

## The Spirit I Never Knew

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Rich Nathan  
August 31 & September 1, 2019  
Come, Holy Spirit  
Acts 19:1-7

I recently read a story about a young woman named Tamara Rabi who began college at Hofstra University in Long Island. As she walked around campus, she noticed some strange behavior. People whom she had never met would walk by and smile and wave at her as if they were longtime friends. Because she was Mexican she figured that maybe they were confusing her with someone else from Mexico.

At her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday party, a friend of a friend could not stop staring at her. The guy came over repeatedly and said, “You look exactly like my friend Adriana Scott.” As people were digging into the birthday cake, the friend persisted. “You look exactly like Adriana Scott. She was born in Mexico and she was also adopted.”

Adriana was raised Roman Catholic in a house with a white picket fence on Long Island. Tamara was raised Jewish in an apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. As it turns out, they were identical twins separated at birth. Neither girl knew she had a twin sister. Tamara’s adoptive mother also didn’t know. Adriana’s adoptive mother knew that Adriana had a twin, but she didn’t know how to find her daughter’s twin.

After the birthday party, with this guy’s insistence, Tamara messaged Adriana. They both learned that they were both 5’3 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>” and they had the exact same birthday. But the confirmation came when they exchanged pictures. Both Tamara and Adriana looked at the picture on their computer screen and they saw themselves staring back on the screen.

They met together. Then they watched videotapes of each other’s lives. Tamara, this Jewish girl, watched videos of Adriana in a white dress taking her first communion at the Church of the Blessed Sacrament. They both finished their sentences with the weird phrase, “You know, dadadadada.” Imagine that – having a twin sister that you never knew.

Here’s what we read in Acts 19:

Slide Acts 19:1-2

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples <sup>2</sup> and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

For many people who attend church, the Holy Spirit is someone they never knew.

For many people in the church, the Holy Spirit is

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The person who is at the end of a creed

In fact, a lot of people don't even think about the Holy Spirit being a person. He's just an item at the end of the Apostles' Creed that's recited at church. "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

The Spirit is one more item in a list of things that I'm supposed to say that I believe in if I'm a Christian. For others, the Holy Spirit is

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The person who is controlled by the church

In lots of churches, the Holy Spirit has been completely domesticated and is at the beck and call of the baptizing priest or the ordaining bishop. As long as we do this particular church rite correctly, we know that the Holy Spirit is involved.

You probably have read about the various church splits that are happening in so many denominations now over issues of sexuality or the authority of the Bible. At the end of these church conventions, after there's been all this behind-the-scenes lobbying and politicking and fighting and committees and papers, the side that gets 51% of the vote will say, "The Holy Spirit has spoken through the conventions decision."

For lots of people in the church, the Holy Spirit is tied to the church's machinery. Whatever we do, that's what the Spirit is doing.

Finally, I would just add one more thing. For some people in the church today, the Holy Spirit is

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The person who makes you a weirdo

Lots of people all over the world avoid getting to know the Holy Spirit as he is because they are afraid that the Holy Spirit will make them weird. People do all kinds of bizarre things and then claim that the Holy Spirit made them do it. Or they say weird things. And when people react, they say, "The Spirit made me do it."

He didn't. I know a lot of things that people have said to me over the years, claiming that it was from the Holy Spirit. It wasn't. I know that because I've gotten to know the Holy Spirit. I know what he sounds like. I know what he feels like.

Today, I'm starting a new series on the Holy Spirit and I would like to introduce some of you or reintroduce many of you to the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. This series is going to culminate in an incredible conference that we're calling "Reveal". Julian Adams, who was here last year ministering to us so powerfully, is coming back from South Africa with his wife, Katia.

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Reveal Conference info

To kick this series on the Holy Spirit off, this initial talk is titled, "The Holy Spirit I Never Knew". Let's pray.

Slide Acts 19:1-7

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They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

<sup>3</sup> So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

<sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.

Let's look back at verse 1:

Slide Acts 19:1

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples

There are a lot of questions that readers of this passage have had. For example, who are these disciples that Paul met at Ephesus? Specifically, were they already followers of Jesus when Paul met them or were they not? Paul assumed that they were followers of Jesus, but he asked this question in verse 2:

Slide Acts 19:2a

<sup>2</sup> and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

Now, why does Paul ask folks who he thinks are followers of Jesus if they received the Holy Spirit? Christians, by definition, are people who have received the Spirit. There must have been something about them that made Paul wonder about the reality of these folks' conversion. Maybe there was something about the way they were behaving? More likely, maybe there was something missing in the way they were praying.

