

The Visible Spirit

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There are times in life where we come up against our limitations and sense we need help from the outside. We struggle to be people of character: kind to our enemies, patient with kids, faithful at work. Sensing this struggle, Lucilius the Roman philosopher, noted humanity's *need for a holy spirit* saying *Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. As we treat this spirit, so are we treated by it.* Now, its not quite as reciprocal as that, but there is a dynamic at work in how we treat and receive the help of the Spirit. Some underemphasize the Spirit for fear of *abuse*; others overemphasize for the fear of *neglect*. Over the next ten weeks we're going to consider what it means to be a *Spirit-filled Church*. Gen-Rev. Let's explore this dynamic relationship. Who is the Spirit? *Spirit of Glory, Spirit of Witness, Spirit of Rest.*

Spirit of Glory

Distinguished theologian J. I. Packer describes the Holy Spirit as a floodlight meant to cast light onto a building. The illuminated building is Christ, and the unnoticed light is the Spirit. Packer insists: the Spirit never says, "Look at me; listen to me; get to know me." I think he's *wrong*. Consider for a moment images of the Spirit in the Bible: a forceful wind, tongues of fire, cosmic birds. These images grab our attention. Listen to the imagery from Exodus, *And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light* (Ex 13:21). Isa 63: *the Holy Spirit placed in their midst* (11) and *the Spirit led them* (14). He appears to Israel as *a pillar of cloud and fire, a single, towering column*: by day a great, dark cloud, by night a column of blazing fire. Terrifying and comforting. *Terrifying* because if you got too close to it you could die. A similar cloud descended on Mt. Sinai, when Moses went up to get the 10 Commandments. The cloud enveloped mountain was so holy priests had to gate the mountain so no one would touch it and die. Ezekiel experiences the glory cloud as having "*the sound of a multitude of wings, like the sound of many waters.*" It reverberates with the power of a million angels attending the presence of God. Fire flashes forth from it (1:4, 24). *Terrifying*. But the pillar was also *comforting*. Think about it. Israel had no map, no flashlight, no real assurance where they were going in the wilderness—*except* the pillar of cloud and fire

before them, guiding them by day and by night, a constant companion. You could see the cloud from a mile off. Where is this Spirit now? After Jesus died and rose from the dead, he told his followers to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit. After waiting 40 days, the room is filled with *wind and fire*. The Glory cloud reappears, but this time, it's dispersed in tongues of fire and blowing wind. They boldly preach the gospel, filled with character, heal the sick. Plant churches, endure persecution. How? The Spirit moved from *dwelling in their midst* to *dwelling in them*, from being out front to being inside. You could see them coming from a mile away. Can people see the Spirit *in us*? Our coworkers, friends, children? If not, why? Perhaps, like Israel, we have *grieved* the Spirit? What's that? It means to spurn his *supernatural leadership*. When Egypt bearing down on Israel, they cried out for the comforts of Egypt, despised God for rescuing them. They wanted comfort more than the Spirit. Do you look to the comforts of *your* Enemy or to the confounding power of the Spirit? Zadie Smith, a British, award-winning novelist and tenured professor at the University of New York shared in an interview that CSL was an early influence for her. She found Lewis' arguments convincing about how joy and faith point to another world (where joy comes from). But, she said, I couldn't make the commitment. Why? She says, "I think maybe that's one of the frightening things about faith for me, that it would be an obstruction of my daily life, and I like my everyday sinful life." Are you in love with your everyday sinful life? Have you exchanged the companionship of the Spirit for the comfort of the world? No wonder we lack character! Do you fear obstruction to your life of comfort? *We are not terrified enough.* The Spirit enters us *not to be neglected but to be obeyed!*

