

Series: "The Holy Spirit"
He Gives Life and Leads Us

In the first sermon in this series I said the Holy Spirit is God, the third Person of the Trinity. He is not an "it" but a divine Person, with personality traits as we have. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost marked a new era in the Spirit's activity. He came not just on a select few (as in the Old Testament), but He is available to all who repent of their sins and trust Christ as their Savior.

Today, I want to talk about two activities of the Spirit: He gives life, and He leads us.

The Spirit gives life. Whenever someone comes alive spiritually, whenever a spiritual awakening happens, we can be certain that this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

One of the ways this happens is through the new birth, being born again. John, chapter 3, relates the story of Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a religious leader, intelligent and educated, a man who believed in God, and that Jesus came from God. Yet, Jesus says he, and *all of us*, must be born again if we are to enter the kingdom of God.

John 3:3 says, "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again'" (or "born from above"). Notice how Jesus describes this: "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (verse 5). It is being born of water (or baptism), and the Holy Spirit. Jesus says more about the new birth: "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit"(verses 6-8).

All of us born *physically* (born of the flesh), and when we repent of our sins and trust Christ we are born *spiritually* (born of the Spirit). The Apostle Paul described this as *spiritual re-creation*. "If anyone is in Christ, he (or she) is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). When we come to Christ it's like being created all over again! We get a new life start!

If you have never turned from your sins and turned your life over to Christ, I urge you to do it now. Life can begin all over again for you!

But the life-giving work of the Spirit goes beyond the moment when we are born again and first become a follower of Jesus. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our *inner nature* is being renewed every day." Here it does not specifically mention that it is the Holy Spirit who does this, but Ephesians 3:16 talks about being strengthened with might through the Holy Spirit in our inward being.

Physically, our body peaks in strength in our late 20's, early 30's. Then it slowly begins to decline (sometimes not so slowly). If we hang around long enough, our body wears out! But if we follow Christ, we can be renewed inwardly, in our spirit, and keep growing and flourishing, because the Holy Spirit renews us.

It's sad to see some people without faith, people who have no relationship with God, grow older, decline physically – and that's all they have. There are no spiritual resources within. It is the Spirit who gives life!

This life-giving work of the Spirit is also seen in times of spiritual awakening and revival.

There are times when **churches** come alive! People in the congregation become more committed to ministry and outreach. Church attenders get saved. People who may have held grudges forgive one another, and a new level of love creates greater unity and joy within the congregation. History records times when a **town or city or college campus or even a nation** experiences genuine spiritual awakening, and moral and spiritual revival take place. This never happens solely through human efforts or human programs. It comes through the work of the Holy Spirit – often in response to people praying for revival! God *wants* to bring about these kinds of spiritual awakenings! Let's pray for this!

The Bible also says the Spirit will give life to believers through the resurrection. Romans 8:11 says, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also *through the Spirit* which dwells in you." We are mortal. We will die. Our body will decay. But if we have received Christ as Savior the Holy Spirit lives in us, and God's Spirit will fashion out of our decayed body a new *spiritual body, a resurrection body*, so we can live forever with the Lord.

Almost every person *desires life*. Life filled with joy and meaning. Unfortunately, many are looking for ultimate meaning in things that don't last or satisfy. Jesus made it possible for us to have a quality of life that is abundant, and eternal. He said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus gives it, and the Holy Spirit is the one who makes it happen, as He comes and lives within us, renewing us day by day!

There is something else that the Spirit does in connection with this abundant life. ***He gives us assurance of eternal life.*** How can I be sure I'm saved, that I have eternal life? Romans 8:16 says, "It is the Spirit himself, bearing witness with our spirit, that we are children of God." It's not being arrogant to say, "I know Christ has forgiven my sins. I know I'm a child of God and that I'm saved." God wants us to have this assurance!

How do we get that kind of assurance of eternal life? This is not something we whip up and talk ourselves into! It does not come as a result of positive thinking or will power. It comes from the Holy Spirit inside of us. If you don't have this assurance of salvation, first of all, make sure you have turned from your sins and received Christ as your Savior. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to give you that assurance. For some, this assurance may come right at the moment of our conversion. For others, it may come gradually, over a period of months or years, as we grow in the Lord. "It is the Spirit himself, bearing witness with our spirit, that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

The Spirit gives life, but also ***the Spirit leads us.*** A key verse here is Romans 8:14: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." The Book of Acts relates how believers

in the early church experienced the guidance of the Holy Spirit. “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 13:2-4).

There is also this account of the Spirit’s leading: “They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas” (Acts 16:6-8).

Is this kind of leading by the Spirit possible for us today? Yes! I was thrilled as a new Christian, in my teens, to hear believers tell stories of how the Holy Spirit directed their decisions and their paths – sometimes in extraordinary ways. I also read a book by a Quaker named Everett Lewis Cattell, a book called *The Spirit of Holiness*. The author has a great chapter on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

He writes about a man who felt led of the Spirit to go preach in a certain logging camp. But when the man got there he found the camp deserted. He still felt a strong inner urging to preach, so he preached a sermon in an empty dining hall. Years later a man came up to him, and reminded him of the incident. He said he was the cook at that camp, and he was the only man around that day. Seeing a preacher come, he hid, and listened outside a window. He was so impressed by the sermon, given without an audience, that he was convicted of his sins, was converted, and went on to live a life of Christian service.

Our life can take on a new sense of adventure and importance when we experience the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s guidance can come *daily*, in non-dramatic ways, and at times, in extraordinary ways! Perhaps you can point to incidents where the Spirit has guided you, in ways that God’s will and kingdom were furthered. Let me share a few stories from my life.

