



Sermon Transcription

Characteristics of the Holy Spirit - Part 2

Pastor Jeff Bucknam

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

J.D. Greear is the name of a Pastor in North Carolina. He also authored a book called *Jesus Continued*, it's a book about the Holy Spirit. Really recommend it to you, it's a really great book, *Jesus Continued*. In it, he tells this story. I'm not telling you this story because I necessarily espouse the outcome of it. It just got me thinking, and I thought it might get you thinking. So here's what he said,

"Toward the beginning of my ministry, I attended a meeting for mission leaders led by a famous Christian leader. At the end of his talk, he invited those who wanted a special manifestation of God's presence to come forward so he could lay his hands on us. I genuinely didn't want to miss out on anything, so I went forward. As the man moved down the row, I noticed that at the end of his prayer he'd give a little shove to each person on their forehead, and they'd crumple to the floor, where they would lie spellbound for several minutes. I whispered to God, "God, I don't want to resist anything you want to do to me. I want more of you. I'm willing for you to humiliate me. If you want to knock my shirt off and tattoo John 3:16 on my back, I'm open to it. But I am not letting that man push me down... As this anointed mega-leader prayed for me, I could feel his gentle pressure on my forehead. But it felt to me like his hand, not God's Spirit, so I didn't voluntarily take a dive. His praying got louder, and the pressure of his hand got stronger. I heard him mutter something about "God, you have something special for this one." By this point, I was having to push back on his hand with my head to keep him from pushing me over backward. But it sure felt like the pressure was coming from his hand, not God, so I stood my ground. Eventually he gave up and moved to the next person, who flopped right on cue. Was I missing something? I went home that night wondering if I had missed a chance to experience the presence of God."

So when I read that, it intrigued me. Largely because I've heard a story from a friend — a guy I know, had known for years, that was very similar story but the ending was very different. My friend, kind of...nominal in his Christian faith, not really that committed to Christ or the church. He was invited by another guy to go to a meeting on a Tuesday night, somewhere in their town. And he was told that there's gonna be a pastor there and he's gonna preach some stuff, talk about God a little bit, and at the end he's gonna come ask people to come forward and he'll pray for them if they want. My friend was like, "Yeah okay. I got nothing else to do." So he went. When the guy was talking, he said, "I started to feel a sense of what he was saying had a particular application to me, and I found that the



way he spoke was really intriguing and what he had to say really intriguing. And I came to the end, when he said, 'Would anybody like to come and get prayed for?' So, yeah, I would like that." So he went forward and he stood in a line, similarly, and noticed that people had hands being laid upon them and some people were falling down. And he was thinking to himself, "There was no way I'm gonna stand up here in the middle of this room and have somebody push me over. It's ridiculous! I'm not doing that."

When the guy came to him, finally, put his hand on his shoulder, looked at him in his eyes and he said, "Son, I think you need the Holy Ghost."

And when he said the word 'Holy Ghost', my friend said, "I don't know what happened. But then the next thing you know, dude, I was on the ground. Like, I had no-, some-some thing power just kind of shot through me and I got thrown back a little bit. The guy didn't push me-, I just fell down." And then he said, "My biggest concern while I was laying there--"

I said, "Could you move?"

He said, "No, I was just... paralyzed. I was thinking, what an amazing experience." And then he said, "At that point I realized that my underwear was a little bit showing, and I didn't want the girl who was next to me - who I actually came to the thing to see - seeing my underwear. And that really freaked me out, but..." <laughter>

