

Introduction



In the fall of 2007, my Colorado Rockies baseball team was on an incredible winning streak, leading to the National League playoffs and eventually the World Series (which we won't talk about). I convinced my wife that our old 27-inch TV wouldn't do, explaining how we couldn't even see the scores from our couch, unless we used binoculars. I laid it on thick. It worked.

Within hours I brought home a 50-inch, plasma HDTV. I couldn't wait to watch baseball and football on this beauty, so I immediately connected all the cables, sound system, and DVD player. When I finished, I eagerly turned on the set to watch a baseball game ... and was totally disappointed. The picture quality looked as lousy as before, except now it was twice as obvious.

Panicking, I grabbed the remote and started exploring buttons. When I hit the INPUT button, I realized that my input was still set on TV rather than HDMI. One click later, I was singing the "Hallelujah Chorus." I could now see the mustard smear on the face of the guy in the stands eating a hot dog. Incredible!

I possessed all the right equipment. I had correctly connected the HD cable. But I wasn't *experiencing* HD ...

until I discovered the INPUT button. That button enabled me to experience the fullness of what was already mine.

Holy Spirit in HD?

For many Christians, our experience with the Holy Spirit resembles my television incident. We have the right “equipment.” We know the Bible verses. We believe in the ministry of the Spirit ... but the “picture quality” of our lives doesn’t really reflect the Spirit’s activity. We long for more – more of His power, more of His love, more of His healing in our normal, everyday lives. And yet we don’t know how to get there. So we end up settling for a “little bit” of the Spirit, rather than the “more” our heart yearns for.

If that describes you, I’m so glad you picked up this book. In it, you will discover a practical and biblical pathway into the exhilaration of an everyday relationship with the Spirit in which you can more deeply experience His love, hear His voice, see His power, and live in His fullness.

As an evangelical pastor, I have seen many abuses and excesses regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but I have also personally experienced and observed in others the joys of a growing relationship with the Spirit. I felt compelled to write this book because of the number of Christians and Christian leaders who long to experience the Spirit more deeply but feel afraid or uncertain about going there. This book will reveal how *you* can experience more of the Spirit ... without being weird.

I’m not interested in theory. You can find other books offering that. I want to provide biblical and practical steps to help you experience the Spirit in real ways. Here’s where we’re headed:

- In Section One, you will discover how you can experience the Spirit *personally*, cultivating an intimate relationship with Him.
- In Section Two, you will learn from the examples and teaching of Scripture how to listen to and recognize the Spirit's voice, as well as how this can enhance your ministry to others.
- In Section Three, you will discover how the Spirit can energize your prayer life, including practical insights into the ministry of healing prayer.
- In Section Four, you will learn how you can be filled with the Spirit's power in ordinary and extraordinary ways.

Throughout the book you will find several "Holy Spirit Laboratory" exercises, providing opportunities to stop and practice what you are reading. To read *about* the Spirit without *experiencing* Him would be to miss the point. So don't hurry through this book. Allow the Spirit to meet you in these pages.

Also, feel free to study this book with a group of friends. (A study guide can be found in the Additional Resource section at the end of the book.) What better way to learn about the Spirit than to do so in community?

Are you ready to experience more of the Holy Spirit? Let's dive in!

Section One

Experiencing the Spirit Personally



Chapter One

You CAN Experience the Spirit



When I was a kid, my family had a very normal, unimpressive mutt named Caramel. She was overweight, moved slowly, and had dishwasher-colored hair. Like I said ... fairly unimpressive to the outside world.

But there was something about Caramel I'll never forget. When taking a car ride, she loved having the window all the way down and leaning out to experience the refreshing breeze. Her face held a look of sheer joy as the wind rushed past. She chose the exhilaration of the wind to the quiet, interior comfort of our vehicle.

That image offers a picture of the invitation God extends to us every day regarding the presence of His Holy Spirit in our lives. Will we slightly open the window of our soul, allowing a "little bit" of the Spirit's activity in? Or will we choose to roll the window all the way down so that we can fully experience the Spirit's exhilarating breeze? This book is for those who realize that a little bit of the Spirit is not enough. You long for a life in which you can experience more of God's love,

more of His peace and power, more of His presence in every circumstance.