In one church I pastored there was a family of five, a husband, wife and their three children. At one point they became irregular in attendance at worship and Sunday School, though they professed Christ and claimed to be filled with the Spirit. I knew there was illness in their family, but I was not sure this was the cause of their spotty church involvement. I suspected that they were not happy with my ministry in that church.

One day as I was going over my prayer list, and came to their names, I kind of laid out to God, “God, I just don’t feel much support from _____. I don’t think really they want to come to church. To be truthful, I don’t much like them.” *One hour later*, the mother in that family called me! She said, “I felt led to phone you, and ask you to pray for my deliverance from our sickness. I’ve asked others to pray too. I’m just tired, and sick of being sick. We need to be fed. I want you to know I appreciate your ministry, and I’m calling to uphold you as our pastor. We appreciate you and Nancy so much.” I have no doubt the Spirit was leading in that encounter!

I kept a note in my file describing another incident. It was a Sunday, and I was making hospital calls. I was weary, and pressed for time. I visited one or two church members who were in the hospital, but decided not to see an elderly hospitalized member who had been ill for some time. I figured I could come back to the hospital the next day or so and see him. Besides, Nancy was with me, and I wanted to get home.

Going out of the hospital, I ran into someone I knew, who inquired about someone else they thought might be a patient in the hospital. So I went back into the hospital to the information desk. I thought again whether I ought to just take the time and see this elderly man who I had decided not to see. I decided to go visit him.

As I entered his room, he saw me from a partially pulled curtain. His voice was very weak, and he spoke in a tone of great anguish: "I'm so glad to see you! Oh, I need to talk to you! (He then motioned for me to come closer to his bed). He had so much he seemed to want to say, but he was having a difficult time talking. I gently told him to take his time. He expressed concern about the swelling on his neck and jaw (he had cancer). "I know what this means," he said. He related his concern for his wife – does she know it's near the end? I assured him that she knows more than he thinks she knows. Yes, she knows it's near the end. "What a miracle," he kept repeating. "God is near to us. Oh, I know He is. If people could only know what this means to me!" He went on: "Did anyone send you? I even thought of calling you...this must be mental telepathy...you're a godsend."

I asked about his fears. No, he wasn't afraid. He was mainly worried about his wife. I reminded him to trust Jesus. Jesus loves you, He's with you, I said. God is with us not only in this life, but in the life to come. He continued. "God brought you here. When you came past that curtain I saw God through your face. I've found God through you. God answered my prayers...now I can rest in peace. I'm so happy...so happy...so happy." I held his hands. I gave him chunks of ice. I committed him and his wife to God in prayer. Later he prayed aloud an intense prayer of committal to God.

Let me give you a little background to this story that suggests that it was the leading of the Spirit. This happened on a Sunday in November. It was the close of a weekend on which we had a weekend retreat at the church. Earlier in the day I had taken the retreat leader, Harold Rogers from the United Methodist Board of Evangelism, back to the airport to catch a plane back to Nashville. Attendance at the retreat was skimpy, but I hated to see it end and hated to see Harold leave.

I was feeling disheartened. It would be a busy week ahead. I had a funeral the next day, Monday. I would be on the radio to do a devotional program on Tuesday, and Thursday was Thanksgiving Day. It would be tough finding time to get ready for the next Sunday's worship services. Besides, I was going through a "down" period when I was feeling depressed about the ministry. Coming home from the airport I felt discouraged, sort of empty inside.

But a theme from the weekend retreat kept playing in my head: “God can use ordinary people in extraordinary ways if we turn our will and situation over to Him.” I remember praying on the way home from the airport, “Lord, I’m an ordinary person. I’m struggling right now and feeling blue. *But will you use me.*” My visit to the man in the hospital happened later that afternoon.

The Holy Spirit wants to guide the sons and daughter of God! Why? Not that we will get rich, or famous, or just feel good. God wants to guide us as individuals, and as a church, so that lives will be touched for Christ, and God’s will shall be done, and God will be glorified.

How can we experience more of the leading of the Spirit? The starting point is that we have begun the journey of following Christ, and that we have sincerely surrendered our lives to Christ, and seek His will and purposes. Secondly, we will need to take time to nurture our life in the Spirit. Turn off the TV, get away from computer, clear some time every day to seek God through prayer, meditation and the Word. And, then, learn to be sensitive to the Spirit’s promptings. Don’t expect the Holy Spirit to talk to you in an audible voice, or see writing in the sky. Most of the Spirit’s leading comes quietly: an inward urge or prompting that doesn’t go away. A gentle pull to do something.

A good way to begin getting more in tune with the Spirit is to ***begin each day*** consciously committing ourselves to God and His will and asking the Holy Spirit to guide us through the day’s activities. Then try to pay attention throughout the day to the quiet, inward urgings and prompting of the Spirit.

Everett Lewis Cattell, in the book I mentioned earlier, reminds us that it is when we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit in the *small, practical ways* day by day that we are more liable to receive times of *extraordinary* guidance. He says, “People want spectacular guidance...but they forget that these extraordinary experiences come to those who have built well the foundation of sensitiveness to the Spirit’s pressure in the soul in small matters. The increase of sensitiveness to the voice of the Spirit is in direct proportion to the implicitness of obedience moment by moment.” He then adds, “Life is terribly inadequate unless caught up into the vital, adventurous realm of daily divine guidance where the Holy Spirit controls...”

The Spirit gives life. The Spirit leads those who are the children of God!

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