Jesus & The Spirit

Keeping in Step With the Spirit

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JESUS & THE SPIRIT
Keeping in Step With the Spirit

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Published by MSSNL Inc.

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First Edition, 2026

Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction

The Spirit Jesus Promised

Jesus knew what His disciples were about to face. They had walked with Him for years, listened as He taught about the Kingdom of God, watched Him heal the sick, and seen Him move with compassion toward people others overlooked. Their lives had been rearranged around His presence, and they had learned to bring their questions, fears, failures, and hopes to Him.

Then Jesus began telling them that He was leaving. The disciples did not fully understand what He meant because they could not yet see the cross, the resurrection, or the mission that would soon carry them far beyond the places they knew. They only knew that the One they had followed was speaking about a time when He would no longer be with them in the way they had known.

Jesus did not leave them with a set of instructions and expect them to continue in their own strength. He made them a promise.

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."

John chapter 14, verse 16.

Jesus was speaking about the Holy Spirit. He continued by describing Him as the Spirit of truth and told His disciples something deeply personal. They knew the Spirit because He was already with them, and He would be in them.

The Holy Spirit was not introduced as an idea the disciples needed to understand before Jesus left. He was the Helper who would remain with them, teach them, remind them of what Jesus had said, guide them into truth, and strengthen their witness. They would not be left alone to remember Jesus or continue His mission through determination and human strength.

That promise gives us the starting place for this book because the Holy Spirit is often one of the most misunderstood parts of the Christian life. Some believers know His name yet rarely think about His presence in everyday life. Others have heard so much discussion about experiences, gifts, or disagreements that the conversations surrounding the Spirit can become larger than the One being discussed.

We all come to this subject carrying something. Our understanding may have been shaped by a church we attended, people we trusted, experiences we treasure, experiences that left us with questions, or passages of Scripture we have struggled to understand. Those things are part of our story, but they do not have to determine where we begin.

We begin with Scripture and allow it to tell us who the Holy Spirit is.

The Holy Spirit is not a force, an atmosphere, or an emotion that appears when a worship service becomes powerful. He is not spiritual energy that people learn to access, nor is He a lesser part of God who becomes important only when we talk about gifts or miracles. The Holy Spirit is God, personally present and eternally one with the Father and the Son.

He has been present from the beginning. Before humanity appears, before Israel exists, before prophets speak, and long before the church gathers in Jerusalem, the Spirit of God is already present.

"And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

Genesis chapter 1, verse 2.

The opening pages of Scripture do not introduce the Spirit as someone who will appear later in the story. He is present in creation itself, and as the biblical story unfolds, Scripture continues revealing His work among God's people.

The Spirit gives wisdom and equips people for what God has called them to do. He works through leaders and speaks through the prophets. Again and again, God's people discover that faithful obedience requires more than their own strength.

Zechariah gave God's people words for this dependence:

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

Zechariah chapter 4, verse 6.

The Old Testament also creates a growing expectation that something greater is coming. The Spirit is already present and active, yet the story begins pointing toward a day when God will work among His people in a new covenant way.

Moses once expressed a longing for the Lord's Spirit to rest broadly upon God's people.

"Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Numbers chapter 11, verse 29.

The prophets later spoke of that hope as a promise. Ezekiel looked toward a day when God would cleanse His people, give them new hearts, and place His Spirit within them.

"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Ezekiel chapter 36, verse 27.

Joel described an outpouring that would reach sons and daughters, old and young, and people from across the ordinary divisions of society.

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

Joel chapter 2, verse 28.

The story was moving toward fulfillment.

Then Jesus entered our world.

The story of Jesus cannot be told faithfully without the Holy Spirit. The angel told Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her as the eternal Son took on our humanity. At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit descended upon Him, and He was later led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Luke tells us that Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. When He entered the synagogue in Nazareth, He opened the scroll of Isaiah and read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."

Luke chapter 4, verse 18.

Jesus proclaimed good news, healed the sick, confronted evil, restored people others had pushed aside, announced the Kingdom of God, and moved with compassion toward people in need. His life revealed the power and presence of the Spirit without separating that power from obedience to the Father.

We need to speak carefully about what the Gospels show us. Jesus did not become the Son of God when the Spirit descended upon Him. He is the eternal Son, fully divine and eternally one with the Father and the Spirit.

Yet the Gospels intentionally show Jesus living His earthly ministry in fellowship with the Spirit. He was led by the Spirit, rejoiced in the Spirit, and ministered in the power of the Spirit. As His ministry moved toward the cross, He began telling His disciples that the Spirit would also be given to them.

The Christian life was never meant to become an attempt to imitate Jesus through determination alone. We can study His words, learn sound theology, develop discipline, serve faithfully, gather with other believers, and make sincere efforts to obey. All of those things have a place, but none of them was meant to replace dependence upon God Himself.

Jesus did not tell His disciples that they had watched Him long enough to take it from there. He promised them the Spirit.

As the cross drew near, Jesus spoke about that promise with increasing clarity. The disciples were troubled because their lives had been built around His physical presence. They knew where to find Jesus, where to listen when they needed wisdom, and where to look when they did not understand.

Jesus understood what His departure would mean to them.

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

John chapter 14, verse 18.

That assurance appears within Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit. The Helper would teach His disciples, bring Jesus' words to remembrance, bear witness about Him, and continue the work of God among His people.

The Spirit's presence would never move them away from Jesus or begin a separate story. Jesus gave them one of the clearest descriptions of His work:

"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

John chapter 16, verse 14.

Those words give us a center for everything that follows. The Spirit glorifies Jesus. He leads us into truth, forms the character of Christ within us, strengthens the church, and gives power to bear witness to Christ.

A life filled with the Spirit should increasingly become a life that looks like Jesus.

Scripture gives us much to explore about the Spirit's work, including new birth, filling, prayer, gifts, fruit, leading, worship, the life of the church, and mission. Some passages have been understood differently by sincere followers of Jesus who love Scripture and desire to obey God.

Those questions deserve careful attention. When we reach them, we will slow down, read each passage within its setting, say clearly what Scripture says, and remain humble where faithful believers have reached different conclusions. We do not need to make disagreement the center of our relationship with the Spirit.

Our desire is to know the Spirit Jesus promised, receive what God gives, obey what He says, and remain open to His work.

The Giver is greater than His gifts, and the Spirit always leads us back toward Jesus.

Before Jesus ascended, He gave His disciples a mission far larger than their ability. They were to make disciples among the nations and proclaim a risen Messiah in places that would sometimes welcome them and sometimes reject them. They would face opposition, cultural barriers, suffering, and questions they did not know how to answer.

Jesus did not tell them to begin by trusting their preparation. He told them to wait.

"And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Luke chapter 24, verse 49.

The disciples had spent years with Jesus, heard His teaching, witnessed His miracles, seen Him crucified, and stood in the presence of the risen Christ. Still, Jesus told them they needed something they could not produce for themselves.

They needed the Spirit's power.

Acts opens with the same promise:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses."

Acts chapter 1, verse 8.

Jesus connects power with witness. The Spirit would equip ordinary followers of Jesus to carry the good news beyond the places they knew and into a mission far larger than their natural ability.

Pentecost brought that promise into a new moment in the story of God. The disciples were gathered when a sound like a mighty rushing wind filled the house. What appeared as tongues of fire rested upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

People from many nations heard the mighty works of God being declared, and Peter stood before the crowd to explain what was happening. He returned to the words of Joel, but he did not make the experience itself the center of his message.

Peter preached Jesus.

He spoke about Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation and explained that the risen Jesus had poured out the promised Spirit. What the crowd was seeing and hearing belonged to the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit and pointed directly toward Jesus.

That connection remains important throughout this book. The Spirit points to Jesus, empowers witness to Jesus, forms the people of Jesus, and sends His followers into the mission of Jesus. Pentecost is remarkable, and everything Scripture includes in that account deserves to be received, but the Spirit does not become a new center that replaces Christ.

Acts continues showing the Spirit at work as the gospel moves outward. Believers receive courage when they are threatened, people are directed toward unexpected conversations, old boundaries are crossed, and the church learns to listen as people are sent into mission.

The early believers did not treat dependence upon the Spirit as an occasional addition to Christian life. They needed Him, and that dependence did not remove Scripture, wisdom, leadership, community, or careful discernment.

The same Spirit who moved powerfully among God's people also formed truth, holiness, love, and order among them. The New Testament teaches believers to receive what God gives and also to test what is claimed to be spiritual. Openness to the Spirit and submission to Scripture belong together.

His work is also much larger than any single gift or experience. Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born of the Spirit, and Paul teaches that those who belong to Christ have His Spirit. The Spirit assures God's people that they belong to Him and begins forming the character of Jesus within them.

That formation reaches everyday life. The Spirit works in the way we respond when someone hurts us, the way we handle temptation, the way we speak, serve, forgive, worship, pray, and treat people who can offer us nothing in return. His presence is not limited to moments we would describe as especially spiritual.

He teaches us to live with God.

The Spirit also leads His people. His leading reaches decisions and opportunities, but it never becomes permission to move beyond Scripture, wisdom, accountability, or the character of Jesus. The Spirit who inspired Scripture does not lead God's people away from what He has revealed.

At the same time, following Jesus was never meant to become a life built entirely around what we can plan, explain, accomplish, and control. Acts gives us people who pray, listen, discern, obey, and depend upon God as they follow Jesus. Their dependence does not make them careless. It makes them aware that the mission before them cannot be carried through human ability alone.

Neither can ours.

The same Spirit Jesus promised remains with the people of God. He convicts, comforts, teaches, produces fruit, equips people to serve, strengthens witness, and sends God's people wherever Jesus calls them to go.

Paul gives us language for the life that follows:

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 25.

Keeping in step gives us a picture of continuing dependence. We do not receive the Spirit and then learn to live without Him. We walk with God through Scripture and prayer, obedience and surrender, worship and service, weakness and courage, ordinary days and unexpected assignments.

His work can comfort us, and His conviction can expose places we would rather protect. He may strengthen us to remain where obedience is difficult or lead us toward people and places we would not have chosen for ourselves.

Wherever we begin this book, we come with something to surrender. All of us carry assumptions shaped by our experiences, our churches, our questions, and the things that have become familiar to us. Scripture invites us to bring those assumptions before God rather than asking Him only to confirm what we already believe.

We do not have to choose between biblical faithfulness and dependence upon the Spirit. The Spirit Himself gave Scripture through human authors, and He is the Spirit of truth. We can remain deeply rooted in the Word while remaining open to the God who is present and active among His people.

That is the posture we will carry through the pages ahead.

We will trace the Spirit's work through Scripture and look closely at His presence throughout the life and ministry of Jesus. We will listen to Jesus' promise of the Helper and follow the story into Pentecost, the church, and the ordinary lives of people learning to follow Christ.

We will consider what Scripture says about being born of the Spirit and filled with the Spirit. We will look at gifts and fruit, prayer and leading, worship and community, and the power to bear witness to Jesus. When questions arise, we will give

them the care they deserve without allowing those questions to become greater than the God we are seeking to know.

Perhaps you have followed Jesus for many years and still feel uncertain when conversation turns toward the Holy Spirit. Perhaps His presence has become deeply familiar to you, or you have experienced His work in ways that have shaped your faith. You may also carry questions because of what you were taught, what you witnessed, what you experienced, or what you have never experienced.

You do not have to resolve every question before beginning. Begin with Jesus, listen again to His words, and allow Scripture to shape your expectations more deeply than fear, familiarity, disappointment, or someone else's experience. Jesus promised the Spirit because His followers would need Him.

Then bring your assumptions honestly before God. Ask Him to correct what needs correcting, deepen what is shallow, strengthen what is weak, and make obedience more important than proving what you already believe. Humility allows Scripture to challenge us while trust keeps us open to whatever God desires to give.

The Spirit Jesus promised has not become less necessary because generations have passed since Pentecost. We still cannot give ourselves new life, transform ourselves into the image of Christ, build His church through human ability, or carry His gospel faithfully through our own strength.

We need the Spirit in prayer and weakness, in our homes and churches, in our workplaces and relationships, and in the mission Jesus has given us. We need His conviction when we wander, His comfort when we suffer, His fruit as He forms us, His gifts as we serve others, and His power when Jesus calls us beyond what we can accomplish alone.

The invitation before us is therefore larger than learning more about the Holy Spirit. It is an invitation to know the God who has come to dwell with His people, to remain close to Jesus, and to learn day by day what it means to keep in step with the Spirit.

Chapter One

The Spirit of God

Before the disciples gathered in Jerusalem, before Jesus stood in the Jordan River, before David was anointed as king, and before Moses led Israel out of Egypt, the Spirit of God was already present. His story does not begin at Pentecost. Scripture introduces Him in the opening verses of the Bible.

"The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

Genesis chapter 1, verse 2.

There is something important about meeting the Spirit here. We have not yet reached human need, spiritual gifts, church gatherings, or questions about how the Spirit works through believers. There is only God and the world He is bringing into being.

The Holy Spirit is therefore more than someone we turn to when we need power, wisdom, comfort, or direction. He is not

an addition to the life of God or a later part of the biblical story. He is God, eternally present with the Father and the Son, and Scripture begins revealing His work before humanity has anything to offer Him.

The Hebrew word often translated *spirit* is *ruach*. Depending upon the setting, the word can also carry the sense of wind or breath. Scripture uses this language in different ways, and several passages connect God's Spirit with the life that comes from Him.

Job says:

"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."

Job chapter 33, verse 4.

The psalmist also speaks of God sending forth His Spirit and renewing creation. The Spirit is associated with life because life comes from God. Before Scripture shows us what the Spirit can do through people, it shows us that He is already present in the work of God.

That order helps us approach Him rightly. We naturally begin with what we need because life gives us many reasons to ask for help. We need wisdom for decisions, courage for difficult conversations, strength to obey, comfort in suffering, and direction when the next step is unclear.

God cares about those needs, and Scripture will show the Spirit meeting His people in many of them. Yet the Spirit is more than the answer to our needs. He is God and worthy of our worship.

As the Old Testament story unfolds, Scripture begins showing the Spirit working through people in different ways. One of the earliest examples appears in a setting we might easily overlook.

God instructed Israel to build the tabernacle. The work required careful craftsmanship because materials had to be shaped, woven, carved, and assembled according to the instructions God had given. God chose a man named Bezalel for that work.

"And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship."

Exodus chapter 31, verse 3.

Bezalel was not standing before a nation or leading an army. He was building. His assignment required skill, creativity, wisdom, and attention to detail, and the Spirit gave what was needed for the work God had placed before him.

This broadens our understanding of what the Spirit's work can look like. We naturally remember dramatic moments in Scripture, such as a prophet speaking, a judge entering battle, or a king being anointed. Yet Scripture also connects the Spirit with craftsmanship offered faithfully to God.

God's work includes more than what happens in front of a crowd. The Spirit can equip people for leadership, service, wis-

dom, creativity, teaching, and responsibilities that may receive little attention from anyone else. Bezalel reminds us that visibility is not what makes work meaningful before God.

The story continues as Israel moves through the wilderness.

Moses carried an enormous burden of leadership. The people looked to him for judgment, direction, and help while he carried responsibility for a nation that could move quickly between gratitude, fear, anger, faith, and rebellion. Eventually Moses admitted that the burden had become too heavy for him to carry alone.

God responded by gathering seventy elders.

"Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders."

Numbers chapter 11, verse 25.

The responsibility would no longer rest upon Moses alone. God provided others to help carry what one person could not sustain by himself. The passage gives us a picture of leadership that depends upon God's provision rather than the strength of a single person.

Something unexpected happened as the Spirit rested upon the elders. Two men who had remained in the camp also began to prophesy. A young man ran to Moses with the news, and Joshua urged Moses to stop them.

Moses answered:

"Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Numbers chapter 11, verse 29.

Moses could have protected his position. He could have treated the Spirit's work as something that confirmed his importance or belonged only to the people gathered closest to him. Instead, he expressed a longing that reached beyond himself and the seventy elders.

He wanted God's people to know the work of God's Spirit.

At this point in the story, Moses is expressing a desire rather than explaining everything God will later do. Still, his words give us an early glimpse of a hope that will grow throughout the Old Testament. The Spirit's work among particular people begins pointing toward something greater.

The story continues with Joshua.

As Moses' life draws to an end, another leader must carry Israel forward. Joshua will lead the people across the Jordan River and into challenges Moses will not personally face.

Scripture tells us:

"And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him."

Deuteronomy chapter 34, verse 9.

Joshua needed more than Moses' position. He needed wisdom for the responsibility that was now his. He could learn from Moses and receive what a previous generation had taught him, but he would also face situations Moses could not prepare him to handle in every detail.

The same is true whenever responsibility passes from one person to another. We can share knowledge, teach what we have learned, and help people avoid mistakes we wish we had avoided. We cannot give another person everything they will need for every situation ahead.

They will need God.

The book of Judges gives us another picture of the Spirit's work. Israel repeatedly wandered from God, experienced the consequences of rebellion, cried out for help, and received deliverance. In those stories, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon people God raises up for particular moments.

Othniel is one of the first.

"The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel."

Judges chapter 3, verse 10.

Later, Scripture describes the Spirit working through Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson in different circumstances. Their stories are not alike, and neither are the people themselves. Some display remarkable courage while also revealing serious weakness and failure.

Samson gives us an especially sobering example. Scripture describes the Spirit empowering him for particular acts, yet his life is also marked by poor judgment, uncontrolled desire, and choices that bring painful consequences. God could work through Samson without approving everything within him.

Spiritual empowerment and spiritual maturity are therefore not the same thing. A person may be gifted and still need formation, or be used by God while carrying areas of character that require repentance, wisdom, and surrender. God's grace in working through imperfect people should make us grateful without making us careless about holiness.

The story of Israel's kings brings the tension into even clearer view. When Saul was chosen as Israel's first king, Scripture describes the Spirit of God coming upon him. Saul received what he needed for the responsibility before him, yet his life gradually became marked by fear, jealousy, disobedience, and an increasing refusal to listen to God.

Eventually another king was chosen.

Samuel was sent to the home of Jesse in Bethlehem. One son after another appeared before him, but God directed Samuel past the men who seemed most likely to be chosen. David, the youngest, was outside caring for the sheep.

When David was brought in, God directed Samuel to anoint him.

"And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward."

First Samuel chapter 16, verse 13.

David's life would include courage, leadership, worship, victory, failure, repentance, grief, and consequences that reached deeply into his family. The presence and work of the Spirit did not turn David into a flawless man. His story reveals both the grace of God and the seriousness of what happens when someone called by God chooses sin.

After David's sin involving Bathsheba and Uriah was exposed, he did not simply ask for the consequences to disappear. He recognized that his deepest need was within him.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Psalm chapter 51, verse 10.

Then he continued:

"Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me."

Psalm chapter 51, verse 11.

David needed more than the ability to lead. He needed cleansing and restoration. His prayer draws our attention toward something Israel's history would repeatedly reveal: God's people needed more than outward instruction or empowerment for particular assignments.

They needed God to work within them.

Israel had received God's law, covenant, leaders, priests, prophets, warnings, promises, and repeated acts of mercy. Still, the people wandered. The problem was not weakness in God's Word. Something within the human heart needed to be changed.

Jeremiah spoke of a coming covenant in which God's law would no longer remain only something written before His people.

"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts."

Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 33.

Ezekiel described the same future with language directly connected to the Spirit.

"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you."

Ezekiel chapter 36, verse 26.

Then God continued:

"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Ezekiel chapter 36, verse 27.

The promise reaches deeper than strength for a particular responsibility. God promises to work within His people. They

need new hearts, and He says He will give what they cannot create for themselves.

Ezekiel later receives a vision that brings together the Spirit and the life only God can give. God places the prophet in a valley filled with bones that are described as very dry. There is no visible reason to believe life remains in them.

God asks whether the bones can live.

"O Lord GOD, you know."

Ezekiel chapter 37, verse 3.

Ezekiel is told to prophesy, and the bones begin coming together. Sinews appear, flesh covers them, and skin forms over them. Still, there is no breath in them.

Then God tells Ezekiel to speak again.

"Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."

Ezekiel chapter 37, verse 9.

The vision brings together the Old Testament language of breath, wind, and Spirit. Breath enters the bodies, and they stand. God then explains that the vision concerns His people, who believe their hope has been lost.

"And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live."

Ezekiel chapter 37, verse 14.

The Spirit gives life where human effort cannot create it.

The theme reaches back toward the opening pages of Genesis, where the Spirit of God was present over creation. Now the prophets are pointing toward restoration and new life among God's people. The story is moving toward something humanity cannot accomplish by trying harder.

Isaiah adds another part of that promise. He speaks of Someone who will come from the line of Jesse.

"And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him."

Isaiah chapter 11, verse 2.

Isaiah continues by describing the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. The coming King will not simply occupy another human throne. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him.

Later Isaiah speaks of an anointed servant.

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."

Isaiah chapter 61, verse 1.

Generations later, Jesus will open the scroll of Isaiah in a synagogue and read those words aloud. That moment belongs later in our story, but Isaiah allows us to feel the expectation building before Jesus arrives.

The Spirit is present at creation. He gives wisdom for God's work, strengthens leaders, empowers people for particular assignments, and speaks through God's servants. The prophets then begin promising new hearts, new life, and a coming King upon whom the Spirit will rest.

Joel widens the promise again.

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

Joel chapter 2, verse 28.

God speaks of sons and daughters, old men and young men, servants as well as people of greater status. His words point toward a time when the Spirit's work will reach broadly across God's people.

Moses had once longed for the Lord to put His Spirit upon all His people. Through Joel, God now promises an outpouring that reaches beyond the leaders and prophets who so often stand at the center of the Old Testament accounts.

The story is moving toward fulfillment.

We should be careful about forcing every Old Testament passage into one simple explanation of how the Spirit worked before Jesus. Scripture uses varied language in different settings. The Spirit comes upon people, rests upon people, fills people with wisdom, works through leaders, gives life, and speaks through God's servants.

The biblical writers do not give us a single formula that explains every dimension of His work during this part of the story. What becomes unmistakable is that the Spirit was never absent from God's people or God's purposes.

