

## Filled with the Holy Spirit

[John 14:15-18; 16:5-15](#)

Discipleship Essentials - Part Three: Becoming Like Christ

Dr. Jean M. Coyle

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Older Adult Sunday - worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

The apostle Paul tells us plainly in Galatians 5: 22-23: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Compressed into these words is not only a portrait of the life Christ lived while he was on earth, but also a description of the kind of life God would have Christians live here and now. Fruit develops in believers as they are willing to say, “Father, I surrender to your Holy Spirit working within me. I will not interfere with the Holy Spirit’s work in my life. As you help me, I will be as clay in the potter’s hands. Let the Christian character be produced IN me, not BY me” (Crabtree, 79-80).

Let us bow in prayer. Holy, heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, who came to dwell within us and to produce holiness in our lives. Help us to follow the Spirit’s leading toward holy living in all we do—in our giving and serving and ministering. Gracious God, may each of us be inspired and led by your Holy Word and by your love for each of us, your creations. Come, Holy Spirit, into our lives now and always. Amen.

In Genesis 1:1-2, we read, “In the beginning, when God created the heaven and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” The opening words of Genesis fire the imagination. They are full of mystery, awe, and power. In this first reference to the Holy Spirit in the Bible, we find the key to the understanding of all the Spirit’s works and ministry in the world. The picture described is one of complete desolation (Crabtree, 72).

But God, in the person of his Spirit, saw potential and promise in that whirling, spinning mass of chaos and confusion. He saw not only what it was but what it could become. Consequently, the Spirit of God MOVED. This is the Bible’s first mention of action or motion. The Hebrew word translated “moved” is a word of incubation. It describes the mother hen who broods over her nest. Her body transmits life-giving warmth. So the Holy Spirit, like a great eagle, spread itself around this formless, empty world, encased in total darkness, and began to impart to that cold scene of death the warmth of life. In the midst of death, life stirred (Crabtree, 72).

After the universe was created, the Holy Spirit did not retire. Throughout the pages of the Old Testament, we read of events in which the Holy Spirit came upon men and women to continue to carry out God’s plan and purpose. The Bible is a progressive revelation of God to man. Through the Spirit, God nurtured man as a mother nurtures a baby (Crabtree, 72).

Then humans were brought into God’s school, with the Holy Spirit as the schoolmaster, to the threshold of the New Testament era. It almost staggers the mind when we think of how much more the people of Malachi’s day knew about God than Abraham knew. For whereas Abraham was nearly two thousand years away from the birth of Christ, the people of Malachi’s day were scarcely four hundred years away from that signal event (Crabtree, 72-73).

With the coming of Christ, we see a revelation of the Spirit of God that was never found in the Old Testament. In Christ, where there was no trace of sin, the Holy Spirit was able to work in power and freedom. Jesus possessed the Spirit of God without measure. The total fullness of deity lived in the body of Jesus. He was God Almighty poured into a human form (Crabtree, 73).

Just before His death, Jesus promised the disciples that he would “send another Comforter” who would abide with them forever. He told them that this Comforter had been WITH them, but that the Holy Spirit would be IN them. This came to pass on Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came to indwell believers, its

presence was permanent. The Holy Spirit did not come in as an overnight guest or as a weekend visitor, but to abide as the possessor, the owner of God's property (Crabtree, 73).

Three major things regarding the Holy Spirit happened on Pentecost. First, the Holy Spirit became the resident presence of God in the world until the end of the age. Its abode became the bodies of believers, whom Paul called "temples" of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16). Second, the Holy Spirit initiated a new body called the church, just as Jesus had promised. The Holy Spirit adds to this body as it draws people to Christ and they receive Christ as Savior. Third, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered believers to witness, to share the reality of their faith with boldness and assurance (Crabtree, 73).

The Holy Spirit has a ministry to unbelievers. There is no way people can know they are lost and in need of a Savior, APART FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT, who opens their eyes to this fact. Scripture teaches that the lost person is "dead" in sin; the Holy Spirit awakens in the lost person the first recognition of God and awareness of personal sinfulness (Crabtree, 73).

