



The Spirit-filled Church

Jonathan K. Dodson | Various Texts | April 7, 2019

It's been an extraordinary few months at City Life. Since January, the Spirit has met us Sunday after Sunday with power, wisdom, and grace. But he hasn't stopped there. He's spilled out into the rest of the week renewing us, the city. We're hearing stories of fresh engagement with the Spirit as a person, accounts of his powerful work in holiness, and stirring service and witness to others. So next Sunday, instead of preaching a final message on the Spirit, we'll spend the whole Sunday hearing stories of the Spirit's work. Today, our final message: 3 Marks of a Spirit-filled Church.

Christ-centered: Serious about Sin

A Spirit-filled church isn't sheepish about addressing sin. It doesn't love the city while being lackluster about holiness. Quite the opposite. If we're living in the Spirit, we'll put to sin to death, "[For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live.](#) (Ro 8:13). *A Spirit-filled church is serious about sin.* Sin is the undoing of a person, the unraveling of their wholeness, a spoiling of what's good—so if you care about goodness you'll be serious about sin. When I was young, I wasn't serious about sin. What I cared about how it made me feel, guilty. In my twenties, there was a stretch where I was quite promiscuous. Over time guilt built up, until one day I sat in my car so weighed down by shame I couldn't go to class. I pulled out my pocketknife and pressed it to my wrist. Tears streaming down my face, I thought to myself, I've brought so much shame on the name of Christ. I need to end this. I was serious about shame, not about sin. It almost killed me. When Paul says put to death the deeds of the flesh, he isn't saying live a life harangued by guilt and shame. He's saying, choose *life*: Put to death the deeds of the flesh *so you will live!* In context, life is both spiritual and physical; immediate and ultimate. If you want to flourish in this life, and the next, you'll put sin to death. How? *Know your Sin, Fight your Sin, Trust your Savior.* 1. *Know your sin.* Find the lie of the flesh, place it next to the truth of the gospel. I've had an awful pattern of getting angry with my kids in the morning before school if they don't get ready on time. What's the lie behind my anger? Lie: "If I control my circumstances I will have peace. If I can't control my circumstances, then I have the right to get angry." If I control my kids I'll have peace. Truth: "Since Jesus is Lord,

he has the right to control my circumstances. Therefore, I get peace not in controlling my circumstances but by trusting him.” His peace transcends our circumstances. Now, how do I move from the lie to the truth? It’s not enough to know your sin, we have to *2. fight your sin*. We fight it by saying no to the lie and yes to the truth. How do that? Confessing to God and asking forgiveness, that breaks the power of it. Confession is not repentance but it is an important step. After we confess, and this is critical, we turn to Jesus for peace not to control—*Trust your Savior*. Look at the Savior, include him in the process, exchange the lie for the truth, the sin for the Savior. Let me tell you, my heart has been much happier. Our mornings much better. But what about when I’m tempted again? Where do we get the power to trust our Savior again? They same way I did before: Put to death the deeds of the flesh *by the Spirit* you will live. It’s recognizing it’s *his* voice calling us *to Christ*, not driving us to shame. Shame will drive you into a corner, but the Spirit will drive you to Christ. Looking back at that college kid in the parking lot, he didn’t have a clue about Christ. It’s because of my sin that Christ died, not so I’ll never sin. Christ was shamed, so we don’t have to be. *A Spirit-filled church is serious about sin because they’re serious the Savior.*

