

It's a good thing the Holy Spirit didn't decide it was enough just to live in the same house with us or watch over us from the outside because our outsides can rarely be trusted to give accurate readings.

It's not all that uncommon, for instance, for a flat stomach to disguise a dangerously high cholesterol level or a blockage in one artery. A smart outfit and a matching smile can sometimes mask a deeply hidden fear of failure or a home life that's falling apart faster than anyone else could possibly guess.

Outsides lie. Not always, not invariably. But they do lie. A lot.

That's why the Spirit knew we needed him on the *inside*, way down low where secret thoughts and insecurities can grow sharp, gouging edges that tear up the landscape and carve deep grooves in our character. If he didn't go to work underneath, where the truth is exposed, where the circuit breakers are housed, where our spiritual infrastructure is being formed and fashioned, he'd be constantly diagnosing symptoms but not meeting our real needs.

Yes, it's a good thing the Spirit is in and still making house calls.

Read Ezekiel 36:24-30, 35-36

One of the most interesting things I'm discovering in writing this is how present and evident the Holy Spirit is from one end of the Bible to the other. This is a clear indication that God, who has always known just how desperately we need him, has likewise always loved us enough to be here and help us out.

Even the Egyptian pharaoh noticed the difference in Joseph, a man who had "the spirit of God in him" (Genesis 41:38). It was God's Spirit that also filled the early craftsman who fashioned the sacred implements of Israel's worship (Exodus 31:3). "The Spirit of the LORD" rested as well on the great judges and warrior deliverers of the Jewish people, such as Othniel and Gideon (Judges 3:10 and 6:34).

John the Baptist was "filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). Peter was infused with Spirit power every time he stood up to open his mouth, it seems, during the exciting first days of the early church (Acts 4:8). And when Ananias, the humble disciple of Damascus, laid his hands on a still blind and shell-shocked Christian killer named Saul, this budding missionary giant was "filled with the Holy Spirit" until the "scales fell from his eyes" (Acts 9:17-18).

He's everywhere you look—the Holy Spirit, indwelling his people with the power they need to transform their lives and serve in honor of his name.

Mixed Signals

But there's an alarming mention of the Holy Spirit in one of the more tragic events from the Old Testament. "The Spirit of the LORD" once enveloped the life of a fighting man named Jephthah while he was in hot pursuit of Israel's enemies (Judges 11:29). But strangely, Jephthah's initial reaction to this influx of energy was to inflate his own pride, cloaking his personal ambitions in a thick gauze of spiritual horn-honking.

Sort of like when we throw the weight of God into a discussion figuring it'll make people more likely to go along with what we want.

But the promise Jephthah had made to the Lord—to sacrifice as a burnt offering the first thing to walk out the door of his house when he returned home in victory—became intensely personal when his only child, his precious daughter, rushed out to greet him, tambourines jingling. Then to add insanity to his stupidity, he went through with his vow—as if God would rather see him keep a cocky promise than choose life over death.

This is a grim object lesson to teach us that we can sometimes abuse the indwelling Holy Spirit, deceiving ourselves into believing that any sort of spiritual thought which pops into our head must of necessity be from God. Truth is, until the day we die, we'll always be subject to mingling some measure of self along with the Spirit's guidance. And while daily trust and obedience does keep it easier to tell the two apart, it's still never easy.

If the Spirit is really to have his way with us, it's not enough for him just to be there. He needs to have every ounce of us under his control . . . more each day, more each moment.

Comes With A Free Gift

That's when the various gifts of the Spirit, given to each of us "according to God's grace" (Romans 12:6), are full released to flow through us like waves down a water slide. As our surrender becomes more and more complete, as his square footage becomes more and more spacious in us—that's when serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, and all those mighty and merciful ministries he's imparted to us will take on their true effervescence.

Because, yes, he's in there. But he also wants to come out through our hearts and lives and everyday activity.

Every one of us longs to be truly Spirit filled, not just merely housing his presence but making him feel at home. This has been the passion of God's people for a long time. I sure do want it to be mine. Don't you?

Ezekiel 36:27 "I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes."

Why is there such a connection between the Spirit's indwelling and our own obedience?

Ezekiel 36:29 "I will save you from all your uncleanness"

How have you experienced the Spirit dealing with you in these areas—purity of heart, purity of thought, purity of motives?

Ezekiel 36:35 "This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden"

How much of God's sheer delight do we truly expect to experience in this life? Why or why not?

The Spirit indwells those who belong to Him. If it's unnerving to know that pure holiness resides within you, shedding stark light on the dusty corners and baseboards of your heart, try looking at it this way. Let it instead be a true relief that this one who dwells inside you is a full-service cleaning crew, creator, manufacturer, and makeover specialist. He can do a lot better job at this than you ever could.

Holy Spirit, you are welcome here, not to leave me as I am, but to change me from the inside out.