Pentecost will bring something new and decisive in God's unfolding work, but it will not introduce a God who had previously been uninvolved. The Spirit who will fill the followers of Jesus is the same Spirit already present in creation, active throughout Israel's story, and promised through the prophets.

This helps us understand why Peter will stand at Pentecost and return to the words of Joel. He will not need to invent a new story to explain what God is doing. Scripture had already been preparing God's people for the day when the promised Spirit would be poured out.

It also teaches us something about our own dependence upon God. Bezalel needed wisdom God could give. Moses needed help beyond his own capacity, Joshua needed wisdom for what was ahead, and David needed cleansing when his heart had wandered.

Israel needed more than laws written before them. They needed God to work within them.

We face the same temptation to believe enough effort can accomplish what only God can do. We may assume better plans can produce spiritual life, stronger personalities can create faithful leadership, or enough information can transform the human heart. Plans, leadership, teaching, discipline, and wis-

dom all have their place, but none of them can create the life that comes from God.

Dependence upon the Spirit does not make human obedience unnecessary. Bezalel still had to build, Moses still had to lead, Joshua still had to cross the Jordan, and the prophets still had to speak what God had given them. The Spirit's work did not remove their response to God.

He enabled God's people to participate faithfully in what He placed before them.

As the Old Testament moves toward its close, much of the promise still points forward. Moses' longing has not yet reached its fullness. Ezekiel's promise of the Spirit within God's people awaits a greater fulfillment, Joel's promised outpouring still lies ahead, and Isaiah's Spirit-anointed King has not yet stepped into view.

Then the Gospel story begins.

An angel visits a young woman named Mary and tells her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her. The child she will bear is the eternal Son entering our world and taking on our humanity.

After generations of promise, the story turns toward Jesus.

The Spirit who was present at creation will be present as the Son enters our world. The Spirit promised through the prophets will rest upon the true King, and through Jesus the promise of God's Spirit will move toward fulfillment.

Before we reach that outpouring, however, we need to understand something even more personal. God did not promise only that His Spirit would strengthen people for the work He gave them. Ezekiel spoke of new hearts and new life from within.

Jesus would bring that promise directly to us.

We must be born of the Spirit.

Chapter Two

Born of the Spirit

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night.

He was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, and a man who knew the Scriptures. He had spent years learning the law, studying the faith of his people, and trying to live faithfully before God. He was not approaching Jesus as someone who knew nothing about God.

Something about Jesus had captured his attention.

“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

John chapter 3, verse 2.

Nicodemus began with what he had seen. The signs Jesus performed told him that God was at work, and he wanted to understand what was happening. Jesus answered by taking the conversation somewhere Nicodemus did not expect.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

John chapter 3, verse 3.

Nicodemus was confused because he understood physical birth. He asked how a person could possibly be born a second time, and Jesus continued:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

John chapter 3, verse 5.

Then Jesus said:

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

John chapter 3, verse 6.

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that the life of God cannot be produced through human effort. That would have been difficult language for a man who had devoted much of his life to knowledge, obedience, and religious faithfulness. Entrance into the Kingdom required something Nicodemus could never accomplish for himself because he needed new life from God.

Jesus' language also reaches back toward promises God had already given His people. Ezekiel had spoken about cleansing, a new heart, and the Spirit of God working within them.

"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you."

Ezekiel chapter 36, verse 26.

Then God said:

"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Ezekiel chapter 36, verse 27.

Jesus does not stop to explain every connection between His words and Ezekiel's promise, so we should be careful not to make the conversation say more than it does. Still, the language of cleansing, new life, and the Spirit would not have been foreign to a teacher of Israel. God had already promised that His work among His people would reach deeper than instruction written before them.

Nicodemus knew the Scriptures, but knowing the words was not the same as possessing the life they promised. Jesus brought the need directly to him. Religious knowledge, ancestry, position, and effort could not create what only God could give.

This is where the Christian life begins. It does not begin when we become more disciplined, informed, or religious, even though those things may change as we follow Jesus. It begins when God gives life to someone who could never create that life for themselves.

Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born of the Spirit.

Birth gives us a helpful picture because life is received before it can grow. A child does not create his own life and then begin developing it. Life is given, and from that life come growth, maturity, relationship, learning, and change.

Much of ordinary life teaches us the value of effort. We work, study, practice, plan, improve, and take responsibility for what has been placed in our hands. Those habits can be good, but spiritual life cannot be achieved in the same way.

We cannot study ourselves into new birth, become moral enough to create a new heart, or work hard enough to make ourselves alive to God. We may improve habits and change outward behavior, but only God can give the life Jesus is describing.

John had already introduced this truth near the beginning of his Gospel. Speaking about those who receive Jesus, he writes:

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

John chapter 1, verse 12.

Then John explains that this new identity does not come from human ancestry or determination:

"Who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

John chapter 1, verse 13.

The Christian life is therefore more than joining a community, accepting a set of beliefs, or deciding to become a better person. God gives life, and that life is received through faith in Jesus.

Scripture also calls us to repentance. Jesus began His public ministry calling people to repent and believe the gospel, and the apostles continued carrying that message. New birth does not make our response to God unnecessary, but it reminds us that salvation begins with grace rather than human achievement.

Jesus later told His disciples that the Spirit would convict the world:

"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

John chapter 16, verse 8.

Conviction is part of the Spirit's gracious work even when it is uncomfortable. He brings into the light what we would rather excuse or hide and shows us the truth about sin and our need for Jesus. His work does not make sin smaller so that we can feel better about ourselves.

Neither does His conviction leave us without hope.

Condemnation can leave us hiding beneath shame and believing there is no path home. The conviction of the Spirit tells the truth about our sin and leads us toward Jesus. He brings what is wrong into the light so that we can repent, receive forgiveness, and begin walking in a new way.

New birth therefore cannot be separated from Jesus. The Spirit does not give us a spiritual life that exists alongside Christ or apart from Him. He brings us into the life found in Christ and dwells within those who belong to Him.

Paul writes:

"Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

Romans chapter 8, verse 9.

Those words give us an important foundation for everything that follows. The Holy Spirit is not reserved for a smaller group of Christians who have reached a deeper level of spirituality. Everyone who belongs to Christ has His Spirit.

Paul continues:

"But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness."

Romans chapter 8, verse 10.

Then he looks toward something still greater:

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies."

Romans chapter 8, verse 11.

The Spirit who gives life now is also connected to the resurrection still to come. Christian life begins with God's work and moves toward the day when even our mortal bodies will share in the resurrection life of Christ.

We often speak about salvation mainly in terms of forgiveness, and forgiveness is essential. Jesus carried our sin at the cross, and through Him we are forgiven and reconciled to God. Yet Scripture describes salvation as more than guilt being removed because God also makes His people alive.

Paul writes:

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked."

Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 and 2.

Then he turns toward the mercy of God:

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us."

Ephesians chapter 2, verse 4.

Paul continues:

"Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."

Ephesians chapter 2, verse 5.

God does more than improve the person we were. He makes us alive together with Christ.

That does not mean every habit, desire, fear, or weakness immediately disappears. New birth begins a new life, but new life still requires growth. A child is fully alive at birth while still having much to learn, and followers of Jesus can truly belong to Him while still needing years of formation.

New birth and instant maturity are not the same thing.

Someone may belong to Christ and still have much to learn about prayer, obedience, relationships, forgiveness, wisdom, and the character of Jesus. New believers may carry patterns formed over many years, and people who have followed Jesus for decades can still discover places that need surrender.

The presence of struggle does not automatically mean spiritual life is absent. Living things grow, and growth is often uneven.

The Spirit who gives life also begins changing the direction of that life.

Paul writes:

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh."

Romans chapter 8, verse 5.

Then he continues:

"But those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."

Romans chapter 8, verse 5.

Paul describes two different directions for life. The flesh turns inward and resists the rule of God, while the Spirit leads us toward a life increasingly shaped by Him.

That change can begin quietly. Someone who once felt little concern about sin begins experiencing conviction. A person who rarely thought about God develops a desire to know Him, and Scripture begins to feel like more than religious information.

Old patterns may still pull strongly, but something new is happening within. The Spirit is forming desires that increasingly turn us toward God.

Titus describes this work with language similar to the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus:

"He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy."

Titus chapter 3, verse 5.

Paul continues:

"By the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."

Titus chapter 3, verse 5.

Regeneration is a word Christians have long used to describe this new life from God. We are saved according to His mercy, washed, renewed, and made alive through the work of the Spirit.

None of this makes our response to God unimportant. The same Scriptures that describe God's grace call us to repent, believe, obey, follow, and remain in Christ. Grace does not turn the Christian life into passivity because the life God gives is meant to be lived with Him.

The Spirit also brings us into a new relationship with God.

Paul says:

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Romans chapter 8, verse 14.

Then he continues:

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons."

Romans chapter 8, verse 15.

The language of sonship carried the rights of belonging and inheritance in Paul's world. In Christ, men and women alike are welcomed fully into the family of God. Through the Spirit, our relationship with God is no longer shaped by slaves wondering whether they have performed well enough to remain accepted.

Paul continues:

"By whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

Romans chapter 8, verse 15.

Then:

"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

Romans chapter 8, verse 16.

The Spirit does more than give life. He bears witness that God's people belong to Him.

That becomes especially important when failure makes us question whether God still welcomes us. A life built upon performance continually asks whether we have prayed enough, served enough, understood enough, avoided enough mistakes, or done enough good to remain accepted.

The gospel gives us another foundation.

Our confidence rests in Jesus, and the Spirit forms us from a place of belonging. That belonging does not make sin unimportant because children still need correction, repentance, and growth. It means God's work of formation happens within a relationship He has graciously given.

Paul uses another image when he writes about believers being sealed with the Spirit:

"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit."

Ephesians chapter 1, verse 13.

Then he says:

"Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

Ephesians chapter 1, verse 14.

The Spirit is God's presence with His people now and a guarantee pointing toward what is still to come. We have not yet received everything salvation will bring. Our bodies still weaken, creation still groans, and we still wait for the day when Christ makes all things new.

God has given His Spirit as the guarantee that His saving work is moving toward its promised end.

This also helps us understand why the presence of the Spirit cannot be measured only by what we feel. There may be moments when prayer or worship carries deep emotion and the nearness of God seems unmistakable. Those moments can be received with gratitude.

There will also be days when prayer feels dry and Scripture is harder to receive. There may be seasons when God seems near and others when faithfulness means continuing without

a strong emotional experience. The Spirit has not left simply because our feelings have changed.

Those who belong to Christ have His Spirit.

That truth protects us from making someone else's story the measure of our own. One person may describe coming to Christ with strong emotion, while another may speak of a quieter awakening as the gospel gradually became clear. Someone may remember the exact moment of surrender, while another who grew up hearing Scripture may have difficulty identifying one particular day.

The stories can differ because people differ. The deeper question is whether we belong to Jesus and whether the life He gives is becoming evident within us.

Do we trust Him? Have we turned toward Him? Is there evidence of a new direction as the Spirit works within us?

Jesus uses the image of wind when He continues speaking with Nicodemus:

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."

John chapter 3, verse 8.

Then Jesus says:

"So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

John chapter 3, verse 8.

The Spirit's work cannot be reduced to a formula or controlled by human ability. We can proclaim Jesus clearly, explain the gospel, answer questions, pray, and invite people to respond. We cannot manufacture new life.

That should make us confident in the gospel while keeping us humble about our role. When we share Jesus with someone, we can speak clearly, love them well, answer questions when we know the answer, and admit when we do not.

We can tell what Christ has done and invite people to repent and believe without carrying the burden of thinking another person's salvation depends upon our ability to say everything perfectly. We bear witness faithfully while trusting God with the work only He can do.

The same truth should keep churches dependent upon Him. Teaching, leadership, planning, community, and faithful service can all help create healthy places where people hear Scripture and encounter the love of God's people. None of those things can create a new heart.

A church can become highly organized without becoming spiritually alive. Programs can gather people and good communication can help them understand what is being taught, but only God can give life. The church therefore works faithfully while continuing to pray for the Spirit to do what human ability cannot accomplish.

That dependence reaches into our families and relationships as well. Parents can teach their children Scripture, model re-

pentance, pray with them, answer questions, and show what following Jesus looks like in ordinary life. Friends can speak truth, offer compassion, and patiently walk with someone who is searching.

We should do those things faithfully while recognizing the limits of what has been placed in our hands. We cannot produce faith in another person's heart. We can love, teach, pray, and bear witness while trusting the Spirit with the work that belongs to Him.

The Spirit who gives new life does not leave us once that life begins. He remains present, teaching, convicting, assuring, strengthening, and forming us. The Christian life begins through the Spirit and continues in dependence upon Him.

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus gives us the foundation. Religious knowledge cannot replace new life, moral improvement cannot create it, and determination cannot produce it. We must be born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus came to Jesus carrying years of knowledge and religious experience. Jesus did not dismiss what he knew, but He showed him that knowing about the things of God could never take the place of receiving life from God.

That life becomes even clearer when our attention turns toward Jesus Himself.

The Spirit who gives us new birth is the same Spirit whose presence is woven throughout the earthly life and ministry of

Christ. If we want to understand where the life of the Spirit leads, our attention must turn again to Jesus.

Chapter Three

Jesus and the Spirit

Before Jesus preached a sermon, healed the sick, called His disciples, or stood before a crowd, the Holy Spirit was already present in His earthly story.

Luke begins with a young woman named Mary receiving news she could not have expected. An angel tells her that she will have a son and that He will be called the Son of the Most High. Mary understands enough to ask how this can happen because she is a virgin.

The angel answers:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

Luke chapter 1, verse 35.

Then he continues:

"Therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."

Luke chapter 1, verse 35.

The conception of Jesus in Mary's womb does not mark the beginning of His existence. The Son is eternal, forever one with the Father and the Spirit. What begins here is His earthly life as He takes on our humanity, and Scripture tells us that this happens through the work of the Holy Spirit.

From the beginning of His life among us, the Spirit is present.

This follows the expectation already growing throughout the Old Testament. Isaiah had spoken of a coming King upon whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest. He had also spoken of an anointed servant who would bring good news, liberty, healing, and hope.

Those promises were waiting for fulfillment.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, and the Gospels tell us little about most of those years. He lived within an ordinary family, learned, worked, worshiped, and grew in wisdom. Then the day came when He stepped into public view.

John the Baptist was preaching repentance and baptizing people in the Jordan River. Jesus came to him, and Matthew tells us that John hesitated because he knew the difference between them. John believed that he needed to be baptized by Jesus, yet Jesus told him to allow it in order to fulfill all righteousness.

Jesus entered the water.

"And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water."

Matthew chapter 3, verse 16.

Then something remarkable happened.

"And behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him."

Matthew chapter 3, verse 16.

A voice from heaven followed:

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Matthew chapter 3, verse 17.

The Father speaks from heaven, the Son stands in the water, and the Spirit descends upon Him. Scripture gives us a clear picture of Father, Son, and Spirit together without confusing them with one another.

Jesus is already the beloved Son before His public ministry begins. He has not yet preached the Sermon on the Mount, healed a crowd, raised the dead, or walked toward the cross. The Father's pleasure is spoken over the Son because of who He is, not because Jesus has earned His identity through ministry.

The descent of the Spirit also marks an important moment in the unfolding story. The prophets had spoken of the Spirit

resting upon God's chosen King, and now the Spirit rests upon Jesus as His public ministry begins.

Luke tells us:

"And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness."

Luke chapter 4, verse 1.

The Spirit does not lead Jesus from His baptism into an easier road. He leads Him into the wilderness, where Jesus fasts and is tempted by the devil. The temptations reach into identity, trust, power, and obedience.

The first begins:

"If you are the Son of God."

Luke chapter 4, verse 3.

Only a short time earlier, the Father had declared Jesus to be His beloved Son. Now the tempter takes aim at that identity and invites Jesus to use His power according to the tempter's suggestion.

"Command this stone to become bread."

Luke chapter 4, verse 3.

Jesus is hungry. Bread is not sinful, and meeting a physical need is not wrong. Yet Jesus refuses to allow a real need to pull Him away from faithful obedience to the Father.

He answers from Deuteronomy:

"Man shall not live by bread alone."

Luke chapter 4, verse 4.

The temptation continues. Jesus is shown the kingdoms of the world and offered authority if He will worship the devil. The offer reaches toward something connected to His mission because Jesus is the true King, but He will not receive a kingdom by abandoning the Father's way.

He answers:

"You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."

Luke chapter 4, verse 8.

Then the devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem and tells Him to throw Himself from the temple. Scripture itself is quoted in the temptation, as though God's promises should become a reason for Jesus to force the Father to prove His care.

Jesus answers:

"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Luke chapter 4, verse 12.

Jesus leaves the wilderness having remained faithful.

The contrast with earlier parts of Scripture is difficult to miss. Adam and Eve were tempted in a garden filled with provision

and chose to distrust what God had said. Israel passed through the waters and entered the wilderness, where the people repeatedly struggled to trust God's provision and presence.

Jesus passes through the waters of baptism and enters the wilderness, but He remains faithful. The Spirit who led Him there did not remove temptation, prevent hunger, or make obedience effortless. Jesus faced genuine temptation and remained obedient to the Father.

His experience in the wilderness gives us an important picture of the Spirit's leading. We cannot measure His direction simply by whether the road ahead feels pleasant or difficult. There are times when obedience brings us into places where trust is tested and where faithfulness is more costly than the easier path.

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Luke then tells us how He came out.

"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee."

Luke chapter 4, verse 14.

Jesus had been full of the Spirit at the Jordan, led by the Spirit in the wilderness, and now returned in the power of the Spirit. Luke keeps this connection before us as Jesus begins His public ministry.

He teaches in the synagogues, and news about Him spreads through the surrounding country. Then He returns to Nazareth, the town where He had been raised. On the Sabbath,

Jesus enters the synagogue, stands to read, and receives the scroll of Isaiah.

Jesus finds the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."

Luke chapter 4, verse 18.

He continues:

"He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind."

Luke chapter 4, verse 18.

Then:

"To set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Luke chapter 4, verses 18 and 19.

Jesus rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant, and sits down. Everyone is watching Him.

Then He says:

"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke chapter 4, verse 21.

The promise has reached Jesus.

Isaiah had spoken about the Spirit-anointed One who would bring good news. Now Jesus says those words are being fulfilled in Him, and the rest of the Gospels begins showing us what His mission looks like.

Jesus teaches with authority, moves toward the sick, touches people others avoid, forgives sins, restores people whose lives have been shaped by shame, confronts spiritual darkness, welcomes children, feeds hungry crowds, and announces that the Kingdom of God has come near.

The Spirit's power in the life of Jesus is never separated from the character of Jesus. His authority is joined to compassion, His courage to humility, and His truth to mercy. The supernatural work of God does not make Jesus less attentive to ordinary people.

It moves Him toward them.

Power can attract attention, and Scripture gives us no reason to deny the extraordinary works of God. Jesus healed, delivered, and performed signs that could not be explained through ordinary human ability. Yet He never turned power into performance or used it to build His identity before a crowd.

When people wanted signs for the wrong reasons, Jesus sometimes refused them. When crowds tried to determine the direction of His ministry, He withdrew. When people wanted what He could give without receiving Him, He directed them toward something deeper.

The Spirit's power in Jesus served the Father's purposes.

Matthew records a moment when Jesus healed a man who was oppressed by a demon and unable to see or speak. Some who watched accused Him of working by the power of evil.

Jesus answered:

"But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

Matthew chapter 12, verse 28.

Jesus connects the work of the Spirit with the arrival of God's Kingdom. Darkness is being confronted because the King has come, and people are being restored because God's reign is breaking into a broken world.

The miracles are therefore more than displays of power. They point toward who Jesus is and toward the Kingdom He brings. The Spirit's work serves the purposes of God and directs attention toward the Son.

His relationship with the Spirit also appears in quieter moments.

Luke tells us:

"In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.'"

Luke chapter 10, verse 21.

Jesus' joy, prayer, relationship with the Father, and fellowship with the Spirit belong together. The Gospels do not present the Spirit merely as power Jesus uses to accomplish ministry. They reveal the Son living in perfect fellowship with the Father and the Spirit.

Jesus often withdrew to pray, gave thanks, listened, and obeyed. His earthly life was lived in complete fellowship with God.

We need to speak carefully here because Jesus is not simply an example of a spiritual person who became more connected to God. He is the eternal Son. He shares the divine nature with the Father and the Spirit and possesses an identity none of us will ever share.

Yet He also truly became human. He became tired and hungry, slept, prayed, grieved, faced temptation, and walked through human life without ceasing to be God. The New Testament holds His full deity and true humanity together rather than asking us to choose between them.

The Gospels show Him praying to the Father and living in the presence and power of the Spirit. That does not make Him less divine. It reveals the perfect fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit.

There is no rivalry within God. The Son glorifies the Father, the Spirit glorifies the Son, and the Father delights in the Son. God's work moves in perfect unity.

This becomes especially clear when Jesus speaks about His works. People saw healing and deliverance, but Jesus continually directed attention beyond the acts themselves. His mission came from the Father, His words revealed the Father, and His works displayed what God was doing among them.

The Spirit empowered that mission without becoming a separate center of attention.

This gives us an important foundation for everything that follows in this book. The Spirit's work brings Jesus into clearer view. He does not compete with Christ for attention but reveals Him, honors Him, and forms His life within those who belong to Him.

We therefore learn about the Spirit by continuing to look closely at Jesus. In Him, power and character remain together. He receives the Father's affirmation without building His identity on the approval of crowds, follows the Spirit into the wilderness rather than choosing the easiest road, and refuses to use power for Himself when obedience requires restraint.

Jesus returns in the Spirit's power and brings good news to people who need it. He confronts darkness without becoming fascinated with darkness, heals without turning people into an audience for performance, prays, gives thanks, serves, and remains faithful to the Father's will.

This is what the Gospels show us before we ever reach Pentecost.

John the Baptist also understood that Jesus' relationship with the Spirit would reach beyond His own earthly ministry. John called people to repentance and baptized them in water, but he knew that the One coming after him would do something greater.

