

# Loved by the Holy Spirit

"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."—Romans 5:5

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by Paul Thigpen *Discipleship Journal* Issue #146 March/April 2005

Imagine that the Holy Spirit, in a flight of whimsy, decided to write a job description for His position. (After all, He has a fine sense of humor; He created the ostrich, didn't He?) The posting might run something like this.

**Company:** The Kingdom of God

**Position:** Third Person of the Holy Trinity

**Qualifications:** Superior intelligence, dynamic creativity, boundless energy, infinite power. Superb skills in supervision, counseling, and communications. Long-term experience in Intelligent Design. Multilingual competence essential. Well-honed interpersonal skills necessary to provide a loving environment for a growing universal company. Needs to be a team player, willing to let others take the credit for success. In order to accomplish objectives, must be patient, persevering, and capable of overcoming chronic and sometimes acute hostility, misunderstanding, and opposition.

**Responsibilities:** Creates all things out of nothing and maintains them. Gives life to the world. Recreates, sanctifies, convicts, corrects, teaches, and empowers all company personnel. Responsible for cultivation of all spiritual fruit and distribution of all spiritual gifts and graces throughout the company. Agent and spokesperson for first two Persons of the Trinity in earthly affairs. Often operates incognito.

**Hours:** On active duty 24/7—for eternity.

**Remuneration and Benefits:** Unsalaries. No holidays, vacation days, sick leave, or other personal leave. However, occupant of this position enjoys eternal fellowship in glory with Father and Son, and with them owns full share in the divine Being. As a bonus, receives fellowship with millions of saints and angels.

## Coming in Third?

No irreverence is intended here. Certainly no one could ever write a complete job description for the Holy Spirit, or even begin to speculate about what it would take to assume His role. That's precisely the point of this exercise: It offers a whimsical reminder of how much the amazing Holy Spirit of God does for us and in us and through us.

He is fully God with the other two Persons of the blessed Holy Trinity. Like them, He is worthy of all our love and adoration. Yet often the Spirit seems to stand in the shadow of the Father and Son.

Think of it: We call on the Father and the Son with family terms that evoke all the warmth and familiarity of home. In our art, we depict the Son in His poignant humanity, while the Father we often portray (for better or for worse) as an ancient, wise, and dignified patriarch.

The third Person, on the other hand, we refer to as the "Spirit"—or even more chilling, the "Ghost." Though these names are preceded by the all-important adjective *holy*, somehow we find it more difficult to think of Him as a Person. In art we represent Him as a faceless figure with the imagery of fire or feathers predominating.

Is it any wonder, then, that the early church had to defend the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Son? Certain ancient heretics known as "fighters against the Spirit" (in Greek, *Pneumatomachi*) thought Him only an impersonal force, or perhaps an angel or some other exalted creature.

Please don't get me wrong. I'm not disputing or even lamenting these names and images. They are, after all, those given to us in Scripture by the Holy Spirit Himself, their author (Mt. 3:11, 16; Acts 2:1–4).

But it grieves me that we often fail to enter deeply into relationship with the magnificent Person to whom the names and images point. We can live—not in doctrine, but in practice—as if we too were *Pneumatomachi*: heedless of the Spirit's purposes; ungrateful for His perpetual care; reluctant to draw near, with all our hurts and needs, into the infinite depths of His loving counselor's heart.

Still He goes about His business undismayed, the breath who gives us life (Jn. 6:63), the wind whose coming and going escapes our notice (John. 3:8). How might we relate to the Holy Spirit in a way that is in keeping with who He is, what He does, and who we are because of Him?

### **No Limits**

An elderly Baptist preacher I once knew told how he used to pray fervently every day, on his knees, for revival. Then one day as he was praying, he heard the Holy Spirit say, "Son, I'm answering your prayer. I'm sending revival!"

"Thank you, Lord!" the preacher cried. "We'll start building a bigger sanctuary!"