Okay, two stories. Two very different outcomes. So, which is it? What should you expect from the Holy Spirit's ministry in your life? It won't surprise you that people take sides on this one. And you can usually tell which side you kind of lean to, based upon which one of those two stories you really like. And which one you're kind of angry at. There are those who think that Christians should normally receive revelations and have profound experiences with the Spirit. In fact, they believe that when there's what they call "a move of the Spirit" that shows up through a teacher or a pastor or even in a location, that it's actually a really good thing for you to drop things that you're doing to make a pilgrimage to that location so that you can receive that particular experience. In fact, most churches in this kind of vein will often bring pastors in who have what they call "the anointing" on them, and so, when the pastor preaches, the Spirit moves. And they know the Spirit moves because people are feeling something profound in this particular moment when they preach. Invite all their friends, "You should come! Cause our church is Spirit-filled," they'll say. And then there are others who think that such revelations and experiences are infrequent at best, and largely nonexistent. They love the first story, these others. They think, "Yeah! that's the way it works. I mean, most of the stuff is fake. It's usually the product of just a strong right arm from a manipulative pastor." And they don't like, these people, they don't like the insinuation that they're somehow less Christian because they haven't experienced all of that stuff. "You're saying, that I'm not really walking with the Spirit because I haven't fallen down somewhere or had a prophetic word spoken over my life? Followed Jesus for 20 years and...I haven't had that." A friend, in fact, who went to a meeting of what it was called the Full Gospel Businessmen's Association - he was invited by somebody else. The group Full Gospel Businessmen's Association, my friend didn't have a clue of what that meant. So when he went, he heard them speaking. A guy at his table just started to share with him that the reason they call it "Full Gospel Businessmen's Association" is that they believe that yes, there's the gospel message, but then there's the Spirit's power that comes after the gospel message and it influences a particular person



and if you don't have that, you don't have the full gospel. My friend walked out. "How dare you!" he said, "say that I've been a Christian for all these years and that my devotion to Christ is somehow lacking because I haven't had this experience." Which is it? What should you normally expect from the Spirit's work in your life?

We're in a series on the Holy Spirit. These first two sermons in the series are more topical. I'm trying to answer the question: What's the Holy Spirit like? What is his character? If I'm going to introduce my wife to you, I would describe certain character traits of her. Trying to describe certain character traits of the Holy Spirit to you. Last week I covered a number of them, I talked about how he's a person and that he's God. And a number of those sorts of issues. And this week I want to be more specific about his character. And say, what kind of character traits does he have that are of particular importance for you and your life with him. So I've got 3 of those:

1. He's an empowerer.
2. He applies our redemption to us.
3. He's our guide.

Alright? So what should you expect from the Holy Spirit? You should expect him to empower you, you should expect him to apply redemption to you, and you should expect him to guide you. So, I want to talk about each one of those and make you mad. So, ready? Here we go.

[He Empowers]

Number 1: He's an empowerer. So, when the Holy Spirit comes upon the church in the book of Acts. Right, which is the book about the Holy Spirit and his work through the apostles. When the Holy Spirit comes upon them, he does it for a reason. He comes upon them not so they could just have feelings about stuff, but there's a purpose for his coming upon them. Here's what I want to do. I want to show you in Acts chapter 1 and chapter 2, the purpose of the Holy Spirit's coming. So here's Acts 1:6-8. So Jesus has been resurrected, he's giving a commission, he's speaking to his disciples now about what's gonna happen now. And he says, Acts 1:6-8,

"Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" [What they expect at this moment is, "You've been resurrected, great victory, heaven's here now, yes?" So what needs to happen Lord for the heaven to come? Jesus' response...] He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. [So that's his way of saying, "Not yet. And you're probably aren't gonna know..."] But you [in this present time, so what should you do? You...] will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

So you have a job to do, a mission that I've given you, and in order to achieve it, the Holy Spirit is going to empower you so that you can be my witnesses. You're gonna wait here, and the Spirit will



come. So they twiddle their thumbs for a little bit; and then in Acts chapter 2, you see the fulfillment. Acts 2:1-14,