John said:

"I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Mark chapter 1, verse 8.

Jesus is not only the One upon whom the Spirit rests. He is also the One who gives the Spirit.

We will come to that promise in its proper place because Scripture gives it significant attention. For now, John's words show us that the Spirit's work in the life and ministry of Jesus points toward what Jesus will one day give His followers.

The Spirit who rests upon the Son will be poured out through the Son.

This is why Jesus' life gives such important shape to our understanding of the Spirit. We are not building our expectations around isolated experiences or our own ideas about spiritual power. We begin with the One the Spirit glorifies.

In Jesus we see power without manipulation, authority without arrogance, supernatural ministry joined to compassion, and obedience that remains faithful when the road becomes costly.

Holiness, truth, courage, prayer, mercy, power, surrender, and mission belong together in Him.

The life of Jesus is large enough to hold all of these things together.

His fellowship with the Father and the Spirit also confronts our instinct toward self-sufficiency. Jesus lived without sin and possessed wisdom none of us can claim, yet the Gospels still show Him praying, being led by the Spirit, and ministering in the Spirit's power.

Spiritual maturity does not mean needing God less. As we grow, we should become more aware of our dependence upon Him. Knowledge cannot replace His presence, experience cannot replace His leading, and ability cannot replace surrender.

The more clearly we understand who God is and who we are, the less attractive self-sufficiency becomes.

Jesus shows us a life completely aligned with the Father and the Spirit, but that alignment did not make His path easy. It eventually led toward the cross.

The Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness did not lead Him away from suffering when obedience required it. Jesus continued walking toward Jerusalem knowing what waited for Him there.

Hebrews later speaks about His sacrifice in language that includes the Spirit:

"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God."

Hebrews chapter 9, verse 14.

The verse is brief, and we do not need to make it answer every question about the Spirit's role in the cross. What it does give us is another moment where Scripture places the saving work of Jesus within the life and work of God.

The Son offers Himself without blemish to God through the eternal Spirit. Even as Jesus moves toward the cross, Scripture does not separate Him from the Father and the Spirit.

The Spirit who was present as the Son entered our world remains present as Jesus moves toward His sacrifice and resurrection.

After the resurrection, the story turns toward the disciples.

They had watched Jesus live before them in fellowship with the Father and in the presence and power of the Spirit. Soon He would tell them that they could not continue His mission through their own strength. He would speak again about the promise of the Father and tell them to wait until they received power from on high.

This keeps us from imagining Christianity as Jesus giving His followers an example and then expecting them to imitate Him through determination. The One who calls us to follow Him also gives what we could never produce on our own.

Before we reach that promise, we should remain with what Jesus has already shown us. The Spirit is present from the beginning of His earthly life, at His baptism, in the wilderness, throughout His ministry, and as His mission moves toward the cross.

The Son lives in perfect fellowship with the Father and the Spirit. His life is marked by obedience, holiness, compassion, truth, courage, power, prayer, and complete surrender to the purposes of God.

We are not Jesus. We do not share His divine identity or His unique mission as the eternal Son who came to save the world. Yet He is the One we are called to follow.

And the disciples who followed Him were about to discover that He would not leave them to do that alone.

Jesus had lived before them in the presence and power of the Spirit.

Now the promise of the Spirit was becoming personal.

Chapter Four

The Promise of the Spirit

The disciples could feel that something was changing.

They had followed Jesus for years, walked the roads with Him, listened as He taught, and watched Him heal the sick. When questions came, Jesus was there. When they were afraid, confused, proud, or uncertain, they could turn toward Him.

Now He was telling them that He was leaving.

The conversation takes place as Jesus moves toward the cross. Judas will soon betray Him, Peter will deny Him, and the disciples will scatter. They do not yet understand how quickly everything familiar is about to change, but Jesus knows what lies ahead.

He begins by speaking to their troubled hearts.

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."

John chapter 14, verse 1.

Jesus begins with trust because the disciples cannot yet see what He sees. They do not understand the cross, resurrection, ascension, or what will happen afterward. They are being asked to trust the One who knows the whole story while they can see only a small part of it.

We often find ourselves in a similar place. We want understanding before obedience and answers before surrender. Sometimes Jesus gives us enough light for the next step while asking us to trust Him with what remains unseen.

The disciples knew Jesus was leaving, but they did not yet understand that His departure would also bring a remarkable promise.

Jesus tells them:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."

John chapter 14, verse 16.

Then He identifies the Helper:

"Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him."

John chapter 14, verse 17.

Jesus continues:

"You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

John chapter 14, verse 17.

Jesus does not speak about the Holy Spirit as an idea, an influence, or a memory that will help the disciples hold onto what He taught. He speaks about Someone who will be with them. The Father will give the Spirit, and the Spirit will remain with the followers of Jesus.

Jesus calls Him the Helper. The word can carry the sense of one who comes alongside to help, strengthen, advocate, and counsel. No single English word captures everything within the term, but one part of Jesus' promise is unmistakable.

His disciples will not be abandoned.

That is important because conversations about the Holy Spirit can quickly move toward power, gifts, guidance, miracles, or spiritual experiences. Scripture will take us into those areas, but Jesus begins somewhere even more foundational.

He begins with presence.

The Helper will be with them forever.

Jesus understands what His disciples are afraid of losing. Their lives have been shaped by His physical presence. They have heard His voice, sat beside Him at tables, walked behind Him on the road, watched how He treated people, and brought their questions directly to Him.

Now Jesus tells them that His departure will not mean God has abandoned them.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

John chapter 14, verse 18.

Those words appear in the middle of Jesus' teaching about the Spirit. His resurrection is coming, and the Spirit will be given to His people. The disciples will not become spiritual orphans trying to preserve the memory of a teacher who is gone.

They will belong to the living Christ.

Jesus continues:

"In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

John chapter 14, verse 20.

The language is deeply relational. Jesus speaks of His relationship with the Father and of the life His followers will have in Him. Through the Spirit, believers will share in fellowship with the risen Christ.

We should be careful not to confuse the Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus clearly distinguishes the Spirit from Himself when He speaks of another Helper whom the Father will send. At the same time, there is no division in the work of God.

The Father sends the Spirit at the request of the Son. The Son prepares His disciples for what is coming, and the Spirit will

continue God's work among them. Father, Son, and Spirit remain distinct while acting in perfect unity.

The Spirit does not lead believers away from Jesus into a separate kind of spiritual life. He brings us more deeply into the life Christ gives.

Jesus then explains another part of the Spirit's work.

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things."

John chapter 14, verse 26.

He continues:

"And bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

John chapter 14, verse 26.

The disciples had heard years of teaching from Jesus, but they did not understand everything when they first heard it. The Gospels show this repeatedly. Jesus spoke about His death, and they struggled to understand. He taught about serving, and they argued about greatness.

After the resurrection, many of Jesus' words would become clear in ways they had not been before. The Spirit would teach them and bring Jesus' words to remembrance as they became witnesses to what He had done.

This promise has particular importance for the apostles. They had been with Jesus and would become His commissioned wit-

nesses after the resurrection. They would carry His teaching into places where people had never heard His voice or watched Him walk the roads of Galilee.

They were not being asked to depend upon human memory alone. The Spirit would help them remember and understand what Jesus had given them.

That helps us understand why the New Testament treats the witness of the apostles with such seriousness. The message about Jesus was not created by people trying to preserve an inspiring teacher after His death. The risen Christ commissioned His witnesses, and the Spirit was at work as they proclaimed what they had seen and heard.

Our situation is not identical to theirs. We did not sit with Jesus during the final meal or hear the Sermon on the Mount with our own ears. We receive their witness through the Scriptures God has given us.

The Spirit remains our teacher, but He does not teach us by leading us away from the truth already revealed. The Spirit who inspired Scripture helps God's people understand, receive, remember, and obey what He has said.

That requires humility.

Not every thought that enters our mind while reading the Bible is a message from God. A strong feeling does not give us permission to make a passage mean whatever we want it to mean. The

Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and His work remains consistent with the truth God has revealed.

The Spirit and Scripture do not compete with one another. We do not become more spiritual by moving beyond Scripture, and we do not honor Scripture by reading it as though the God who gave it is no longer present.

We open the Word, pay attention to what it says, and ask the Spirit to help us understand and obey.

Sometimes what we need most is remembrance. A temptation comes, and words from Scripture return to mind. Fear rises, and something Jesus said becomes clear again.

We may be preparing to react in anger, protect our pride, or take an easier path when the truth of God interrupts us. Those moments may seem quiet, but they can redirect the course of a decision.

The Spirit teaches us so that truth reaches beyond information. We can know verses about forgiveness and still carry bitterness. We can understand what Scripture says about generosity while remaining controlled by fear, or explain Jesus' teaching about loving our enemies while making exceptions for people we find difficult to love.

Knowing what God has said and surrendering to what He has said are not always the same thing. The Spirit works within that space, bringing truth close enough to obey.

Jesus repeatedly calls Him the Spirit of truth. That gives us a firm foundation for discernment.

The Holy Spirit will not lead us to justify sin, abandon the character of Christ, manipulate other people, or ignore Scripture while claiming God told us to do so. Spiritual language does not turn disobedience into faithfulness.

The Spirit leads in truth.

Jesus continues preparing the disciples for what they will face after He leaves. The gospel will not always be welcomed, and the disciples themselves will experience rejection because they belong to Him.

In that setting Jesus says:

"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."

John chapter 15, verse 26.

Then Jesus says:

"And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning."

John chapter 15, verse 27.

The Spirit bears witness about Jesus, and the disciples bear witness about Jesus. Jesus places those realities beside one another.

The disciples are not being sent to create their own message. They will testify to what they have seen and heard, and the Spirit will be at work as they bear witness to Christ.

There are things human communication can do and things it cannot do. We can explain the gospel clearly, answer questions, open Scripture, tell what Jesus has done, and speak with kindness and courage. Those responsibilities belong to us.

We cannot open another person's heart.

The Spirit bears witness about Jesus.

That truth frees us from passivity without placing upon us a burden that belongs to God. Jesus tells His disciples that they will speak, so dependence upon the Spirit is never an excuse for silence. At the same time, they do not have to manipulate people into believing.

We speak truthfully, love faithfully, pray continually, and trust the Spirit with the work only He can do.

Jesus explains more about that work:

"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

John chapter 16, verse 8.

We considered conviction when we looked at new birth, but here Jesus places it within the Spirit's larger ministry. The Spirit confronts the world with truth and exposes what human beings often learn to excuse or hide.

Conviction can be uncomfortable because it brings us face to face with what is wrong. We can compare ourselves with others and decide we are doing well enough. We can rename pride, selfishness, bitterness, lust, dishonesty, or disobedience until they no longer sound as serious as they are.

The Spirit brings truth into the light, but His conviction is not hopeless condemnation. He exposes sin while directing people toward the Savior. The truth He reveals calls us toward repentance rather than deeper hiding.

Jesus then tells His disciples something they are not yet ready to receive completely:

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

John chapter 16, verse 12.

Jesus understands their limits. He does not overwhelm them simply because more truth remains to be understood. There are things that will become clearer after the cross and resurrection.

Then He says:

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

John chapter 16, verse 13.

Jesus continues:

"For he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak."

John chapter 16, verse 13.

Then:

"And he will declare to you the things that are to come."

John chapter 16, verse 13.

Again, we should hear these words first within the setting in which Jesus gives them. He is speaking to the apostles who will soon become witnesses to His death and resurrection and help establish the church. The Spirit will guide them as the meaning of what Jesus has done becomes clearer and as they carry His message into the world.

These words also reveal the complete unity of the Spirit's ministry with the Father and the Son. He is the Spirit of truth. He does not create a competing message, establish a separate center of attention, or move God's people away from Christ.

Jesus makes that even clearer in the next sentence:

"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

John chapter 16, verse 14.

The Spirit glorifies Jesus.

That gives us a center for everything else we will study. The Spirit gives gifts to strengthen the body that belongs to Christ. He gives power so that believers can bear witness to Christ, and He convicts, teaches, leads, strengthens, and transforms God's people so that their lives increasingly reflect Christ.

The Spirit does not compete with Jesus for our attention. His work reveals the Son and brings God's people more deeply into the truth and life found in Him.

That gives us helpful questions when we are trying to discern something claimed to be spiritual. Does it agree with Scripture? Does it reflect the character of Jesus? Does it produce humility, love, obedience, and a desire to serve others?

Does it direct glory toward Christ, or does the person and the experience become the center?

Those questions will not settle every issue we encounter. Scripture itself must guide us through particular questions as they arise. Yet they keep our attention facing the right direction.

The Giver is greater than the gifts, and the Spirit glorifies the Son.

Jesus then says something His disciples must have found difficult to imagine:

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away."

John chapter 16, verse 7.

How could losing the physical presence of Jesus possibly be to their advantage?

Jesus explains:

"For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you."

John chapter 16, verse 7.

Then:

"But if I go, I will send him to you."

John chapter 16, verse 7.

The disciples can see only what they believe they are losing. Jesus sees the cross, resurrection, ascension, and the giving of the Spirit.

His death will deal with sin, He will rise from the grave, return to the Father, and send the promised Spirit to His people. What appears to the disciples as the end of Jesus' presence among them will become part of God's plan to dwell with His people in a new covenant way.

Jesus will no longer walk physically beside one small group of disciples along the roads of Galilee and Judea. The gospel will move outward, and the Spirit will dwell within those who belong to Christ.

The first disciples could not yet imagine the places where followers of Jesus would eventually live, worship, suffer, serve,

and carry the gospel. Yet wherever Christ gathered a people to Himself, they would not be abandoned.

The Helper would remain with them.

God's presence was no longer tied to one particular place. The God who had made His presence known among His people in the tabernacle and temple would now dwell among and within His people by the Spirit.

Paul would later tell believers that they are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in them.

We do not have to travel to Jerusalem, stand beside the Sea of Galilee, or enter a particular building in order for God to be near. Places can carry deep meaning, and gathering with other believers remains an essential part of following Jesus. Yet the Spirit is not confined to a sacred location.

He dwells with God's people.

His presence therefore reaches ordinary life. The Spirit is with us when we wake in the morning and when we lie down at night. He is with us at work, at school, around the table, in the hospital, on the road, and in quiet places where no one else knows what we are carrying.

He is present when prayer feels alive and when words come slowly. There will be seasons when our emotions are strong and the nearness of God feels unmistakable, as well as seasons when faithfulness continues without that same sense of nearness.

Those quieter seasons do not mean the Spirit has abandoned us. Jesus promised that the Helper would remain with His people, so our confidence rests in God's promise rather than the strength of what we feel.

If we measure the Spirit's presence only by emotion, we may assume He is near when we feel something powerful and distant when we do not. Scripture gives us a firmer place to stand.

Those who belong to Christ have His Spirit.

That truth should also make the Christian life deeply relational. We can learn correct theology about the Spirit and still move through our days with little awareness of our dependence upon Him. We can know what Scripture says while relying almost entirely upon our own judgment, strength, plans, and ability.

Jesus did not merely promise His disciples better information. He promised the Helper.

Learning dependence often begins in ordinary ways. We can ask the Spirit to help us receive Scripture before we read. We can ask Him to expose what needs repentance, give wisdom before a difficult conversation, remind us of Jesus when fear becomes loud, and help us recognize opportunities to love the person in front of us.

Dependence does not need to be dramatic. It can look like a quiet prayer before answering someone who has hurt us, a pause before reacting in anger, a willingness to surrender a plan, or the humility to admit that we may be wrong.

The Spirit's presence reaches those moments too.

The disciples were about to learn dependence through their own weakness. Peter would confidently promise that he would remain with Jesus and then deny knowing Him. The others would scatter, and their confidence in themselves would be shaken.

Their failure would not be the end of their story. The risen Jesus would restore them, and the promised Spirit would come.

The same disciples who scattered in fear would eventually stand publicly and bear witness to Jesus. Their courage would not come from finally discovering enough natural strength within themselves. Jesus would give what He had promised.

Before He spoke to them about power, He had given them the promise of presence. The Helper would come. The Spirit of truth would teach them, remind them of Jesus, bear witness about Him, convict the world, and guide the apostles in the truth they would carry to others.

Above all, He would glorify Jesus.

That gives us the foundation we need before we move into what Scripture says about being filled with the Spirit. We are not seeking power detached from the presence and purposes of God, nor are we chasing spiritual experiences so that we can feel more important or advanced than someone else.

We are receiving the Spirit Jesus promised.

He is the Spirit of truth who remains with God's people and continually directs us toward Christ. He is the Helper who enables ordinary followers of Jesus to live within a calling far larger than their own ability.

Jesus knew what His disciples needed before they did. They thought they needed Him to remain exactly as He had been, while Jesus knew they needed the cross, the resurrection, and the Spirit.

Soon He would tell them to wait.

They had a message to carry and a mission far beyond their strength. The Helper had been promised, and Jesus was preparing them to receive power from on high.

Chapter Five

Filled With the Spirit

After His resurrection, Jesus spent forty days appearing to His disciples and speaking about the Kingdom of God. They had seen Him crucified and then stood in His presence alive again. Everything He had told them about His death and resurrection was becoming clearer, and the mission He had given them was now before them.

Jesus had told them to make disciples of all nations. The message they carried would move far beyond Jerusalem, cross boundaries they had rarely crossed, and reach people whose languages, cultures, and histories were different from their own. Yet Jesus did not tell them to begin immediately.

Luke records His instruction:

"And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father."

Acts chapter 1, verse 4.

Jesus then reminded them of something John the Baptist had said years earlier:

"For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Acts chapter 1, verse 5.

The disciples had already received more preparation than most of us could imagine. They had spent years beside Jesus, heard His teaching directly, watched His miracles, witnessed His death, and seen Him after the resurrection. They could tell people what Jesus had done because they had been there.

Even with all of that, Jesus told them to wait. Their knowledge was real, their calling was clear, and their experience with Jesus was unmatched, but none of those things meant they could carry His mission through their own strength. They needed what the Father had promised.

A few verses later, Jesus explains what the Spirit's coming will mean for their mission:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses."

Acts chapter 1, verse 8.

Jesus continues by naming Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth. The book of Acts will follow that movement as the gospel travels outward from Jerusalem into places the disciples had not expected to go.

The power Jesus promises has a purpose. His followers will bear witness to Him. The Spirit's power is never detached from the mission of Jesus or given so that His people can become impressive in the eyes of others.

The disciples returned to Jerusalem and waited together. Acts tells us that they devoted themselves to prayer. They did not know everything about what the promise would look like when it came, but they knew what Jesus had told them to do.

Then Pentecost came.

The disciples were together when a sound like a mighty rushing wind filled the house. What appeared to be divided tongues as of fire rested upon them.

Luke tells us:

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Acts chapter 2, verse 4.

Jerusalem was filled with people who had come from many nations for the feast. As the disciples spoke, people heard the mighty works of God being declared in languages they understood. The crowd was amazed and confused, and some tried to explain away what was happening.

Peter stood to speak.

The man who had recently denied knowing Jesus now addressed the crowd publicly, and he began with the prophet Joel:

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

Acts chapter 2, verse 17.

The promise we followed through the Old Testament had reached this moment. Moses had once longed for the Lord to put His Spirit upon all His people. Joel had spoken of sons and daughters, young and old, servants and people of greater status receiving from God.

Jesus had told His disciples that the promise of the Father was coming.

Now the Spirit had been poured out.

Pentecost is extraordinary, and the account should be allowed to speak with its full weight. Scripture describes the sound of a mighty rushing wind, what appeared as tongues of fire, believers speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, people from many nations hearing the mighty works of God, and Peter standing to proclaim Jesus.

All of it belongs to the story Luke gives us. The Spirit has come as Jesus promised, and the effects are immediate. God is being praised, Jesus is being proclaimed, people are hearing the gospel, and the mission Jesus gave His disciples is beginning to move outward.

Peter does not leave the crowd wondering who stands at the center of what they are witnessing. He speaks about Jesus, His

crucifixion, His resurrection, and His exaltation at the right hand of God.

Then Peter explains:

"Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."

Acts chapter 2, verse 33.

The Father gives the promise. The exalted Son pours out the Spirit, and the Spirit empowers people to bear witness to Jesus. Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct, yet the work of God moves in complete unity.

The crowd is cut to the heart and asks what they should do.

Peter answers:

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts chapter 2, verse 38.

Then he continues:

"For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Acts chapter 2, verse 39.

The promise will not remain within the walls of the room where the disciples first gathered. The gospel is already moving outward, and Acts will continue showing the Spirit at work as people respond to Jesus.

The same Peter who is filled with the Spirit at Pentecost is later described as filled with the Spirit when he stands before religious leaders.

Luke writes:

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them."

Acts chapter 4, verse 8.

Peter had not ceased to belong to Christ between Acts 2 and Acts 4. Luke is describing the Spirit's empowering presence as Peter faces a moment requiring courage and faithful witness.

Soon afterward, Peter and the other believers gather to pray. They have been threatened because they are proclaiming Jesus, but their prayer is not mainly for escape. They ask God to give His servants boldness to continue speaking His word.

God answers:

"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken."

Acts chapter 4, verse 31.

Luke continues:

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

Acts chapter 4, verse 31.

Many of the believers in that gathering had already experienced the Spirit's work. Yet Luke again describes them as being filled with the Holy Spirit. Their dependence upon God did not end with an earlier experience.

As we have already seen, those who belong to Christ have His Spirit. Romans makes that clear. Acts also repeatedly describes the Spirit filling and empowering people as they continue following Jesus.

We do not need one truth to erase the other. Those who belong to Christ have the Spirit, and the New Testament still gives us a life of continuing dependence upon His presence and power.

Acts shows that dependence as the gospel moves into new places and among new people. In Samaria, Peter and John pray for people who have received the word of God. In the home of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit falls upon Gentile hearers while Peter is still speaking.

Later, Paul encounters disciples in Ephesus whose understanding has not yet moved beyond John's baptism. Paul directs them toward Jesus, they are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

Each account deserves to be heard within its own setting. The details are not identical, and Luke does not stop after each event

to answer every later question Christians would bring to these passages.