The Holy Spirit has a ministry to believers. It reveals God's will to them; it makes the Scriptures come alive and speak to their hearts. The Spirit works through their consciences to reveal truth and to encourage right decisions. The Holy Spirit is the constant companion, supporter, and guide of Christians (Crabtree, 73).

The Holy Spirit also constantly reveals to believers more and more about God, His love, His purpose for the human race, and His purpose in believers' lives. The Holy Spirit refines, teaches, encourages, and tenderly reworks (Crabtree, 73).

What have we learned about the Holy Spirit? It is the divine mover. It is the agent in the Godhead who simultaneously moves a holy, all-powerful God toward sinful humans and sinful humans toward God. In the indescribable glory of this miracle, the Holy Spirit brings about the new birth. Just as it moved over the angry, chaotic waters of a spinning world of dead matter and brought forth life, so it moves over sinners who are "dead to trespasses and sins." Then it continues. The Holy Spirit works with God's people to the end of the age (Crabtree, 73-74).

The Holy Spirit is one person of the Trinity, co-equal with the Father God and the Son Jesus Christ. In Christianity, we believe it is the Holy Spirit who leads people to faith in Jesus and the one who gives us the ability to lead Christian lives.

The Trinity—and, perhaps, the Holy Spirit specifically—may be difficult concepts for us to understand. There's a word that I will use to explain the Trinity that is going to sound very complicated, but it really isn't. The word is perichoresis, which means an interpenetration of the parts of the Trinity. Now, this may sound complex, but please bear with me. A definition of perichoresis is "dancing around." That is a beautiful image to me—to think of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Godhead—dancing around in a circle with one another. The "peri" means around, the "choresis" is the basis of our word choreography. Indeed, in a book by theologian Shirley Guthrie, there is actually a line drawing of three figures dancing in a circle to illustrate this concept. While this may sound like a somewhat fanciful idea, I find this a very visual way to think of this seemingly very complex idea of perichoresis.

In Reformed theology, we can think of the Holy Spirit as being the presence of God in us—as individuals, in the church, in the world. As we have been created imago Dei, in the image of God, so we carry—each of us—the presence of God with us every day.

The Holy Spirit is present in this world in many ways, as expressed in the heroic and sometimes very unheralded acts of love and kindness we implement for one another.

We read of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove as Jesus the Christ is being baptized by John in the river Jordan. When we read this Biblical passage, we can sense the Spirit of God entering the world through, and in the person of, Jesus Christ. Christ was human and in the world in human form, but also brought this element of the divine—the Holy Spirit—within him.

We affirm in our confessions of faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, our belief in the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit.

Throughout the Bible, we can find numerous evidences of the Holy Spirit entering into the world. What about Samson, weakened, blinded, shorn of the locks of hair that gave him strength, suddenly being endowed with a superhuman strength that enabled him to bring down the building on his enemies? What were the pillar of fire and the pillar of smoke helping Moses lead the Israelites across the wilderness if not evidence of the Holy Spirit in this world? What was the dove appearing with the olive branch in its beak to let Noah and his family know that the flood was over, if not the presence of the Holy Spirit? How does the father have the strength to forgive his prodigal son if not for that Godlike element in him signifying the presence of the Holy Spirit?

When I read articles and stories in such publications as Guideposts about seemingly miraculous events occurring on this earth—a mother being able to lift a multi-ton car off her son after an accident, a man who can't swim jumping into a river to save a drowning person, a teacher donating a kidney to her student who is dying—then I say that I believe that these are all VERY REAL evidences of the Holy Spirit IN OUR MIDST.

Each of us may have the opportunity in this earthly journey—indeed, most of us will have many, many opportunities, large and small—to evidence the presence of God to someone else. When we practice random kindnesses, we are practicing a God-like attitude.

The Holy Spirit is a part of our Trinitarian God, as Jesus Christ is. The Holy Spirit is able—through us and through the church—to BE the presence of God and of Christ in the world. In one sense, since Jesus and the Holy Spirit are two parts of a three-part God, yes, the spirit IS the same as the presence of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit allows us to practice being made in the image of God.