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind [Yeah, you know what that's like, yes? Yes? Yeah. The blowing of a violent wind] came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [So this is an indoor wind.] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [So like, fire and little pillars coming down upon them. That's what it looked like.] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them...[Now you need to understand that the other tongues that they're speaking on *this* occasion, is known languages. It would be like me all of a sudden speaking German to you. I don't know German. But just, kind of...the Spirit taking my words right now and I'm intending English, but it's going out German.] Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment [That's a good word. It's German!] <audience laughs> [It's already happening! Right? <laughs>], because each one heard their own language being spoken. [Now Luke is writing this to get to the point, 'look guys we're not just talking about one language, we're talking about, *all sorts of languages* coming upon different disciples. So this disciple's speaking German, and that one over there is French, and this one over here Russian. So he gives you a list of the different languages and regions that the people were from.] Utterly amazed, [verse 7] they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? [It's a way of saying, by the way that they're stupid. Galileans were thought to be kind of backwater people. It's like us saying, "Aren't they all from Kelowna?" I'm kidding...harrrr. If I were in Vancouver I would've said "Abbotsford" wouldn't I? Yeah. People from Abbotsford! How can they possibly know these other languages? They're not, that area's not that smart.] Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? [So here's his list:] Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" [All of them!] Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" [Of course there are few among them, the cynics, who made fun of them and said] Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."... [Drunkenness does crazy things to you, right?] Then Peter [verse 14] stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say."

And then he *boldly* proclaims the gospel to all of these people. So the Spirit has come upon them, why? For the mission. Power that they've received from the Spirit is to accomplish the desire that the Spirit has in the mission. And then when the Spirit comes and he fills these people, guys I gotta tell you the boldness is remarkable. They start saying things to people that they probably shouldn't say. And by shouldn't say, I mean it's gonna get them in hot water. So I'm gonna give you a couple of examples to my favourites throughout the book of Acts. So, Peter and John in Acts 4 are pulled in



because they started proclaiming that Jesus is the only way to salvation. They say this and they get pulled in by the ruling religious authority called the Sanhedrin. It's like the ruling religious counsel who have authority over this Jewish group. So the government pulls them in and says, "Hey you guys need to stop saying this stuff or we're gonna... <points fingers> get you."

Peter says that, in their faces, "Look, you tell us, should we obey you or God?"

"I don't know—but if you keep talking, you're gonna be in trouble."

So they released them cause they don't have any reasons to hold them. They released them, these guys go immediately back to their friends. Listen to what happens in Acts 4:23-31,

"On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. [Listen to this prayer] "Sovereign Lord," [the Lord who knows and controls all things] they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.' [In other words, this is a psalm and you told us a long time ago that there would be a time when the rulers of the earth fight back against your anointed servant. So] Indeed [verse 27] Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. [So, we're living in the moment that is a fulfilment of what you predicted, *sovereign* Lord. This is not a surprise to you - what we're experiencing. In fact, verse 28] They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

Right? Cause when the Spirit fills you, you speak boldly even if the government says "stop"! Even if it's gonna cost your life, it doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. Power of the holy Spirit. He'll make it so. So, the Spirit comes upon the Apostle Paul on an occasion a little bit later. And Paul's going on his little mission trip. And he's planting churches all over the place with his friend Barnabas. So in Acts 16, sorry, Acts 13:6-12,

"They [Paul and Barnabas] traveled through the whole island [island of Cyprus] until they came to Paphos [which is the main city, so like Victoria]. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. [So listen, you need to understand the characters here. What you've got is the proconsul, he's a governor or he's the premier. He's John Horgan. And he wants to hear from these guys about the word of God, he wants to hear about Jesus from them. But he's got this little attendant, this little helper who's over on the side <evil snickering voice>, long fingers... "I don't want you to hear that at all!" </evil snickering voice> He's a sorcerer! And so,] But Elymas



the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. [*<evil snickering voice>* “Don’t listen to them, my pretty....They’re not speaking from God!” *</evil snickering voice>*] and then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, [this is what happens when the Spirit fills ya!] looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! [I’ve wanted to say this to so many people. Right? I guess I’m not Spirit-filled. This is what happens when the Spirit comes! He’s in the governing chambers and he’s speaking straight, in the presence of the premier, to his confidant, “You’re the devil, man!”] You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.”

