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**THE BLAZING CENTER**


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 BY JOHN WENRICH
 

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**As a church, the Evangelical Covenant Church affirms a conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit, who is the Blazing Center of our mission.**

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One of my favorite words for personal and congregational vitality is “awaken.” When we awaken, we suddenly see what we’ve been missing all along. It is no coincidence that the revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries were called the Great Awakening. The Holy Spirit is the one who causes this awakening to occur. Without the Holy Spirit there would be no revival because the Holy Spirit is the one who blows through the valley of the dry bones.

A conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit is one of the affirmations of the ECC. You may be thinking, “What does that mean? How does that work? Who is the Holy Spirit? What difference does the Spirit make? How can we respect the mystery of the Holy Spirit while learning practical ways to keep in step with the Holy Spirit?”

**Let’s begin with the Trinity.**

We believe in a Triune God—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Christians know about God the Father and about God the Son. But fewer Christians actually know about God the Holy Spirit. In some churches the only time you hear about the Holy Spirit is when the church recites the Apostles Creed.

**The Holy Spirit is God.** The Holy Spirit is worthy of our love and devotion. The Holy Spirit is God just as much as the Father and the Son are God. Three distinct persons in perfect union as one God.

**The Holy Spirit is a person.** The Holy Spirit has intellect. The Holy Spirit has emotion. The Holy Spirit has will. These are the elements of personhood. The Holy Spirit does not have a body but that does not mean the Spirit is not a person. The Spirit is not some impersonal cosmic force. The Spirit is a person who can be known, who can be grieved, who can be loved.

Imagine with me for a moment where we would be without the Holy Spirit.

Without the Holy Spirit:

- There would be no creation, because the Spirit was hovering over the primordial waters in Genesis 1.
- There would be no prophecy, because the prophets were carried along by the Holy Spirit
- There would be no incarnation, because the Spirit “overshadowed” the virgin Mary.
- There would be no resurrection, because the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead.
- There would be no church, because the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church on the day of Pentecost.



- There would be no Christians, because the Spirit is the one who regenerates the dead soul and mediates the presence of Jesus.
- There would be no spiritual gifts, because the gifts are given by the Spirit to equip the church for mission.
- There would be no mission, because the Holy Spirit is the blazing center of our mission.
- There would be no church planting, because the Spirit told the church in Antioch to commission Paul and Barnabas to go and plant churches.
- There would be no Bible, because the Scriptures are God-breathed and the authors were carried along by Holy Spirit.
- There would be no adoption into God's family, because the Spirit cries out within us, "Abba Father."
- There would be no hope because the Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our salvation.
- There would be no revival, because the Holy Spirit gives us the passion to know God and to make God known.

We could go on and on. Imagine where we would be without the Holy Spirit.

In the ECC, we believe that when a person says yes to Jesus and crosses over the threshold of faith, that person receives the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul said that when you believed, you received. This makes sense. Paul calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Jesus. According to John Clark and Marcus Peter Johnson in their book *The Incarnation of God*, "The Holy Spirit is the personal agent of Christ's presence and power." The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Jesus.

In the Old Testament, the word for Spirit is ruah. You can hear and feel the breath. Ruah. The word for Spirit in the New Testament is pneuma, from which we get our word

pneumatic. If you are a mechanic, you probably have a pneumatic wrench that enables you to accomplish more work than you could do in your own human power. The Holy Spirit empowers us for kingdom work.

**The Holy Spirit is closer to us than our very breath.** A sign of health today is the ability to slow down and become aware of our own breathing. How much more to become aware and consciously dependent on the Holy Spirit who is the breath of God.

Sometimes we forget that the Holy Spirit was active in the life of Christ. As I said earlier, without the Holy Spirit Jesus never would have been born or raised from the dead. But there is so much more in between. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus was led by the Spirit, filled by the Spirit, guided by the Spirit, full of joy in the Holy Spirit, and anointed by the Holy Spirit.

