

The Key to Experiencing Closeness with God

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[0 : 00] Have you ever had an overwhelming desire to draw close to God and really sense His presence? I think most of us have if we're Christians.

Last Sunday night's storms may have had that effect on you. When the phone rings in the middle of the night with tragic news, one of the first things that we will do as Christians is call out to the Lord.

We desperately want to sense His presence then, don't we? Sometimes we have to make major life-changing decisions.

And so we pray. And we really want to have a sense of God's, not just His presence, but His guidance. His giving us direction concerning this decision we've got to make.

You know, all of us, no matter what your walk in life, all of us have times when we're just stressed out, when we're afraid, when we're uncertain.

[1 : 12] And we want to experience God's presence and have Him to assure us that He's with us, that He's for us, that He cares, and that He is in control.

Those are some things that we as Christians, children of God, desire, want. And hopefully we do experience that.

That's the Lord's will. The Lord Jesus Christ wants us to have that kind of relationship with Himself and our Heavenly Father.

In fact, both Jesus and our Heavenly Father have already acted to make it possible for us to experience every day His presence, the Lord's presence, the Father's presence.

What they've done in providing this for us, they've sent the Holy Spirit to live within us. Last Sunday, Easter Sunday, we celebrated the resurrection of the Lord.

[2 : 25] And I called attention to some of the major points of the Gospel. I pointed out how Jesus died on the cross for our sins. How He arose from the grave by the power of God and appeared to over 500 people over a period of 40 days.

The Lord's ascension was something we also looked at last week when the Father seated Jesus following the resurrection at His right hand, the place of power and authority.

But you know, there is one vitally important part of the Gospel missing from what I just said. God the Father and the Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell every person who believes the Gospel.

Every person who trusts in Jesus as their Lord and Savior receives the Holy Spirit within them. Think about this. Jesus saves us not just so we can be forgiven and miss hell, but to bring us into a new relationship with Himself and our Heavenly Father.

This is not just a new relationship. It's a right one. It's a healthy one. It's close and personal. And the way we experience that kind of fellowship with our Heavenly Father and the Lord is through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 03] I want us to look at several passages this morning about how this is possible. We're going to look first. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit within us.

All of us as Christians. This message is to believers. People who have a real relationship with Jesus. If that's you, you need to understand the presence of the Holy Spirit is with you.

He is with you. Jesus promised that He and the Father would send the Holy Spirit to live in us after He returned to heaven. During His last night with His disciples, Jesus had an extended teaching time with them.

John records this. John chapters 13 through 16. In those verses, specifically chapters 14, 15, and 16, Jesus refers to sending the Holy Spirit four times.

Here's one example that emphasizes how Jesus is going to send the Holy Spirit to live in us. Look at the scripture from John 14. Jesus said, Jesus is promising, comforting His disciples.

[5 : 49] That after He leaves them, He is going to send His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, to be with them and in them. Now, the book of Acts describes how Jesus and the Father originally fulfilled that promise.

And they did it in a very powerful and unique way. In Acts chapter 2, verses 1 through 13, we read how the Holy Spirit came upon those first disciples on the day of Pentecost.

I encourage you to open your Bibles and read that sometime later today. As you read that, I want you to notice all those believers were Jews.

But the Christian faith is not just for Jews, obviously, if you just look at us. The Christian faith is for all people.

Paul said it very clearly in Romans 10, 13, For all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. The book of Acts intentionally shows that salvation is for all people.

[7 : 05] And it describes how all believers, not just Jews, received the Holy Spirit. If you move on in Acts chapter 8, verses 14 through 17, We read how the Holy Spirit came upon the Samaritans, the group that the Jews hated, despised.

Yet when God saved those people, the Holy Spirit came upon them just like He had the Jews. And then later on in Acts chapter 10, we read this entire chapter tells us this story, how the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles who believed in Jesus, just as He had originally on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

The book of Acts shows us how the Lord got His church started by sending the Holy Spirit in a unique way to all who believed in Jesus.

Now, the normal, or what you might call the regular way God intends for His people to receive the Holy Spirit is at conversion.

When we trust in Christ as our Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us at that time. I want you to note how Peter explains this is to be the norm in his first sermon.

[8 : 30] In Acts chapter 2, look with me beginning at verse 7. Now, when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?