We can receive what Scripture gives us without forcing the accounts into a pattern more precise than Luke provides. Together, they show the gospel crossing boundaries and the Spirit unmistakably present as the mission of Jesus reaches new people and places.

That dependence becomes visible through obedience.

People who were afraid speak boldly. Believers facing opposition receive strength to continue. The church prays and listens as people are sent into mission, and the gospel crosses boundaries that habit, culture, and prejudice might otherwise have kept closed.

The Spirit moves people into the mission of Jesus.

When we think about being filled with the Spirit, we may naturally think first about what someone experiences. Acts certainly records remarkable experiences, but it also keeps directing our attention toward the life and obedience that follow.

Peter speaks where fear once silenced him. Believers continue proclaiming Jesus after being threatened. Stephen remains faithful when following Jesus costs him his life, and the church in Antioch worships, listens, and releases people into the work God has given them.

The Spirit's power produces faithful response.

Sometimes that obedience is public. Much of our own obedience, however, may happen where few people notice. We may need courage to speak about Jesus when silence would be easier, but we may also need strength to forgive someone, confess a hidden sin, serve someone who cannot repay us, or remain faithful during a difficult season.

The Spirit gives what is needed for the life Jesus places before us.

His power should never be separated from His work within our character. The Spirit who gives boldness also produces love. The Spirit who gives gifts also forms patience and self-control, and the Spirit who sends people into mission teaches believers how to live faithfully with one another.

Paul's instruction to the church in Ephesus gives us another picture of continuing dependence:

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 18.

Paul is writing to people who already belong to Jesus. His instruction is not directed toward people outside Christ who need to become Christians. He is calling believers to live in continuing dependence upon the Spirit.

Being filled with the Spirit is not something we graduate from as we mature. Growth should make us increasingly aware of how much we need God. Experience can help us recognize His faith-

fulness, and knowledge can help us understand His Word more clearly, but neither gives us permission to become self-sufficient.

Paul's words also lead directly into ordinary life within the church. He speaks about psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing to the Lord, giving thanks to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, and relationships increasingly shaped by the life God is forming among His people.

The setting is larger than a single powerful moment.

Being filled with the Spirit reaches worship, gratitude, community, marriage, family, work, and the ways believers treat one another. The Spirit's presence cannot be separated from the life He is forming.

We need His power when we speak about Jesus, and we need His help when we return home to people who know us well. We need courage in mission and patience in relationships, boldness to speak and humility to listen.

The Spirit works in all of it.

Living in that dependence requires surrender because the Holy Spirit is not power placed under our control. We do not direct Him toward whatever plans we have already made and ask Him simply to make them successful.

We belong to God. Our plans, abilities, relationships, desires, fears, resources, and future are brought before Him. We ask for wisdom because we do not know everything ahead, and we

ask for strength because our natural ability is not enough for everything Jesus calls us to do.

That surrender continues into ordinary obedience. The Spirit may convict us to forgive when we would rather hold onto an offense, give us an opportunity to speak when fear tells us to remain quiet, or restrain us when pride wants the final word.

He may lead us to give, serve, wait, apologize, or change direction. A life filled with the Spirit cannot be reduced to an experience separated from the obedience that follows.

At the same time, surrender is not a way of forcing God to give us a particular experience. The Spirit remains God, and we receive from Him rather than placing Him under a formula.

Jesus taught His disciples to trust the goodness of the Father:

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke chapter 11, verse 13.

Jesus spoke those words before Pentecost, within a particular moment in the unfolding story of Scripture. Yet His words reveal the generosity of the Father. God is not reluctant toward His children.

We can ask Him for what we need. We can bring our weakness honestly before Him, surrender what we are trying to control, and remain open to His work in us and through us.

We may come to these passages with different experiences and questions. Rather than using someone else's story as the measure of God's work in our own life, we can bring our questions honestly before Him and remain close to what Scripture gives us.

We look to Jesus, trust the goodness of the Father, and remain open to the Spirit's work. Our desire is to receive what God gives and respond faithfully to Him.

Acts itself gives us many different stories, but the Spirit remains at work throughout them. He strengthens witness, gives direction, gathers people into the body of Christ, and moves the gospel into places the first disciples would never have reached through their own plans.

The believers waiting in Jerusalem could not have known everything ahead. They did not know that Stephen would die for his witness to Jesus or that persecution would scatter believers beyond Jerusalem. Peter did not yet know that he would enter the home of Cornelius and watch God welcome Gentiles in a way that challenged what he had expected.

They could not have imagined Paul's missionary journeys, churches forming throughout the Roman world, or generations of believers who would follow Jesus long after they were gone.

They knew what Jesus had told them to do.

Wait for the promise of the Father.

So they waited, the Spirit came, and from that point forward the story of Acts cannot be told without His presence.

He fills people and strengthens them to speak. He directs the church, sends people into mission, gives what is needed for service, and opens paths for the gospel. He works through ordinary followers of Jesus whose own strength could never carry the mission before them.

Jesus remains at the center of it all. The coming of the Spirit does not move the church beyond Jesus. The Spirit enables the church to proclaim Him, obey Him, become more like Him, and carry His mission into the world.

That gives direction to our own desire to be filled with the Spirit. We do not seek Him because we want to become impressive Christians or prove something about ourselves. We seek God because we belong to Jesus and recognize that following Him requires more than our own strength.

We need help to obey, courage to witness, strength to endure, wisdom to serve, and love that reaches beyond our natural preferences. We need the Spirit because the Christian life never becomes a work we can accomplish through human ability alone.

The believers in Acts are filled and later filled again. Paul tells Christians to be filled with the Spirit. The pattern Scripture gives us is not one of receiving God's Spirit and then becoming independent of Him.

It is a life of continuing dependence.

Tomorrow we will need Him just as surely as we need Him today. That is not because He disappears and must be recovered. Those who belong to Christ have His Spirit.

We need Him because we still cannot give ourselves new hearts, transform ourselves into the image of Christ, produce spiritual fruit through determination alone, change another person's heart, or faithfully carry the good news while relying only upon personality, preparation, experience, or courage.

The life Jesus calls us into requires the presence and power of God.

So we continue asking, surrendering, and obeying. We receive with gratitude what the Spirit gives and trust His wisdom concerning the form His work takes in our lives.

The same Spirit who fills also gives according to His wisdom. He does not give every believer the same assignment, and Scripture will soon show us that He does not give every believer the same gift.

What He gives is grace, and His gifts are given for the good of others and for the work of Christ among His people.

The Spirit gives according to His will.

And the Giver is greater than every gift.

Chapter Six

The Giver and His Gifts

The Spirit who fills God's people also works through them for the good of others.

As the early church grew, believers discovered that following Jesus was never meant to become an individual life lived beside other individual lives. They belonged to one another. The Spirit gave different people different ways to serve, strengthen, encourage, teach, lead, help, and build up the body of Christ.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth:

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.”

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 4.

He continues:

“And there are varieties of service, but the same Lord.”

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 5.

Then:

"And there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 6.

Paul begins with God before describing what God gives. There are different gifts, different kinds of service, and different ways those gifts are expressed, but the source is the same. Father, Son, and Spirit are present in Paul's description of a church filled with variety while belonging to one God.

That gives us a healthy place to begin.

Spiritual gifts can draw attention because they involve the ways God works through people. Some may be highly visible in a gathering, while others are expressed quietly through service, generosity, encouragement, leadership, mercy, discernment, teaching, or other ways the Spirit strengthens His people.

Whatever form a gift takes, it begins with grace.

Paul writes:

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 7.

The Spirit gives, and what He gives is meant to benefit others. A spiritual gift is not a possession handed to us mainly for our own fulfillment or importance. It is grace entrusted to us so that someone else can be served.

That places comparison where it belongs.

We may see someone teach with unusual clarity, pray with great faith, lead wisely, serve faithfully, or speak into a situation in a way that brings needed encouragement. Another person may carry compassion that repeatedly moves them toward people others overlook. It can be easy to begin comparing what God seems to be doing through someone else with what He is doing through us.

Comparison can move in either direction. Pride tells us that what we have been given makes us more important, while insecurity tells us that another person's gift makes our contribution unnecessary. Neither response remembers that everything began as a gift.

Paul asks the Corinthians:

"What do you have that you did not receive?"

First Corinthians chapter 4, verse 7.

If we received it, we have little reason to boast about it.

Paul names several manifestations of the Spirit in First Corinthians 12. He speaks of wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits,

various kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Other New Testament passages speak about service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, mercy, and people given to equip the church for ministry.

First Peter gives a broad instruction that reaches across these different expressions of grace:

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

First Peter chapter 4, verse 10.

Scripture does not gather every gift into one single list and give us a complete inventory to master. Instead, several passages reveal the varied grace of God moving through His people in different ways. Some expressions may feel familiar to us, while others may require more careful attention as we encounter them in Scripture.

The larger purpose remains clear.

God gives so that we can serve.

Paul makes the freedom of the Giver especially clear after describing the manifestations of the Spirit in Corinth:

"All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 11.

The Spirit gives according to His will.

That frees us from trying to manufacture what God has not given or copy what He has done through someone else. We do not have to prove our spirituality by reproducing another person's experience, ministry, or expression of a gift. The Spirit knows His church, knows what is needed, and gives according to His wisdom.

Scripture does not therefore call us to become indifferent toward spiritual gifts. Paul will later tell the Corinthians to earnestly desire them. We can desire whatever will strengthen others, ask God to use us, and remain available to ways of serving that may lie beyond what has been familiar to us.

Our desire still remains surrendered to the Giver. We ask, He gives according to His wisdom, and we receive what He entrusts to us with gratitude.

The Spirit may work through abilities, experiences, and skills that have developed throughout our lives. Bezalel showed us long ago that craftsmanship and Spirit-given wisdom can meet within faithful service. God can use the ways someone has been shaped, trained, and prepared.

Yet the New Testament also keeps our attention on grace. What God does through His people cannot always be explained by personality, education, talent, or natural strength. The Spirit remains free to provide what is needed for the work He places before His people.

A local church gives us countless examples.

Someone opens Scripture and helps people understand what once seemed difficult. Another recognizes a person who is hurting and quietly moves toward them. Someone leads when a group needs direction, while another gives generously without needing recognition.

A believer may bring wisdom into a complicated situation. Someone may pray with unusual faith when circumstances seem impossible. God may bring healing, discernment, encouragement, or another expression of His grace according to His wisdom.

The people are different because the body needs them to be different.

Paul reaches for that image when he writes:

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 12.

A body cannot function if every part tries to become the same part. An eye does not need to become a hand, and a foot does not lose its place because it cannot perform the function of another member.

Paul later says:

"But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 18.

God arranges the body.

Unity therefore does not require sameness. The church becomes healthier as different people offer what God has entrusted to them under the lordship of Jesus. We need one another precisely because no single person has been given everything the body needs.

Paul even speaks about parts of the body that may appear weaker and says they are indispensable. God's measure of usefulness is not visibility, applause, titles, platforms, or the number of people who recognize what someone has done.

Some of the most necessary service in the church happens quietly.

A believer may pray faithfully for people who never know their name was mentioned. Someone walks beside a grieving family, teaches children, prepares a meal, welcomes a stranger, visits someone who is sick, notices a practical need, gives when help is required, or speaks a timely word of encouragement.

The Spirit is at work among ordinary people serving faithfully.

Scripture also places highly visible manifestations of the Spirit beside quieter forms of service without asking us to rank them by how ordinary or extraordinary they appear. They come from the same Spirit and are given for the common good.

We can therefore receive what Scripture gives us without fear or exaggeration. We do not need to dismiss what is unfamiliar, and we do not need to make more of an experience than Scripture allows us to make of it. We remain rooted in the Word, humble before God, and willing to receive what the Spirit gives.

The church in Corinth especially needed that humility.

Paul tells them early in his letter that they were not lacking in any gift. Yet the rest of First Corinthians reveals division, pride, sexual sin, lawsuits, arguments about status, selfishness around the Lord's Supper, and disorder when believers gathered.

Giftedness had not made them mature.

God can work through people who still need significant formation. That should make us grateful for grace while keeping us from assuming that the presence of a gift settles every question about someone's character or spiritual maturity.

The Corinthians needed more than gifts. They needed to learn how to love.

That is why Paul's teaching about love sits directly between his discussion of the body in First Corinthians 12 and his instructions about spiritual gifts when the church gathers in First Corinthians 14. First Corinthians 13 is not a break from the subject. Love determines how everything Paul has been describing should be carried.

Paul writes:

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant."

First Corinthians chapter 13, verse 4.

He continues by describing love as unwilling to insist on its own way, slow to become irritable, and unwilling to rejoice in wrongdoing. Those qualities reach directly into the way believers serve one another.

A gifted person can still crave attention. Someone with knowledge can use it to make another person feel small, while a leader can begin protecting a position instead of serving people. A person who believes God has given them something to say can become defensive when others ask questions or seek discernment.

Love leads in another direction.

Love wants another person strengthened more than it wants recognition. It can receive correction, wait patiently, listen carefully, and remain more interested in faithful service than in appearing spiritually impressive.

The Spirit who gives gifts is also forming the character of Christ within His people. Those parts of His work belong together.

None of us has to reach perfect maturity before God can use us. If that were the standard, no one would ever serve. God works through people who are still growing, learning, repenting, and being formed.

Yet giftedness never becomes an excuse to stop growing. The Giver cares about the people we are becoming as well as the ways He chooses to work through us.

Paul eventually tells the Corinthians:

"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 1.

Paul does not ask them to choose between love and spiritual gifts. Their desire for what God gives is meant to be governed by love for the people those gifts are intended to serve.

That concern continues throughout First Corinthians 14.

Paul writes:

"Let all things be done for building up."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 26.

When believers gather, the good of the body should shape the way gifts are used. Something being spiritual does not remove the need for wisdom, self-control, discernment, or concern for the people around us.

Paul gives practical instructions because a healthy gathering is not simply a place where individuals express whatever they desire whenever they desire. Believers learn to steward what God gives in ways that allow others to receive, understand, participate, and be strengthened.

Near the end of the chapter Paul writes:

"But all things should be done decently and in order."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 40.

Order is not the absence of the Spirit's gifts. Paul has spent the chapter teaching believers how those gifts can function faithfully among God's people. His concern is that the church be built up as people remain responsive to God and considerate of one another.

The same principle reaches beyond a gathered church service. Whatever God gives us should become a way to serve.

Peter writes:

"Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies."

First Peter chapter 4, verse 11.

Then he gives the purpose:

"In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

First Peter chapter 4, verse 11.

The Spirit gives, believers serve, and glory moves toward God through Jesus Christ. A gift reaches its proper purpose when grace moves toward another person and glory returns to God.

That can simplify the way we think about discovering how God has equipped us. Asking about spiritual gifts can be helpful when the question moves us toward faithful service. It becomes less helpful when we believe we must identify the perfect label before we can begin serving anyone.

Often we learn while serving.

We teach because someone needs help understanding Scripture. We encourage because someone is discouraged, give because a need is before us, and pray because a situation has gone beyond what we can solve. We lead because responsibility has been placed in our hands, and we show mercy because someone is hurting.

Over time, other believers may recognize ways God consistently works through us. Mature leaders and trusted people within the church can encourage what they see, help us grow, and sometimes correct what we have misunderstood.

Timothy was encouraged to steward what God had entrusted to him.

Paul told him:

"Do not neglect the gift you have."

First Timothy chapter 4, verse 14.

Later he wrote:

"Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

Second Timothy chapter 1, verse 6.

What God gives by grace can still be handled faithfully. A teacher should prepare. A leader should continue growing in wisdom and character. Someone who serves should resist resentment when the work goes unnoticed, and a person entrusted with a visible gift should remain humble and accountable.

We are stewards of what belongs to God.

For that reason, a gift should never become the foundation of our identity. We may use words such as teacher, leader, encourager, or another description to explain how we often serve, but none of those words tells the deepest truth about who we are.

We belong to Jesus.

Opportunities can change. Seasons of life can change, and the way a gift is expressed may change with them. Someone who once served publicly may enter a season where faithfulness happens almost entirely out of sight.

Jesus has not become less valuable because our role changed, and our place in His family was never secured by how useful we appeared to be.

That freedom also helps us celebrate what God gives other people. Someone else may carry wisdom we need, compassion where we tend to move too quickly, courage where we hesitate, or discernment where we struggle to see clearly.

We were never meant to carry the whole body within ourselves.

Receiving from other believers is part of humility. Dependence upon God often includes receiving what He provides through people He has placed around us.

There are gifts in Scripture that deserve more attention as we continue. Some may be familiar to many readers, while others raise questions because of the ways Christians have understood or experienced them.

We do not need to rush those passages or turn them into arguments before listening carefully to what Scripture actually says.

For now, Paul's larger picture is clear.

The gifts come from the Spirit and differ according to His wisdom. They are given for the common good, exercised within the body, governed by love, and used to strengthen others.

Paul writes in Romans:

"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them."

Romans chapter 12, verse 6.

There is a simple faithfulness in those words. Grace has been given, so we use what God gives to serve the people He places before us.

We remain teachable, pursue love, receive from others, and leave room for God to work beyond what we could accomplish through our own ability. The church does not need every person to become someone else. It needs followers of Jesus who are

willing to receive from God and offer what He gives for the good of others.

Some will serve where many people can see them. Others will serve where almost no one notices. Some gifts may feel familiar, while others remind us that God is free to work beyond the limits of our own experience.

All of them belong to Him.

The Spirit knows what His people need, and He gives according to His wisdom. Our part is to receive His grace with humility and use what He gives in love.

The Giver decides.

And the Giver is greater than every gift.

Chapter Seven

Prayer in the Spirit

There are moments when prayer comes easily. We know what we want to say, the words seem clear, and our hearts feel fully engaged with God. We bring gratitude, confession, questions, needs, and the names of people we love, and prayer feels like the conversation with God it was always meant to be.

There are other moments when we sit before God and do not know what to say. Grief may be too heavy, a decision too complicated, or the situation before us may have gone far beyond what we know how to fix. We know we should pray while still being unsure what faithfulness would even ask God to do.

Scripture makes room for those moments.

Paul writes:

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”

Romans chapter 8, verse 26.

Then he explains:

"For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

Romans chapter 8, verse 26.

There is comfort in the honesty of that verse. Paul does not say mature believers always know what to pray. He includes himself among people who sometimes reach the limits of their own understanding and tells us that the Spirit meets us there.

Romans 8 is filled with longing. Creation groans as it waits for redemption, and believers groan as we wait for the redemption of our bodies. In the middle of a world that is still broken, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

We experience pain we cannot explain. We watch people suffer, carry concerns we cannot resolve, and wait for things God has promised but has not yet completed. Sometimes that uncertainty reaches into prayer because we simply do not know what God's wisdom requires.

The Spirit does.

Paul continues:

"And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit."

Romans chapter 8, verse 27.

Then:

"Because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Romans chapter 8, verse 27.

Our weakness does not make prayer useless. We are not heard because we found the perfect wording or understood every part of the situation. We come to a Father who knows us, and the Spirit helps us when our own understanding reaches its limit.

Romans does not tell us that the groanings Paul describes are speaking in tongues, so we do not need to make that connection for him. The promise is already remarkable as Paul gives it. When we do not know how to pray, the Spirit Himself helps us.

That can free us from trying to perform for God in prayer. We may have learned to judge prayer by its length, intensity, vocabulary, or how spiritual we sound. Public prayer can especially tempt us to become aware of the people listening rather than the God to whom we are speaking.

Jesus warned about that long before His disciples understood everything He would later teach them about the Spirit.

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites."

Matthew chapter 6, verse 5.

Jesus described people who loved to pray where others could see them. Their words had become part of their public image rather than simple communion with God.

He gave His followers another way:

"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."

Matthew chapter 6, verse 6.

Prayer begins with relationship. We come before the Father because Jesus has opened the way to Him. The Spirit's help does not make prayer less personal or turn it into a technique. He helps us live within the relationship God has already given us through Christ.

Paul describes that relationship earlier in Romans:

"You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

Romans chapter 8, verse 15.

The Spirit turns our hearts toward God as Father. Prayer can therefore carry joy, fear, questions, grief, gratitude, confession, and tears because all of it is being brought within a relationship God Himself has given us.

We do not have to hide our weakness from Him. We can tell God when we are afraid, angry, tired, confused, disappointed, or tempted. We can admit when our desires are pulling us somewhere they should not go and when part of us does not want to obey what we already know is right.

The Psalms teach us to pray with that kind of honesty. David and the other psalmists bring worship, fear, anger, repentance,

confusion, hope, and grief into the presence of God. They trust Him enough to bring their real hearts before Him.

The Spirit already knows what is within us. Prayer gives us a place to bring it before God and allow His truth to reshape it.

We often begin prayer with what we want, and Scripture gives us freedom to ask God for specific things. Jesus teaches His followers to ask for daily bread. Throughout Scripture, God's people bring needs, fears, healing, protection, wisdom, provision, and the people they love before Him.

Prayer also brings our desires under God's wisdom.

Jesus shows us this in Gethsemane. He knows the cross is near, and the suffering before Him is real.

He prays:

"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me."

Luke chapter 22, verse 42.

Then He continues:

"Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Luke chapter 22, verse 42.

Jesus does not hide His anguish from the Father. He asks honestly and then entrusts Himself completely to the Father's will.

As the Spirit forms us, prayer begins moving us toward the same kind of surrender. We bring what we desire while remaining

willing for God to reshape those desires around His wisdom. Sometimes that happens quickly, while at other times prayer becomes the place where we keep surrendering the same fear, plan, relationship, or unanswered question.

The Spirit may bring conviction while we pray. He may remind us of someone we need to forgive, expose pride beneath a request, or bring Scripture to mind in a way that redirects what we are asking.

A prayer that begins with asking God to change someone else may eventually include asking Him to change us. A prayer for an easier path may become a prayer for strength to walk faithfully. What began as a request for God to remove a difficult situation may become a deeper willingness to trust Him within it.

Prayer does not only carry our words toward God. It becomes one of the places where the Spirit continues forming us.

Paul gives another instruction near the end of Ephesians:

"Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication."

Ephesians chapter 6, verse 18.