This is the way it works. The Spirit comes upon us so that we can fulfill the mission. And when that Spirit comes upon us to fulfill the mission, *boldness* is the mark of it. So J.D. Greear he summarizes all of this, he said:

“The book of Acts tells the mind-blowing story of how a group of underqualified, mostly blue-collar workers filled with the Holy Spirit can turn the world upside down. We’re still reeling today from that first Christian century. New Testament scholars have pointed out that when later Christians gave a name to the book of Acts, they probably chose the wrong title. Rather than ‘Acts of the Apostles,’ many say it should instead be ‘The Acts of the Holy Spirit.’ They say this because even a quick read of Acts reveals that the Spirit of God is the primary actor. *He* guides; *he* speaks; and *he* moves; the disciples are simply trying to keep up... And despite themselves, he slowly drags them to victory. It becomes readily apparent that the Holy Spirit, not them, is the one accomplishing the mission Jesus gave in Acts 1:8.”

Listen, I tell you all of that because, when we get together as a church and we talk about how we want to be a church that renews other churches, and plant other churches, and sees a gospel renewal in our country. I gotta tell you, that is a huge hill, filled with difficulty. And if you don’t believe that, ask other churches that have tried to do the same thing. It’s filled with opposition, and difficulty, and personal sacrifice, and all sorts of things. And I gotta tell you, that when you look at the side, and we stand at the foot of that hill, and you say “There’s the mission!” You’re like, *<laughs>* “There’s no way!” There’s not enough money, there’s not enough time, there’s not enough effort, there’s not enough—there’s not enough! I mean, unless, we’re not the one climbing it. Unless there’s another power, a *bold* power that can fill us. I have a friend, um, I think I’ve shared this before, who was, had his little boy out chopping wood with him. I went over to the house, sometime when I was in Europe at one point, this little boy was chopping wood with him. And he had one of those little hatchets, one of the little axes. And the little boy weren’t very strong he had one armed it, and he was hitting the top of the wood [arm chopping wood]. I mean, the hatchet was pretty dull, so it was bouncing off. But his dad was standing behind him, and as soon as the son do that, he pulls the axe back and his father



would [chopping wood motion] <whooshing thud>, cut it right in half. And the father would say, “Look what you did!” and the kid would go, <screams joyfully> ”Whoa!” </screams joyfully> He’s so excited. He’s kind of dumb, this kid [laughter]. Anyway, he’d go up again and go to the next one, Bonk! Come off. Right? He might sometimes make a little tiny split in it. But then the father’s axe, [chopping wood motion] <whooshing thud>. You know that this is what it’s like to, to work for Jesus. You got your little hatchet there, baby. Swinging with all your might, sweat coming down, “Look at me follow you!” <Boink> And then the Holy Spirit’s like, [chopping wood motion] <whooshing thud> and he splits it in half! I was in...behind here [points behind the stage], a while ago. You know, there’s moments in ministry that are hard. Moments in your life that are hard. You start facing those hills and you start feeling like, maybe this is all a waste and it’s not going well. How is it that you help lead a church like this? And all the challenges and all these things, and I had to come up and preach. And I was really down. And my friend Kyle, one of our pastors, who seems to be my friend in dark moments; he came up, looked me in the eye, he’d seen that look before, we’ve known each other for 20 something years. And he quietly walked over next to me and he put his arm around me, and he whispered in my ear, “Jeff, it’s God’s church.”

“Yeah, it’s God’s church. I got this little hatchet, Kyle. You should see me swing it.”