The Holy Spirit is God's presence with us—loving us, caring for us, strengthening us. The Holy Spirit may empower us to perform “superhuman” feats when needed, and it imbues us with the strength and courage to deal with tough decisions and tragedies in our lives.

I want to share with you a couple of instances in MY experience when I have TRULY felt the POWER of the Holy Spirit. I imagine you, also, may be able to think of such occurrences in your life.

One of my seminary requirements was a practicum in a specific ministry. Mine was the truck stop ministry in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, one very cold two weeks after Christmas in 2000-2001. Our ministry consisted of being present at several truck stop lunch counters in that very busy intersection of interstate trucking routes to listen to and to provide pastoral care for truckers passing through that area. Toward the end of my last week there, I went to one of the VERY, VERY LONG lunch counters in one of the truck stops. There were a few truckers seated toward the ends of the counter, but I chose a place smack dab (as we say in the Midwest) in the middle—too far really to carry on a conversation with any of those already there. I was surrounded, on both sides, by MANY EMPTY seats. Perhaps, I was feeling shy, or just not too friendly, that morning—or LED. As I sat there, waiting for whatever or whoever was supposed to transpire, a middle-aged trucker I'll call Hank came in for breakfast. Of ALL the truck stops where Hank could have stopped, of ALL the empty seats available at THAT lunch counter that morning, Hank chose to sit one seat away from me —definitely in range of conversation. I greeted him and mentioned the weather, my usual tactic for engaging these strangers. I probably said something about working with the truck stop chaplain. Hank began to tell me his story. And it turned out that Hank was grappling with a very difficult decision in his life, particularly regarding his service to Christ's church. He was seeking an answer.

By this time in my seminary career and with many pastoral care and counseling courses behind me, I knew better than to offer an “answer” for him. He had to determine that answer for himself, however obvious it might seem to me. All I could do that cold, January morning was to be PRESENT for him in a way that would allow the Holy Spirit to guide Hank to God's design for the rest of his life. I will NEVER know, in THIS lifetime, what Hank chose to do, HOW he responded to God's call to him. But I DO know, for certain, that the Holy Spirit was present in an AWESOME way that morning at the truck stop lunch counter. Of ALL those empty seats at the counter, Hank was guided to one near someone who could listen

and who could understand. We left one another with a hug and with tears in our eyes.

When I was first beginning my ministry as a hospice chaplain, I had been on the job only a couple of months when I was asked to visit a relatively young man who was gravely ill. The first 15 minutes or so of my visit, as I sat at the foot of his bed, this extremely intelligent and articulate man told me ALL the reasons he did NOT believe in God or have ANY faith. As I sat there, I wondered how on earth I could bring comfort to this man, since my hope and faith were based in believing that there was a God who loved us and who loved him. When the man finished explaining his beliefs, I walked several feet over to stand by him and hold his hand. As I walked those few steps, I think I must have silently prayed to God to give me words that would respect what this man had said but also bring him hope and comfort in his dying and evidence to him God's love in a way that he could accept. As I reached the man's side and held his hand, I heard myself speaking to him. It was as though I were watching myself and hearing myself speak, but not knowing WHENCE the words came. When I left the patient's home that day, I thought that I had, indeed, been able to provide support for the patient, and that, perhaps, I should make note of what I had said, for future reference. As I sat in my little red car outside the patient's home, I found that I could NOT REMEMBER anything of what I had said that day, even moments afterwards. For, you see, the words were NOT MINE. I truly felt then—as I still do—that God was USING me in a VERY powerful way as a conduit of GOD'S GRACE to this man.

I BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit empowers EACH of us to become CONDUITS OF GOD'S GRACE to one another. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God with us, enabling us to portray the image of God on earth. To each of you, I would say that Christ is with you, God is with you, and the Holy Spirit is with you—at ALL times, in ALL places, in every WAY possible, in your daily life. YOU are the image of God and YOU carry His presence in the form of the Holy Spirit. THANKS be to God for each of you!

Benediction May the Lord bless you and keep you, May the Lord shine his countenance upon you, And grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

References Crabtree, T. T. The Zondervan 2007 Pastor's Manual. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007.