Community-shaped: Loving the Church

A Spirit-filled church is a Spirit-filled *church*. It is not a collection of individuals who share beliefs. Not a clique of people who share the same interests. A non-profit or a running club meet that criteria. A Spirit-filled church is a community that shares life *and* Christ together, *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you* (Eph 4:30–32). The Spirit seals us into redemption and into a community. We can’t be filled with the Spirit and remain detached from other people. He attaches us to the Church, and not the church of our choosing. He compels us to live close enough to people that we may be hurt, experience bitterness and anger. But he also compels us to live close enough to be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving. You can’t do those things on your own. Kindness, compassion, and forgiveness require relationship. Are you living close enough to others *to need the Spirit*? Are you making Christ or shared interests, convenience, beliefs center of your relationships? Many of you are in CGs



comprised of diverse people. But, are you slightly annoyed with someone? Do you find yourself thinking, man if so and so wasn't here this would be awesome. You're moving towards bitterness. If you're sharing your thoughts with others, you're already slandering. What would it look like for you to approach your CG as an opportunity to practice Ephesians 4? To be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving? It'd change the whole dynamic, maybe even you! And if your children saw you doing this, just think how loving, inclusive, and city-engaged they'd become. They'd learn to not just go to church but to be the church *by the Spirit*. This week I had to discipline our kids for fighting. While I was disciplining them I told them they need to practice Eph 4:32 toward one another. Then I asked, Has God been kind to you? Yes. Is he tenderhearted towards you? Yes. How has he forgiven you? In Jesus. How often has he forgiven you? A lot. Then you can be kind, tenderhearted forgiving one another *a lot*. God wants you to treat his family the same way. What God has given you in Christ, he wants you to give to others. *The Spirit filled church is a Spirit-filled church—a community that puts Christ in the center of relationships.*

City Engaged: Love the City

A Spirit-filled Church is a church that isn't too spiritual for the city. It doesn't get on its high horse, withdraw from the city, focus on self. It loves the city. We named our church City Life Church because we didn't want to be a community that takes life but gives life to the city, to be a church that exists not only for ourselves but also for our neighbors. *A Spirit-filled church is a city-engaged church.* We see this in Acts chapter 8, where Phillip a newly appointed deacon goes to a city in Samaria. He's picked because he was full of the Spirit “pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Ac 6:3). The response to his preaching is staggering, “there was much joy in that city” (8:8). Why much joy? For one, he wasn't too spiritual for the city; quite the opposite, filling with the Spirit put him in touch, literally, with the city. He mingled among outcasts and preached to the public. But why was there so *much* joy? His words and **deeds**. Notice in verse 7 unclean spirits (demons) came out of people: *mental* healing. The lame experience *physical* healing. But not just that. In Jewish culture, impaired people weren't allowed to enter the temple grounds, often rejected by family members, and marginalized in society because they were unclean. So when Philip heals them he does more than restore their health; he

restores their *status*. *Social healing*. A couple of weeks ago our CG was serving a meal to an apartment community, and one of our members sat down with a girl who has MS and uses a walker. She also has sickle-cell anemia. Amber spent the whole time with her, listening to her struggles, empathizing with her, pointing her to a suffering Savior, and prayed for her. Then she followed up with her. Oh, and guess what, the night before she met this girl, Amber was looking for something to watch on TV and ended up watching a special on *sickle-cell anemia! A Spirit-filled church loves the city...with deeds and with **words***. Philip communicates the gospel numerous times by: “preaching the word,” “proclaiming Christ,” “speaking” the good news, “[But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women](#)” (8:12). Words about Jesus and his kingdom. Notice people weren’t baptized until they *heard* the good words. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Deeds are not enough. Mercy, justice, and miracles are wonderful but they don’t speak. They cannot impart lasting joy; only temporal joy. A Spirit-filled church shares the gospel with the city *for lasting joy*. Words and deeds. Leslie Newbigin put it like this: If nothing is happening in the Church that calls for a gospel explanation, then our words are empty. But, if our deeds have no explanation, they’re mute. They don’t speak. *A Spirit-filled church loves the city in word and deed*. So as we wind up our series, let’s be cautious of becoming too spiritual for the city. The Spirit compels us to do the things we’ve been doing for 11 years: Gospel (serious about sin and the Savior); Community (loving the church); Mission (engaging the city). *A Spirit-filled Church is gospel-centered, community-shaped, and city-engaged*.