Every time I ever preach anywhere, I do it what Charles Spurgeon did. Great preacher, Baptist preacher of the 19th century. He, it used to be said, that he would, when he climbed into his pulpit, there’s a stairway that used to go into the pulpit where he preached. And every step along the way he would stop, pause for a second, and say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit.” And he’d climb up and he boldly proclaim the gospel. Because that’s what you need. Look, I know that there are probably hills in front of you that God has placed in your race—right in front of you. And I’m gonna tell you the way you get through this, is that you are provided the power of God by the Holy Spirit to fill you, you are not alone. I’m with you always, even to the end of the age. And He will give you the power you need. So you walk forward, step by step, in his mission. And we will see God move in our day. So he’s an empowerer.

[He Applies Our Redemption]

He’s also the applier of our redemption. So I was at a conference. And I was speaking to a guy at my table. Was kind of a working conference thing, I got to know this guy, we’re talking about our different churches. After me describing my church, and him describing his church and stuff, he said he was plagued with a question for me. So around lunch time, he asked me this question, we just met, he asked me this question. He said, “Jeff, I don’t know you. But I feel like I want to ask you this, is the Holy Spirit welcome in your church?” And I thought, “Okay, that’s an interesting question.” I mean, my answer to him was, “Man, I hope so.” So I asked him to explain what he meant, and he explained it the way I thought that he would explain it, given his particular background and thinking. But I thought it was an interesting question, what makes it—what makes a church ‘Spirit-filled’? What makes a church welcoming to the Holy Spirit? And how do you know that you’ve been in a church like that? Now, I’ve been around the Christian community long enough to know that I think, I think the answer if you’re walking out of a church service, and someone asked you, “What’d you think?” And if your



answer is, “Oh, the Holy Spirit was there.” And they say, “How do you know?” Your answer would probably be, “Because I felt it.” In fact, I would say that in large part, most of us say, that the Holy Spirit’s presence is marked by our feeling his presence. So we even pray prayers something like this “Holy Spirit, come.” What do we mean by that? We mean, “Come and help us to feel that you’re here. Give us a whoosh of some variety to know that this is a Spirit-filled moment.”

So I’ve been around in some settings where that’s become a very poignant...perspective. I was at a conference, sorry, just visiting a church in New York City with some friends. I was having some meetings with some other church leaders there and... we went to one of the churches I’ve always wanted to go to in my life, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Tim Keller is the name of the pastor there, or has been the name of the pastor there for years. Tim Keller, he basically mentored me, without knowing it. My sister-in-law went to his church and used to send these tape cassettes to me in New Zealand. And I would listen to them in my little pink Honda that I was driving around all the time in. I listened to this guy’s sermons all the time. And I would pray, “Lord, help me to do it at least a little bit of what he does.” So when I got the opportunity to go to New York City, we decided to go to his church. Ezra and I were together and we sat in the front row. Right? Cause those who love Jesus are in the front row, yeah? Yep. So there we are, front row, he’s right in front of us the whole service is going on. Some people who were with us were about 4 or 5 rows back and they were sitting there in their little gaggle of folks. It’s a Presbyterian church and the service we were at was a traditional Presbyterian liturgy. I grew up in that kind of setting. And so, Presbyterians if they felt anything they would think that something was wrong, right? So, they... most things are read. It’s done with a guy in a tie, in a suit, and it goes all the way through the liturgy - the order of the service is what we mean by that - is beautiful. If you know what they’re trying to do it’s quite beautiful and engaging. However, if you don’t know what they’re trying to do, it can feel quite dry. Then Tim Keller comes up and he preaches his sermon, which was fantastic, there were points at which he was getting a little excited. And I was like, “Oh, Tim, just spit on me, man! And I’m just loving it. This is great. It’s good. It’s good.” At the end of the service, I turn to Ezra and I said, “My heart is so full, brother. Not just from the preached word, but from the whole thing. And it’s different than what we do, what I do, probably not the kind of service that I would probably organize, but I tell you what, my heart is so full.” I turn around and I saw some of the guys who were with me, one of the guys who were with me, he had his arms crossed, and he was shaking his head like this [shakes head] looking at me, in a very disappointed face. And I said, “What’s wrong?”

And he said, “I don’t think the Holy Spirit has ever come to this church.”

