

“Presence is the Best Present”

John 14:15-27

Series: Recharge: Plug into the Power of the Spirit Week 3. The Presence of the Spirit

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Years ago I visited a 94 year old member of Woodside named Edith. She read her Bible and devotional book daily. Her hearing and eyesight were dimmed but her mind and spirit were not. She actually gave me a very clever zinger that I should stop by and visit more often. That day I brought her flowers from the church. At the end of the visit, she said, “It was sweet of you to drop by. I like presence better than presents.” “What?” I asked. “Not p-r-e-s-e-n-t-s,” she said pointing to the flowers, “but p-r-e-s-e-n-c-e” and she pointed to me. “Your presence means the most to me. Please come again.”

So far in our message series: *Recharge: Plug into the power of the Spirit* we learned from Meg that God wants to give us power through the Holy Spirit. Next we discovered the Spirit is not a ghost, a force or an It but a Person. Today we focus on the fact Jesus didn't just send us presents. His presence is with us and in us through the Holy Spirit. You are not alone. You are never alone. The God of the Universe lives in you.

People say to me, “I don't understand the Spirit. I know the Father and the Son but who is the Holy Spirit?” This is surprising since the Father and Son are in heaven. The only member of the Trinity with us on earth is the Spirit. The only way we know the Father and Son is through the Spirit. The only Person of God we are personally in touch with is the Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit is *in you and me*. Why, then, is it so hard for us to understand the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is close to us. Ask a fish to describe living in water, ask a human to describe living in air. It's around us, it's in us, we can't live without it. Yet it's hard to put into words.

The purpose of this series is not so much to know about the Spirit but to help you know the Spirit. We give you information about the person of the Spirit yet the real goal is to experience the presence of the Spirit. My prayer is you will draw into a deeper communion with the Spirit, that you will experience His power and presence in your life.

The best way to learn about the Spirit is to listen to Jesus. It is the night of His arrest, the calm before the storm of His crucifixion. As the disciples eat the Passover, Jesus' words make it feel like the last meal of a man on death row.

My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me: Where I am going, you cannot come. John 13:33

Jesus is going away. Imagine the shock, fear, and confusion on the disciples' faces. So He offers this comfort:

But I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth.
John 14:16, 18

Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for the Spirit is Paraclete. It is a hard word to put into English. It literally means "A person called to stand beside another and offer help." This is why it can be translated as Counselor, Comforter, Advocate or Helper. It is used for an attorney in a court of law, an advocate in a dispute, a helper and defender in a time of trouble.

I tell you the truth: it is to your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7

While in the body, Jesus is in one place at a time. Through the Spirit, he can be in every place throughout time. He can communicate His message instantly to us any time or place. Here's where it can get a little confusing. The Holy Spirit is not a substitute for Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a separate Person from the Son. And yet the Father and the Son will come and make their home in the life of every believer through the Holy Spirit (John 14:23). Let that grab you: If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, God lives in you. God's presence is not just beside you, but deep within you.

What does the presence of the Holy Spirit do in you and me? There are many roles scattered throughout the New Testament. Today we look at three Jesus mentions in the Gospel of John. First, **the Spirit Convicts You**. Jesus declares,

When (the Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt with regards to sin... because people do not believe in me. John 16:8-9

The first job of this heavenly attorney is to put you and me on trial. Why? Because the Spirit must first convict us, convince us that we need Christ. We humans tend to go our own way instead of God's way, to rely on our strength instead of God's, to find fulfillment in our achievements instead of in God's love. "Why do I need God?" some may ask, "Compared to others, I'm a good person - I help others, I do charity work, I follow the golden rule. What more does God expect of me?"

But then the Spirit comes and puts us on trial. He proves to us we are not perfect. The Spirit reveals all the sins, faults and shortcomings we hide from others and from ourselves. It may come when you feel you've lost your way. It may be when your strength has run out. It may even be when all your earthly supports let you down and you have nothing left. Some people only look up to God when everything else lets them down. The Spirit first gives you the bad news of your sin and shortcomings, then the Good News of Christ's forgiveness, salvation and transformation. Only the Spirit can convince you Jesus is the Way, the Truth, the Life and the only way to the Father. Pascal, the French Mathematician, says in every life there is an infinite abyss. We try to fill that hole with all manner of things: power, pleasures, possessions, popularity. But the Spirit shows only Christ can fill the void. It may happen in a dramatic conversion or a gradual awakening to the truth, at the lowest valley of your life or on a high mountain top experience. The Spirit may be convicting you right now. If so, open your heart to Christ and let the Spirit fill that abyss.