Those words come within Paul's teaching about standing firm in spiritual opposition. He has spoken about truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. Prayer runs through the life he is describing.

Paul says to pray at all times in the Spirit and with all prayer and supplication. His language is broad. He is describing believers whose lives remain dependent upon the Spirit rather than identifying one particular form of prayer.

Jude uses similar language:

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit."

Jude verse 20.

He continues:

"Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life."

Jude verse 21.

Jude does not define praying in the Holy Spirit as speaking in tongues. He places it within a larger life of faith, love, perseverance, mercy, and waiting for Jesus.

We can leave the language as wide as Scripture leaves it.

Praying in the Spirit is prayer lived in dependence upon Him. He helps us in weakness, reminds us of truth, brings conviction, directs our hearts toward the Father, and teaches us to pray as people who belong to Jesus.

First Corinthians gives us another part of the biblical picture, and here Paul does speak directly about prayer in tongues.

He writes:

"For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 14.

Paul then says:

"What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 15.

He continues:

"I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 15.

Paul clearly describes prayer in a tongue. He also describes prayer with understanding, and he gives both a place within the life he is discussing.

Earlier in the chapter Paul writes:

"For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 2.

Then:

"For no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 2.

Those words give us a biblical basis for recognizing prayer in tongues as prayer directed toward God. Paul himself later speaks about praying in a tongue, so we do not need to avoid what the passage includes.

At the same time, Paul does not answer every question Christians have asked about the wider work of the Spirit. He does not explain every dimension of what happens when someone prays this way, and he does not tell us that every New Testament reference to praying in the Spirit means speaking in tongues.

We can receive what Paul says without requiring this passage to settle questions it was not written to settle.

Prayer in tongues belongs to the biblical conversation. Paul does not dismiss it, and neither should we. We can give it the place Scripture gives it while continuing to seek the Lord with humility and remain open to His work.

Paul also keeps the mind engaged.

"I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also."

His words do not present thoughtful prayer and spiritual prayer as enemies. There is room for prayer that engages our understanding, specific requests, Scripture, confession, and careful thought. There is also room in First Corinthians 14 for prayer

in a tongue where Paul says his spirit prays while his mind is unfruitful.

Both remain under the lordship of Jesus and the work of the Spirit.

The setting becomes especially important when Paul turns toward the gathered church. Prayer offered personally to God is not the same setting as a public expression that others in the gathering are being asked to receive. When a tongue is expressed publicly, Paul repeatedly returns to the good of the people who are listening.

He writes:

"Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 13.

Interpretation allows what would otherwise remain unintelligible to become something the gathered church can receive. Paul's concern is not to diminish the gift. He wants what happens among believers to strengthen the body.

He gives even more specific direction later:

"If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 27.

Then he continues:

"But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 28.

Tongues, interpretation, and order all have a place in Paul's teaching, and the reason is love. When believers gather, other people are present, and Paul wants what happens among them to strengthen the body.

Understanding becomes especially important when something is being expressed for the gathered church. Paul wants believers to be instructed, encouraged, and able to participate rather than left unsure of what has been said.

He writes:

"I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 18.

Then:

"Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 19.

Paul can value tongues personally while placing the needs of the gathered church ahead of his own expression. Love asks what will serve the people around us.

Near the end of the chapter, Paul gives two instructions that belong together:

"So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 39.

Then:

"But all things should be done decently and in order."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 40.

Paul does not solve disorder by forbidding the gift, and he does not treat openness to the Spirit as permission for confusion. He gives room for what God gives while also giving direction for how believers should care for one another when they gather.

Order is not opposition to the Spirit. Interpretation, discernment, self-control, and concern for the body help believers steward what He gives in ways that strengthen others.

At the same time, Paul's command not to forbid speaking in tongues should be allowed to stand with the same clarity as his instruction about order. We do not need to become suspicious of what Scripture includes simply because it lies outside our own experience.

Both instructions belong to the same chapter. We receive what God gives and serve one another in love so that the church may be strengthened.

Prayer in the Spirit is therefore larger than one question about tongues, while tongues remain part of the biblical picture.

Romans shows the Spirit helping when we do not know how to pray. Ephesians tells believers to pray at all times in the Spirit. Jude places prayer in the Spirit within a life of faith and perseverance. First Corinthians explicitly gives us prayer in tongues, prayer with understanding, praise, interpretation, and order.

Together, those passages give us a life of prayer that is dependent, honest, surrendered, thoughtful, open, and rooted in God.

We pray with our minds engaged and bring specific requests before the Father. We open Scripture, listen for conviction, and remain open to whatever the Spirit gives. Through all of it, the Spirit helps us.

There are seasons when that help becomes especially precious. A hospital room can reduce prayer to a few words, and a grave may leave us without any. A marriage in pain, a child who is wandering, a decision with no obvious answer, or a season of suffering can bring us to the end of what we know to ask.

God is not waiting for us to become eloquent before He listens.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness.

There may be moments when all we can say is the name of Jesus. There may be tears without sentences, silence that lasts longer than expected, or the same request repeated day after day because we do not know anything else to pray.

The Father knows us, the Spirit helps us, and Jesus Himself intercedes for us. We are held by more grace than our weakness can see.

Prayer becomes one of the places where self-sufficiency begins losing its grip. When we pray, we admit that we cannot see the future, control another person's heart, heal every wound, solve every problem, or carry every burden through our own strength.

We bring what we cannot carry to God.

That does not make prayer passive. Jesus prayed and then walked toward the cross. The early church prayed and then spoke boldly, served people, sent missionaries, crossed boundaries, and obeyed what God placed before them.

Prayer prepares us to obey.

Sometimes the answer to prayer includes an invitation for us to take a step. We ask God to help someone and recognize that He may be asking us to serve them. We pray for reconciliation and realize we need to make the first call, or pray for our community and begin seeing the people around us as people we are called to know and love.

The Spirit can move us from concern into obedience.

He can also teach us to wait.

Not every prayer produces immediate clarity. Some prayers remain before God for years, and some answers come differently

than we hoped. Faithful prayer does not mean God will always do what we asked in the way we imagined.

It means we continue trusting Him.

The Spirit brings us back to the character of God when circumstances leave us with questions. He reminds us of what is true, turns our attention toward Jesus, and helps us remain with the Father when the answer has not yet come.

Over time, prayer becomes less about controlling an outcome and more about living in continual dependence upon God.

That kind of prayer can follow us throughout the day. Paul told believers to pray without ceasing. He was not describing people who spend every waking moment with their eyes closed and heads bowed but people whose lives remain turned toward God.

We can pray before walking into a meeting, while driving, while caring for a child, while preparing for a difficult conversation, or while sitting beside someone who is hurting. A few quiet words can turn our attention back toward the One who is already present.

Help me.

Give me wisdom.

Show me how to love.

Keep me faithful.

Jesus, lead me.

Prayer does not need to become complicated in order to become a life of dependence.

Over time, the Spirit teaches us to recognize how often we need Him. We begin bringing decisions before God before we have already made them. We become quicker to pray before reacting and more willing to remain quiet when we do not know what to say.

We learn to pray for people rather than only talk about them. We become willing to ask God to change us rather than always asking Him to change the circumstances around us.

The Spirit is forming a praying people.

Prayer always leads us back toward Jesus because He opened the way to the Father. We pray in His name because our access to God rests in Him, and the Spirit helps us pray because He has brought us into the life of Christ and teaches our hearts to cry, "Abba, Father."

Father, Son, and Spirit are not competing destinations in prayer. We come to the Father through the Son with the help and presence of the Spirit.

There will remain things about prayer we cannot completely explain. We will not always know why one prayer seems to receive an immediate answer while another remains before God for years. We may encounter passages and experiences that leave us with questions.

We can remain humble there without becoming fearful.

We pray because Jesus taught us to pray. We pray because the Father hears us, because the Spirit helps us, and because we belong to Christ.

We pray with understanding when we know what to say. First Corinthians also gives a clear place for prayer in a tongue as Paul describes it. When tongues are expressed for the gathered church, Scripture gives direction concerning interpretation and order so that others can be strengthened.

Those truths do not need to compete.

The same Spirit is present in the quiet prayer no one hears and in the gathered church where gifts are exercised in love. He helps when our words are clear and when our understanding reaches its limit.

The Giver remains greater than every gift.

When words fail, prayer has not failed. The Spirit helps us in our weakness, and as we remain with God in prayer, His work reaches beyond the words we speak.

He begins shaping the character of the people who are praying.

The Spirit who helps us pray also changes the way we live.

And that is where we turn next.

Chapter Eight

The Fruit of the Spirit

The Spirit who helps us pray also changes the people who are praying. His work reaches deeper than the words we speak, the gifts we receive, or the moments when we sense His presence strongly. He works within us over time, confronting what does not belong in the life Jesus gives and forming what increasingly reflects Him.

Paul describes that work as transformation.

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."

Second Corinthians chapter 3, verse 18.

Then he says:

"For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

Second Corinthians chapter 3, verse 18.

The Spirit is forming people who look more like Jesus. That work begins when He gives us new life, but it does not end there. We are born of the Spirit and then spend the rest of our lives learning to walk with Him.

Old patterns do not disappear simply because we belong to Christ. Habits formed over years may still need to be surrendered, and desires that once ruled us may continue trying to pull us backward. God receives us through Jesus, and then He continues changing us.

Scripture often speaks about this work as sanctification. We belong to God, have been set apart in Christ, and are called to live increasingly in a way that reflects His holiness. Paul can speak of believers as already sanctified while still calling them toward continued growth and obedience.

He writes to the Corinthians:

"But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

First Corinthians chapter 6, verse 11.

They belonged to God, yet anyone who reads the rest of First Corinthians can see that their formation was far from complete. They struggled with pride, division, sexual sin, selfishness, disorder, and the way they treated one another.

Being set apart by God did not mean they had finished becoming like Jesus.

The same is true for us. We can belong fully to Christ and still discover areas of our lives that do not resemble Him. We may have followed Jesus for years before recognizing pride we had learned to call confidence, control we had called responsibility, or bitterness we had convinced ourselves was justified.

The Spirit brings those places into the light because He intends to form us more deeply.

Paul brings that work into sharp focus in Galatians 5.

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 16.

Then he continues:

"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 17.

Paul is describing two different directions for life. The flesh is more than the physical body. He uses the word to describe human life turned away from the rule of God, where sinful desires, pride, fear, selfishness, and rebellion begin determining how we live.

The Spirit leads in another direction.

Following Jesus does not mean we never feel the pull of the flesh again. It means that pull no longer has the right to rule us. We

belong to Christ, and the Spirit is present to lead us into a life increasingly aligned with Him.

Paul does not make the conflict sound small.

"Now the works of the flesh are evident."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 19.

He goes on to name sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, hostility, jealousy, anger, rivalries, divisions, envy, drunkenness, and other sins that damage people and relationships.

Some of those sins are easy to recognize. Others can hide inside lives that appear respectable. Anger may hide behind being direct, jealousy behind criticism, and rivalry behind ambition.

The flesh does not have to look scandalous in order to pull us away from Jesus. Sometimes it looks like protecting ourselves, needing to be right, holding onto an offense, or refusing correction because admitting we were wrong feels too costly.

The Spirit confronts those places because Jesus did not save us merely to make our old lives more religious. He gives us new life and teaches us how to walk in it.

Paul then turns from the works of the flesh toward what the Spirit produces:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 22.

He continues:

"Gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 23.

Paul calls these qualities fruit, and the image helps us understand the kind of work God is doing within us. Fruit grows because there is life within the tree. It develops as the tree remains rooted, nourished, and connected to what sustains it.

The Christian life has a similar movement.

There are times when obedience requires us to make a right choice before our emotions agree. We may have to speak kindly when we do not feel kind, remain patient while irritation is rising, or walk away from temptation even while part of us still wants what is wrong.

That obedience is real and necessary, but the Spirit is working toward something deeper than controlled outward behavior. He is forming patience until it increasingly becomes part of who we are. He is forming kindness until compassion begins replacing irritation, and He is forming self-control where our impulses once ruled us.

The fruit belongs to the Spirit because He is producing what human effort alone cannot create.

Jesus had already given His disciples an image for this kind of life.

"Abide in me, and I in you."

John chapter 15, verse 4.

Then He says:

"As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."

John chapter 15, verse 4.

A branch cannot create life apart from the vine. Its fruit comes from remaining connected to the source that sustains it.

Jesus continues:

"Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."

John chapter 15, verse 5.

Then:

"For apart from me you can do nothing."

John chapter 15, verse 5.

Fruit grows from abiding in Jesus.

That does not make the Christian life passive. We remain with Christ through trust, Scripture, prayer, obedience, repentance, worship, and life with His people. Those practices do not earn God's love, but they continually bring us before the One who is forming us.

We open Scripture and allow truth to confront our assumptions. We pray and bring our desires honestly before God. We confess sin rather than protecting it and obey when obedience requires something from us.

We also remain connected to other believers who can encourage us, challenge us, forgive us, and sometimes show us things about ourselves we would rather not see. These ordinary rhythms become places where the Spirit continues His work.

Fruit often grows slowly enough that we do not notice every change while it is happening. Then a situation arrives that once would have produced immediate anger, and we recognize that our response is different. Someone who used to irritate us may become someone we are learning to love patiently.

A temptation may still be present without holding the same power it once held. Fear may still speak without making the final decision.

The Spirit has been at work.

Paul begins the list with love, which is fitting because the character of Jesus cannot be separated from love. Jesus moved toward people who could offer Him nothing, welcomed those others avoided, served His disciples, forgave His enemies, and laid down His life for us.

The Spirit forms that same love within His people.

Jesus told His disciples:

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John chapter 13, verse 35.

Love makes the life of Jesus visible. It reaches beyond people who are easy to love and begins changing the way we respond to those who disappoint, interrupt, offend, or disagree with us.

We learn to speak truth without using truth as a weapon. We learn to serve without constantly calculating what we will receive in return. We begin remembering how patiently God has dealt with us when we are tempted to withhold patience from someone else.

Paul then names joy.

Joy does not require us to deny grief. Jesus wept, carried sorrow, and experienced anguish, and the New Testament never asks believers to pretend that painful things are not painful.

The Spirit forms a joy that reaches deeper than circumstances. It grows from knowing that Jesus has risen, that our lives belong to God, and that suffering will not have the final word. There are seasons when joy feels strong and others when it may look like quietly refusing to surrender hope.

Peace grows alongside it.

Peace does not mean every conflict disappears or every question receives an answer. Jesus lived faithfully in the middle of oppo-

sition, misunderstanding, betrayal, and suffering. His peace was not built upon the absence of difficulty.

The Spirit forms steadiness within us because our lives are held by God. When anxiety rises or circumstances move beyond our control, we learn to bring what we cannot manage before the Father rather than immediately grasping for control.

We remember that God is present before the situation changes.

Patience becomes visible in the places where life refuses to move at our preferred speed. Family, coworkers, church relationships, interruptions, unanswered questions, traffic, and long seasons of waiting can reveal how quickly frustration rises within us.

The Spirit teaches us to endure without becoming harsh. He slows the response that wants to react immediately and reminds us of the patience God has shown toward us.

Kindness often grows in those same places.

Kindness is not weakness. Jesus could confront sin directly while still treating people with dignity. He spoke truth and repeatedly moved toward the wounded, ashamed, overlooked, and forgotten.

The Spirit teaches us to see people rather than simply manage interactions. We begin listening before responding and noticing needs we might once have passed without seeing. Ordinary kindness can reveal Jesus in places where people have grown accustomed to harshness.

Goodness reaches into the integrity of our lives. It is the desire to do what is right because it agrees with the God we belong to. Goodness resists the quiet compromises that become possible when no one else is watching.

The Spirit forms people who increasingly desire what is good. That reaches into private habits, relationships, business decisions, money, sexuality, speech, and the way we handle responsibility.

We begin asking more than whether something is technically allowed. We begin asking whether it reflects Jesus.

Faithfulness gives that goodness endurance.

A faithful person remains steady after the excitement has passed. They keep promises, show up, continue serving, and remain loyal to Jesus when obedience becomes costly.

Faithfulness may receive little attention because much of it is built through ordinary choices repeated over time. Yet those choices form lives that can be trusted.

Jesus remained faithful all the way to the cross, and the Spirit forms that same steadiness within His people.

Gentleness may be one of the most easily misunderstood qualities on Paul's list. It is not weakness or the inability to speak firmly. Jesus described Himself as gentle and lowly in heart while also speaking truth with courage and authority.

Gentleness is strength that does not need to overpower. It can correct without humiliating, disagree without becoming cruel, and carry responsibility without making everyone else feel small.

The Spirit forms that kind of strength.

Then Paul names self-control.

Self-control reaches into places where desire tells us we need something immediately. It may involve food, sex, anger, money, alcohol, entertainment, attention, speech, or the urge to respond the moment someone has offended us.

The Spirit does not remove our responsibility to choose. He strengthens us to make choices that agree with the life of Jesus instead of becoming servants to every impulse.

Paul speaks elsewhere about this active dependence:

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die."

Romans chapter 8, verse 13.

Then:

"But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Romans chapter 8, verse 13.

Paul places the Spirit's work and our response in the same sentence.

By the Spirit, we put sin to death.

We do not sit passively and wait for temptation to disappear, and we do not imagine that willpower alone can transform the heart. The Spirit gives strength, conviction, truth, and grace, and we respond in obedience.

Sometimes that obedience means walking away from something. At other times it means confessing what we have hidden, asking another believer for help, ending access to something that repeatedly draws us toward sin, or putting a boundary in place before temptation grows stronger.

Dependence upon the Spirit becomes practical obedience.

The fruit of the Spirit therefore gives us an important picture of spiritual maturity. A person can be gifted and still immature. Someone can teach well, lead effectively, understand Scripture deeply, or be used by God in visible ways while still treating people poorly.

The church in Corinth had genuine gifts and serious character problems at the same time. The Spirit gives gifts for service and produces fruit as He forms the character of Christ within us. Neither part of His work should be used to dismiss the other.

This should make us cautious about being impressed by spiritual visibility while ignoring character. The New Testament repeatedly brings maturity back to holiness, humility, faithfulness, love, self-control, and the way people treat one another.

A Spirit-filled life should increasingly look like Jesus.

That does not mean perfection.

Fruit grows over time, and there will be seasons when circumstances expose how much formation still remains. A person who usually thinks of themselves as patient may discover deep impatience during exhaustion. Someone who believed they had forgiven may recognize bitterness returning when an old wound is reopened.

Those moments do not have to become reasons for despair. They can become invitations to surrender again because the Spirit shows us what remains as part of His continuing work.

When He exposes pride, anger, lust, dishonesty, jealousy, bitterness, or another sinful pattern, we do not have to hide. We can bring what He reveals into the light, repent, receive forgiveness, and return to obedience.

Repentance is part of spiritual growth.

Mature believers do not become people who never need to repent. They become people who are increasingly willing to respond when the Spirit shows them where repentance is needed.

The Spirit also uses community in this process because nearly every quality Paul names becomes visible in relationship with other people.

Love needs someone to love. Patience becomes visible when someone or something requires waiting. Kindness needs another person to receive it, while gentleness becomes visible in the way we handle strength and responsibility.

Faithfulness becomes visible over time, and self-control becomes visible when desire pulls us in another direction.

The church is therefore more than a place where we hear teaching or use our gifts. It is one of the places where our character is formed.

Other believers will encourage us, and sometimes they will frustrate us. Someone may recognize growth in us before we recognize it ourselves, while another person may lovingly point toward a pattern we have been unwilling to see.

We need enough humility to receive both.

Private spirituality can sometimes feel easier because other people expose us. They interrupt our plans, misunderstand us, disappoint us, require forgiveness, and see parts of us that our public life can hide.

Yet those relationships often become places where the Spirit forms fruit. He teaches us to love real people rather than an imaginary community that never inconveniences us.

Jesus formed His first disciples in community. They misunderstood Him together, competed with one another, argued about greatness, disappointed one another, and sometimes failed badly.

Jesus continued forming them, and the Spirit continues that work among His people.

As we read the fruit of the Spirit, it would be easy to turn Paul's list into another measure of performance. We could begin scoring ourselves on love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

That would miss the image Paul chose.

Fruit is evidence of life.

We should examine ourselves honestly, but we do so while remaining connected to Christ. When patience is missing, the answer is not merely trying harder to appear patient. We bring the anger, fear, pride, or need for control beneath our impatience before God.

We listen to the Spirit's conviction, receive what Scripture says, apologize when our impatience has wounded someone, and choose a different response when the next opportunity comes.

Over time, the Spirit forms what was missing.

This work is often slower than we would prefer. Some of the deepest changes God makes within us may take years. We may wish every weakness would disappear in a moment, but God often teaches us dependence through the long process of formation.

We pray, fail, repent, learn, and obey again. Then one day we recognize that something has changed. We are not responding the way we once did because the Spirit has been faithful in places we could not always see.

Becoming like Jesus should remain near the center of everything we say about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit glorifies Jesus, gives us new life in Jesus, helps us pray through Jesus, and strengthens the body that belongs to Jesus.

He also forms the character of Jesus within us.

The same Spirit who gives courage for public witness forms patience at home. The same Spirit who works through His people when they gather can convict us about the way we spoke to our family afterward.

He is forming whole lives.

A Spirit-filled life should therefore become increasingly recognizable by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That fruit should appear in public and private, in church and at home, at work, when we are tired, when someone disagrees with us, and when no one else will ever know whether we chose obedience.

Those ordinary places often reveal what is growing.

Paul closes this part of Galatians by bringing the whole life back under Christ:

"And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 24.

Then he says:

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 25.

We live by the Spirit, so we learn to walk with Him.

The fruit does not grow because we eventually become strong enough to produce it alone. It grows as we remain with Jesus, surrender what the Spirit exposes, obey what God has said, and continue taking the next faithful step.

The transformation may be slow enough that we do not always recognize it while it is happening, but over time Jesus should become more visible in us.

As the Spirit forms His character within us, He also teaches us to follow His leading in the decisions and ordinary moments of life.

We are learning not only to live by the Spirit.

We are learning to be led by Him.

