

BEING FILLED WITH AND SENT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.



Who is the Holy Spirit? From the beginning of the Bible, it is through the Holy Spirit that God carries out every aspect of His purposes. He is God's personal and empowering presence. No aspect of God's mission is possible without God's Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is more than personal, but also not less than personal.

The Holy Spirit only works to point us to the Father or the Son - it is consistent to know the Spirit in our lived experience as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO?

Creates and sustains life...He is "God's breath" which enables human beings to come to life and the bird hovering over Jesus at His baptism recalls the Spirit over the waters at creation, bringing new life.

Re-creates a broken world..."I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you...And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God." (Ezekiel 36: 26-28). The Holy Spirit's power is linked to the power of Jesus' works and His resurrection. "Christ Jesus...who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 1: 1-4)



Restores disciples... The new creation work of the Holy Spirit is seen in the world, but also in disciples being "new creations", who are being transformed from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). Our practices of being with God help change us indirectly as they give space for the Holy Spirit to change our hearts. A word for this process is sanctification - of the journey being made more holy - set apart for God - throughout our lives.



Makes God's love and presence real...we talk about the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit". "And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8: 15-16)

Commissions and strengthens disciples...The Holy Spirit appoints and commissions God's people to carry out tasks and gives the strength and wisdom to put them into action. God's Spirit also influences people with God's wisdom and ideas, giving them insight they could not naturally have, helping them to speak His words. When the Spirit of the Lord influences a person, rather than taking away or overriding their human talent or gifting, He fulfils it, making more of their strengths and qualities.



The Holy Spirit is poured out on all disciples at Pentecost, empowering them to continue Jesus' work, not through particular anointed individuals, but as a whole community.

The Holy Spirit is promised to every disciple - there are not different levels of Christian.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MISSION

The Holy Spirit is the "chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian church...He is the director of the whole enterprise. The mission consists of the things that he is doing in the world." (Bishop John V. Taylor)

All the gospels, particularly Luke, emphasise how Jesus is led by and speaks by the Spirit. "I used to ask God to bless what I am doing. Now I find out what God is blessing and go there."

The Holy Spirit always sends us to be a blessing.

"We must not pray, "Come Holy Spirit", unless we are prepared to go with the Holy Spirit." (Andrew Murray)

This is why the Holy Spirit gives, or strengthens, particular gifts. They are "...given for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12.7) and "for the service of others" (1 Peter 4:10).



BEING BAPTIZED IN, OR FILLED WITH, THE HOLY SPIRIT

For the early Christians it was **natural** that they “prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8: 14-17).

While most Christians know that we need God’s Spirit to empower us, we might have different understandings and expectations about how this might happen, and what our experience can be. **Some expect there to be two distinct stages**, in which someone can be baptised in the Spirit at a later stage to coming to faith. (“Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8: 15-17))

Some might emphasise being filled with the Spirit as something that may result in receiving particular gifts in order to be a blessing, **but which is also an ongoing journey and not a once-for-all experience** (“Keep on being filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

Others might emphasise that a disciple receives the Holy Spirit when they first say they have faith in Christ.

While these differences can cause confusion, and at worst a reluctance to seek the Holy Spirit, they all point in some similar directions:

The Holy Spirit is the best, and most necessary, gift we can receive.... Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit as the greatest gift of God. (Luke 11). “The Spirit is more than just one of God's gifts among others; the Holy Spirit is the unrestricted presence of God in which our life wakes up...the greatest and most wonderful thing which we can experience...We feel and taste, we touch and see our life in God and God in our life.” (Moltmann)

The Holy Spirit is a “Comforter” and “Helper” (John 14) who stands alongside us in “fellowship”, meaning that He never forces us to do anything against our will.

There are three ways in which the New Testament describes how the Holy Spirit comes to us, but they all speak of a complete dependence on Him. We can be baptized with the Spirit, clothed with the Spirit be full of the Holy Spirit or be filled by the Spirit.

We are constantly encouraged to depend on the Spirit: “eagerly desire spiritual gifts” (1 Corinthians 14:1) and that growing an awareness of the Holy Spirit in our lives is part of everyday discipleship.

People and communities experience the Holy Spirit in different ways. “The Spirit blows where it pleases” (John 3:8)



Without the Holy Spirit:
God is far away, Christ stays in the past,
the Gospel is a dead letter,
the Church is simply an organisation,
authority a matter of domination,
mission a matter of propaganda,
liturgy no more than an evocation,
Christian living a slave morality.

But with the Holy Spirit:
the cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth-pangs of the Kingdom,
the risen Christ is there,
the Gospel is the power of life,
the Church shows forth the life of the Trinity,
authority is a liberating service,
mission is a Pentecost,
the liturgy is both memorial and anticipation,
human action is deified.

Ignatius of Latakia, 1968 (bishop of an Eastern rite)

“What is a Christian? A person who has caught fire from God’s... presence...a Christian is a person set on fire.” Kierkegaard.

HOW DO I RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT IN MY LIVED EXPERIENCE?

The way that people are empowered by the Holy Spirit resists formulas. The Spirit can **come upon people**. He can **fall upon people**. He can be **poured out on people**. People can **receive** the Spirit or be **filled** with the Spirit. In the Bible sometimes people have hands laid on them, and sometimes they don’t.

God offers us a partnership in which we have a part to play.

Paul tells us in one chapter to **walk** by the Spirit, be **led** by the Spirit, **live** by the Spirit, and **keep in step** with the Spirit (Galatians 5: 16, 18, 25). The **practices of discipleship are our part in doing this**.

It is possible for us to be in step with the Spirit, but also to **get out of step with the Spirit**. While every human being is alive because of God’s Spirit, and the Holy Spirit never leaves a disciple, **our attitudes and practices are important in how much we experience being in tune with God**. We can choose to allow

God’s Spirit to **have more or less influence in our lives**.

If we want to be individuals or communities who seek to be a blessing empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, these questions may help keep us open:

How am I or how are we **receiving** from God before we give?
Am I/Are we experiencing a **balance between my/our effort and relying on God**?
Do I/we have the humility to know that **it is God’s work that matters** and not mine/ours?
Where am I/are we stepping out into **situations in which I/we need His Spirit**?
St Bonaventure said, ‘To whom does the Spirit come? He comes to the ones who love Him, who invite Him, who eagerly await Him’.
Am I/are we prepared to **give space to wait for God before acting**?
Am I/are we open to being used by God for His purposes?
Am I/are we **thirsty for His presence**?
Am I / are we able to trust God’s love and goodness so much that I/we can **surrender to His control**?