Second, **the Spirit Counsels You**. Jesus said,

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have taught you. John 14:26

God speaks to us through the Spirit. He is the Original I-Messenger, the Great IM. You can read the Bible cover to cover but without the Spirit, it is just another work of religious literature or even a fairy tale. With the Spirit, these words come alive as God's Word. God speaks directly to you through the Bible, by the power of the Spirit. The words leap off the page and into your life. As someone once said, "The Bible is the only book that reads me."

Every time I study the Scriptures, the Spirit reveals new insights and discoveries. Every time I prepare to preach a sermon, the Spirit guides my study and writing. The Spirit speaks to me through all of you. You have no idea what insights the Spirit gives me from your lips and lives. Yet even if the Spirit is in the writing and preaching of the message, it's all meaningless if the Spirit is not also in you as you hear and live these words. You cannot receive my text if you don't have a cell or computer and a phone plan with Almighty AT&T or some other carrier in the sky. Some of you say, "How did you know I needed to hear that?" I didn't, but the Spirit did. Some of you say, "You really spoke to me when you said so and so," and it worries me because I don't remember saying that. I believe in those moments, the Spirit spoke to you. God absolutely refuses to be silent. The great I AM is IMing you.

And third, **the Spirit Comforts You**. Jesus promises,

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27

Some Bibles translate the word Paraclete as the Comforter. The word comforter does not mean a blanket. "Co" means "with" and "fort" means "strength." The literal meaning of Comforter is someone who is with you to give you strength.

Why does Jesus say, "Do not be afraid?" He is sending the disciples into a dangerous world. Yet He does not send them out as orphans, they are never alone. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, will be with them. He will encourage them. The Spirit will put courage in them. The Spirit will pray to the Father for them. The Spirit will give them the words to say. The Spirit will give them a peace that is beyond the understanding of this world, a peace this world can never give. He wants to give that strength to you. We face the same struggles, challenges and heartache as the rest of the world. Yet if we live by the power of the Holy Spirit, if we are filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit, if we are led by the Holy Spirit we will face them differently than everyone else. We will face them without fear.

When the checkbook does not stretch as far as the bills: be not afraid, I am with you.
When the grades come back and they are worse than expected: be not afraid
When injustice and dirty politics rule the office: be not afraid
When you can't keep your close knit family from unraveling: be not afraid
When temptation keeps calling your name: be not afraid

When you feel rejected by friends or family because of your faith: be not afraid
When you need a reason to live one more day: be not afraid
When you wonder if there is a God in heaven who cares: be not afraid

One of the most moving passages in English literature comes towards the end of Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, a story of the French revolution. Each day, a grim procession of prisoners makes its way through the streets of Paris to the guillotine. One prisoner, Sidney Carton, a brave man who once lost his soul but now found it again, gives his life for his friend. Beside him is a young girl. They met before in the prison, and the girl notices the man's gentleness and courage. She says to him, "If I may ride with you, will you let me hold your hand? I am not afraid, but I am little and weak, and it will give me more courage."

So they rode together, her hand in his; and when they reached the place of execution, there was no fear in her eyes. She looked up into the quiet composed face of her companion, and said, "I think you were sent to me by heaven."

In all the dark valleys of life, the Holy Spirit is sent to be at our side.¹

Jesus promises, "I will not leave you as orphans." A horrifying discovery that came to light after the fall of Communism were the orphanages of Romania. Babies were warehoused three and four to a crib without proper food, heat or even a clean diaper. God brought into my life not a baby but a teenager from one of those orphanages - her name was Juliana. As a child, Juliana, her sister, and father were caught in an industrial fire. Juliana escaped with legs badly burned. Her father and sister did not.

Later, her mother, for whatever reason, placed her in one of the state orphanages. While Juliana was there, her mother underwent a crude surgical operation and bled to death. Now she was an orphan indeed. There was little chance her legs would ever heal. There was little chance, as a teenager, anyone would want her. But through the Pearl Buck Foundation, a couple in Bucks County named Bill and Janet arranged for Juliana to come to America. Here, her body was healed. And so was her spirit. Juliana met three Romanian women in Bucks County who shared Christ with her. From the moment I met her I could tell the Spirit was strong in her. I had the honor of baptizing Juliana. Yet I, with all my seminary training, was humbled by this child. This teenage girl who suffered and saw tragedies for three lifetimes, radiated the love, joy, and peace of the Spirit. This young woman's first concern was to tell others about her Savior. Juliana is not an orphan. Juliana is a child of her heavenly Father. Juliana is filled with the Spirit. Juliana is a witness to the power of the Spirit.

Woodside, let Jesus Christ speak His I-Messages through you. Be a witness who is filled with the Holy Spirit. Let Jesus place your life in the hands of the Holy Spirit and say, "Your witness, Counselor." Amen.

¹ Owen Bourgaize, Guernsey, United Kingdom.