You know, one indication that the Holy Spirit is present in someone's life is listen to them pray. Have you ever heard someone pray and their prayer sounds like a business letter to the complaint department of a corporation? They are praying, but the prayer sounds like "To Whom it May Concern, my child recently turned 12. Her name is Cynthia. We call her Cindy. But she's been having some difficulties in school."

Have you ever listened to someone pray and you thought to yourself, "It doesn't sound like they know the God they are talking to." There's no intimacy. There's no spark of connection. There's no warmth or familiarity. They're giving God information as if he's the attending physician or the refrigerator repairman, instead of the God who knows everything.

I would just say as an aside, if you are a person who wonders if Christianity is true, try praying! I read a statistic that one in four people who say they have no religion regularly pray. Try praying. Even if you feel like you don't know God or if you wonder if God exists, pray. You can say, "God, I don't even know if you exist or if I'm just talking to myself, but I need your help with this job interview, with this money problem, with this depression." Try praying. Lots of people have connected with God simply because they took a step of praying as if God was there when they weren't sure he was.

But for whatever reason, Paul found something deficient in these so-called disciples. So, Paul asked them in verse 2:

Slide Acts 19:2a

<sup>2</sup> and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

And we read their response.

Slide Acts 19:2b

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Then the dialogue continues in verses 3 and 4.

Slide Acts 19:3-4

<sup>3</sup> So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

<sup>4</sup> Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”

How could disciples of John the Baptist not know there was a Holy Spirit? Virtually all of ancient Jewish writings in the first century spoke about the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist said that after him was coming one who would baptize people in the Holy Spirit. How could his disciples not know there was a Holy Spirit? I don’t think they’re saying they’ve never heard that the Holy Spirit existed. They just didn’t know that the Holy Spirit had come, that the age of the Spirit had broken in through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. They heard there was a Holy Spirit, but they didn’t know that the Holy Spirit was now available to them.

You see, right now, we live in the age of the Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on the world depended upon Jesus coming, dying on a cross, being raised from the dead and going back to heaven where he was glorified and crowned as King by God the Father.

So, you can know that the Holy Spirit exists, but like these disciples of John the Baptist, not know that the Spirit is available now. Right now, you can experience God the Holy Spirit.

So, the Apostle Paul lays hands on these followers of John who were not yet Christians. Here’s what we read:

Slide Acts 19:5-7

<sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.

All at once all 12 of these guys were filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke in tongues. The New Testament doesn’t say that every time that someone receives the Holy Spirit they are going to speak in tongues. Sometimes people prophecy. Sometimes people experience an overwhelming sense of being loved by God. Sometimes people feel like they are being cleaned from top to bottom by God. But whatever the experience, the New Testament witness is that you can know that you know that you have received the Holy Spirit.

So, who is the Holy Spirit that many of us never knew? Who is the Spirit who we knew inadequately, incompletely like these disciples of John the Baptist?

The Bible provides us with a number of

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## Pictures of the Holy Spirit

Because the Holy Spirit is so mysterious and because spiritual things are hard for us human beings to grasp, God gave us a number of pictures. The term in English grammar is “similes”. The Spirit is “like this”. There are these pictures the Bible gives us to help us become more acquainted with the Holy Spirit. What does the Bible say the Holy Spirit is like?

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The Spirit is like the wind: He is outside of our control

The Hebrew word for Spirit in the Old Testament is the word

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*Ruach* = wind, breath

It can be translated not only as Spirit, but as wind or breath. In the New Testament, which was written in Greek, the Greek word is

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*Pneuma* = spirit

But the root of *pneuma* is *pneo*, which means “to blow”. Regarding the wind, you can’t see it but you can see its effects. Jesus uses the mystery of the womb to describe the Holy Spirit and what the Holy Spirit does when someone is born again. Here’s what Jesus says to a rabbi named Nicodemus:

Slide John 3:8

<sup>8</sup>The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

The wind – *pneuma* – blows where it wills. This is the reason why so many people avoid the Holy Spirit and avoid even talking about the Holy Spirit or seeking more of the Holy Spirit in their life. The truth is, friends, we’re control freaks. We don’t like things that we can’t control, that we don’t manage. Over the years, I’ve heard from literally hundreds of people who have visited Vineyard Columbus and they told me things like, “You know, I was at one of your services and I had this experience of God. I can’t explain it.” Some of them will say, “You know, I didn’t really want to be there. My sister took me. My friend from work kept nagging me to come with her. I finally couldn’t avoid it and I agreed because they were getting baptized or their child was being dedicated. And then, completely unexpectedly, during the singing portion of your service or while you were speaking or when I came into the building, I felt God’s presence or I suddenly began to cry.”