"Not so fast!" the Spirit replied. "You see, I'm sending revival to that Methodist church down the street."

At that point, the preacher told me with a sheepish grin, he was tempted to think it must be the devil talking instead!

How often, I wondered, had I too tried to limit the Holy Spirit's work by my expectations? How many times I have resisted His dealings, His inspirations, His whispers! Recognizing His gracious kindness in my life has led me to repentance. I have come to see how often I have broken His divine heart by my sin (Is. 63:10, Eph. 4:30) or have dismissed His work accomplished through others or attributed His enabling to some other source (Mk. 3:22-30). I have "put out [his] fire" (1 Thess. 5:19-20).

### **Relying on His Power**

I've come to realize that the more deeply we know the Holy Spirit, the more we will rely on Him to work in us and through us. Sometimes, of course, He lets us run out of our own resources so that we'll learn to rely on His instead.

When I was young, the fuel gauge on our family's gas-guzzling 1958 Chevy seemed perpetually on empty. My father used to joke about how, when we had to go somewhere but couldn't afford to buy gas, we would "just have to run on fumes."

That saying came to mind late one night when I was on the mission field. A coworker and I were driving a lonely road with hardly a coin in our pockets. Suddenly the old van we were driving began to sputter. When we checked the fuel gauge, we saw that we were out of gas, with no place (or money) to purchase more.

We pulled off the road as the van rolled to a stop and gave out. Attempts to crank it again were futile. With our spirits as low as the fuel-gauge needle, we did the only thing we knew to do: We climbed out of the van, laid hands on the gas cap, and prayed: "We're out of gas. But You sent us on this mission, and You have the resources to get us there. We rely on You, Lord!"

Suddenly my friend felt a prompting to crank the engine again. It started right up—and we were on our way.

Did gas appear miraculously in that tank, or did the engine and fuel gauge malfunction and suddenly start working properly? Only the Holy Spirit knows for sure. But whenever I feel as if I'm running on fumes, I remember that day. He, with His unlimited power, can do what I never could.

If we rely on Him, the Spirit will motivate us to action—to serve our brothers and sisters—by pouring out a supernatural love for them in our hearts (Ro. 15:30, Col. 1:8). His desire is that we be immersed in Him (Acts 2:17-18) so that we can minister through His power.

### **Actively Present**

As we draw near to the Spirit, we discover the very heart of God:

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.... The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

—Ro. 8:14, 16

As the active presence of God in our lives, the Holy Spirit will strengthen us (Mic. 3:8) and lead us (Ps. 143:10). And if we set our minds on Him, we will find that "the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Ro. 8:6). It is the Holy Spirit who

helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

—Ro. 8:26–27

Last year, as my elderly mother lay in a coma, only hours from death after an extended illness, I knelt beside her bed to pray for her. She was a Christian, dying with a confident trust in her Savior, but still my heart was heavy with grief and my mind troubled with questions: *How long will she linger? Is she in great pain?*

Through my tears, I asked the Holy Spirit to help us both. As I thought of Him, my mind was filled with hope and my heart was flooded with peace. He reminded me that He had created her, and He had cared for her all her life. He would one day breathe on the ravaged remains of her mortal body, raising her up to behold at last the Lord she had served all her life. I could entrust her without reservation to Him.

### **Personal Attention**

It is through the Holy Spirit's care that we come to see that God knows us personally and will speak directly to our hearts. The Spirit is, after all, the one who "searches...the deep things of God" and reveals them to us (1 Cor. 2:9–13).

Soon after I became a Christian (many years ago), I was thrilled to read in my King James Bible that the Holy Spirit is our Comforter (Jn. 14:16, 26). I was in great need of comfort at that time, so this was a truth about Him I could "snuggle under" with great pleasure!

It didn't take long, however, to discover that the Spirit didn't want me to get too comfortable. In no time He was lighting a fire to get me out of my spiritual bed and into action.

