

The Holy Spirit: Working Behind *the* Scenes



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ezek. 37:5, 9; Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13; Exod. 31:1–5; John 16:13, 14; Gal. 5:16–23.*

Memory Text: “He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (*John 16:14, NKJV*).

The Holy Spirit does not receive the same prominent attention in Scripture as do the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit was present at significant moments throughout sacred history. At the beginning, at God's creation of this world, He was at work, but more in the background. He was active in the inspiration of God's prophets, thus playing a key role in the writing of God's Word. He was also involved with the conception of Jesus Christ in Mary's womb.

Yet, He is not at the center of the biblical record, and we know amazingly little about Him. He remains in the background, and that's because His role is to advance the work of Someone else in the Godhead—Jesus, the Son of God—and to give glory to God the Father. All this so that fallen human beings might be saved from the eternal death that sin would otherwise bring them.

From the testimony of Scripture, we learn that the Holy Spirit willingly and gracefully accepts a supporting, helping, sustaining, and equipping behind-the-scenes role. No matter whether it is in creation or redemption or mission, He does not seek to stand in the spotlight, regardless of His crucial role.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 14.

The Elusiveness of the Holy Spirit

Read John 3:3–8 and Ezekiel 37:5, 9. Why is the wind a fitting picture for the mysterious workings of the Holy Spirit?

By comparing the Holy Spirit's actions to that of the wind, Jesus describes the Spirit's elusiveness. The movements of the wind have something mysterious about them. It is difficult to predict with exactness where the wind comes from and where the wind is going. Who hasn't at times been baffled by the sudden appearance of wind, seemingly out of nowhere?

Yet, we can learn to become somewhat familiar with the movements and patterns of the wind. In a similar manner, the Holy Spirit is active where He wills. No one can control Him. Yet, we can know where He is active and at work. Just like the wind, the Holy Spirit is invisible but can be most powerful. We, of course, can feel the presence of the wind and can often see its effect, even if we can't see the wind itself. From a light breeze to deadly blasts, wind can be a very powerful force. When the Holy Spirit is described as wind, His activity has been connected with the idea of bringing life to the dead. This assumes power to the highest potency, something that only God is capable of doing.

How this is accomplished remains a mystery. God and His workings through the Holy Spirit are greater than what we can fully comprehend, as are so many things both secular and sacred.

This does not mean that we cannot know what the Holy Spirit accomplishes. But we have to acknowledge that the appropriate virtue in dealing with divine mysteries is humility. Humility appreciates the grandeur of God, recognizes our creaturely limitations, and accepts our need for divine revelation.

Ellen G. White has aptly stated: "The mysteries of the Bible, so far from being an argument against it, are among the strongest evidences of its divine inspiration. If it contained no account of God but that which we could comprehend; if His greatness and majesty could be grasped by finite minds, then the Bible would not, as now, bear the unmistakable evidences of divinity."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 170.

What are some unseen forces in nature that can impact our lives? What should this teach us about the reality of unseen yet powerful influences in our world?

The Holy Spirit at Creation

The first major work of God on this planet was its Creation. The Bible clearly mentions God (*Gen. 1:1*) and Jesus Christ (*Col. 1:16, 17*) as the Creator of heaven and earth and of all that, in fact, was made (*John 1:1–3*). Yet, the Bible also mentions the presence of the Holy Spirit in the work of Creation.

Read Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; Psalms 33:6; 104:29, 30. What was the role of the Holy Spirit at Creation? How is the Spirit of God related to the creation of life?

The Creation story in Genesis 1:2 mentions the presence of God's Spirit at Creation. Job 26:13; 33:4; Psalm 104:29, 30; and Psalm 33:6 support the active role of the Holy Spirit in the supernatural Creation of the earth. While the Bible clearly mentions God the Father and His divine Son, Jesus Christ, as being active in the Creation of the world (see *Isa. 64:8; Col. 1:16, 17*), the Holy Spirit is present also, although in a more subtle manner.