An experience of God is not something we initiate. The coming of the Holy Spirit is not under human control. The Spirit's like the wind. You can't control him. He's comes at the initiative of Jesus.

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The Spirit is like breath: He gives life

When God created Adam, here's what we read in

Slide Genesis 2:7

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

God breathes and life comes into us. Breath in the Bible is life. You take away breath and there is no life. We die.

There is a really famous passage from the book of Ezekiel where we read:

Slide Ezekiel 37:4-5

<sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.

When we feel dried up, just going through the motions, uninspired; when the church feels dried up, when worship becomes routine and becomes dull and uninspired; when any so-called spiritual activity becomes lifeless, what we need is not simply better thinking, better strategy. We need more Holy Spirit! We need God to breathe on us and breathe life into us again!

Friends, do you ever pray that way for yourself? Lord, I'm just dragging. I'm just going through the motions in my marriage or at work or in my small group or in prayer. Breathe on me, breath of God. I need more of your Spirit. Do you ever pray that way? Holy Spirit, please come fill me up. Do you ever pray that way for the church? Spirit of God, we need you to come. Would you breathe on us again?

As pastor, I would ask you to pray for Vineyard Columbus. Pray for God's breath, the Spirit, to breathe new life in us.

- The Spirit is like the wind. He's outside of our control.
- The Spirit is like breath. He gives life.

And

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The Spirit is like a dove: He signals a new beginning

We find doves in really interesting places in the Bible. The Holy Spirit in creation is seen like a bird hovering over the waters. When the rains that flooded the earth ended during the days of Noah, he sent out a dove three times. The first time it returns to a waiting Noah because it doesn't find a resting place. Noah puts out his hand and affectionately takes the bird back into the ark. The second time it returns with a freshly plucked olive leaf, a sign of renewed life on earth; the ground is drying up. And the third time the dove doesn't return. It's apparently found a resting place. When Jesus is baptized, the Spirit comes like a dove. It rests on Jesus.

The picture of a dove in the Bible is not what we say today – you know, the dove is a picture of peace. No, instead the picture of a dove is sent to speak to us about a new creation. There's the Spirit hovering at the beginning of creation. There's the dove when the earth is being restored in the days of Noah. There's the dove again at Jesus' baptism. Something new is happening. There's a new beginning, a new start. When a marriage rises from the ashes because God did something, there's the Spirit like a dove, a new creation. When a person gets up from their hospital bed after years of sickness because God did something, there's the Spirit like a dove, a new creation. When a person is living a broken life marked by alcoholism or addiction or traumatic experiences is born again. There's the Spirit like a dove, a new creation.

There are lots of other pictures of the Spirit in the Bible. The Holy Spirit is like fire to empower us. He's like water poured out on us, filling us to overflowing. He's like anointing oil setting us apart for God. But concerning the Spirit that many of us never knew, the Bible gives us more than pictures. The Bible tells us about the personality of the Spirit.

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Personality of the Holy Spirit

It's really important that we understand that

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The Holy Spirit is a person

The Spirit is not a force. It's not Star Wars, may the force be with you. That's not what we're talking about by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not an it. He's a person with a personality.

I have a favorite chair in a little front room that Marlene and I sit in in the morning when we do our devotions. It's a green plaid chair with a green plaid matching footrest. When I went to buy the chair 25 years ago, I went with Marlene and I sat down in the chair and said, "This is what I want!" And she said, "Richie, it doesn't match with anything in the house." And I said, "Look, you've gotten to pick every other thing in our home. Everything else in the house is yours. I just want one thing. This chair. I like it. It's comfortable." So, she let me have my green plaid chair.

Now, I love my chair, but my chair doesn't love me back because my chair is an "it". It's not a person. I don't have a relationship with my chair. But you can have a relationships with the Holy Spirit. And he will love you back.

So, how does the Holy Spirit act as a person to us? Let me just share one of the Spirit's roles. The Holy Spirit in the Bible is called

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The Holy Spirit is the helper

Slide John 15:26

<sup>26</sup> "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.

Over the years, there's been lots of discussion centered on this word "Counselor" which in the Greek is *paraclete*. It's been understood as counselor, comforter, intercessor, interpreter, advocate, and prosecutor. The basic meaning has been helper. The Spirit is the one sent by the Father and Son to help us.