In Luke 4 Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 as he stands up in the synagogue: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind. To set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus was consciously dependent on the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was 100% God and 100% human. He had a human body and his body was a temple of the Holy Spirit. He modeled to us how to be consciously dependent on the Holy Spirit. We are to follow his example.

Later in the Scriptures, the Apostle Paul says our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. What is the definition of a temple? A place where God lives. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, lives in you. Your body is sacred because your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

This is one of the reasons Jesus told his disciples to be glad that he is going to the Father. Because after Jesus is



glorified, the Father will send the Holy Spirit to fill every believer.

When Jesus walked the earth, he had a human body, so he could only be in one place at one time. But now that we have the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Jesus himself, that spirit can fill every believer, in every place all the time.

This is why Jesus said, “You will do greater works than me...because I am going to the Father and the Father will send you the promised Holy Spirit.” Now every believer can be filled with the person of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. As a human being, Jesus could not jump into your body. But in the form of Spirit, Jesus can fill your body through the Holy Spirit who is the personal agent of Christ’s presence and power.

Jesus taught us many things about the Holy Spirit. For example, Jesus said the Spirit would be like an Advocate or a Counselor. In John 14:15-17, he says, “If you love me keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.”

The Greek word is *paraclete*, which means one who comes alongside. As a comforter, it’s as if the Spirit puts an arm around us to comfort us. But the Holy Spirit is also a convictor of sin who will nudge us when we go astray. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, one who comforts and convicts.

And conviction is different from condemnation. In Romans 8:1, the Apostle Paul says, “There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

**Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, but he also taught that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of power.**

Let’s read Acts 1:1-9.

In this passage, Jesus is basically saying to his disciples: Ready, set, wait. And the disciples did wait. On the day of

Pentecost, the promised Holy Spirit descended upon the early believers and the church was born. If we are going to do the work of God, we need the power of God.

The mission of Jesus continues through these believers who are now filled with the power of Holy Spirit. Pentecost is a multicultural experience with more than 15 different nationalities hearing the gospel in their own language. It was a Pentecost moment where there was shared understanding. On that day, after Peter’s sermon, 3,000 people came to a saving knowledge of Jesus and they too were filled with the Holy Spirit. Pentecost moments are still going on today and every day.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of power, transformed the disciples from a group of cowards into a courageous band of brothers and sisters. So much so that by the end of the first century the good news of Jesus had spread to more than 30 countries and 39 major cities—all in the midst of persecution. That’s the power of the Holy Spirit at work through everyday people like you and me.

**So how do we become more consciously dependent on the Holy Spirit?**

I want to lay the groundwork for application by first talking about the difference between trying and training.

Trying is about performance and legalism. Training is about relationship and apprenticeship.

The disciples followed Rabbi Jesus because they admired him so much. They watched the way he lived his life and they wanted to be just like him. They wanted to learn how to pray like Jesus, forgive like Jesus, serve like Jesus, love like Jesus, laugh like Jesus, and how to be relaxed like Jesus. This is the essence of discipleship: transformation into Christlikeness.

Following Jesus is not about trying; it’s about training. Paul said to his young protégé Timothy, “Train yourself to be godly.” He did not say, “Try to be godly.” In the kingdom of God we do not try harder; we train diligently. Learning to



live our lives as if Jesus were living them for us. The Holy Spirit empowers us in that training, to train our bodies to be temples of the living God.

I've been on a spiritual journey. This journey began when I was nine years old when I heard the gospel at vacation Bible school. It was there that I put my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord.

Even though I have been a Christ follower a long time, it has not been until the last 15 years that I began to appreciate the person and the work of the Holy Spirit even more. Like you I have good days and bad days, but that sense of adventure and anticipation of what God is going to do next ...all of that is catalyzed by the Holy Spirit. It feels like I'm getting to know Jesus all over again. I am so grateful for the person and work of the Holy Spirit in my life. And that journey continues.

