

Read also Ezekiel 11:14-25. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

When we meet on Wednesday night to listen to a passage of Scripture, we talk about it being like a puzzle that we throw out on the floor, pieces everywhere, and we can't really see the picture. We all begin listening to the passage, and noticing what we hear, and between the whole group of us, its meaning begins to emerge. It's amazing to see what comes out of it, so I am going to challenge you to try it.

It's not about analyzing or finding some sort of "right" answer. The idea is that the Holy Spirit speaks to all of us through the Bible. The Bible is alive with God's Spirit, who is present and knows just what to say; He says what you personally need to hear from God.

God's plan is to put the Spirit in each of us—you heard it in Ezekiel.

It was the time when God's people were exiled; conquered and carried away from Israel. They thought when bad things happened, it was God's punishment. In this case, the gossip was that God had given up on them. They had not kept God's law, they were worshiping the idols around them, and thus God scattered them. "Left for dead," so to speak. All those promises to Abraham that he and Israel would bless the nations and that God would give them land and they would prosper—their attackers were saying, *it's over for you. God has abandoned you.*

But God said something through Ezekiel. He said,

Although I have scattered you in the countries of the world,
I will be a sanctuary to you during your time in exile. (11:16)

A sanctuary is a safe place. It is where we find God, thus a sacred, special place.

So even though it was a bad time, God was with them and had a plan. He would bring them back. So God further said:

When the people return to their homeland, they will remove every trace of their vile images and detestable idols. And I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart, so they will obey my decrees and regulations. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God. (18-20)

The problem they had was a stony, stubborn heart. As a result, they could not discern the truth and followed false gods. They got sidetracked. They lost their faith. They doubted in hard times. They were grasping for straws to bring meaning to life. They lost their vision of God. The solution was to gain a tender, responsive heart so they could recognize the truth.

Does that seem like a need you might have? Have you ever lost vision of what's important? Have you or your friends ever lost connection with the truth?

I mean, I would just love for my stony, stubborn heart to be transformed into a tender, responsive heart so I can stay connected to the truth. God knows I need it and you need it, too, I suspect, so that we don't turn to false idols.

Jesus was about to leave the earth. He was trying to prepare his disciples. They had not seen him die or rise yet. Can you imagine the challenge of believing in Him? Can you imagine the emotional swing that would occur during His last few weeks of life on earth? So He talks to them about the Holy Spirit. HEAR the Word of the Lord. READ John 16:5-16

What?? He's going away and it's good? And He's going to send what?? He's not going to be king right here, right now? No, he's sending an Advocate. That means a supporter, a backer, an activist, a campaigner, a believer, *a helper who sticks to you like glue.*

Eugene Peterson calls him "The Friend."

The Advocate does several things:

1. **Convicts the world of its sin.** The Advocate helps us see that refusing to believe in Jesus is the basic sin. You might think of sin as a litany of bad things. In God's eyes, it is rejection of Jesus.
2. **Convinces the world of God's righteousness.** The world crucified Jesus. That means they judged Jesus as unrighteous. But God reversed this by resurrecting Jesus and making him Lord and Messiah. His righteousness covers us when we believe.
3. **The Holy Spirit tells the world that there will be a judgment** because Satan, the ruler of this world, has already been judged.

This is the truth. This is how to get out of life alive. It's like a courtroom trial. Have you watched a trial?

- Scott Peterson was accused of killing his wife Laci and their unborn child. This was a very watched trial and people all over America condemned Peterson, who is now on death row. They perceived the truth through the evidence and felt that it convicted him. He will die for his crime. That happened through a judgment; a trial to determine right from wrong.
- O. J. Simpson was accused of murdering Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. Half of the American population watched this trial on television in 1995 as he was acquitted. Do you remember it?

With O. J. Simpson, lots of evidence was presented. Was it true? Or false? Lawyers argued their case. He was judged and found innocent.

In a trial you are seeking the truth. Testimony is given to support or deny the truthfulness of the defendant. So in essence, the Holy Spirit gives testimony to support the truthfulness of Jesus' life and message.

The Holy Spirit convinces people Jesus is the way.

The Holy Spirit also gives you confidence you will escape the future judgment because you belong to Jesus.

This is the large background of what Jesus' death on the cross accomplished and the Holy Spirit helps us to share that message. This is good news! It's the way to get out of death and judgment. It's the way to be acquitted.

Does this passage seem rather complicated? Does it seem relevant to life? Well, let's see how it played out for one of the disciples.

Peter was a fisherman who initially met Jesus on a fishing expedition and his first response was "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." (Lk 5:8)

But, he followed Jesus anyway and became the first disciple to say to Jesus, "You are the Christ, son of the living God!" (Mat 16:16)

But then, Jesus was arrested. Peter was in the courtyard while Jesus' trial was going on and a servant-girl approached him and said, "You were with Jesus," but he denied it, swearing he didn't know Jesus at all. He left and wept bitterly. (Mk 14:66-72) Later he went back to Jesus and Jesus forgave him.

Then after Jesus ascended to heaven, when the Holy Spirit came to the believers in Jerusalem, Peter changed. A man who crumbled before one little servant-girl and cowardly denied Jesus now stood up with a tender and grateful heart sharing the good news to a crowd of people who numbered in the thousands. He told them:

Jesus did all kinds of signs, and miracles, but you judged him wrong and crucified him. But God raised him from the dead and proclaimed him Master and Lord. He said, "We are all witnesses to that and it's the truth."

As he spoke, those in the crowd were cut to the heart. They asked him, "What should we do?" Peter said, "Change your life. Turn to God, be baptized in the name of Jesus, receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:22-42)

And that day about three thousand people took him at his word and were saved. They would never face the judgment or death. They, too, would receive the Holy Spirit.

As we listened to this passage last Wednesday night in Conversations with God someone said, *we are to be out there, telling others. Yes we are!*

What does the Holy Spirit *do*, exactly? First, he leads you to the truth and gives you a new heart. Then he helps you have courage and brings the message through you to others. Are you grasping the truth and revealing it to others?

This is just a part of what the Holy Spirit does. He helps you in many other ways— He is your Advocate, your supporter, your backer, an activist and campaigner for Christ. Be open to the Holy Spirit. Ask for Him! He's the greatest gift.

AMEN