Only a few months after my conversion, I entered Yale University as a freshman. Reading the book of Acts one day over Christmas break, I learned about the Spirit's critical role in sending believers "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). That set me to thinking: *Was it possible He had an overseas mission for me?*

I had never thought of such a possibility, much less discussed the idea with anyone. So I prayed rather tentatively, "Here am I. Send me!" Even so, I was reluctant to give up the privilege of attending Yale unless I knew for sure that the decision was God's will. So I asked the Holy Spirit to make the matter utterly clear.

Returning to school after Christmas, I met up with one of my two closest Christian friends on campus. Before I could confide in her what I had been praying about, she said: "I have something important to ask you. I believe the Lord told me that you'll be dropping out of college to go to the mission field. Is that true?"

Needless to say, I was startled. I confirmed my intentions, then I went on to see my other close friend on campus. When I reported to him what had just happened, tears began to run down his cheeks.

"When I was praying one day over Christmas break," he said, "I was thanking God for our friendship. And I heard the Holy Spirit say, 'Will you still thank Me if I choose to send Paul away to another task?'"

The next day I called a former high school teacher, a dear Christian friend and mentor. Before I could say anything beyond "Hi—it's Paul!" she said, "You don't have to tell me. I already know. The Holy Spirit told me that you're leaving college to go to the mission field."

As if that weren't enough, the following Sunday I visited a friend's church, where no one but the people sitting right next to me knew anything about me or my situation. During a moment of silence in corporate prayer, a man across the room stood up and said: "The Lord would say to you, as He said to Abraham, 'Get up and leave this place, and go to the place where I will send you.' The Lord says, 'Do not worry about your education. I myself will be your teacher.'"

A few months later, I was overseas—way beyond my comfort zone, but nevertheless right where my Comforter wanted me. In the meantime, I had encountered God's personalized guidance, persistence, and reassurance through His Holy Spirit.

### **Grateful Response**

Such a personal God is to be praised! Some years ago I deepened my worship of Jesus by worshiping Him using a list of all the names and attributes I could find for Him in Scripture. I recently decided to do the same thing for the Holy Spirit.

Creating a list similar to the one on page 55, I addressed Him with every title and description I had found. The result: My praise of the Spirit is now more passionate, since I have a richer, fuller understanding of who He is. I have been enabled to pray, *Thank You, Holy Spirit...*

for “hovering over the waters” at the beginning of time (Gen. 1:2), bringing the fertile chaos into fruitful order, and giving life to all the exquisite creatures that fill our world (Ps. 104:30).

for inspiring the biblical writers to give us such a precious gift (Neh. 9:30, Mt. 22:43, Acts 1:16, 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:19–21).

for Your critical role in our salvation as You overshadowed Mary to bring about the incarnation of the Word for our sake (Lk. 1:35, Jn. 1:14), bring new life to our spirits (Jn. 3:5–8), and baptize us into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

for living our lives with us as You guide us (Ro. 8:14), teach us (Jn. 16:13), strengthen us (Eph. 3:16), correct us (Jn. 16:8), make us holy (Ro. 1:4) and fruitful (Gal. 5:22), and grant us rest (Is. 63:14).

for Your part in our final destiny: abiding with us forever (Jn. 14:16), anticipating Jesus’ return with us (Rev. 22:17), and restoring life to our mortal bodies on Judgment Day (Ezk. 37:11–14, Ro. 8:11).

As I thanked the Spirit for all this and more, I realized anew that all things good in this world and the next have their source and destiny in Him. My passion for the Holy Spirit grew more intense than ever.

Yet it can never equal His passion for me. The Spirit is the very channel through which we know divine love, almighty and fathomless: “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us,” says Ro. 5:5.

As we rely on Him, the Spirit will demonstrate in a thousand ways—sometimes subtle, sometimes startling—His desire to draw us deep into the heart of God.