He does not appear as the central actor in the Creation story. Instead, He is “hovering” over the void, and through His moving He is present at the genesis of life on this earth. The Hebrew word for “moving over,” or “hovering” (*merahepeth*) over, the surface of the earth that is used in Genesis 1:2 is the same word that is used in Deuteronomy 32:11, where God is compared to an eagle hovering over its nest of young. The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in the creation of life on this earth and takes care of the newly created living beings as an eagle would do for its young. Psalm 104:30 suggests that the Creation act was possible only through the work of the Holy Spirit and that He played an active part during this process.

The Holy Spirit was not only present at the Creation of this world; He is also active in the process of our re-creation, in which He gives us a new heart and new mind. How are both of these activities related? What does the Sabbath tell us about this work of Creation and re-creation?

The Holy Spirit and the Sanctuary

“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (*Exod. 25:8*).

After the act of Creation, God’s plan of salvation is of prime importance in the Bible. In a fallen world, what good would Creation be without the plan of Redemption? As sinners, we need not just a Creator but also a Redeemer. How thankful we should be that we have that Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Without Him, we would be without hope in a world that, in and of itself, offers us none.

In the Old Testament it was the sanctuary and its service that illustrated God’s forgiveness of sin and foreshadowed the work of Jesus, our Redeemer. It was here that the plan of salvation was revealed to the ancient Israelites (*see Heb. 4:2*). While much of the sanctuary service pointed to Jesus and His death for the forgiveness of sin, the Holy Spirit is depicted as being actively involved by enabling specific people to build the sanctuary according to the pattern God had revealed to Moses.

Read Exodus 31:1–5. How was the Holy Spirit involved in the building of the sanctuary? How did the Holy Spirit assist those who constructed God’s dwelling place?

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit was also present at the building of the sanctuary, the central place where reconciliation between God and human beings took place and a holy God met sinners. It was God who communicated to Moses His plan to build the earthly sanctuary according to the heavenly original (*Exod. 25:9, 40*).

The sanctuary was God’s model to illustrate His plan of salvation. God was going to dwell amid His people in a special way, and He was going to do it in the sanctuary, which He told them to build. And it was the work of the Holy Spirit to enable human beings to accomplish, with artistic skill and with beauty, what God had told them to do. Without His help, Israel would not have been able to accomplish this artistic craftsmanship.

Considering the power of the Holy Spirit, He certainly didn’t need human help in building the sanctuary, but He enabled other people to do it with skill and beauty. How and where can you encourage and assist other people to use their talents to further the kingdom of God to God’s glory?

The Holy Spirit in Glorifying Jesus Christ

The Holy Spirit was active during Old Testament times, although it does not appear that His work was as extensive as it was in the New Testament era. With the coming of Jesus, the promised Messiah, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is intensified, and He gives His gifts to all believers. While the New Testament tells us that the Holy Spirit is active in many different ways in our spiritual lives and in the life of the church, His most important work is to glorify Jesus Christ.

Read John 16:13, 14 and John 15:26. What does Jesus say is the work of the Holy Spirit? How is all other work of the Holy Spirit related to this central work?

Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit speaks not of Himself but of Jesus. His work consists in elevating the redemptive work of Jesus. He keeps Himself in the background and puts the floodlight on Jesus. It has been aptly said that “the Spirit’s message to us is never ‘Look at me; listen to me; come to me; get to know me’ but always ‘Look at *Him*, and see His glory; listen to *Him*, and hear His word; go to *Him*, and have life; get to know *Him*, and taste His gift of joy and peace.’ The Spirit, we might say, is the matchmaker, the celestial marriage broker, whose role it is to bring us and Christ together and ensure that we stay together.”—J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk With God*, revised and enlarged edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005), pp. 57, 58.

This is highly significant. Any emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit that detracts from the Person and work of Jesus Christ is not from the Holy Spirit. As important as the Holy Spirit is for our spiritual lives, He should never take the place that is due in our thinking and for our salvation only to Jesus Christ. Wherever Jesus is exalted, the Holy Spirit is at work. This is why we are called Christians—that is, followers of Christ (*compare with Acts 11:26*)—rather than “Pneumians,” that is, followers of the Spirit (see Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossways Books, 2007], p. 284).

Why is it so important for us to uplift the risen Lord in all that we do? After all, think about what Jesus has done for us. We owe everything to Him. How can we show our gratitude (see, for instance, 2 Thess. 1:11, 12)?