**Here are three practical exercises to help us keep in step with the Spirit.**

**1. Practice the agenda of thirds.**

When your leadership team or your prayer team gets together, experiment using the agenda of thirds. Divide your agenda into three parts. In the first part of the meeting ask the question, "In what ways is the Holy Spirit moving or working in my life? It may be a particular Scripture, answered prayer, a breakthrough, a dream. The point is to take a few minutes to share about how the Holy Spirit is working in your life since the last time you met.

In the second part of the meeting ask the question, "In what ways is the Holy Spirit working in and through our church or community?" Spend some time going around the room discerning how the Spirit is working in your church or community collectively.

In the third part of the agenda, ask the question, "Based on how the Holy Spirit is moving in me and in us, what decisions or topics do we need to discuss and pray about?"

The agenda of thirds centers our attention and our affection immediately on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who is the blazing center of our mission. Do you know what many leadership teams or councils talk about when they meet every month? Two de-motivating factors: money and attendance. Or they get lost in administrative minutiae, such as talking for 20 minutes about what kind of towels should be in the restrooms at church.

When a leadership team or prayer team centers their discernment in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, that is an amazing experience. It's the experience the first century believers had as well. In Acts 15, during a significant leadership meeting, the participants were focused on the Holy Spirit. We know that because after the meeting was over, they wrote a letter saying, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (v. 28). The Holy Spirit was active in their decision-making. That's the kind of meeting I want to be a part of. Following the agenda of thirds can position us to hear from the Spirit.

**2. Practice praying the Holy Spirit prayer.**

The Holy Spirit prayer goes like this: "Holy Spirit, what is it that you want to do in and through my life today?" A spiritual director taught me how to do this and to listen. Almost every morning before I get out of bed, I pray the Holy Spirit prayer. "Holy Spirit what is it that you want to do in and through my life today?"

I do not claim to hear the audible voice of God, but I do sense within my spirit a word or two, such as forgive, peace, trust, joy, or let go. Throughout the day, I watch and wait to see how the Holy Spirit will fulfill that word. Sometimes it's clear and sometimes it's not. But it is about relationship and keeping in step with the Holy Spirit.

I recognize that I can be self-deceived, so I cross reference what I hear with the word of God, because the Spirit of God will never speak against the word of God. I find it interesting that I often hear one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. This is why we need to continue in Bible study.



In Isaiah 50:4 we read, “The Sovereign Lord has given me a well instructed tongue. To know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.”

That language of instruction is about apprenticeship and relationship with the teacher, Rabbi Jesus. There is nothing magical about the morning. Just make it a daily practice to listen the Holy Spirit.

### 3. Picture the Holy Spirit moving in and through your life.

The Holy Spirit is mysterious, and we continue to respect that mystery. At the same time, the Holy Spirit is also knowable. This is one of the reasons the Scriptures provide us with word pictures or metaphors to understand the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Look at this list:

- Hovering over the waters
- Oil and anointing
- Streams of living water
- Fire
- Gift
- Dove
- New birth
- Wind
- Pouring
- Breath

With this precedent of biblical word pictures and metaphors, we are going to practice this experience right now. Throughout the sanctuary you will find various pictures.

In a few moments we are going to stand up and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us to a picture that expresses how the Spirit is working in and through our lives and faith communities. Take a few minutes to linger until you find a picture that fits. This picture is yours to keep.

After you find a picture, gather into groups of three and briefly share why you selected this specific picture.

Just to give an example of how this works, I will go first. I selected this picture.

It’s a balloon festival. I was attracted to the vibrant colors. This picture reminded me of how the Holy Spirit, the Blazing Center, is advancing the mission through the multiethnic mosaic of churches. I see the Holy Spirit working in and

through the Ethnic Commission and the ethnic associations. I see how the Holy Spirit is working through the sixfold test, especially in the area of practicing solidarity.

Everyone ready? Go for it.

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I trust this was an encouraging exercise for you.

Let’s continue to walk this journey together as we learn to keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

I want to leave you with two verses:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

“May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and the love of God, be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).