Chapter Nine

Led by the Spirit

The Spirit who forms the character of Jesus within us also leads us as we follow Him.

Paul writes:

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Romans chapter 8, verse 14.

Those words may make us think first about decisions. We want to know where we should go, what we should do, whether an opportunity is from God, or what direction we should take when several paths seem possible. Yet the setting in Romans reaches deeper than decision-making.

Paul has been describing people who belong to Christ, who have the Spirit dwelling within them, and who are learning by the Spirit to put sin to death. Being led by the Spirit begins with belonging to God and learning to live the life He has given us. The Spirit leads us away from the rule of the flesh and toward

obedience, forming the character of Jesus within us and teaching us to walk according to the truth God has revealed.

His leading certainly reaches decisions, relationships, opportunities, and mission. But it begins with learning to follow God in the life already before us.

We can become so interested in God's direction for a particular decision that we overlook what He has already made clear. We may ask whether God wants us to take a new job while ignoring how we treat people in the job we already have. We may seek direction about the future while resisting forgiveness, honesty, generosity, purity, or another act of obedience Scripture has already placed before us.

The Spirit does not lead us away from what God has already said. Jesus called Him the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit who leads us is the same Spirit who inspired Scripture, glorifies Jesus, and produces holy fruit within God's people. His leading remains consistent with His character and His Word.

If something we believe is spiritual direction requires us to lie, manipulate, abandon faithfulness, pursue sin, feed bitterness, or place ourselves beyond correction, Scripture has already given us what we need. We do not have to search for another answer when God has spoken clearly.

The more difficult decisions usually come when several options may all be morally possible. We may wonder whether to take a job or remain where we are, move to another place, begin something new, speak now or wait, step into an opportunity,

or allow it to pass. Scripture may not give us a verse naming the city where we should live or the opportunity we should pursue, but God is not absent from those decisions.

The Spirit is present there as well.

Learning to recognize His leading requires more than demanding certainty about everything ahead. We learn to pray, listen, test, receive wisdom, wait when necessary, and obey what becomes clear. Dependence does not mean abandoning careful thought, and careful thought does not require us to live as though God no longer guides His people.

The book of Acts gives us several pictures of the Spirit directing God's people.

Philip had been preaching in Samaria when he was directed toward the road that went from Jerusalem to Gaza. As he traveled, he saw an Ethiopian official riding in a chariot.

Then Scripture says:

"And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot.'"

Acts chapter 8, verse 29.

Philip obeyed. He ran toward the chariot, heard the man reading from Isaiah, and asked whether he understood what he was reading. The conversation opened into the gospel, and Philip told him the good news about Jesus.

The Spirit's direction moved Philip toward a person.

That pattern appears repeatedly in Acts. His leading often moves God's people toward the mission of Jesus, across boundaries they might not have crossed on their own, and into conversations where the gospel can be heard.

The Spirit leads people toward people.

We see His direction again in Antioch. The church was worshiping the Lord and fasting when Scripture says:

"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Acts chapter 13, verse 2.

The church responded:

"Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

Acts chapter 13, verse 3.

The calling involved Barnabas and Saul, but the community participated in recognizing and sending them. Worship, prayer, listening, community, and obedience belonged together. The Spirit could lead personally without making the Christian life private.

God has placed us within a body, and trusted believers can sometimes help us recognize what we cannot see clearly on our own. They may confirm something we have sensed, ask questions that uncover motives we had not recognized, offer wisdom

from experience, or see dangers that strong emotion has made difficult for us to notice.

Humility is willing to receive that kind of help.

This does not mean every important decision needs the approval of everyone around us. There will be times when we must personally take responsibility for what God has placed before us. Yet spiritual maturity should not make us less willing to receive wisdom, accountability, and discernment from others.

That becomes especially important when we believe God has impressed something strongly upon us.

Scripture gives examples of God speaking and directing His people with remarkable clarity. We do not need to explain those moments away simply because our own experiences may be different. The Spirit is free to guide His people according to His wisdom.

At the same time, our impressions are not Scripture.

We can misunderstand. We can want something strongly enough that desire begins sounding like direction, or allow fear, pride, impatience, disappointment, or ambition to shape what we think we are hearing. Even a good desire can become difficult to discern when we have already decided what answer we want.

Humility allows us to believe the Lord may be leading while remaining willing to test what we sense.

Paul gives the Thessalonians language that holds openness and discernment together:

"Do not quench the Spirit."

First Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 19.

Then:

"Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good."

First Thessalonians chapter 5, verses 20 and 21.

Paul does not tell them to choose between openness and testing. He tells them not to quench the Spirit, not to despise what God may give, and also to test what they receive.

We can remain open without becoming careless and discerning without becoming cynical.

John gives similar instruction:

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God."

First John chapter 4, verse 1.

Not every spiritual claim is trustworthy, so discernment belongs within a Spirit-led life. We listen with open hearts and open Bibles because Scripture remains our clearest standard, and the Spirit will not contradict the truth He has already given.

The character of Jesus also helps us recognize the direction of the Spirit's work. He glorifies Christ and produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If what we call spiritual leading repeatedly produces pride, dishonesty, manipulation, contempt, secrecy, or resistance to correction, we should pay attention to what that fruit is revealing.

That does not mean the Spirit always leads us into peaceful circumstances. Jesus encountered opposition, and Paul encountered conflict and suffering. Faithfulness can place us in situations where people disagree with us or misunderstand our decisions.

The way we walk through those situations should still increasingly reflect Jesus. Believing we are right does not release us from love, and believing God is leading us does not release us from humility. Urgency does not remove the need for self-control because the Spirit who leads us is the same Spirit who forms His fruit within us.

Acts gives another helpful picture because sometimes the Spirit's leading includes a path that does not open.

Paul and his companions were carrying the gospel through Asia Minor when Luke writes:

"And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia."

Acts chapter 16, verse 6.

Then:

"And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them."

Acts chapter 16, verse 7.

Luke does not tell us exactly how the Spirit prevented them in either case. We know the direction came from God, but Scripture does not give us the method.

Then Paul receives a vision of a man of Macedonia asking for help.

Luke writes:

"And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia."

Acts chapter 16, verse 10.

Then he adds:

"Concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

Acts chapter 16, verse 10.

A vision is given to Paul, and the group concludes that God has called them to Macedonia. They discern what God is doing and then move in obedience.

The account reminds us that circumstances can become part of discernment without becoming a formula.

A closed door does not always mean God is saying no. Paul faced enormous opposition in places where God had clearly called him to remain, so difficulty by itself is not proof that we are outside God's will.

An open door does not automatically mean God is saying yes either. Some opportunities should be declined. Something can be possible, profitable, exciting, or successful without being the assignment God has given us.

Circumstances can help us discern, but they are rarely enough by themselves. We also need wisdom.

James writes:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God."

James chapter 1, verse 5.

God's wisdom may become clearer as Scripture shapes our thinking, prayer exposes our motives, trusted people offer counsel, circumstances reveal what is possible, and time brings clarity to something that once felt uncertain. Sometimes direction becomes clear quickly. At other times, we make the wisest decision we can with the light God has given and continue trusting Him as we walk.

We do not have to live paralyzed by the fear that one imperfect decision will destroy God's purposes for our lives. The disciples

misunderstood Jesus many times, Peter made impulsive decisions, and Paul and Barnabas strongly disagreed about whether John Mark should travel with them. God continued working through imperfect people who remained within His grace.

Our decisions are important, but God's faithfulness does not depend upon our flawless ability to interpret every circumstance or impression. We seek Him, remain teachable, obey what we understand, and trust Him enough to receive correction when we need it.

There may be times when we realize that what we believed was God's direction was shaped more by our own desire than we understood. Recognizing that does not require us to become afraid of discernment. We can admit that we were wrong, receive correction, and change direction.

Being led by the Spirit includes being willing to be corrected by the Spirit.

Patience also becomes part of discernment because we often want direction faster than clarity comes. Uncertainty can make us uncomfortable, and sometimes God does give clarity quickly. At other times, waiting becomes part of the way He forms us.

David was anointed king long before he became king. Abraham received promises and waited years to see them fulfilled. Jesus Himself lived many years before the public ministry recorded in the Gospels began.

God does not appear hurried by the things that make us anxious.

The Spirit may lead with urgency, but anxiety and urgency are not always the same thing. Fear can tell us that everything must be settled now, while pride can make us afraid to admit that we do not yet know. Sometimes faithfulness means waiting until the next step becomes clearer.

We should also be careful about making inner peace the only measure of God's direction.

Peace is a gift from God, and there are times when He gives remarkable steadiness in the middle of a difficult decision. Yet obedience can still feel costly and uncomfortable.

Jesus entered Gethsemane in deep anguish and remained perfectly faithful to the Father. Paul continued toward suffering he knew was ahead. An uncomfortable road is not necessarily the wrong road.

Rather than depending upon one feeling, we bring the whole decision before God. We ask whether it agrees with Scripture and reflects the character and mission of Jesus. We bring our motives honestly before Him and remain willing to receive wisdom from mature believers.

We also remain willing for God to redirect us, willing to wait if clarity has not come, and willing to obey if the faithful path costs more than we expected.

Those questions are not a formula that guarantees certainty. They help bring our motives and desires into the light.

Discernment also becomes especially important when another person believes God has given them something for us.

Paul tells the Corinthians:

"Let the others weigh what is said."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 29.

Paul is speaking about prophecy in the gathered church, and even there what is spoken can be weighed. Openness to what God may give does not require people to surrender the discernment Scripture asks them to exercise.

This gives room for faith and humility to remain together. We can believe God leads and speaks without pretending people never misunderstand. We can receive what another believer offers without feeling pressured to treat every spiritual statement as unquestionable.

The Spirit does not need manipulation to accomplish His work.

Over time, His leading also becomes easier to recognize as Scripture renews the way we think.

Paul writes:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

Romans chapter 12, verse 2.

Then:

"That by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Romans chapter 12, verse 2.

Discernment grows as our minds are renewed. We begin valuing what God values. Things that once seemed normal may begin troubling us, while acts of obedience we once avoided because they were costly begin looking beautiful because they resemble Jesus.

Our desires slowly change.

God's will becomes less like a secret code we are trying to break and more like a life we are learning to recognize because we know the One we are following. Relationship forms understanding.

A person who has walked closely with someone for years often knows what that person values. They understand the person's character well enough that many situations can be approached with confidence because relationship has shaped the way they think.

Something similar happens as we walk with God.

We never outgrow Scripture or prayer, and dependence upon the Spirit does not decrease with maturity. Yet the Word becomes more deeply rooted within us, the character of Jesus be-

comes increasingly familiar, and the fruit of the Spirit continues shaping our desires.

Discernment grows within that relationship.

This is one reason ordinary obedience is so important. We can long for dramatic direction while ignoring the person God has placed before us today. We can seek a clear word about the next ten years while neglecting the work, family, church, friendship, or responsibility already in our hands.

The Spirit often leads one faithful step at a time.

Philip went toward the chariot. Barnabas and Saul went where they were sent. Paul changed direction as God redirected the mission, and the church prayed, discerned, and obeyed.

Most of our days will not include a vision of Macedonia or an instruction to approach a chariot. They will include decisions that seem far more ordinary.

We will have opportunities to tell the truth when dishonesty would be easier, forgive when an offense still hurts, make a call we have been avoiding, listen before answering, stop and pray before reacting, or serve the person in front of us. We may recognize an opportunity to speak about Jesus or simply remain faithful when nothing dramatic appears to be happening.

Those ordinary acts of obedience form a Spirit-led life.

Paul gives us simple language for it:

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 25.

Keeping in step requires attention. We do not run far ahead and then ask God to bless a direction we chose without Him, and we do not refuse to move until every mile of the journey has been explained.

We walk with Him.

Sometimes His leading calls us to speak, while at other times wisdom tells us to wait. Sometimes He convicts us to repent, and sometimes He gives courage for a step we would not have chosen on our own. At other times His leading looks wonderfully ordinary because the next faithful step is simply doing what Scripture already tells us to do.

The goal is not to become people who constantly announce that God is speaking. It is to become people who respond faithfully when He leads. Scripture, prayer, humility, discernment, community, and obedience belong together within a life surrendered to God.

There also comes a time when discernment must become action.

When a direction agrees with Scripture, reflects Jesus, has been brought honestly before God, and has received the wisdom appropriate to the decision, faith may mean taking the next step while some questions remain. We may still feel nervous and may not possess perfect certainty.

Faithfulness does not require knowing everything ahead. It requires trusting the God who goes with us.

The Spirit who leads does not send us forward and remain behind. He is present in the decision, the obedience, the waiting, the correction, and the uncertainty. We learn to recognize His leading because we are learning to know the God who leads us.

This keeps discernment relational rather than mechanical. We are not looking for a technique that guarantees we will never misunderstand. We are walking with the Father through the Son in the presence of the Spirit.

The more deeply Scripture shapes us, the more clearly we recognize the character of Jesus, and the more willing we become to surrender our own way, the more prepared we are to respond faithfully when the Spirit leads.

Throughout Acts, His direction repeatedly turns believers toward other people, toward the body of Christ, and toward the mission Jesus gave His church. He leads into obedience, guides people toward service, and sends God's people so that others can encounter the truth and love of Jesus.

Following the Spirit therefore moves us beyond private discernment. He is forming a people who pray together, listen together, worship together, serve one another, discern faithfully, and carry the good news of Jesus into the world.

The Spirit who leads us personally is also present among the people of God.

As we learn to follow His leading, we also learn to gather before the Father with one another.

And there, the life of the Spirit becomes worship.

Chapter Ten

Worship in Spirit and Truth

Jesus was traveling through Samaria when He stopped beside a well.

The conversation that followed began with water. Jesus asked a Samaritan woman for a drink, and she was surprised that a Jewish man would speak so freely with her. Before long, Jesus was speaking about living water, the woman's life, and the God she had come to worship according to the traditions she had received.

Then the conversation turned toward a question that had divided people for generations.

The woman said:

“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”

John chapter 4, verse 20.

The disagreement was not small. Jews and Samaritans carried different histories, different sacred places, and deep suspicion toward one another. The woman pointed toward the mountain her people considered sacred, while Jewish worship centered upon Jerusalem and the temple.

Jesus answered by pointing beyond the argument over location.

"The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father."

John chapter 4, verse 21.

Then He said:

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

John chapter 4, verse 23.

Jesus continued:

"For the Father is seeking such people to worship him."

John chapter 4, verse 23.

Then:

"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

John chapter 4, verse 24.

Jesus moves the conversation beyond a debate over sacred geography. The question will no longer be settled simply by identifying the right mountain or standing in the right building. The Father is seeking worshipers whose worship reaches deeper than location.

We should be careful not to make the phrase *in spirit and truth* answer more than Jesus gives us. The word *spirit* has been understood in different ways, including the human spirit and worship shaped by the work of God's Spirit. Jesus does not stop in this conversation to explain every dimension of the phrase.

The larger direction is still clear. Worship will not be confined to one sacred place, and it will be shaped by the truth God has revealed. Those who belong to Jesus worship the Father through the life He gives them, and the wider New Testament will show that the Holy Spirit dwells within God's people.

Worship therefore reaches far beyond singing.

Songs can become beautiful expressions of worship. Scripture is filled with singing, instruments, praise, thanksgiving, lament, celebration, and people lifting their voices to God. Yet worship exists before a song begins and continues after the final note ends.

Worship is the response of a life turned toward God.

Paul writes:

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice."

Romans chapter 12, verse 1.

Then:

"Holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Romans chapter 12, verse 1.

Paul brings worship directly into ordinary life. Our bodies, relationships, work, desires, time, money, decisions, and obedience can all become part of an offering placed before God.

We worship when we sing to Him, and we worship when we obey Him. A song about surrender may be sincere, but the surrender it describes continues after the music stops. Forgiveness, honesty, purity, generosity, service, and obedience become part of the life we place before God.

Worship reaches into Monday morning because God is worthy beyond the moments when the church is singing.

Jesus also spoke about worship in truth. We do not worship a version of God created from our preferences or imagination. We worship the God who has made Himself known.

Truth gives worship its direction.

The Holy Spirit never leads God's people away from that truth. Jesus called Him the Spirit of truth and said:

"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

John chapter 16, verse 14.

The Spirit glorifies Jesus, so worship shaped by His work continually draws our attention toward Christ. That keeps everything surrounding worship from becoming larger than the One we worship.

Style, volume, instruments, tradition, spontaneity, silence, and outward expression can differ from one gathering to another. Communities and cultures may worship in different ways, and Scripture itself gives us a wide range of expressions.

A quiet congregation can worship Jesus deeply, and so can a room filled with raised voices. Someone may kneel, stand, sing, remain silent, lift their hands, weep, or listen closely as Scripture is read. Different outward expressions can accompany hearts turned toward the same Lord.

The Psalms give us this kind of variety. God's people shout for joy, sing, clap, kneel, bow down, wait quietly, remember His faithfulness, give thanks, and bring grief honestly before Him. David danced before the Lord, while other passages describe people waiting before Him in silence.

Biblical worship has room for celebration and reverence, joy and grief, sound and stillness. That should make us careful about judging another believer simply because their outward response differs from ours. Personality, culture, church experience, and the season someone is walking through can all affect the way worship is expressed.

Jesus brings us toward something deeper than outward style.

Are our hearts and lives turned toward the Father through Him?

A strong emotional experience is also not the same thing as the presence of God. Emotion belongs within our humanity, and Scripture never asks us to become emotionally empty before Him. Music may move us, a testimony may bring tears, conviction may come strongly, and someone carrying anxiety may experience a deep sense of peace.

Those experiences can be received with gratitude without becoming the measure of whether the Spirit is present. He does not become present because a room becomes emotionally intense. Jesus promised the Helper would remain with His people, and the New Testament teaches that God's Spirit dwells within those who belong to Christ.

The Spirit is present before the first song begins.

That gives worship a firmer foundation. We do not gather to create an atmosphere strong enough to persuade God to draw near. We gather as people whom God has brought near through Jesus and among whom His Spirit dwells.

We sing because He is worthy. We listen because He has spoken, pray because Christ has opened the way to the Father, and remain open to the Spirit because He is living and active among His people.

There may be gatherings where His work is deeply felt. Someone may experience strong conviction, receive needed encouragement, become aware of God's nearness in a fresh way, or respond to something the Spirit is bringing into the light.

At other times, the gathering may feel quieter. Someone may come carrying grief and leave still grieving. Another may pray for healing and continue waiting, while someone else remains uncertain about a decision.

We do not need to pretend that every gathering resolves every burden. Our confidence rests in a God whose faithfulness is larger than the emotion of a single moment.

Paul gives us a beautiful picture of Spirit-filled worship in Ephesians.

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 18.

Then he continues:

"Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 19.

Paul adds:

"Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart."

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 19.

Then:

"Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 20.

Father, Son, and Spirit appear together within this life of worship. Believers are filled with the Spirit, sing to the Lord, and give thanks to the Father in the name of Jesus.

Worship is directed toward God, but it also strengthens the people gathered around us. Paul says believers address one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. What rises toward God can also remind His people of what is true.

Someone may enter exhausted and hear the church sing about the faithfulness of Jesus. Someone whose faith feels weak may hear voices around them confess truths they are struggling to hold. A grieving believer may not have the strength to sing every word, but the body of Christ can sing beside them.

Gathered worship gives us something we cannot receive entirely by ourselves.

There are also important parts of worship that belong in private. Jesus withdrew from crowds, and the Psalms give us language for solitary prayer and praise. Opening Scripture alone, sitting quietly before God, singing when no one else is listening, or

giving thanks in the middle of an ordinary day can all become meaningful acts of worship.

Private worship can expose whether our hearts remain turned toward God when no one else is watching. Yet following Jesus was never meant to become a private faith because we belong to a body.

Acts gives us an early picture of that shared life after Pentecost:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts chapter 2, verse 42.

Luke continues describing believers sharing meals, praising God, praying, learning, caring for one another, and living with an awareness that God was at work among them. Their worship included far more than music.

They listened to teaching, prayed, ate together, remembered Jesus, shared what they had, and praised God. Worship and community were woven together.

That challenges us whenever gathered worship becomes something we mainly attend and evaluate. We can easily begin asking whether the music matched our preference, whether we enjoyed the message, whether the service felt long, or whether we personally experienced something powerful.

Those questions can quietly place us at the center of a gathering that belongs to Jesus.

The church gathers around Him. We come not only to receive but as members of His body, bringing our attention to Scripture, our voices in worship, gifts that may strengthen others, willingness to serve, burdens others may help carry, and love for the people God has placed beside us.

The Spirit forms a worshiping people, not merely a collection of worshiping individuals.

That becomes especially important when spiritual gifts are expressed in the gathering.

We have already considered Paul's teaching in First Corinthians 12 through 14. Different people receive different gifts, love governs their use, and whatever happens among believers should strengthen the body.

Paul writes:

"When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 26.

Then:

"Let all things be done for building up."

First Corinthians chapter 14, verse 26.

Paul expects participation, and he also gives direction. Openness to what the Spirit may give does not remove the need for love,

discernment, self-control, or order because the people gathered belong to one another.

Someone may have something meaningful to share and still need to wait. A person who believes God has given something to be spoken can remain humble enough for others to weigh what is said. A genuine gift can still be expressed in a way that considers the people around us.

Love gives spiritual freedom a purpose.

The body should be built up.

Silence can also have a place within worship. Many of us are accustomed to filling every empty moment, so quiet can feel uncomfortable. Yet Scripture gives us examples of waiting before God.

The psalmist writes:

"For God alone my soul waits in silence."

Psalm chapter 62, verse 1.

Silence is not automatically spiritual, just as loudness is not automatically spiritual. Either can become an empty form. Yet silence can give us room to pay attention, allow Scripture to settle, and remember that God does not need us to keep everything moving.

Some of the Spirit's deepest work may happen without outward drama. He may expose a motive, bring someone to mind,

remind us of truth, call us toward repentance, or strengthen a decision to obey.

Not every work of God needs to become visible to everyone else.

Worship also has room for lament.