The Holy Spirit and Christ

The Holy Spirit effected the incarnation of Jesus (*Luke 1:34, 35*). He anointed Jesus for His mission (*Luke 3:21, 22*). The anointing of Jesus endowed Him with power to fulfill His Messianic mission and qualified Him to bestow the Holy Spirit on His disciples. The Holy Spirit guided and sustained Jesus in His temptations (*Mark 1:12; Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:1, 2, 14*) so that Jesus “is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (*Heb. 2:18, NKJV; compare with 4:15, 16*). The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus for this redemptive work (*Heb. 9:14*) and made Jesus’ resurrection possible (*1 Pet. 3:18*). In all this, the Holy Spirit remained in the background and helped to bring Jesus Christ to prominence.

Read **Luke 24:44–49; Galatians 5:16–23; and Ephesians 4:23, 24.** What do we learn about the work of the Holy Spirit in these passages? How does the Holy Spirit glorify Jesus?

The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus in at least the following ways:

1. By teaching about Him in the Holy Scriptures in a trustworthy and reliable manner. Nothing that is necessary for us to know about Christ and His salvation is missing or misleading. It’s all there in the Word of God, if we would but read it in faith and submission.
2. By drawing men and women into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit gently works on people’s hearts and minds. He gives them understanding so that they understand spiritual things and so that they will be willing to place their trust in Jesus Christ and accept Him as their Leader and Redeemer.
3. By reproducing Christ’s character in us. He thus brings to life Christlike virtues in our lives (*Gal. 5:22, 23*). Through the blood of Jesus we are given victory over sin (*compare Rev. 12:11*), and the Holy Spirit enables us to walk in faithfulness to God’s commandments.
4. By enabling us to live a Christlike, selfless, and loving life of service to others. He calls men and women into specific lines of work for God and enables us to reach out to others in the attractive Spirit of Christ.

How does the work of reproducing the character of Christ in our lives bring glory to the Father?

Further Thought: No question, the work of the Holy Spirit is crucial to our walk with the Lord. Again, we might not be able to see Him work, but we can see the effect of His work in our lives and in the lives of others. If your life has been changed through faith in Jesus, it has been changed only through the work of the Holy Spirit in it. “While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 173. These are wonderful promises, and an untold number of lives have shown just how real they are. But the work of the Holy Spirit is not instantaneous. We don’t automatically become the kind of people we ought to be. A life of faith and submission to the Lord is a life of struggle, of surrender, and of repentance when we fail. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Agent that works in our lives to make us new creatures in Christ. This is, though, the work of a lifetime. Although our faults and weaknesses should spur us on to a greater surrender to our Lord, we must not let the devil use them to discourage us in our Christian life, which he is always eager to do. When taunted by our sins, we must always remember the death of Jesus on behalf of sinners. It’s precisely because we are what we are—sinners in need of grace—that Jesus died for us and gives us that grace.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What can the Holy Spirit’s example teach you about ministering from behind the scenes? That is, doing the work of the Lord in a manner that many people don’t know about, see, or even appreciate?
- 2 How does the Holy Spirit elevate Jesus and put Him into focus? How can you elevate Jesus without putting yourself at the center of attention? Why is that sometimes so hard to do? How can we fight the natural inclination to self-promotion?

A Gift in the Forest: Part 2

The Polish Union decided to rent the camp, and soon a truck from Denmark arrived, filled with military surplus beds and dressers and kitchen supplies! The union stepped out in faith and started holding camps at Zatonie.

Ryszard [ree-SHARD] went to the local village council and explained that the church wanted the campsite to train children and youth to be good citizens. He reported on how the church already had used the camp to benefit children from a coal mining region and children whose homes had been destroyed during recent flooding. He explained the purpose of Pathfinder camps and youth camps. Then he asked the council to consider giving the camp to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. One member of the local council objected, but in the end the council voted overwhelmingly to give Camp Zatonie to the Adventist Church. A gift from Adventists in Britain paid for the buildings (which were privately owned). God had spoken.

Besides summer camps for youth, the campground hosts Poland's annual camp meeting. Hundreds of people who are not Adventists come to this camp, and many leave having turned their lives over to Jesus.

Children are encouraged to bring non-Adventist friends to camp, and some of these young people have decided to follow Jesus. Literature evangelists use the camp as a training site for colporteurs, who practice their sales skills in the villages around Zatonie.