Spirit of Witness

Standing at the edge of the Red Sea, with hundreds of Egyptian war chariots bearing down upon them, a terrified Israel cried out to God: Why did you rescue us? Didn't we say leave us alone to serve the Egyptians? Then, a rushing east wind begins to blow and the pillar of cloud moves to the rear, Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel (Ex 14:19–20). Why the movement? So God could deliver his people from their love of comfort *and* unbelieving fear. The Glory cloud threw Egypt into confusion protecting Israel, *and* the angel of God, a



figure who went in front of the Glory cloud, also moved to the rear. Isaiah tells us, “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them” (63:9). What’s going on? This is a pre-incarnate Christ. How do you know? He is afflicted so Israel might be delivered. When they should be judged; he is judged in their place. He steps in front of their enemy so they can go free: pitied, loved, redeemed. The Spirit and the Son working, hand in glove, to accomplish and apply redemption for us. Have you despised the Spirit for a life of everyday comfort? Look to the Son; afflicted for your forgiveness. Have you neglected his supernatural leadership for an everyday sinful life? Behold the angel of God, wounded for your sin. Church, the Spirit is bearing witness to Christ; he is IN YOU calling you to be a distinct, holy witness to Jesus, something people can see a mile off. MY FRIEND who left the comforts of Minneapolis, MN to do business as mission MALAY. 5 kids, one with diabetes, a wife who struggles with depression, and they are there, following the pillar of fire and cloud. CG who has rallied around a foster mom, drives to Pflugerville, to care for her kids, pray for her, share the gospel, following a pillar of fire. What would it look like for a whole church to do this? Missionary-statesman Leslie Newbigin noted: Jesus did not write a book; he formed a community. He could have written a detailed memoir, but instead, he redeemed a people, gave them his Spirit, and sent them to be a visible witness to the world. What could a community filled with the Spirit look like? Well, first we have to be in the community. Are you an active participant in a City Group? If not, we’d love to have you join one. If you are part of a City Group, *how will you live together as a Spirit-filled community this year to be a visible witness to Jesus?* Will you be honest with one another about your fears and sins or will you hide your everyday sinful life? This past year my CG confessed overworking, unbelief in God’s goodness, fear of praying aloud, anger towards God, attraction to non-spouses, lack of love for spouses, anger towards children—we’re a pretty messed up bunch. But week after week, we also pointed one another to Jesus; his patience toward us that we might be patient with kids; his forgiveness for that we might be pure; and sent off six members to spread the gospel *because Jesus is enough.* How will you treat the supernatural leadership of the Spirit? Our mercy ministries and Kids Life ministries are typically under-served. Do you love your comfort more than the least of these? We need new leaders to reach new people. Training. *How will you live together as a Spirit-filled community this year*



to be a visible witness to Jesus? The wind and the fire are in you! Fan the flame. Open your sail to the wind. The Spirit wants to bear witness to Jesus through you!

Spirit of Rest

As the Spirit guided the people of God through the Red Sea, and across the wilderness, he led them toward rest, “*Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest*” (63:13–14). Like a horse in the desert—sounds pretty unsteady—but the word “desert” can also be translated “open country.” Its idea is that “*God’s care was so great that Israel traversed an awful wilderness, as sure-footedly as a horse galloping in open country.*” Even if your journey is rough right now, keep your eye on the Spirit, heed his witness to Christ, afflicted for you and with you, and you will run, you will gallop, you will *rest*. Like sheep meandering down into a lush, green valley to find refreshment, rest, and satisfaction. A couple years ago I took a sabbatical and spent a week at a monastery. While I was there, I had a confession and a question. The confession was that I did not love God like I ought to. The question was, Do you still want me to pastor? After several days, I heard no reply. Then, one morning I went into the chapel for morning Scripture readings. The first reading was from John 21, where Jesus asks Peter, do you love me? Peter says, repeatedly, yes Lord you know I do. To which Jesus says, *Feed my Sheep*. This repeats three times. Okay, Lord, I get it. You want me to go back to City Life and feed your sheep. But I’m so tired and it’s so hard. The next reading was Ezekiel 34, where God says, “*I will feed them with good pasture...They shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down*” (13–15). I will feed; I will lead; I will make them lie down; I will do it. The Spirit of rest is with you. Surrender to him and *he will do it*. Whatever daunting thing lies before you, *God will do it*. He will make you run and he will give you rest. His reputation hangs on it, *to make a glorious name for himself*. Your rest is God’s reputation. For the glory of his name, he will give you rest. But we have to relinquish the comforts of our Enemy. Let’s renounce comfort, and as a community, seek to be a Spirit-filled community, visible from a mile off.