So I asked him, “What do you mean by that?”

He said, “Well, as you leave today, have you felt anything?”

Right. Right, so, that’s our assumption. That the Holy Spirit is in the feels. We know that the Holy Spirit’s there when we feel the thing.

I’m involved in sometimes dealing with church planters and others. I’ve heard so many church planters talk about the stories and why it is they want to be a church planter because they were at a particular part of their city, and overlooking the city or something, and the tears came to their eyes and they looked at it and thought, “Oh, God, wants me to this particular work.” I’ve also sat in some



meetings where church planters have said, they've been asked, "Why do you want to plant a church?" And they say, "Well, some friends have told me I'd be good at it." And the conversations that are had behind the scenes about these respective church planters are, "Of course the Spirit is talking to the first one cause they cried. But the second one? I don't know...the story's a little bit dry. How do we know the Spirit's in it?" And I'm just saying that, we think that way because we believe that the Holy Spirit largely is in the feeling of it. Now here's why I bring all of this up, I think that our tendency to reduce the Spirit's work down to what we *feel* him doing is so wrong headed. I am not suggesting that the Spirit doesn't do stuff that we feel. I am suggesting that he does *way* more than what you feel. So to judge a church or anything else by what you feel is really missing the majority, in fact, of what the Spirit does. You say, "Tell me what the majority of the Spirit does?" Actually the majority of what the Spirit does is the application of your redemption. He takes the gospel and he applies it to you. So when you come to faith in Jesus, *that's* how it happened. The Holy Spirit gave you eyes to see. So, Acts 16:14,

"One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."

You're a Christian here, if you're a Christian here today, the reason you're a Christian, and the reason you say, "Why is it that I see it and others don't?" Because the Holy Spirit has given you eyes to see and ears to hear. He was actively involved and he continues to be actively involved in giving you eyes to see and ears to hear. And he didn't leave you alone, he started there but now he's doing a continual, daily, regular transforming work in your life. And so, for example 2 Corinthians 3:18,

"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

You're being transformed into the image. It's like the Holy Spirit has taken an image of Jesus, a sculpture of Jesus, and he is sculpting you. But you're this big block of ugly clay. And he's like, "Okay, I'm just gonna knock off everything that doesn't look like Jesus here." And so even in the quietest moments of your life, the Spirit is doing his work. You wanna know if you're Spirit-filled? You having any trouble lately? The Spirit's working on you. You learning something about God? You growing in grace? Do you see it happening? Do you see conviction of sin in your life? That's the Spirit—actively involved in your life.

So what I'm saying is that there's never a moment in your Christian life that the Holy Spirit isn't working with you. And sometimes we feel it. So you have a passage like Romans 8:16,

"The Spirit himself testifies with our Spirit that we are God's children."

There's a commentator on that passage, who says that, listen, what he's describing is like a father walking down the street with his kid. And he's holding hands with his child. And you know, it's his son. And the father looks down on his son and just delighted that he's with his son. So there's this moment



where he picks the son up and he twirls him around and he holds him close and he says, “I love you, boy! I’m just...I’m so happy to be with you, son!” Now was the son a son prior to the twirl? Was he a child prior to—yes, of course he was. Is he more a child because of this? No. But what happened then? Well the Spirit testifies with our Spirit that we are a children of God. There’s a feeling in there. So in moments in your life there’s gonna be these moments where you’re like, “Oh I feel the presence of God reaffirming to me that I am his! And it’s glorious.” But that doesn’t mean if you don’t feel it, that God’s not doing his consistent application of redemption in your life. You ever been to a dam? If you look at a dam, on the top there’s a frothy water often times. You go to a dam, and you’re like, “Whoa! Look at the power of the water going through! You know, it’s spilling over the top!” And it’s creating all this froth on the top. That’s not...That’s remarkable and it’s part of what the dam does. But do you know where the power, you know where the power is in the dam? It’s under the surface. It’s consistent and it’s always happening as those turbines are being turned by the power of the water and you don’t always see it. But you turn your lights on because it’s happening. Listen, the Holy Spirit is consistently at work. Don’t ever think that the Holy Spirit is not working in your life that you haven’t had an experience of the Spirit because you don’t feel it. Sometimes we feel it, but he’s always working.