There are times when believers can feel pressure to enter a gathering already joyful. We know the songs and the language of faith, and we may begin believing that strong faith should always sound victorious.

Scripture gives us something more honest.

David asks:

"How long, O LORD?"

Psalm chapter 13, verse 1.

He does not hide his questions from God. He brings them into worship.

The same Bible that tells us to rejoice gives us words for grief, loneliness, injustice, confusion, waiting, and loss. Worship in truth means we do not need to pretend before God because sorrow does not frighten Him.

A healthy church therefore has room for celebration and lament. Someone may enter celebrating wonderful news while the person beside them has just received a diagnosis. One family may be celebrating a birth while another is grieving a death.

The Spirit is present among all of them.

The body learns to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Worship becomes more faithful when love for real people is more important than maintaining a particular mood in the room.

The presence of the Spirit should make us more attentive to people, not less.

We see that in Jesus. The Spirit's power did not make Him unaware of the person standing before Him. Jesus noticed people others overlooked, stopped when others wanted to keep moving, welcomed children, touched people others avoided, and listened to people whose stories had been ignored.

Spirit-shaped worship should form that same attention within us.

If we sing passionately about loving Jesus while repeatedly ignoring the people He has placed around us, something has become disconnected. Scripture repeatedly confronts worship separated from justice, mercy, obedience, and love.

God is not honored by words that remain detached from the way we live. Worship continues in obedience.

Gratitude becomes part of that life as well.

Paul repeatedly tells believers to give thanks. Gratitude turns our attention away from what we believe we deserve and toward what God has graciously given. It remembers salvation, mercy,

provision, people God has placed around us, and the faithfulness of Jesus when circumstances are trying to make us forget.

Gratitude does not require us to pretend every circumstance is good. Paul gave thanks while enduring hardships most of us would gladly avoid. Thanksgiving helps us hold difficulty inside a larger story.

God is still God. Jesus is still risen. The Spirit is still present, and our final hope remains secure. We can give thanks because our gratitude rests in the goodness of God rather than the ease of our circumstances.

Worship also carries a sense of awe.

Awe is difficult to manufacture because it grows from seeing again who God is. The One we worship spoke creation into being, knows every hidden place within us, is perfectly holy, and has shown remarkable mercy to sinners.

The Son entered our world, went to the cross, rose from the dead, and reigns. The Spirit of God dwells within His people. These truths can become familiar enough that we hear them without feeling their weight.

The Spirit can awaken our attention again. He does not need to move us beyond Jesus in order to deepen worship. He helps us see Jesus more clearly.

Jesus said:

"He will glorify me."

John chapter 16, verse 14.

When worship is centered rightly, Jesus becomes greater in our attention. We remember His grace, confess His lordship, receive His Word, respond to His love, and surrender again to His way.

That response will not always look the same. Sometimes it may be joyful and expressive, and sometimes it may be quiet. At other times worship may bring repentance as something hidden is exposed.

Someone may leave a gathering and make a phone call because worship revealed a relationship that needs repair. Another may decide to serve, give, forgive, wait, or obey in a place no one else will ever see.

The expressions differ, but the center remains Jesus.

That also protects us from trying to reproduce a past experience. God may have met us powerfully during a particular song, gathering, retreat, prayer time, or season of life. We can remember those moments with gratitude without turning them into a formula we believe must be repeated.

The Spirit is not an atmosphere we recreate.

He is God.

We do not have to repeat the same song, mood, sequence, or outward response in order for Him to work again. We return to Jesus, open Scripture, offer ourselves to God, and remain responsive to the Spirit.

There is freedom in worship when we stop trying to manufacture an experience. We can sing fully when joy rises, sit quietly when our hearts need stillness, respond to conviction without embarrassment, and receive what God gives without demanding that everyone around us experience the same thing in the same way.

We can remain open and grounded at the same time.

The Father is seeking worshipers.

That is where Jesus began with the woman at the well. He did not give her a musical style or point her toward a better atmosphere. He brought her toward the Father and toward the truth standing in front of her.

The woman said:

"I know that Messiah is coming."

John chapter 4, verse 25.

Jesus answered:

"I who speak to you am he."

John chapter 4, verse 26.

The conversation about worship ultimately brought her face to face with Jesus.

She had come to the well carrying an ordinary need and a complicated story. She left speaking about Christ to the people in her town.

Worship and witness began touching one another.

The Spirit does not gather God's people around Jesus merely so that we can enjoy His presence privately. He forms us together, gives gifts for the good of the body, teaches us to love one another, and makes the church a people through whom the life of Christ becomes visible.

The gathered church is more than a crowd sharing a room. We belong to one body, receive from one Spirit, and serve one Lord.

The Spirit who draws our attention toward Jesus also joins us to one another.

And that is where we turn next.

Chapter Eleven

The Spirit and the Church

The Spirit who draws our attention toward Jesus also joins us to His people. Following Jesus is deeply personal, but it was never meant to remain private. The Spirit gives life to people who belong to Christ and brings them into a family, a people, and a body whose life is found in Jesus.

Paul writes:

"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 13.

Then he says:

"And all were made to drink of one Spirit."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 13.

Paul is writing to a church marked by significant differences and serious problems. The Corinthians came from different backgrounds, possessed different gifts, carried different levels of maturity, and often struggled with comparison and division. Yet Paul's point in this passage is clear: they belong to one body through the work of one Spirit.

Whatever other questions we may bring to Scripture about the Spirit's work, Paul is emphasizing shared belonging here. No group within the Corinthian church possessed a different Spirit, and no individual stood outside the body's need for the others. They had been joined to Christ and, because they belonged to Christ, they also belonged to one another.

Paul writes:

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 12.

The church is not a collection of identical people. It is a body made of different members who receive life from the same Lord and are joined together by the Spirit. Their differences do not have to become obstacles because God Himself has chosen to form His people as a body.

That kind of dependence can make us uncomfortable. Independence often feels easier because we can manage our own lives, solve our own problems, and decide how much of our-

selves other people are allowed to see. Community eventually asks more from us because people know us, interrupt us, need things from us, and sometimes become the people we need.

The Spirit forms the church by teaching people who belong to Jesus how to belong to one another.

Paul continues:

"But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 18.

No member designed the body, and no member gets to decide that the others are unnecessary. God arranged the members according to His wisdom, which gives dignity to contributions that may never become highly visible.

Some believers teach publicly, while others quietly care for children, prepare meals, visit someone who is sick, welcome strangers, repair what is broken, give generously, pray faithfully, or sit beside someone who is grieving. Some gifts are visible to a room full of people. Others may be recognized by only a handful, but the Spirit is not limited to what happens on a platform.

Paul addresses comparison from both directions. One person may believe they are unnecessary because another person's contribution seems more important, while someone else may begin acting as though their own role makes them less dependent upon everyone around them.

Paul writes:

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.'"

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 21.

A gifted teacher still needs people who serve, pray, encourage, give, show mercy, discern wisely, and speak truth. A strong leader still needs people who can offer counsel, carry burdens, and lovingly say what needs to be said. The person serving quietly behind the scenes needs the rest of the body too.

No one possesses everything Christ intends to give His church. That should free us from competing with people whose gifts differ from ours or believing we must become like someone else in order to have value. God has arranged the body, the Spirit gives according to His wisdom, and Jesus remains the head.

Paul's concern in First Corinthians 12 is therefore larger than helping individuals discover what they are good at. He keeps returning to the health of the whole body.

He writes:

"That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 25.

Then:

"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 26.

That is a much deeper picture of church than people attending the same gathering each week. The body shares life. When someone suffers, others move toward them, and when someone is honored, others learn to rejoice without feeling diminished.

Those responses do not always come naturally. We compare ourselves, protect our place, become jealous, and sometimes find another person's success harder to carry than their suffering. The Spirit forms a different kind of people by teaching us to rejoice when someone else is blessed and to move closer when another person is hurting.

Love does not require us to become less distinct. It teaches us to use whatever God has given us for the good of someone else.

Paul had already stated that purpose:

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 7.

The words *common good* keep spiritual gifts facing outward. What the Spirit gives through one person is intended to strengthen others. We considered the variety of those gifts earlier, but Paul's picture of the body now helps us see why that variety exists.

We need one another because the Spirit chose to distribute His work among His people rather than placing everything into one person.

That also helps explain why First Corinthians 12 moves directly into Paul's teaching about love. He does not leave spiritual gifts behind and begin an unrelated subject. Love shows us how a gifted body is meant to live.

Paul writes:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."

First Corinthians chapter 13, verse 1.

He continues through the chapter speaking about prophecy, knowledge, faith, generosity, patience, kindness, envy, pride, irritation, truth, endurance, and hope. Paul brings spiritual expression and Christian character together because the church needs both.

A church can possess strong teaching and still need deeper humility. It can experience meaningful spiritual gifts and still need to grow in patience and care. It can organize ministry well while overlooking people, or encourage wide participation without giving enough attention to wisdom and order.

None of those weaknesses is solved by moving to another extreme. Paul continually brings the church toward Jesus, where truth, love, service, gifts, discernment, and humility belong together.

The Spirit who gives gifts also produces fruit.

Paul gives another picture of this shared life in Ephesians.

"With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love."

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 2.

Then:

"Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 3.

Paul does not tell believers to create the unity of the Spirit. He tells them to maintain it because God has already joined His people to Christ and to one another. The church is called to live faithfully within the unity God has given.

Paul continues:

"There is one body and one Spirit."

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 4.

Then:

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Ephesians chapter 4, verses 5 and 6.

Our deepest unity is not created by shared personalities, backgrounds, worship preferences, ministry methods, or experiences. It rests in the God who has called us and the Jesus to whom we belong.

That does not make every disagreement unimportant. Paul himself corrected churches when the gospel was distorted, confronted serious sin, and warned believers about false teaching. Unity does not require us to pretend that truth no longer matters.

Scripture also shows that God's people can have real differences while continuing to belong to the same Lord. We may not understand every passage in exactly the same way or make every decision about church life in the same way. Those differences call for conviction joined to humility rather than contempt.

The Spirit of truth is also the Spirit who produces love, patience, gentleness, and self-control. We can hold convictions without treating another believer as an enemy. We can listen carefully without surrendering what we believe Scripture teaches, and we can remain willing to learn because none of us approaches the Bible without a history.

Our families, churches, teachers, cultures, experiences, and assumptions have shaped some of the questions we ask and some of the answers that initially feel most familiar. Recognizing that should not weaken our confidence in Scripture. It should deepen our humility as we continue returning to it together.

The church is much larger than what any one of us has personally experienced.

Followers of Jesus gather in large buildings, homes, storefronts, simple shelters, and places where gathering openly carries real risk. They worship in different languages, sing different songs, follow different rhythms, and live within cultures very different from our own.

They belong to the same Jesus, and the same Spirit is at work among the people of God.

Paul's vision of unity does not require sameness. It gives us a people held together by Christ who learn to walk with humility, patience, truth, gentleness, and love even while differences remain.

The Spirit also works through leaders who help the church grow toward maturity.

Paul writes:

"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers."

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11.

Then he explains their purpose:

"To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 12.

Christians may understand some of these roles and how they function in the church today differently. Paul's stated purpose, however, is clear. Christ gives people to the church so that God's people can be equipped and the body of Christ can be built up.

The work of ministry is therefore not reserved for the few people who stand in front of the church. Pastors and other leaders carry real responsibility to teach faithfully, shepherd carefully, model Christian character, guard those entrusted to their care, and help God's people mature.

Healthy leadership also equips the rest of the body. It recognizes what God is doing in others, creates room for people to serve, and helps believers become increasingly faithful with what God has placed in their hands.

Leadership should not make a church increasingly dependent upon one personality.

Paul continues:

"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God."

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 13.

The goal is maturity in Christ.

Then he writes:

"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 15.

Jesus remains the head of the church.

That protects leaders from believing the body belongs to them, and it protects believers from treating a gifted leader as though everything depends upon that person. Leaders matter deeply, but the church belongs to Jesus.

Truth and love belong together under His leadership. Truth separated from love can become harsh and proud, while love unwilling to speak truth can leave people trapped in patterns that are harming them. The Spirit forms a church that learns to speak truth in a way that increasingly reflects the character of Jesus.

Healthy community therefore includes encouragement and correction.

We need people who remind us of grace when shame is crushing us, and we need people who love us enough to speak when our choices are pulling us away from Jesus. Correction should never become an excuse for humiliation, control, or spiritual superiority.

Paul writes:

"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."

Galatians chapter 6, verse 1.

Then he adds:

"Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."

Galatians chapter 6, verse 1.

The goal is restoration, and the posture is gentleness. Sin is taken seriously while the person being restored is still treated as someone Jesus loves. The one offering correction also remembers that they remain dependent upon grace.

Healthy spiritual community has enough truth to confront what is wrong and enough humility to know that no one stands above the need for mercy.

Paul continues:

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Galatians chapter 6, verse 2.

Some burdens are visible and practical. A family walking through illness may need meals, transportation, childcare, financial help, or someone willing to sit in a waiting room. Grief can make simple responsibilities feel overwhelming, and the body can move toward those needs with practical love.

Other burdens are much harder to see. Someone can attend church every week while carrying fear no one knows about. A parent may be deeply worried about a child, a marriage may be struggling quietly, or a leader may be exhausted while believing there is nowhere safe to say it.

The body cannot carry what it never knows exists.

Christian community therefore requires some willingness to be known. That does not mean telling everyone everything because trust, wisdom, boundaries, and discretion remain important. Some parts of life should be shared only within relationships that have demonstrated maturity and care.

Isolation carries its own danger, however. Temptation hidden in darkness can grow stronger, fear repeated only within our own thoughts can become more convincing, and exhaustion can deepen while everyone around us assumes we are doing well.

The Spirit often cares for His people through His people.

We may ask God for strength and receive a friend who sits beside us. We may pray for provision and encounter someone's generosity, or ask for wisdom and receive counsel from another believer who sees something we have missed.

Receiving from the body can require as much humility as serving the body. Some of us would rather help than be helped because helping allows us to remain in the stronger position. Receiving reminds us that we have limits and were never intended to carry everything alone.

Needing the body is not evidence that spiritual maturity has failed. God designed the body so that its members would need one another.

This shared life became visible immediately after Pentecost.

Luke writes:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts chapter 2, verse 42.

The believers learned together, prayed together, ate together, worshiped together, and cared for people in need. The coming of the Spirit did not produce isolated spiritual individuals who simply shared similar experiences. He formed a people whose life together became part of their witness.

Later, practical needs created tension within the growing church. Acts 6 tells us that some widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles did not dismiss the problem because it involved an ordinary need rather than preaching or prayer.

They addressed it and involved trusted people described as being full of the Spirit and wisdom.

That tells us something about the kind of church the Spirit forms. Spiritual life is not separated from practical love. The Spirit who gives gifts also forms people who notice when someone vulnerable is being overlooked.

The Spirit who empowers proclamation also forms generosity and service.

Jesus had already shown His disciples this kind of life when He knelt and washed their feet.

"For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."

John chapter 13, verse 15.

The church becomes increasingly recognizable as the body of Christ when it begins taking on the posture of Christ. That includes forms of service that may never receive public recognition.

It includes making room for children, caring for older people, welcoming someone new, walking patiently beside people who are struggling, and remaining faithful to people who cannot advance our reputation. Hospitality, generosity, forgiveness, encouragement, and practical service become ways the life of Jesus is made visible among His people.

This kind of church cannot be built around personal preference alone. At some point, belonging to a body means choosing the good of others.

Paul writes:

"Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

Romans chapter 15, verse 2.

Paul is not telling believers to avoid every disagreement or spend their lives trying to keep everyone happy. He is describing a heart that no longer makes every decision around itself. We begin

considering what will strengthen the people God has placed around us.

That reaches into how we use spiritual gifts, handle disagreement, speak about leaders, welcome strangers, care for weak believers, respond to people with different backgrounds, and react when someone else's need becomes inconvenient.

The Spirit forms people who increasingly think in terms of *we*, not only *me*.

Even so, the church will sometimes disappoint us.

No community made of unfinished people will avoid conflict or failure entirely. Churches can wound people deeply, leaders can fail, friendships can break, and followers of Jesus can treat one another in ways that do not reflect Him.

The language of unity should never be used to hide abuse, excuse serious sin, silence necessary accountability, or require someone to remain in an unsafe situation. Biblical unity walks in truth, and there are times when confrontation, boundaries, accountability, or leaving an unhealthy environment may be necessary.

Failure within the church does not erase the place Jesus gives His people, and acknowledging the beauty of the church does not require us to deny its brokenness.

Paul writes:

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 25.

Jesus loves His church.

He does not love only an ideal church that exists in our imagination. He loves actual people who are still being formed by grace, and He gave Himself for them.

That does not require us to ignore what is broken. It means brokenness is not the whole story.

The Spirit is still sanctifying His people. He gives gifts, brings conviction, restores what can be restored, raises up leaders, strengthens tired believers, calls people to repentance, draws strangers into families, and sends ordinary followers of Jesus into the world.

Paul gives another picture of the body near the end of Ephesians 4:

"From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped."

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 16.

Then:

"When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 16.

Christ is the head from whom the body receives its life and direction. Every part contributes, and love becomes the environment in which growth takes place.

There is something beautiful about a church living this way. The teacher teaches, the giver gives, the encourager strengthens, the leader serves, the person with mercy moves toward pain, and people with gifts that receive less attention remain faithful with what God has entrusted to them.

No one needs to become everyone else, and no one was meant to become the center. The Spirit works through different people while drawing every member toward the same Jesus.

That kind of unity becomes a witness in a divided world. People with different ages, backgrounds, personalities, histories, resources, and experiences can share life because they belong to a Lord greater than everything that might otherwise separate them.

Jesus prayed for His people before the cross:

"That they may all be one."

John chapter 17, verse 21.

His prayer reaches toward a people whose shared life says something about Him to the world. Jesus continues by connecting that unity with the world's recognition that the Father sent Him.

The church makes Christ visible not only through what it proclaims but also through the way its people learn to love one another.

The Spirit is forming that people. He teaches us to receive from one another, forgive one another, carry burdens, speak truth in love, use what He gives, restore gently, serve faithfully, and remain centered upon Jesus.

The church will not do those things perfectly before Christ returns. Yet by the Spirit, it can increasingly reflect the One to whom it belongs.

And when the body begins living as the body, its attention does not remain turned inward.

The gifts strengthen the church so the church can serve. Leaders equip believers so believers can participate in the work of Jesus. The Spirit forms a people together and then sends that people outward with the good news of Christ.

The Spirit who joins the church together also empowers the church to witness.

And that is where we turn next.

Chapter Twelve

Sent by the Spirit

The Spirit who joins the church together also sends the church outward. He forms a people around Jesus, gives gifts for the good of the body, produces the character of Christ within them, and then leads them into the world with good news. The life of the Spirit was never meant to end with what happens inside the church.

Jesus made that clear before He ascended.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses.”

Acts chapter 1, verse 8.

Then Jesus told them where that witness would go:

“In Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts chapter 1, verse 8.

Power and witness belong together in Jesus' promise. The disciples were not being empowered simply so that they could have remarkable spiritual experiences or become important people. The Spirit would enable them to bear witness to Jesus wherever He sent them.

That word *witness* gives the mission its center.

The disciples had seen Jesus, heard Him teach, watched Him heal, seen Him crucified, and encountered Him alive after His resurrection. Now they would tell others who He is and what He had done, and the Spirit would empower them for that work.

Jesus had already given them the mission:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 19.

Then:

"Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 19.

Jesus continued:

"Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 20.

The mission reaches beyond a single decision or moment of response. Jesus calls His followers to make disciples, baptize them, teach them His way, and help them learn obedience to everything He commanded. The church is sent to announce the gospel and walk with people as they learn to follow Jesus.

That work cannot be carried faithfully through human strength alone.

Before sending His disciples outward, Jesus told them to wait.

"And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you."

Luke chapter 24, verse 49.

Then:

"But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Luke chapter 24, verse 49.

These were people who had spent years with Jesus. They had heard His teaching directly, seen the empty tomb, and encountered the risen Christ. They possessed firsthand knowledge that no later generation of believers would possess in the same way, and still Jesus told them to wait for the Spirit.

Knowledge alone was not enough for the mission before them. They needed God's power.

That should shape the way we approach mission. We need Scripture, thoughtful preparation, wise leadership, clear communication, and practical ways of serving people. None of those things competes with dependence upon the Spirit, but none can replace Him either.

We cannot create new birth in another person. We cannot argue someone into the Kingdom, manipulate a heart into surrender, or produce spiritual life through the strength of our personality.

Paul gives us language for this dependence when he describes his work and the work of Apollos:

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."

First Corinthians chapter 3, verse 6.

Then:

"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

First Corinthians chapter 3, verse 7.

Paul does not use God's work as an excuse for passivity. He planted, and Apollos watered. They taught, traveled, served, endured, reasoned from Scripture, built relationships, and proclaimed Jesus.

God gave the growth.

That distinction gives us freedom. We can take our responsibility seriously without carrying a responsibility that belongs only

to God. We speak, serve, pray, teach, invite, love, and remain available while trusting the Spirit to work in ways we cannot see.

Acts gives us a beautiful example through a woman named Lydia.

Paul and his companions had traveled to Philippi and met a group of women gathered for prayer. Paul spoke, and Luke tells us what happened as Lydia listened:

"The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."

Acts chapter 16, verse 14.

Paul spoke, and the Lord opened her heart.

Both parts belong in the story.

We should speak clearly about Jesus and trust the Spirit with what happens inside another person. We can pray for them, love them, listen to their stories, and speak when opportunities come. We remain faithful with what has been entrusted to us while trusting God with the places we cannot reach.

Many of those opportunities arrive through ordinary conversations.

A coworker may ask why we handled a difficult season differently. A neighbor may begin talking about grief, a family member may ask what we believe, or a friend may finally admit that something in life is falling apart.

Mission often begins with paying attention.

Peter tells believers:

"Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."

First Peter chapter 3, verse 15.

Then he adds:

"Yet do it with gentleness and respect."

First Peter chapter 3, verse 15.

