

## “Surrender to God? How Do I Do That?! Help!!! (Cue the Holy Spirit)”

### John 14:1-7, 11-17

#### Intro

So last Sunday we started down the ‘interconnected worship ideas’ that bind Living Inside Out together by talking about how all of us surrender to something, and many times the thing that we surrender to, at the very least, keeps us at a distance from God, if not causing us to meander ever further from God. The conversation quickly got to the point where we recognized that we need to surrender to God.

Now, some of you were listening to that sermon...and you went home...and you dwelled on that idea...and then you started asking a question (before making a declaration). It sounded something like this: ‘The preacher guy says scripture says I need to surrender to God. How do I do that? I don’t know how to do that!! Help!!!’ (And thus the reason for the sermon title becomes abundantly clear!). No joke, that was the social media post I was shown.

Well, I heard these comments because the reality is that I have having those same sorts of questions as these different ideas were being put together. The answer is a simple one (you know, before it gets complicated): we need to lean upon the Spirit of God. Our opening passage (which are very familiar words from Jesus that speak to the fact that his earthly life is about to end, but that his connection with his friends, his disciples, never will) speaks to where this Spirit abides. The question that I have for you is this: do you feel the Spirit of God in your life? When? How? (I know, that’s three questions...I’m so demanding) The scripture reads this way.

### John 14:1-7, 11-17

<sup>14</sup>Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’

<sup>11</sup>Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup>Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup>I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup>If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

<sup>15</sup> ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

### Romans 8:2-17

#### Intro

Our second passage is one of those pieces of scripture which very much cuts two ways.

On the one hand, we are able to be reminded that those who are able to profess their faith in Jesus (which Paul defines in and of itself as a manifestation of the Spirit of God) will ultimately be received into an eternal glory with the Almighty (along with everyone else who declares their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior).

That, we like.

On the other hand, however, we hear these descriptions of a believer and too often look in the mirror and see someone who (at least according to the describer that Paul has created) who has ‘set their minds on the things of the flesh’, or at the very least seem indifferent to the ways of the Spirit, you know, because we don’t seem all that ‘righteous’, all that virtuous. We may not see ourselves as ‘bad’, but we certainly don’t see ourselves as purveyors of God’s presence.

So is the Spirit of God really with us? Or, as was asked a few minutes ago, do you feel the Spirit of God in your life? When? How? The scripture reads this way.

### **Romans 8:2-17**

<sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. <sup>3</sup>For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. <sup>12</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— <sup>13</sup>for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ <sup>16</sup>it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

### **‘Surrender to God? How Do I Do That?! Help!!! (Cue the Holy Spirit)’**

So, do you feel the Spirit of God in your life? I say this not just as a preacher, but absolutely as someone who believes that Jesus is the Savior of all, I give a definitive...maybe? I think so? I’m not exactly sure?

Yeah, the idea of leaning upon the Spirit of God that dwells within is something that most Christians have been taught, have heard preached about, and yes, feel is important.

And yet, the reality is that most people live in the land of, ‘I’m really not sure’ when it comes to this concept of God’s Spirit assisting us in our need (Remember that whole surrender concept which is what allows Living Inside Out? Yup, like that.).

Speaking for myself, I think part of the reason that I struggle with how to lean upon God's Spirit is because leaning upon God's Spirit gets transformed into activities that feel utterly monastic. Read the Bible...for hours at a time; pray silently for the six hours after that; and make sure that these things are done while wearing clothing that's incredibly itchy (have you seen the sack cloth that monks wear? Itchy I tell you! Itchy!).

I hope that you are able to appreciate the little bit of fun that I am having here, but the truth is that the examples that come to mind of people who are really plugged into God's Spirit end up feeling a world away from who we are and the lives that we lead which leaves us in that awkward position when we hear that we need to lean on God's Spirit we end up surrendering to the feeling that we are not a very good child of God...or a straight up lost cause.

First off, if you feel that way, you're not a lost cause, or for that matter a bad Christian. But what we will need to do is reorient ourselves to who God is and how he works.

First, take a quick look around. Do you see any other you's? I mean, even if you have an identical twin, their still not you. You are you and you are certainly the only you out there in terms of your combination of physical appearance, skills, interests, and passions.