[He Guides]

Alright last one: he guides. You guys are going to have to listen quicker than what you’re doing. He guides. I’m gonna make you mad now. Here we go. Um...there’s a story from a book that I will not give you the name of, because the book makes me mad. So, story about a guy who, he and his family are gonna go out and they’re gonna buy a Christmas tree. They usually buy the Christmas tree on the Saturday after the U.S. Thanksgiving weekend, right? So that’s late November. On this one year, even though they felt in their hearts that they probably should go and do it that day because that’s what they’ve always done. They decided instead, we’re not gonna do it that way this year, we’re gonna wait ’til next week because we’re tired after Thanksgiving. They waited ’til next week. When they went to go get the tree on their property, which was a long distance away and up in the mountains. Everything went wrong. Like, the car ended up in the ditch, daughter was frozen from the waist down. Battery of the car wore out. Instead of it taking like 3 hours to get the tree, it took them 15 hours to get the tree. And they came home exhausted in the evening. And they sat down on the couch, he did with his wife. And he looked at her and he said, “What happened there?” And she said, “I don’t think we listened to the Spirit of God. He told us,” she said, “to go the week before but we didn’t listen so we went the week later and therefore we were not hearing him properly.” He describes it this way, “The weekend God told us to go was a gorgeous weekend—no snow, sunny skies, no wind. The whole event would have been delightful. But no. We had to do things our way. How does the old hymn go? ‘Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.’ The whole ordeal could have been avoided had we simply listened.” So is that how it works? Is walking with Jesus and walking with the Holy Spirit, is the normal way that that takes place? Is that God has a desire for you in non-moral circumstances, meaning like when you should get your Christmas tree or whether you should turn left or right at a particular light. That you need to tap into in order to be hearing him rightly.



Is that what we should expect from him? Gerald Sittser in his book *The Will of God as a Way of Life* says “Yes”. Here’s how he summarizes it, he says,

“Conventional understanding of God’s will defines it as a specific pathway we should follow into the future. God knows what that pathway is, and he has laid it out for us to follow. Our responsibility is to discover this pathway—God’s plan for our lives. We must discover which of the many pathways we could follow is the one we should follow, the one God has planned for us. If and when we make the right choice, we will receive his favor, fulfill our divine destiny and succeed in life... If we choose rightly, we will experience his blessing and achieve success and happiness. If we choose wrongly, we may lose our way, miss God’s will for our lives, and remain lost forever in an incomprehensible maze.”

You can be in the centre of God’s will by listening to his extra biblical commands about non-moral things, or you can be outside of it. If you want to be—you should be in the centre - cause things are gonna go badly outside. All of that has led one author to reflect on it, he said,

“We fear that if we make the wrong decision we’ll mess ourselves up for life—like one of those Choose Your Own Adventure books in which you make some seemingly arbitrary decision, like who to sit next to on the bus, that results in marriage to a beautiful princess on your own island in the Caribbean, while the opposite choice leads to your slow, painful death by flesh-eating bacteria in a South American prison... So we start to obsess: What if I choose the wrong option? What if I go to college A, but God planned for me to meet my wife at college B? Does that mean I’ll be single for the rest of my life? And what if I make the right choice but she makes the wrong one? Can she mess up for me too? And so we peer into our hearts as into a Magic-8-Ball, nearly hyperventilating as we look for the one ‘Spirit answer’ to various questions.”

Listen, I’ve heard people describe this as the normal way that you should be experiencing the Spirit and saying, “Listen, you need tune in to Holy Spirit radio. Get your antenna up.”

“Well, how do you do that?”