When Ryszard first found Zatonie, he noticed some words written on a building: "God doesn't exist." Two years later during a camp meeting, he asked the youth what should be done about the graffiti. A young man stood and said that he had written those words in 1989 while at a camp for troubled teenagers. When he returned home, he learned that one of his friends had become an Adventist. The friend invited him to church, and in time, he, too, gave his life to Christ. God took away his desire to drink and smoke and made him into a new person. So this young man who had written the words against God on the wall during a drunken act of rebellion helped to paint over them as a brother in Christ.

In 2010, part of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to renovate the buildings at Camp Zatonie. Part of this quarter's offering will fund live television productions aimed specifically at children and youth on Hope Channel Poland. Thank you for your support through the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

RYSZARD JANKOWSKI, now president of the West Polish Conference, was Polish Union youth director when Zatonie's story unfolded.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 3:3–8*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize that the Holy Spirit is powerfully working in this world and in his or her life, even if he or she is not able to fully discern and comprehend His ways.

Feel: Foster daily the feeling of openness to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his or her life.

Do: Submit to the guidance, conviction, and instruction of the Holy Spirit in his or her daily life.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Understanding the Background Role of the Holy Spirit

A Why does Jesus use the symbolism of wind to describe the working of the Holy Spirit in His discussion with Nicodemus?

B How is the working of the Holy Spirit a divine mystery?

II. Feel: Creation and Redemption

A How do you feel knowing that the same power of the Holy Spirit that brought this world into existence is available to us today to re-create our lives in His image?

III. Do: Glorifying God

A One of the prime functions of the Holy Spirit is to glorify God. What does it mean to glorify God, and how can we make glorifying God central to our lives?

B How does the background ministry of the Holy Spirit, always “testifying” of Jesus, provide a model of humility for each one of us today?

► **Summary:** When we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to take full control of our lives, we will glorify Jesus in all we do and will reveal the fruit of the Spirit in our daily interactions with others.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *John 3:3–8*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Holy Spirit’s role throughout the Bible is significant. He is our Teacher, our Guide, and our Instructor. He convicts us of sin and reveals the path of righteousness. He provides us with power to overcome and strength to resist temptation. His role is to exalt Jesus and glorify the Savior and lead us to do the same in our own lives.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson especially highlights the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Creation and Redemption. The Holy Spirit participated with the Father and the Son in the beginning at Creation (*Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:4; and Ps. 104:29, 30*). The psalmist declares, “You send forth Your Spirit, [and] they are created” (*Ps. 104:30, NKJV*). The Spirit brings life to all living creatures. The Holy Spirit played a significant role in the Creation of the earth, and He also played a significant role at the cross in the Redemption of all humanity. The Holy Spirit sustained and strengthened Jesus throughout His entire life. He presided at the Savior’s birth, guided Him throughout His ministry, attended to Him at the cross, awaited Him at the Resurrection, and accompanied Him at the Ascension.

Emphasize that without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are lifeless, powerless, and spiritually dead. We may have a “form of godliness” (*2 Tim. 3:5*) but are, in reality, a hollow shell of religiosity. It is the Holy Spirit who breathes the life of God into our souls, testifies of Christ, and exalts Him in our lives.

Opening Discussion: Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. We need not condemn him for coming in the darkness. It is a miracle that he came at all. The fact that he came is an indication of the moving of the Holy Spirit on his heart. If you were Nicodemus and could make one request of Jesus, what would it be? What was Nicodemus really seeking?

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 What do you think prompted Nicodemus to come to Jesus?

2 Why do you think that Jesus used the symbolism of wind with Nicodemus?

3 How does the symbolism of wind compare with the “Spirit of God . . . hovering over” or blowing across the waters in Genesis 1:2 (*NKJV*)?