Jesus longs for us to experience this as well. Check out His amazing promise to us in Luke 11:13. “How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” More of the Spirit. That’s the promise Jesus gives to us. Which raises an obvious question: *Why aren’t we experiencing the “more” that Jesus promises?*

We can trot out the usual suspects—busyness, distractions, sin. But if we’re honest, we realize our struggle actually has a much deeper root. The joy, the peace, the power promised us in Scripture are all dependent upon our *experiencing* the Holy Spirit. And quite honestly, we’re not sure what to do with the Holy Spirit.

We know He’s important, given how frequently He’s mentioned in the Bible. We know He’s an essential part of the Trinity. All that is settled in our minds. What we struggle to understand is how we *experience* Him. What does it look like to lean out the window and experience the Spirit more fully?

Is Experiencing the Holy Spirit a Little Scary to You?

I realize this kind of language may be making some of you nervous. I get that. Attending church as a kid, I heard about the “Holy Ghost” and immediately concluded, *I don’t want THAT to get near me.* I wasn’t interested in hanging out with a ghost, even if it was holy. For many Christians, our image of the Holy Spirit is this impersonal (and at times scary) “force” that we prefer leave us alone.

In college, I found myself engaged in fairly intense conversations with believers who referred to themselves as “Spirit-filled.” These friends insisted I wasn’t filled with the Spirit because I didn’t speak in tongues.

What a challenging and painful season for me. I deeply respected these guys, but I couldn't help feeling that the Christian world was now divided into two camps—the "haves" and the "have nots." And I was a have not.

For some of us, our hesitance in wading into the reality of experiencing the Spirit hearkens back to similar conversations, where a sincere friend tried to project *their* experience of the Spirit onto us, and in doing so made that particular experience a mark of authentic spirituality. Since we don't do *that*—whatever *that* is—we feel like second-class Christians, forever destined to sit on the bench.

Once, at a worship conference, I walked forward to receive prayer. The person praying for me so wanted me to be "slain in the Spirit" that he kept trying to push me over. In that moment, I discovered a new way to apply the apostle Paul's encouragement in Ephesians 6 to "stand firm."

Most of us probably have similar stories where certain "manifestations" of the Spirit were forced upon us or on someone we know, leaving a distinctively bad taste in our mouths. The problem, however, is that we often throw the baby out with the bathwater. Consciously or subconsciously we conclude, *If THAT is what it means to experience the Spirit, I'm not interested.* We end up settling into a Christianity in which we talk about the Spirit and memorize verses about the Spirit and believe truths about the Spirit, but we rarely if ever actually *experience* Him.

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This describes my Christian life for a number of years. I knew the Bible. I memorized Scripture. I was

active in ministry. I fasted and prayed regularly. But below the surface lay a weariness, an emptiness, a dissatisfaction. Even with the discouraging conversations I experienced with my friends in college, my heart felt a longing to know the Holy Spirit better. Over time, that began to happen in a variety of ways, which resulted in a passion to help other Christ-followers experience the Spirit more deeply.

It's Time to Peel off Our Labels

Part of the challenge in writing a book like this and in openly sharing my own personal experience is that many of us operate in fairly neat and tidy theological categories regarding the work of the Spirit. We tend

The Spirit does not fit well into our narrowly defined theological boxes.

to label people who have different experiences than we've had or who use certain words differently than we do or who attend a church with a different perspective on the

Spirit. Once we determine what camp they are in, we quickly dismiss them—and unfortunately miss an opportunity to grow in our relationship with the Spirit. The Spirit does not fit well into our narrowly defined theological boxes, often working in ways outside our own experience or personal comfort. We too easily dismiss these experiences simply because they don't fit our categories.

I once listened to a podcast of a Bible teacher discussing the authority of Scripture. When asked about the possibility of people coming to know Jesus through dreams and visions rather than a direct interaction with the Bible, he mockingly rejected the idea, asserting that, "These alleged supernatural experiences are outside of what the Bible teaches."

As I listened, I thought of my conversation not long before with a man in the Middle East who described how he became a Christian: Jesus appeared to him in a vision and called this man to follow Him. He did. He now actively ministers for Jesus among a people very much opposed to Christianity. His story is not unique. I have visited with a number of missionaries in that region who describe how common this phenomenon is.