“Well, I’ve got four easy tricks that will make it happen,” they’ll say. “Come to my meeting...and I’ll tell you. I’ll write my book, and you can buy it, and you can find out how it is you can listen to the Holy Spirit better than what you’re currently doing. So that you can know what he wants you to do in non-moral circumstances.”

So here’s my question, is that the way the Bible describes walking with the Spirit? And here’s my argument as we finish. In the New Testament, the guidance of the Holy Spirit in non-moral decisions is not normally something that Christians seek. Rather, they commit themselves to the revealed will of God and remain open to the Spirit’s interruption. I’ll say it again, in the New Testament, the guidance of the Holy Spirit in non-moral decisions, you know what I mean by that, I’m not talking about whether or not you should cheat your wife or not—there’s a clear desire of the Spirit there. You should seek the Spirit’s desire in that regard, but in non-moral decisions, in the New Testament, the guidance of



the Holy Spirit is not normally something Christians seek. Rather, they commit themselves to the revealed will of God and remain open to the Spirit's interruption. So you find some really cool examples of this kind of thing happening in Acts. In fact the whole book of Acts is basically this. It's the book of the Holy Spirit and people walking with the Spirit. So here's how they do it. The Apostle Paul, Acts 18, he's in the city of Corinth. And things aren't going well there. He's preaching the gospel, a lot of people aren't believing. And he decides, you know what, I think I might move on. Go to the next town where people might hear a little bit better. So one night, Acts 18:9-11,

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.”

See, he was going down the path, God had given him a commission, to go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He was doing that work, trying to figure out where to stay and where not to stay. And the Spirit interrupts. One of my favourite texts along those lines, Acts 16:6-10,

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. [How did that happen? They tried to go to Asia, but they were stopped. Maybe somebody got a bad tummy bug. Maybe they had a prophetic word. Maybe, I don't know. But he says, look, the Holy Spirit stopped us from going there.] When they came to the border of Mysia, [verse 7] they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. [I don't know... Maybe the border guard took on the form of Christ and was like, [swings arms around] “You shall not pass!” I don't know! But somehow, the Spirit stopped them from going where they had planned.]... During the night [verse 9] Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

Do you see how this works? I used to ski moguls. Before the days of snowboarders. Snowboarders ruin moguls, just so you know. Like, they ruin most things, but especially moguls, right? So you're skiing, and then there's these moguls there. The way you ski moguls is that you pick a line. You'd stand at the top and you look down, and you say, “Look, okay, I'm gonna start there, and I'm gonna hit it off [points] that mogul, that mogul, that mogul, that mogul. Avoid the snowboarder who's sitting there pushing all the snow down into the crevice so you can't do this. So anyway...” And you start. That's my plan. It's a good plan. Looks good. Boom, boom, boom, boom. Knees like a spring, boom, boom, boom, boom. Inevitably, the snowboarders show up. The spirit of the snowboarders divert you, right? They go vroom right across, <grunty voice> “Hey what's up man?” </grunty voice> Right across your lane, so what do you do? After screaming at them, you go... New line. And another ones comes, new line, new line. You get to the bottom, it wasn't what you planned it to be... but it was still fun. Listen, I'm telling you, this is the way it works. I can't... you know how many Christians I talk to



who are burdened with false guilt because they think that they're missing out on the best God's will for their life. If you're not sinning, you're fine. Love God, do what you want, pick a line! Pick a line. The Lord will, he'll guide you. That's the way it works. He likes to drive moving cars. So stop sitting there in your garage going, "Tell me, Lord." Hey next week we're gonna talk about spiritual gifts and that's gonna be controversial. So you should come back for that, right? Alright.

Let's pray. Father, I'm so thankful for your grace and your interrupting kindness to us to bring about some results that we don't always expect. But they're always wonderful. Cause you're always wonderful. Your Spirit is so great. Thank you for his empowering, thank you for his application of redemption, his promise to bring us safely home to harbour as we're tossed by the storm. We love him and thank you for him. In Jesus' name, Amen.