4 What does wind indicate? Why is it an encouraging symbol for each one of us?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The Holy Spirit first inspired the Bible writers. Today He inspires us as we read their inspired words. The Holy Spirit was present with His mighty power at Creation. Now, through that same power, He works the miracle of re-creation in our lives. The Holy Spirit strengthened Jesus to face the temptations of the devil. Now He strengthens us to face those same temptations. The Holy Spirit encouraged Jesus with the hope of the Resurrection as He faced death, and He encourages us with the hope of the resurrection as we face the end of our lives. The Holy Spirit gives us the assurance that we are children of God and places within our hearts the divine guarantee, or assurance, of eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Bible Commentary

I. The Fruit of the Spirit (*Review Galatians 5:16–24 with the class.*)

The verses of Galatians 5:16–24 are some of the most powerful ones in the New Testament. Here the apostle Paul contrasts living in the flesh and walking in the Spirit. The expression “walk in the Spirit” (*Gal. 5:16, NKJV*) simply means living a life in harmony with spiritual ideals through the power of the Holy Spirit. It means permitting heavenly values to guide

your life. It means filling your mind with eternal principles. It involves saturating your thoughts with the life-giving Word. And it includes allowing the principles of Scripture to guide everything you do.

In contrast to life in the Spirit, Paul describes life in the flesh—a life governed by earthly passions, desires, and lusts. A person living in the flesh is one who yields daily to the desires of the natural heart. One whose life is dominated by the works of the flesh—such as lustful thoughts; an angry, bitter spirit; an envious mind-set; or a lack of self-control—lives in his or her own strength rather than in the power of the Spirit. In contrast to those enslaved by the lusts of the flesh, there are those who are surrendered to, and controlled by, the Holy Spirit. Their lives reveal the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, and self-control.

What a contrast! How could two lives be more apparently different? What enables one to walk in the joy of the Spirit, while another succumbs to the lusts of the flesh? Christ’s counsel to Nicodemus reveals the answer: the endowment, or the lack thereof, of the Holy Spirit. The wind, or the breath, of the Holy Spirit is life changing (*John 3:3–8*). We find throughout the entire Bible powerful indicators of the Holy Spirit’s working. The same Spirit’s power that brought worlds into existence is available to us today. The same Holy Spirit—who breathed life into Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones, causing a mighty army to stand on its feet—is available to us today (*Ezekiel 37*). The same Spirit who strengthened Jesus during His earthly life is available to us today. It is this Spirit that performs the miracle of divine grace in the hearts of believers so that we become a “new creation” in Christ (*2 Cor. 5:17*).

Ellen G. White wrote these insightful words to a missionary: “Appreciate the fact that God is our efficiency. We do not remember this, and therefore we lose much in religious experience. We work ourselves in place of being worked by the Holy Spirit’s power.”—*Testimonies to Southern Africa*, p. 81. Just as Creation did not take place on its own through some process of evolution, re-creation does not take place on its own through some process of human works or activity. It is the working of the Holy Spirit’s power in us that transforms us into the image of Christ.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? How can each one of us be more sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit in our own lives? Why is it possible to have blind spots in our characters?
- ❷ What work might God want to do in our lives that we do not yet recognize?
- ❸ What other things may others see about us that we do not see? How might the Holy Spirit be using these things to convict us of some blind spot in our own characters?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The Holy Spirit testifies or glorifies Jesus and never seeks glory for Himself. Discuss with your class how this attribute of the Holy Spirit would solve most church conflicts in a very short amount of time.

Thought Questions:

❶ How can we cultivate openness to the Holy Spirit's working in our own lives?

❷ How can we be more sensitive to the things that the Holy Spirit is attempting to reveal to us?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Just as the Holy Spirit filled Jesus' life with divine power, He longs to fill each of our lives with His power. Without the power of the Spirit, we are doomed to failure in the Christian life. We can no more re-create our hearts than we can create the world. We can no more breathe life into these lifeless souls than Ezekiel could into the valley of dry bones. Just as Mary could not conceive the Christ child unaided by the Spirit, we can not conceive new life in our barren hearts without the Spirit of Christ.

Activities:

- ❶ Invite your class to spend a few moments reading the list of the works of the flesh and the works of the Spirit in Galatians 5.
- ❷ Encourage class members to examine their hearts in light of these lists, asking the Holy Spirit to empower them with the fruit of the Spirit.
- ❸ Ask class members to reflect silently upon which character traits they are exhibiting from the list of the works of the flesh. Invite them to pray silently as you end the class, asking for the fruit of the Spirit to replace the works of the flesh in each of their hearts.