Peter had presented the gospel. Jesus Christ died for their sins. He had risen. He had ascended. Verse 38, And Peter said to them, 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.

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

Now, I want you to note how Peter told those people who were under conviction how to respond to the gospel. He said, First, repent. And then he said, Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Then it says, The result would be they would receive the gift of the Spirit. Now, let's pause here for a moment. I want to make sure that no one misunderstands what Peter meant when he said, Repent and be baptized.

[9 : 53] Peter was not talking about baptism taking the place of faith, baptism being a requirement for salvation. I think the English Standard Version Study Bible explains this very clearly and concisely.

Look at it with me. It says, This does not imply that people can be saved without having faith in Christ as Savior because the need to believe is implied both in the command to repent and also in the command to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

The willingness to submit to baptism is an outward expression of inward faith in Christ. baptism is a sign, not a substitute for faith.

When Jesus was dying on the cross, there was a man on another cross beside him. And at some point during the crucifixion, that man looked to Jesus in faith.

And Jesus responded to him immediately, Today, you will be with me in paradise. Now think about that.

[11 : 15] That man looked to Jesus in faith and Jesus assured him, Today, as we die here today, you're going to open your eyes with me in paradise.

That man did not have a chance to be baptized, did he? But it didn't matter because baptism is not essential for salvation.

Salvation is by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, period. Nothing else. Today, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit the moment we put our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Every Christian, every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God?

Think about it. Look at yourself. Your body, if you're a Christian, is the temple, the residence of the Holy Spirit right now.

[12 : 39] Every Christian is indwelt by the Spirit. Look also, if the Holy Spirit does not live in us, we're not Christians. Paul made that plain in Romans 8.

anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. Think with me. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit, sometimes called the Spirit of God, sometimes called the Spirit of Christ, lives within you.

He lives within you right now, and He has since the day you put your faith in Jesus. Now, the question I want to ask you is, are you experiencing His power?

That's the next thing I want us to look at. We have the power of the Holy Spirit within us. After Jesus' resurrection, He clearly told His disciples that they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit for their mission, but He also told them, don't start until you receive the Holy Spirit.

I want you to note two statements Jesus gave His disciples in which He made it clear, you cannot do what I've called you to do on your own power. So wait for this special power that I will send.

[14 : 09] Look at it. First from Luke's Gospel. 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.

And then a very well-known verse in Acts 1.8, Jesus said, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

The Holy Spirit lives in us today to empower us to live the Christian life as the Lord intends and as we really desire if we are the Lord's people.

John Stott gives us a good summary of the comprehensive work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. I want you to look with me at how Stott describes, really summarizes what all the Spirit does in every one of us as Christians.

Look at it. His ministry is both to reveal Christ to us and to form Christ in us so that we grow steadily in our knowledge of Christ and in our likeness to Christ.

[15 : 38] He goes on, It is by the power of the indwelling Spirit that the evil desires of our fallen nature are restrained and the good fruit of Christian character is produced.

He also unites us to the body of Christ, the church. He reaches out through us to others, prompting us to witness to Christ and equipping us with gifts for the service to which He summons us.

That's just a general statement of all that the Holy Spirit does in us and through us throughout our lives as Christians. He helps us to know the Lord better.

He helps us to grow in Christ's likeness. He helps us to overcome sinful habits, to say no to temptation.

He enables us to truly develop Christ-like character qualities. The Holy Spirit works in a way to really help us love and enjoy one another as Christians, as brothers and sisters.

[16 : 50] And the Holy Spirit, when He is working in our lives and we're being sensitive to His presence, He will compel us to share the gospel, to live out our faith, to try to reach people who don't know Christ with this good news that will change them from the inside out.

The Holy Spirit is at work in your life and in mine right now in these ways. And He will be. He'll continue to work as long as we're alive.

We need to be sensitive to His presence and obedient to His leadership in each of these ways. Now, R.C. Sproul gives an example of one specific way the Holy Spirit works to help us to understand and apply Scripture.

As Christians, we read the Bible. It's a part of, it's one of the ways, one of the means of grace that God has given us along with prayer to grow in our knowledge of Him, to grow in our knowledge of His will, to know how to please Him, to know how to live life the way that He designed it to be lived.