Our hope should become visible enough that questions can arise, and when they do, followers of Jesus should be ready to speak. Yet Peter keeps the manner of our witness connected to the character of Christ. Gentleness and respect belong in evangelism because the Spirit who gives courage is also the Spirit who produces gentleness and self-control.

Boldness is sometimes mistaken for volume or forcefulness. We can imagine that speaking boldly means saying whatever comes to mind without concern for the person receiving it.

Acts gives us a richer picture.

After Peter and John were threatened for speaking about Jesus, the believers gathered and prayed:

"Grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness."

Acts chapter 4, verse 29.

Luke then tells us:

"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken."

Acts chapter 4, verse 31.

He continues:

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

Acts chapter 4, verse 31.

Their boldness was not the absence of danger. The threats were real, but obedience to Jesus became greater than the fear of what might happen to them. The Spirit strengthened them to continue speaking when silence would have been safer.

Spirit-given boldness can take many forms. It may look like speaking before a crowd, telling a friend how Jesus has changed us, praying with a coworker who asks for help, or speaking truth with love when the conversation may become uncomfortable.

Sometimes courage simply means crossing a room toward someone we would normally avoid.

The Spirit gives courage for obedience.

Acts repeatedly shows His work moving the church across boundaries. Philip is directed toward an Ethiopian official, Peter

is sent into the home of Cornelius, Barnabas and Saul are sent from Antioch, and Paul and his companions carry the gospel farther into the Gentile world.

The mission Jesus described in Acts 1 begins moving outward from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and beyond.

The gospel keeps crossing lines people had learned to treat as permanent.

The story of Peter and Cornelius makes that especially clear. Peter had grown up within well-established Jewish boundaries concerning food, Gentiles, and religious purity. Then God began preparing both Peter and Cornelius for a meeting neither man would have arranged on his own.

The Spirit told Peter to go with the men Cornelius had sent. Peter entered the home and began proclaiming Jesus, and while he was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon those who were listening.

God was doing more than changing one person's plans. He was teaching the church that the good news of Jesus would cross boundaries the first disciples were still learning to cross.

Peter later looked back on what God had done and said:

"If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

Acts chapter 11, verse 17.

The Spirit leads God's people toward people they may not have expected to receive.

That continues challenging the church. We naturally move toward people who are familiar to us, understand our language, share our background, or make us feel comfortable. Mission often asks us to move beyond those instincts.

The person God places before us may come from a different culture, generation, social position, political background, family story, or way of life. We do not need to become alike in every respect before we can speak about Jesus, listen well, serve faithfully, and make room for another person at the table.

The gospel is large enough to cross the boundaries we create.

This mission may carry some believers into another nation, language, or culture. For others, the Spirit's sending will remain close to home for much of their lives.

Both belong to the mission of Jesus.

A parent teaching a child to follow Christ is participating in it. So is a believer opening Scripture with a friend, a business owner treating employees with integrity and speaking about the hope found in Jesus, a family welcoming someone into their home, or a church serving a neighborhood that has learned not to expect anyone to care.

The distance traveled does not determine the value of the obedience.

Sometimes mission takes us across the sea, and sometimes it leads us across the street.

Wherever Jesus sends His people, we carry His name.

Acts also reminds us that the Spirit's power is not limited to courage and direction. The book includes healing, deliverance, prophecy, signs, miracles, visions, unusual guidance, and other works of God that go beyond ordinary human ability.

We do not need to remove those things from the story in order to make mission understandable.

God is free to work according to His wisdom.

The same Spirit who gave boldness to speak also worked through gifts and acts of power that caused people to recognize that something greater than human ability was taking place. Those moments belong to the witness of Acts and should be received as Scripture gives them.

At the same time, the signs themselves never become the gospel.

Peter still preached Jesus. Philip explained the good news about Jesus. Paul entered cities and reasoned about Jesus, and when God worked in extraordinary ways, those works served a mission centered upon Christ.

The Spirit glorifies Jesus.

That remains the measure.

We can pray for God to heal, remain open to His gifts, and expect Him to work beyond what we can accomplish ourselves without turning spiritual power into a performance. We can receive what He gives without demanding that every situation unfold in the same way.

Acts contains remarkable works of God, and it also contains faithful believers who suffer, wait, labor, serve, teach, travel, endure, and sometimes see very different results from what they hoped.

Both belong to Spirit-empowered mission.

The gifts we considered earlier also begin moving outward here. A teacher equips people who will eventually teach others. A person with mercy moves toward someone whose pain may have kept them far from Christian community.

Someone with generosity meets a need. A leader helps people move toward obedience, an encourager strengthens someone who is close to giving up, and a person with unusual faith may help a church continue trusting God when the path ahead feels impossible.

The gifts strengthen the body, and a strengthened body becomes able to serve.

Mission does not belong only to people who have the gift of evangelism or who cross cultural boundaries professionally. The whole church participates because every part can contribute to the work Jesus has given His people.

Discipleship becomes one of the clearest ways that work continues.

Paul told Timothy:

"And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men."

Second Timothy chapter 2, verse 2.

Then:

"Who will be able to teach others also."

Second Timothy chapter 2, verse 2.

There is multiplication in those words. Paul teaches Timothy, Timothy entrusts truth to others, and those people become able to teach others. The life and teaching of Jesus move from one generation of disciples to another.

The Spirit is present throughout that process because discipleship is more than transferring information. A person can learn Christian vocabulary, understand doctrine, and attend church regularly while still resisting the transformation Jesus desires.

The goal is formation.

We want people to know Jesus, become like Him, obey Him, and help others follow Him. That requires patience because growth rarely moves in a perfectly straight line.

People make progress, struggle, ask questions they have asked before, return to old patterns, repent, learn, and take another step. Anyone who walks closely with another person in discipleship eventually learns that we cannot rush what God is forming.

We keep walking with people while trusting the Spirit to continue His work.

Paul writes:

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion."

Philippians chapter 1, verse 6.

Paul's confidence rested in God's continuing work among His people. That gives us patience because the Spirit can continue forming someone when we are not present, and He can accomplish things we do not know how to produce.

It also protects us from trying to make disciples in our own image.

Our goal is not to produce people who share every preference we have, speak exactly as we speak, or reproduce our personality and traditions. We point people toward Jesus.

We teach Scripture, help them learn obedience, encourage them to recognize the Spirit's work, serve the body, walk in holiness, love people, and carry the gospel into their own relationships. Then we trust God to form them according to His purposes.

The church at Antioch gives us another picture of what happens when a community becomes attentive to the Spirit's mission.

Luke writes:

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"

Acts chapter 13, verse 2.

Then:

"Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

Acts chapter 13, verse 3.

The church worshiped, prayed, discerned, and sent. They did not keep every gifted person close simply because those people were valuable to the local congregation.

Healthy churches should be willing to send.

That may mean sending missionaries across the world or helping plant another church. It may involve raising up leaders who eventually serve somewhere else, releasing people into ministries outside the congregation, or blessing a family as God redirects their lives.

Mission loosens our grip because the church belongs to Jesus.

We are stewards rather than owners. The Spirit may send people we love, redirect plans we thought were settled, or call us toward places and people we never expected.

The book of Acts also reminds us that mission can be costly.

The apostles are threatened. Stephen is killed. Believers are scattered, and Paul is beaten, imprisoned, rejected, and repeatedly opposed.

The Spirit who gives power for witness also strengthens God's people to remain faithful when witness brings suffering.

Jesus had prepared His disciples for such moments. Speaking about times when they would be brought before authorities because of Him, He said:

"Do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say."

Mark chapter 13, verse 11.

Then:

"But say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit."

Mark chapter 13, verse 11.

The promise was not that following Jesus would keep them away from danger. The Spirit would remain with them when obedience led into it.

Stephen gives us a sobering picture of that faithfulness. Acts describes him as full of the Holy Spirit even as hostility around him grows. His Spirit-filled life does not end with escape from suffering.

He remains faithful to Jesus within it.

That protects us from measuring the Spirit's work only by visible success. A large response does not automatically prove that every method was faithful, and opposition does not automatically mean someone missed God's direction.

Peter preached at Pentecost and thousands responded. Stephen bore witness and was killed.

Both were faithful.

The results of mission belong to God.

We can celebrate when people respond to the gospel, churches grow, prayers are answered, needs are met, or a ministry bears visible fruit. Gratitude is appropriate.

We should not turn visible results into the final measure of whether the Spirit is at work.

Some people may labor for years before seeing what they hoped to see. Others may plant something another generation eventually harvests. A parent may pray for a child for decades, a missionary may work faithfully among people who seem uninterested, or someone may share Jesus repeatedly with a friend who never responds in the way they hoped.

We remain responsible for faithfulness and leave the results with God.

That gives us freedom to continue praying, loving, serving, speaking when God gives opportunity, and making disciples even when we cannot yet see what He is doing.

Mission also reaches beyond words without ever becoming separated from the gospel.

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom and moved toward people in need. The early church preached Christ while caring for the poor, widows, outsiders, and people carrying practical burdens.

James writes:

"If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food."

James chapter 2, verse 15.

Then:

"And one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?"

James chapter 2, verse 16.

Love takes form.

Sometimes witness includes explaining the gospel clearly. At other moments, love begins with bringing a meal, sitting beside

someone in grief, serving a family in crisis, caring for a child, welcoming a stranger, or meeting a practical need.

We do those things because Jesus loves people, not simply as a strategy for earning the right to speak.

Yet love often creates space for deeper conversations. People may begin asking why we care, why we have hope, or why we would give time to them when others have walked away.

When the opportunity comes, we point toward Jesus.

The Spirit gives His people compassion for the world Christ loves. He can interrupt our comfort, make us aware of people we had stopped seeing, and turn what once felt like someone else's problem into a burden we are willing to help carry.

That does not mean any one person can meet every need. We are still part of a body, and no member was meant to become the whole body.

We listen for our part and remain faithful with what God places before us.

Sometimes the mission will take us across the sea, and sometimes it will lead us across the street. Wherever Jesus sends His people, we carry His name.

That brings us back to His promise:

"You will be my witnesses."

Acts chapter 1, verse 8.

We are not witnesses to our own spirituality, our church tradition, or the importance of our experiences. We are witnesses to Jesus.

The Spirit glorifies Him. The church proclaims Him. The gospel announces Him, and disciples learn to follow Him.

Everything continues returning to Jesus.

One day the mission will reach its fulfillment.

John gives us a picture of a great multitude before the throne:

"From every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages."

Revelation chapter 7, verse 9.

The mission is moving toward a people gathered around the Lamb.

Until then, the church remains sent.

There are still people who have never heard clearly who Jesus is. There are neighbors who know His name but have never seen what following Him looks like in everyday life, children who need someone to teach them Scripture, believers who need someone to walk with them toward maturity, and lonely people who need a table where they can be known.

Communities need churches filled with people who love truth, practice mercy, walk in holiness, serve faithfully, remain open to the Spirit, and speak about Jesus without shame.

The Spirit is still forming and sending that kind of church.

We do not have to become extraordinary people before God can use us. Acts begins with ordinary followers of Jesus waiting in dependence upon the promise of God. The Spirit is poured out, and those ordinary people begin speaking, serving, crossing boundaries, enduring suffering, making disciples, and carrying the gospel outward.

The story moves through people who continue saying yes to Jesus.

That remains our calling.

We abide in Christ and learn to walk by the Spirit. We use what He gives for the good of others, love the people of God, listen for His leading, and remain available when He sends us.

The mission belongs to Jesus, and the Spirit gives His people power to participate in it.

The Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation has not abandoned His work. He spoke through the prophets, was present throughout the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, was poured out upon the church, and continues dwelling within the people of God.

He is still forming people who look like Jesus. He is still strengthening His church and sending witnesses into the world.

And until Jesus comes, we keep in step with the Spirit.

Conclusion

Keep in Step With the Spirit

The Christian life was never meant to be lived in our own strength. Jesus did not save us, give us instructions, and then leave us alone to figure out how to follow Him. He gave His people the Holy Spirit, the Helper He promised would remain with us.

The Spirit gives life to those who belong to Christ. He dwells within us, forms the character of Jesus within us, gives what is needed to serve others, helps us pray, leads us in truth, strengthens the church, and gives power to bear witness to Jesus. From beginning to end, the Christian life is a life of dependence upon God.

Paul gives us a simple picture of how that life continues:

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 25.

We live by the Spirit, so we learn to walk with Him. Keeping in step is not about becoming anxious over every decision or

constantly wondering whether we have missed something God wanted to say. It is the posture of people who know they need Him and intend to remain responsive to His work.

We stay close to Jesus. We remain rooted in Scripture, bring our lives honestly before God, receive conviction when the Spirit exposes what needs to change, and obey what God has made clear. Over time, that dependence becomes less like something we remember during a crisis and more like the way we live.

Some followers of Jesus will have remarkable stories of moments when the Spirit's work was unmistakable. Others will describe years of quieter faithfulness, gradual transformation, answered prayer, strength in suffering, growing discernment, and ordinary moments when God made His presence known. Scripture gives us room to receive the Spirit's work without requiring every believer's experience to look exactly the same.

We are not called to reproduce another person's story. We are called to follow Jesus with the Spirit He has given us.

That has been the direction of this entire journey.

From the opening pages of Scripture, the Spirit is present. He moves over the waters at creation, gives life, equips people for God's purposes, speaks through the prophets, and points toward the day when God will place His Spirit within His people.

The story continues moving toward Jesus.

The eternal Son enters our world and takes on our humanity, conceived in Mary through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit descends upon Him at His baptism, leads Him into the wilderness, and is present throughout His earthly ministry. Jesus proclaims good news, confronts darkness, heals, serves, loves, suffers, dies, rises again, and promises His disciples that they will not be left alone.

He promises the Helper.

Jesus gives us the center for understanding the Spirit when He says:

"He will glorify me."

John chapter 16, verse 14.

Those words remain a steady guide for everything we have considered. The Spirit does not draw attention away from Jesus or compete with the Son for glory. He leads God's people into truth, brings conviction, forms holy character, gives gifts for service, strengthens the church, and empowers witness in ways that continually lead us toward Christ.

A Spirit-filled life should therefore become increasingly shaped like Jesus.

His love should become more visible in the way we treat people. His holiness should reach our private choices, His compassion should move us toward people in need, and His courage should strengthen us when obedience becomes costly. His humility should affect the way we use whatever influence or gifts God has entrusted to us.

The Spirit gives power for that life, but His power is never given so that we can become impressed with ourselves. Jesus promised power so that His people could become His witnesses. The Spirit gives courage for obedience, strength in weakness, gifts for service, and help for work that human strength alone cannot accomplish.

There are things we simply cannot produce for ourselves.

We cannot give ourselves new birth or transform our hearts through willpower. We cannot manufacture the fruit of the Spirit by learning to appear patient, peaceful, kind, or self-controlled. We cannot open another person's heart to the gospel or carry the mission of Jesus through strategy alone.

We need the Spirit.

Our dependence upon Him does not make us passive. It teaches us where our strength comes from while calling us into active obedience. Grace does not leave us sitting still because the Spirit is forming people who walk with God.

Paul writes to believers:

"But be filled with the Spirit."

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 18.

Paul is speaking to people who already belong to Jesus. They have received the Spirit, yet they are still called to live in continuing dependence upon Him. Scripture does not require us to choose between the truth that every believer has the Spirit and

the truth that believers continue needing His filling, strength, wisdom, and help.

We never mature beyond our need for God.

In many ways, maturity makes that dependence more obvious. We learn to pray sooner rather than waiting until every other option has failed. We repent more willingly, listen more carefully, receive help more humbly, and become less impressed with our own strength because we have seen where that strength eventually reaches its limit.

Dependence also requires surrender.

There will be places where surrender feels costly. The Spirit may expose a habit we have defended, pride we have learned to hide, fear that has been making our decisions, an ambition that has become too important, or a relationship where forgiveness and truth are needed.

His conviction does not call us into hiding. It brings us back toward Jesus.

We confess what He reveals, receive the grace Christ has already secured, and take the next faithful step. We may need to apologize, ask for help, walk away from something, wait when we would rather move, speak when fear would keep us quiet, or surrender a plan we had already decided must happen.

As we keep responding to Him, something begins changing within us.

Love becomes more costly and more real. Joy learns to remain through sorrow, peace reaches places once ruled by anxiety, and patience grows through waiting. Kindness changes the way we treat people, goodness reaches decisions no one else sees, faithfulness continues when excitement disappears, gentleness teaches strength how to serve, and self-control weakens the rule of desires that once controlled us.

The fruit of the Spirit makes the character of Jesus visible in ordinary life.

His work cannot be measured only by extraordinary moments or by what happens when the church gathers. The Spirit is present when we are tempted, tired, interrupted, disappointed, misunderstood, or given an opportunity to love someone who can offer us nothing in return.

He works in homes, workplaces, conversations, friendships, marriages, churches, hospital rooms, classrooms, and quiet places where no one else sees the choice being made. A life formed by the Spirit eventually reaches all of life.

That same Spirit also gives according to His wisdom.

We have seen that Scripture gives real room for spiritual gifts. We do not need to fear what God gives, manufacture what He has not given, or rank ourselves according to another person's gift or experience. The Spirit distributes according to His will, and what He gives is meant for the good of others.

Love remains the way those gifts are carried.

Some gifts may be expressed publicly, while others serve quietly. Some may be familiar to us, while others require us to slow down and listen carefully to Scripture. Whatever He gives, we receive as stewards rather than owners.

The Giver remains greater than every gift.

The Spirit also meets us in prayer. Sometimes we come before God with clear words and specific requests. At other times, suffering, confusion, grief, or uncertainty brings us to the edge of what we know how to say.

Our weakness does not make prayer useless.

The Spirit helps us there.

He teaches us to come before the Father honestly, through the Son who opened the way for us. He brings truth to mind, convicts us when our motives need to change, helps us surrender what we cannot control, and remains present when answers do not come as quickly as we hoped.

Prayer gradually becomes more than a place where we ask God to change our circumstances. It becomes one of the places where God changes us.

We become quicker to pray before reacting. We learn to bring decisions before God before we have already made them, pray for people rather than only talk about them, and remain before the Father when the answer is still unclear.

That dependence follows us into discernment.

The Spirit leads His people, but His leading is never permission to move beyond Scripture, wisdom, humility, accountability, or the character of Jesus. We remain open to His direction while remembering that our impressions are not Scripture and that we can misunderstand.

We test what we receive. We listen to trusted believers, pay attention to the fruit being produced, wait when waiting is wise, and remain willing for God to correct us.

At the same time, we do not have to become so afraid of getting something wrong that we stop expecting God to lead His people. Acts gives us a church that prayed, listened, discerned, moved, changed direction, crossed boundaries, and trusted the Spirit to guide the mission Jesus had given them.

The Spirit still leads us toward obedience.

Often that leading will appear wonderfully ordinary. Tell the truth. Forgive. Pray. Serve. Listen. Repent. Encourage. Give. Wait. Speak about Jesus when the opportunity comes.

Faithfulness is built through those steps.

We also take those steps with other believers because the Spirit has not formed us into isolated followers of Jesus. He has joined us to a body.

We need people whose gifts differ from ours, people who encourage us when we are tired, people who can tell us the truth when we cannot see clearly, and people who will pray when

our own words are few. We need opportunities to serve and the humility to allow others to serve us.

The church will never be perfect before Jesus returns because it is filled with people still being formed by grace. There will be disagreements, failures, and places where repentance and correction are necessary. Yet Jesus still loves His church, and the Spirit continues forming His people together.

He creates unity without requiring sameness. He gives different gifts while keeping Christ as the head. He teaches us to carry burdens, restore gently, speak truth in love, care for people who are overlooked, and use what He gives for the common good.

Then He sends that church outward.

The Spirit's work does not end with our own formation. Jesus gives power for witness, and the church carries His name into the world.

Sometimes that mission takes us across the sea, and sometimes it takes us across the street. It may involve preaching before many people or opening Scripture with one friend. It may look like crossing a cultural boundary, discipling a child, welcoming someone to our table, meeting a practical need, praying for someone who is suffering, or speaking about Jesus when an ordinary conversation becomes an opportunity.

We remain witnesses to Jesus.

We do not have to produce the results. We plant, water, serve, speak, love, pray, and make disciples while trusting God to give

the growth. Some will see visible fruit quickly, while others may remain faithful for years without seeing everything they hoped to see.

The Spirit's presence is not proved by immediate success.

He strengthened Peter when thousands responded, and He was present with Stephen when faithful witness led to death. He works through moments of remarkable breakthrough and through years of costly perseverance.

Our calling is faithfulness.

That faithfulness also carries us toward something still ahead.

The Spirit is God's presence with us now, but the Christian story is moving toward the day when faith becomes sight. Sin, suffering, injustice, disease, death, and everything else that belongs to this broken age will not have the final word.

Jesus will.

The final pages of Scripture give us a remarkable picture:

"'The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'"

Revelation chapter 22, verse 17.

The Spirit and the church look toward the coming of Christ.

That longing keeps the Christian life facing forward. We serve because Jesus is coming. We pursue holiness because Jesus is coming. We make disciples, bear witness, love our neighbors,

strengthen the church, endure suffering, and remain faithful because history is moving toward Him.

Our hope is not that we will eventually master the Spirit-filled life. Our hope is Jesus.

The One the Spirit glorifies is the One we are waiting to see.

Until that day, the Spirit remains with God's people. He gives life, helps us in weakness, produces fruit, gives gifts, guides us in truth, strengthens the church, empowers witness, and keeps drawing our attention toward Christ.

There will still be questions we cannot answer and moments when we are unsure what God is doing. We will still need to repent, ask for wisdom, receive help from others, and trust God when the road ahead is unclear.

We will never outgrow dependence.

That is not a weakness in the Christian life.

It is the Christian life.

Jesus has given us the Helper.

So remain close to Christ. Stay rooted in Scripture. Pray. Listen. Test what you receive. Love the church. Use what God gives you to serve others. Welcome the Spirit's conviction, depend upon His strength, remain open to His work, and go wherever Jesus sends you.

Then take the next faithful step.

And the next one after that.

Until the day we see Jesus face to face, we live by the Spirit.

So let us keep in step with the Spirit.