Some of you might know that I came from a Jewish background and I've been asked over the years, "Why did you become a follower of Jesus when you weren't raised in a Christian family, you weren't raised in church? Why did you become a follower of Jesus?" Honestly, one reason I became a follower of Jesus is I realized that I needed help with my life. If I could do life perfectly well on my own, I wouldn't have come to Jesus. The truth is that I knew then and I know so much better now that I need help with my life and so do you. We need help with our relationships. We need help with our emotions. We need help with our families. We need help in order to hope for the future. Frankly, I'm not smart enough to figure out everything in my life that I need to know.

How is the Holy Spirit our helper? Well, he's

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The helper who teaches us

Jesus says this in John

Slide John 14:26

<sup>26</sup> But the Advocate [the Helper], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

What an incredible promise! Jesus said that he will send to his followers a helper who will teach us everything. God is incredibly smart. There's no subject that God isn't an expert in. God has all the answers. You say, "I don't know what to do with my son or daughter right now. They've got all kinds of problems. They're going through a hard time at school. They're having problems in their relationships. They are being bullied or they are a bully. They're hanging out with the wrong crowd." Whatever. Have you ever said "Holy Spirit, you're an expert in child raising. Show me what to do."

There is no subject where God is not an expert. He has all the answers – whether it's about your finances or your relationships with your mom or dad or relationship at work. The Spirit will help you by teaching you if you ask him.

What kind of helper is the Holy Spirit? He's

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The helper who guides us

Let me be personal here. People often come to me as a pastor and they'll say, "Pastor, I don't know what God wants me to do regarding this job situation or this marriage or move or whatever. Will you pray for me and ask God what he wants me to do?"

Now, I think it's completely 100% right to seek counsel from people who you respect, who are spiritually mature. It's good to get good advice from good people. Not everyone gives good advice. It's right to ask for counsel. I think it's totally appropriate to ask someone you respect to pray for you. If you feel like you have a prophetic word or something that God is laying on your heart and share that with me. But asking a pastor or anyone else, "Would you tell me what God has for me?"

It's sort of like – and I say this with affection – coming up to a person and saying, "I don't know where my wife wants to go to dinner tonight. Would you ask her for me? Would you talk with my wife and ask her where she wants to go to dinner?" The natural question is why don't you ask her? In the same way, you can speak to God the Holy Spirit yourself. "Lord, where are you guiding me? Where are you leading me regarding this work situation, this living situation, this romantic situation?"

Friend, have you ever felt the Holy Spirit guiding you? Internally guiding you to do God's will? Have you ever felt that from the inside? I feel like I should go over to that person

and encourage them. I need to say something to them to comfort them. I need to give them a certain amount of money to meet their need. Have you ever felt the Lord guiding you, prompting you to say something or maybe prompting you to not say something? You need to hold your tongue. I'm at work here, God's telling you. I don't want you sticking your nose into this thing.

The Spirit helps us. He helps teach us. He helps guide us. What kind of helper is the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is finally

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The Helper who touches us

Some churches say, "Forget about experiences. Forget about your feelings! Don't worry if you've never felt God's presence at all. Concern yourself with the truth. The truth is enough." Now, on the one hand, I think that's partially right. You don't have to wait for a feeling to obey God or do what is right or moral or loving. You don't have to wait to be swept away with a feeling to decide to forgive someone who has hurt you. We should not be holding a grudge. You don't need to wait to be swept away with feeling in order to not gossip or cheat on a test or steal someone else's client. You can do God's will regardless of your feelings.

But, on the other hand, if you have never felt or rarely feel God's presence and you believe yourself to be a follower of Jesus, something is wrong. It's true that the Christian life is not based on our feelings. But if feelings don't accompany your relationship with God, it's good to check out your Christian experience.

I've used this illustration before but, you know, I think your relationships with God is like a great marriage. If I came home at night after work and said to my wife, Marlene, "You know, Marlene, our marriage is not based on our feelings so when I hug you, I feel absolutely nothing. I feel stone-cold dead inside. I am coolly, reasonably and wholly indifferently in love with you. If you want to kiss me, great." Something's really wrong with that guy. God wants to touch you. He wants you to feel his presence. He wants you to experience him. He wants you to feel his love.

I know we're all wired differently. I know that some of us are more emotional than others. But no matter how you're wired, you can feel love. You can feel God's presence. You can feel his prompting. You can feel his leading and his teaching. Do you know the Holy Spirit? Do you know his activity in your life? Have you felt it? Do you need to be renewed by his presence and power? I sure do. This church sure does. Will you pray with me during this series – Come Holy Spirit! Breathe on us again.

## The Spirit I Never Knew

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August 31 & September 1, 2019  
Come, Holy Spirit  
Acts 19:1-7

The Holy Spirit is:

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