Well, Sproul explains how the Holy Spirit works to help us to understand what God is saying in His Word. He begins by quoting a passage of Scripture that ends with this verse in 1 Corinthians 2.

[18 : 22] He says, These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

Now, Sproul explains what Paul's talking about there, how the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. He says, Paul is telling us here that the Holy Spirit acts as a searchlight and shines on the text of Scripture when we read it, giving us the capacity to understand the meaning of it.

When this happens, we see the truth of God intensely and sharply. Every one of us who is a Christian has had this experience sometime in his or her life.

We are reading from the Scriptures, and suddenly a particular truth seems to jump off the page and pierce our souls. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

I want to give you a personal example. A personal example that I had, I experienced a few days ago in my devotional Bible reading.

[19 : 32] I was reading through Luke chapter 6. Luke chapter 6 has 49 verses. As I just read through that chapter, three verses just stood out to me.

It's as if the Holy Spirit directed my mind, my eyes and my mind to three verses, not back to back, and said something to me.

I want you to look at the verses first. Verse 31 of Luke 6. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

Verse 36. That was verse 31. This is verse 36. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Then verse 38, the last sentence.

For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. Now when I was reading that, I underlined those three verses.

[20 : 39] And I just thought, I need to show more grace and mercy to the people who are in my life. I thought about how God has been gracious and merciful to me.

He's not giving me what I deserve. He has been so gracious and loving and giving me things I in no way deserve.

And so as I was just thinking about those verses, I thought, why would I not be gracious and merciful to other people?

That's what I want them to do to me. That's the way God has set the example in the way He treats me. This is just an example of how the Holy Spirit can take the Word of God and just make it come alive to us.

It may not happen. It won't happen every time you read the Bible. But if we're going to read God's Word prayerfully, expectantly, willing to be taught, God will work through His Spirit to open our eyes and to apply His Word in ways that we need to change, in ways that we need to mature, I encourage you, listen to the Lord, listen to His Spirit as you read the Bible.

[22 : 17] I want to ask you, can you see signs of the Holy Spirit's presence and power in your life the way that you're living right now?

Just think about this past week. How have you experienced, how could you describe the Holy Spirit's presence and power in your life?

Are you growing in your knowledge of Christ? Are you growing and becoming more like Him? Slowly but surely, all of us.

But are you? Think about it more specifically. Are you developing a real hatred for sin?

That's something the Holy Spirit will do within us as He changes us. Are you developing a real hatred for your personal habits of sin?

[23 : 24] Are you making progress in your efforts to overcome the sin, to resist the temptations? Do you have a real desire to develop Christ-like character?

Do you really want to become more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self-controlled?

That's what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit. And I heard it a long time ago and it stuck with me. That's some of the character qualities that Jesus demonstrated.

And it's some of the character qualities we will demonstrate as we are obedient to the Holy Spirit's leadership, as we develop Christ-like character.

It's not going to happen overnight. It's a lifetime process. But it should be a process whereas we can look back and see we're moving forward.

[24 : 34] We're moving forward. You know, one of the most obvious signs of the Holy Spirit's working in our lives is that He gives us a true desire and then the ability to please God.

Paul describes this in Philippians chapter 2 verse 13. He says, For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Think about it. Do you have a real desire to please God? I mean, do you think about it? Do you think about as you read the Bible learning what pleases God, what doesn't please Him?

Do you have a desire to please God? Do you have a real heartfelt desire to put forth the effort to please God?

It's one thing to think sometime that I really would like to please my spouse. but it's totally different just to have that thought and then to put forth the effort to please your spouse by what you do and see a smile come over his or her face as a result of you doing it.

[26 : 04] You know, the way that you answer those two questions, do I have a desire to please God? Do I have a desire to put forth the effort to please God? That will show you if the Holy Spirit is really at work in your life.

If you don't see clear signs of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, something is terribly wrong in your life. Two possibilities mainly.

You may not be a Christian. If there's absolutely never been and is not today any signs of the Holy Spirit's presence or power in your life, there's no reason for you to think you're a Christian.

And if that's the case and that bothers you, I want to encourage you right now. Turn from your sin. Repent. Put your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

Call upon Him to save you. Call upon Him to come into your life right now. Surrender control of your life to Him. But it could be that you are a Christian.