Now, who is the author of you (and yes, I am asking that from a position of faith)?

That's correct: God. God created you.

Question to ponder: do you think that God screwed up? Do you think that He created you in such a way that you would be unable to tap into and lean upon the Spirit of God as she abides in you?

And yes, sin is one of those areas that cause us to separate from the Almighty and one another but who you are is a creation of God. And if all things weren't possible in Christ, then we wouldn't have been promised it in scripture.

So with that caveat to knock down the sin qualifier, let me get back to my previous question, do you think that God would have created you so as to be unable to lean upon the Spirit of God as she abides in you?

Neither do I.

Which then, I believe, necessarily means that the 'monastic' cookie cutter Christian variations that many of us have pictured as 'the ways' to plug into the Spirit of God are not the only ways to be able to lean upon the presence, care, and power of God to not only surrender, but forgive, serve, love.

Now mind you, I am not throwing the reading of scripture and prayer out the window, but what I am trying to say is that how that manifests itself in your life might be (and probably will be) different then someone else whom you walk with in the faith.

So take a listen to this list (which I found in the book that I am reading that was most recently read by the Tuesday morning women's group that meets over at Panera entitled, 'The Me I Want to Be' by John Ortberg).

As you hear these different experiences, please realize that all of them are opportunities for us to be able to lean upon God's Spirit, providing us that which we need to move from where we were, to where God wants us to be. When do you feel God's Spirit? When you spend time in nature, solitude, serving, study, leading, rest, celebration, worship, art, being with friends who walk with you in the faith? What about time spent in recreation, exercise, with family, on long walks, laughing, leading a cause, in a small group, on a retreat, and yes, even reading scripture. And please know that what we have heard is anything but complete as there is also the ubiquitous activity known as 'other' (don't you love to other? I know I do!).

But in all seriousness, the point of that list is to reframe the way we understand how God's Spirit is able to reach into our lives...and what allows me to hear God in my life might feel like complete garbledygoop to you (my grandmother loved that word). And vice versa in regard to how I might look at the way that you are able to feel closer to the presence of God.

And you know what? That's a good thing! That's a God thing!

So how do you surrender to God so that His will might be done?

The short answer is that you need to lean upon God's Spirit which, as we have heard in scripture, dwells within all believers.

And the congregation responds emphatically, 'and how is that supposed to happen preacher man?! We know how to lean on God's Spirit as well as we know how to surrender to God's will for our lives.'

To which the preacher man says, 'I don't know! But you do!'

Look, pastors, teachers, and leaders are able to provide suggestion after suggestion as to how they are able to abide all that much closer to the Spirit of God. By and large we tend to lean on very churchy activities. There's nothing wrong with that...but those aren't the only ways.

When do you feel most alive? Do you recognize that this is part of who God made you to be and therefore may be (or at the very least will lead you to) a way that you are able to draw upon the ever present power, care, and love of the Spirit of God?

Some people hear God in the silence. Some feel God in the reverberations of the unending sounds of the city.

Some people feel God through reading, others through listening.

Some feel God's presence through their work, others feel God when they are able to take the time to get out and play.

God made you and you are the only you.

God also promised that the Advocate, the Spirit of God would be with us, and within us, for all time, to provide us the support, love, peace, and grace that we need. We need this spirit to surrender our lives, our very being, over to God.

Therefore, the ways that You will be able to wade into the flow of God's Spirit in the world, and more specifically in your life, will be unique to you.

'The preacher guy says scripture says I need to surrender to God. And now he says that I have to lean on God's Spirit! How do I do that? I don't know how to do any of that!! Help!!!'

Well, the truth is that I don't know the specifics of how you are able to begin to flow with the Spirit of God (mark your calendars: a minister just said he didn't know): but you do. When do you feel alive? Know that God made you and that these moments are the opening steps to becoming immersed in the flow of God's Spirit in your life. We need God's Spirit. I know I do.

Abide with the Almighty by embracing the gifts that God has blessed you with.

### **After Sermon Prayer**

Holy God, we need to submit our lives to You...and in order to do that we need Your Spirit. Lead us to understand, accept, and celebrate the way that You have crafted us for it will be through our skills and interests that You have blessed us with that we will begin to abide in You and experience Your support, peace, love, and grace. Lord, help us to live inside out. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.