Do you need new life? God's Spirit moves like a wind, giving life. Ask him for it.
- Do you need peace and rest? God's Spirit descends like a dove, promising peace and rest. Ask him for it.
- Do you need a greater sense of security? God's Spirit guarantees like a deposit, providing security. Ask him for it.
- Do you need understanding? God's Spirit anoints like oil, giving understanding. Ask him for it.
- Do you need a new sense of purity in your life? God's Spirit burns like a fire, leading to holiness in our lives. Ask him for it.
- Do you need a friend to carry a heavy load? God's Spirit is a *paraklete*, that helper who will carry your load. Ask him for it.
- Do you want your thirst quenched? God's Spirit is like water that satisfies, quenching thirst forever. Ask him for it.

ⁱ *Ruwach* used over 100 times in OT for the Spirit; *Pneuma* is found in 262 passages in NT.

ⁱⁱ Many other passages of Scripture highlight this. For example, Job 33:4 says, "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." See also Psalm 104:30. This same imagery is seen in the promise made to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel:

9 Then he said to me, "Speak to the winds [ruwach] and say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! [ruwach] Breathe into these dead bodies so that they may live again.'"
10 So I spoke as he commanded me, and the wind entered the bodies, and they began to breathe. They all came to life and stood up on their feet--a great army of them.
11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones--all hope is gone.'
12 Now give them this message from the Sovereign LORD: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel.
13 When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the LORD.
14 I will put my Spirit [ruwach] in you, and you will live...
Ezekiel 37:9-14 *NLT* Cf. also Acts 2:2; John 20:21-22; 2 Pet 1:21.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Spirit of God moves like a wind, giving life. Paul says, "And because you belong to him, the *power of the life-giving Spirit* has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death" (Romans 8:2).

^{iv} Philip Yancey, foreword of Roberston McQuilkin's *Life in the Spirit*.

^v Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32.

^{vi} The dove sometimes stood for Israel, and it may be that Jesus is here shown as the True Israelite chosen of God. From here, it's an easy step to see in Jesus Christ the One who alone can fulfill the many promises made to Israel in the Old Testament. I suspect, however, that our typical descriptions of peace, beauty, goodness and gentleness are also not far from the mark, for these qualities will characterize the new heavens and earth. Even in the Old Testament the Spirit is described as God's "gracious Spirit" or "good Spirit" (Nehemiah 9:20; Psalm 143:10).

^{vii} Thomas Lindberg, "Holy Spirit," *Leadership Journal*, Summer, 1986, 39 taken from Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations and Quotes*, 438.

^{viii} Cf. John 16:13 "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will *guide* you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future." (*NLT*) The Holy Spirit is like a tour guide. He takes you through the truth of God's Word and patiently, faithfully explains its meaning. He

gradually unfolds truth for every believer. This doesn't mean that you will suddenly understand everything in a type of cram course. No, it's going to be a gradual unfolding as the truth penetrates your life. Again, Paul elaborates on this role of the Holy Spirit in his first letter to the Corinthians. Here's what he says: "And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us...But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means." 1 Corinthians 2:12-16.

^{ix} Various passages refer to this image: Isaiah 6:6,7; Jeremiah 5:14; Exodus 3:2; Malachi 3:2-3; Hebrews 12:29; 1 Peter 1:7.

^x Our English word "comfort" comes from the Latin word, *cum fortis*, to give strength.

^{xi} There are frequent references in the Bible that speak of the work of God's Spirit using the figure of water. For example, dew typifies the refreshing work of the Spirit in spiritual darkness (Gen 27:28; Hos 14:5). Through the prophet Isaiah God says: "For I will give you abundant water to quench your thirst and to moisten your parched fields. And I will pour out my Spirit and my blessings on your children" (Isaiah 44:3 NLT). And earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus says to the Samaritan woman "People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life." (John 4:13-14 NLT).