[27 : 12] You know, you've experienced the presence and power of the Lord at various times and various degrees throughout your Christian life.

But right now, you see very little evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence and the Holy Spirit's power.

And if that's the case, it may be that you've done as Paul describes it, you've grieved the Spirit by your sin. You've quenched the Spirit by your refusal to obey Him, to do what you know you should do when it comes to pleasing God.

If that's true, if you've grieved or quenched the Spirit, if you're not sensing His presence and His power, if you're a Christian, you're miserable, aren't you?

We can't, as Christians, grieve and quench the Spirit, just ignore Him, disobey Him, and be at peace with God.

[28 : 26] we're going to be miserable until we wake up spiritually, confess our sin, turn from it, come back close to the Lord, renew our faith, our confidence, our commitment to Him.

And if that's you as a Christian, I want to encourage you to not wait another hour, but admit to God where you are.

Tell Him how much you hate it and how miserable you are and ask Him to work in you, to change you, to help you willingly turn from whatever it is that's gotten in the way between you and the right relationship with Him.

Ask Him to help you to draw close to Him. And the Scripture says when we draw close to God, He will draw close to us. All Christians, every Christian, you and me, we can live a Spirit-filled, Spirit-controlled, Spirit-empowered life if that's the kind of life we want to live.

If we'll be obedient to Him, sensitive to Him, do what He's calling us to do. If that's what you want right now, I encourage you to just draw close to the Lord.

[29 : 57] Listen to Him. Obey Him. On a daily basis, to maintain this presence and power of the Holy Spirit, spend time with the Lord and confess your sin.

Don't let it build up in your life. Make it a daily practice. Commit yourself and you in afresh every day to walking with the Lord in fellowship, in obedience.

Spend time every day talking to the Lord, listening to the Lord, in prayer, in Bible reading. That's the only way we're going to develop a real, close relationship with Him.

And you can ask God, and I encourage you to do this, ask God to fill you with His Spirit and you in afresh every day. You know, what we're talking about this morning, this is not wishful thinking.

We're talking about absolute fact based on the Word of God. we can experience closeness with God, but we'll only experience by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

[31 : 16] And one more thing, I want you to think about something we looked at for just a moment last week and I want to close with this. We can experience closeness with God by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and also by the powerful prayers of our Lord Jesus who is right now at the right hand of the Father.

R.C. Sproul points this out as a way to encourage us as Christians. Look at what he says. One of the chief ways in which God preserves His people is through the priestly intercession of Jesus.

We see an example from this from the night when Jesus was betrayed. Jesus knew that Peter was going to deny Him later that night so He told Peter, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail and when you have turned again strengthen your brothers.

Peter's denial, Sproul says, was a ghastly and heinous crime but Jesus had prayed for him and He commanded Peter to strengthen his brothers when He returned not if He returned but when.

So the prayer of Jesus for Peter was effective. Today, Jesus is in heaven interceding for you and me if indeed we belong to Him and His prayers for us are equally effective.

[33 : 02] We can live faithful Christian lives in this world because the Spirit of God indwells us and the Son of God is praying for us.

It is our responsibility to stay sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence and obedient and obedient to His leadership. And I pray we're all going to pray in a moment but I pray that you will respond to what the Lord is calling you to do right now and that you will respond to Him every day in such a way that you will make experiencing the Holy Spirit's presence and His power your normal way of life.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You so much for not leaving us alone in this world. Thank You Father.

Thank You Lord Jesus for sending Your Spirit to indwell us, to teach us, to convict us, to comfort us, to encourage us, and to enable us to live our lives in a way that will glorify You, make a difference in other people's lives, and bring joy and satisfaction to us.

Lord, we pray right now that You will so work in the life of whoever is listening to this message and show them how they need to respond.

[34 : 59] If they're not Christians, Father, we pray that You will draw them to faith in Jesus now. And Lord, for any Christian who is disobedient, indifferent, rebellious, wake them up, overwhelm them with conviction and brokenness.

Call them to be truly repentant and to run back to You in total commitment, love, trust.

rest. And I pray, Father, that You will so respond that that person will experience closeness with You, that they will enjoy a growing, loving relationship with You by the power and presence of Your Spirit.

Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. and Dan will be on of my fear andatra