How easily we can dismiss certain stories that don't fit our theological categories or our experience. Ironically, the Bible offers numerous examples of God speaking to people through dreams and visions. In fact, on the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and declared this to be one of the marks of the age of the Spirit: "Your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17).

We need to be careful, lest we find ourselves on the side of the Pharisees who saw Jesus perform miracles but rejected them because they didn't fit into their theological framework (see Luke 6:6–11 as one of many examples of this.) If we truly want to grow in our experience of the Spirit, our hearts need to be open to having our theological boxes expanded—not beyond the principles given in Scripture but certainly beyond our experience. My own Holy Spirit boxes have been expanded numerous times over the years, which makes me hesitant to use labels to categorize the Spirit's activity.

I struggle to find labels that describe my own experience with the Spirit. I don't know what category I fit into. I am a seminary-trained, senior pastor of an evangelical church. I am absolutely committed to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to our mission to reach the world. I also frequently pray for the sick. I teach people how to hear God's voice. I sometimes see pictures when I pray

for people and will share with them what I sense God saying. I have a personal prayer language that I at times use in my prayer times with God. My life and ministry have been profoundly impacted by two pastors: Tim Keller, a gospel-centered Presbyterian, and the late John Wimber, who founded the Vineyard movement and whose ministry was marked by dramatic manifestations of the Spirit.

For some, this description may cause you to stop reading this book. However, I hope that for many my journey with the Holy Spirit might stir in you a longing to experience Him more fully in your life. I'm not interested in getting anyone to switch camps. I'm not even sure what camp I'm in. I do know that the Holy Spirit has become more real to me over the years and that He wants to do that for you as well.

You Can Enjoy a Relationship with the Spirit

Recently we interviewed a young man for a church staff position. After he effectively answered several ministry-related questions, I decided to throw him what I perceived to be a softball question.

"Tell me about your relationship with the Holy Spirit?" Given that his denomination has historically been open to the work of the Spirit, I assumed this question would be a no brainer.

Silence. "Uh ... well ... He's really important, you know. Um, He ... well, He helps me be a better Christian, I guess ... Is that what you are asking?"

I followed up to clarify but quickly realized this question was no softball question at all. It was a question he struggled to answer. He's not alone. I find that very few Christians feel comfortable talking about their relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Not so for the apostle Paul. For Paul, the Holy Spirit was not a convenient afterthought or a minor theological concept but rather a vital part of his everyday experience. Paul talked about the Holy Spirit the way we talk about a personal friend.

For instance, in a letter to the church at Philippi—a letter Paul wrote from prison—Paul said, “Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance” (Philippians 1:18–19, NIV84). In the midst of dire circumstances, Paul acknowledged the personal help he received from the Spirit.

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Or how about Romans 8:26, where Paul declared, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

Help in weakness. This depicts what a close personal friend would do—offer tangible help in a time of need. Paul felt very comfortable talking about his personal relationship with the Spirit. Clearly this relationship was vital to his Christian experience and to ours as well.

Getting Up Close and Personal

In the New Testament, when someone wanted to describe a significant level of participation or personal engagement, they frequently used a particular Greek word, *koinonia*, which is often translated “fellowship” or “participation” (see Acts 2:42 and Philippians 3:10). In today’s terminology, the word *koinonia* describes the difference between watching from the sidelines or playing in the game. Huge difference.

One of my sons is learning to drive. For the first 15 years of his life, he rode in the backseat of a car, oblivious to stop lights, lane changes, and street names. Now that he sits in the driver's seat, he suddenly has a new appreciation for the complexity of automobile transportation. That's *koinonia*—not simply a distant awareness but a personal experience.

In light of this definition, it is fascinating that Paul twice chose this word to describe our relationship with the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 13:14, Paul declared, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Paul was describing our personal engagement with the Spirit of God.

Similarly, in Philippians 2:1-2, Paul wrote, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship (*koinonia*) with the Spirit ... then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." (NIV84)

Experiencing the Spirit is normal Christianity.

Paul realized that unity in relationships depends on every believer experiencing *koinonia* with the Spirit of God—a very real, personal,

engaging relationship with the Spirit. For Paul, *experiencing the Spirit is normal Christianity*. This is not for a few select, super spiritual saints. Every believer has this privilege.

Does Jesus Agree?

So how does all of this strike you? Does this stir within you a longing for a deepening experience with the Spirit? If so, great! Keep reading. However, I'm guessing that for others, this kind of talk still makes you

a bit uncomfortable. Isn't there a danger that we might be emphasizing the Spirit too much? I'm certainly not arguing for de-emphasizing the Father and the Son, while elevating the work of the Spirit. I am, however, passionate that our relationship with the Spirit aligns with the picture given in the New Testament—where the ministry of the Spirit is essential in experiencing the fullness of the Father and the Son.

In John 14–16, as Jesus explains the reality of His departure, He encourages the disciples to not let their hearts be troubled and to trust Him when circumstances seem dark and difficult. But He actually offers them more than an exhortation to deeper faith. Read the following verses carefully:

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:15–18, NIV84)

Did you notice what He offers them? He promises to give them “another Counselor.” This word translated “Counselor” refers to an advocate, one who comes alongside to assist, to help, to encourage. What’s fascinating is that Jesus describes the Spirit as “another” Counselor. This Greek word specifically refers to another of the same kind. In other words, the Spirit that Jesus promises will have a similar ministry as He had among them—with one crucial distinction: “But you know him, for he lives with you *and will be in you*” (John 14:17, my emphasis).

Whereas Jesus' ministry to them had been external—a relationship among people—now the Spirit's ministry to them will be internal; the Spirit of God living in them. Jesus promises them an even deeper experience after He leaves. In fact, notice how Jesus describes this Spirit. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). He doesn't say "I will not leave you as orphans; My Spirit will come to you." No. He says, "I will come to you."

From Jesus' perspective, the Spirit that would come to live in His followers was Jesus' very own presence! That's why Luke and Paul both speak of the "Spirit of Jesus" or the "Spirit of Jesus Christ" (see Acts 16:7 and Philippians 1:19). The Holy Spirit is the very presence of Jesus in us. You can't get more personal than that.

Recently my dad, my son, and I were heading back home after doing some shopping about an hour away. Unfamiliar with the area, I soon found myself disoriented and uncertain as to the direction to go. Okay ... we were lost.

The Holy Spirit is the very presence of Jesus in us.

At that point the three of us males decided to do something highly unusual for our gender: we asked for directions. Pulling into a car dealership, we found a very helpful young man who knew exactly how to get us home.

"Take a right out of the parking lot," he told us. "Then go left at the railroad tracks. At the next light, take a right and stay on that road and it will get you exactly where you need to go."

It sounded simple enough, but I took notes just in case. We drove out of the dealership ... and within three minutes were completely lost again. The path home

wasn't quite as simple as he described. At that moment, I realized what we really needed – that young man in our car. We needed him sitting next to us, guiding us to our destination.

For many believers in Christ, we settle for directions in our relationship with God. We view the Bible as a guidebook, telling us how to live. But it doesn't take long to realize we need more than a list of guidelines to follow. We need the very Person of God living in us – His power, His presence with us. The Spirit enables this to happen.

The Presence of God Lives in You

Not surprisingly, the entire story of the Bible centers around this idea of God's presence with His people. The tabernacle and then the temple were both physical localities in which God's presence dwelt. But in the New Testament, something absolutely glorious happened on the day of Pentecost. God gave His Spirit to every believer in Jesus. Paul later declared this to be the essence of the gospel: "Christ in you" (Colossians 1:27). The very presence of God lives in us. We are now the temple, the place in which God's Spirit dwells.

What an incredible truth! What an awesome reality – the actual presence of Jesus living in you through the Spirit. Not information. Not a map. Not a list of rules to follow. If you have placed your trust in Jesus, this is absolutely true of you. God's very own Spirit lives in you.

So how can we experience more of this Spirit in our lives? That's the question we will explore in the chapters ahead. But before you go there, I encourage you to stop reading and take a few minutes to reflect upon your relationship with the Holy Spirit.

HOLY SPIRIT LABORATORY

On a piece of paper or in your journal, answer the following question:

How would you describe your relationship with the Holy Spirit?

After answering that question, slowly read Jesus' words in John 14:15-18:

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (NIV84)

What do you long for your relationship with the Spirit to be like? Be specific.

Take a moment and ask the Father for more of the Holy Spirit in your life.

[If you are uncertain as to whether or not you even have a relationship with the Spirit, please turn to page 211, endnote 1]