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Sermon Title: ‘The Spirit bearing witness with our spirit’

Bible Reference: Romans 8:16

**A disclaimer from Pastor Stuart**

*My role in the church here is to feed and care for God’s people the best I can. Key to that, in my opinion is teaching and preaching from the Bible; but that is not all a pastor has to do! In fact after the emails, staff admin, hospital visits, community visits, leadership meetings, etc, etc, there sometimes seems to be little time for sermon prep! Years ago I used to agonise over trying to come up with two, often three, totally original sermons each week. But I’ve found that, for me at least, that is impossibility. I’ve learned to be grateful for and to use the gifts God gives to help me – not only the Holy Spirit, but other Bible teachers and preachers.*

*Over the years I’ve discovered that if something teaches, inspires and excites me it’s likely to do the same for those I speak to. So I admit that sometimes I find myself depending heavily on other people’s ideas, at least to ‘prime the pump’ and therefore I claim originality for very little in these sermons. If you look hard enough and wide enough you’ll probably find who I’ve been reading and learning from! I never knowingly plagiarise, but if you find I have, then I apologise. It must have been that what was said was just too good not to use!*

*I am particularly indebted to the likes of John Piper, Sam Storms, Wayne Grudem, John Ortberg & Rick Warren. The Lord regularly uses them to get my spiritual pulse racing. I’m also indebted to many who kindly make their sermons available on the likes of sermoncentral.com and preachingtoday.com. Others who help me include ‘The Doctor’ (Martyn Lloyd-Jones), C.H Spurgeon and any of the Puritans.*

*These sermons are not made available because I think they’re good but in the hope and with the prayer that they may be used by the Holy Spirit to bless others as they have blessed our own church here in Ipswich, UK.*

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‘The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.’ Rom 8:16

The case so far: Promises, Obedience, Leading of the Spirit, Spirit of sonship.

Tonight I want to take you to what I think must be the surest & best form of assurance of God’s forgiveness and the pinnacle of Christian spiritual experience – that of God, by the H/S telling you that he loves you. This is not us feeling we love God or about anything we feel or do; this is about God saying to you that he loves you. Now we all know that there is a world of difference between feeling you love someone and that person telling you that they love you! It’s wonderful to feel love and affection towards another person – but unrequited love is a sad thing! Let them take you in their arms and tell you that they love you and it’s altogether different. That’s what this is all about - ‘The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.’

It is one thing to believe, to obey, and to see a changed life and even to feel love and appreciation and admiration to God, but it is infinitely more wonderful to feel God saying deep inside that he loves you. This is the most personal and comforting assurance that we can have. Yes it is deeply subjective, it is impossible quantify or explain, but for the person who has it, well, they know it! *Thomas Goodwin, a puritan, used to liken what the Spirit does to a father and son out walking hand in hand. They stop and the father picks up the child, hugs it and says ‘I love you’ puts him down and carries on. Boy has always been his son, and the action of the father didn’t change the relationship; but it gave the boy a great assurance that he was loved.*

Note – it’s what the parent does for the child, not what the child does! But what the parent does certainly impacts and affects the child! Let the Spirit once whisper in your ear or work in your heart that God loves you life is not the same again, it raises everything to a new and different level. Some call it being *baptised with the spirit,* some call it *being filled with the spirit* – but in truth I’m as fussed about labels as I am that we know and seek after this for ourselves as Gods people. For the sake of argument I’m going to use the phrase ‘filled with the Spirit’ because when I look at the scriptures it seems to be connected with that happening.

**Acts 2:4** describes the first time the disciples were filled with the Spirit and the rest of book describes what happened subsequently to this. In **4:8** we read of Peter ‘filled with the H/S’ Again making a defence of the gospel and then again in **4:31,** when under threat and they prayed – what happened? ‘*They were filled with the Spirit’*; again! Not just once but again and again. We read in **Acts** **7:55** - ‘Stephen, full of the H/S’; **13:9** - ‘Then Saul, filled with the H/S; **13:52** ‘Disciples were filled with joy and with the H/S’.

What was the H/S doing each time he filled them? Telling the/ assuring them that they were right, that God was pleased with them, that God loved them and the effect was that they had boldness, peace, joy - things only found in someone who has absolute assurance and confidence in what they were doing.

When the Holy Spirit moves in this way in many people at once this is when we have what we call a ‘revival’. That is all ‘revival’ is - this personal and inward experience happening to many people all at once!

**Why doesn’t every Christian experience this?**

Good question! **Partly**, largely because of poor teaching – too many have never been told about this or if they have that it’s a non experiential thing which happens at conversion whether you know it or not! And **partly** because of lack of conviction of sin and real seeking after the Lord. (real, but defective conversion).

But whatever the reason clearly it doesn’t happen for everyone at conversion because if it did then there would be far greater joy experienced and far great confidence and boldness and general change in life and priorities. I’ve been a pastor 30 years and my observation is that this is pretty widespread in our kind of ‘non charismatic/Pentecostal’ churches.

I suspect that many of us this would describe our conversion experience – not experiential. Assurance based pretty much solely on promises and evidence of obedience, with nothing or very little of what we’re talking about here. If you have experienced it then almost certainly you wish you had it more!

Come to some application and encouragement: are there things we can do to encourage God to grant this blessing to us?

1. Tell him that you are dissatisfied with how you are spiritually! If from the scriptures you see there’s more and feel in your heart – as I hope you do – that there’s more, then tell that to God! If you don’t feel love then tell him!
2. Cultivate a holy discontent. Don’t settle for the status quo, aspire for more. A. W. Tozer says in [*The Pursuit of God*](http://www.amazon.com/Pursuit-God-Definitive-Classic/dp/0830768785/?tag=thegospcoal-20)*, We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found him, we need no more seek him. . . . In the midst of this great chill there are some who will not be content with shallow logic. They want to taste, to touch with their hearts the wonder that is God. I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God.*

How do we cultivate discontent? Read the Bible, read history, spent time with people who have what you’d like, talk to them, and pray!

It’s not uncommon for true believers to see God as somehow cold and distant, harsh and demanding; life experiences can allow these thoughts to take deep roots. If that’s you then you need this prayer: “Father, direct my heart into your love!” Ask God, and go on asking, until like the snow that melted in the warmth this week, your heart begins to thaw in the warmth of the love of God.

1. Prayerfully read, meditate or listen to the Bible. Said this before but I’ll say it again because this is Gods supreme way of speaking to us. As you read ask the Spirit who inspired to teach you and inspire your heart. Read about God, read about Jesus – gaze at Jesus, meditate on him and what he’s done and is doing. Meditate and give time to think about God’s character and then his grace and mercy. Ask him to melt your heart with the truths your reading.
2. Seek Jesus and not experience: desire him to know him and admire him first above all things. This was the Psalmist in Ps 34. It’s the mistake that has been so often made – if I fall over, if this happens of that happens then I’ll feel different! NO, No, NO! if, big if, anything like happens it will be in response to meeting Jesus, in response to this work of God of his spirit telling you God loves you and you being totally assured of that!

Having tried to explain what this spirit bearing witness with our spirit is I’d like to give the last few minutes to sharing with you what this experience has meant to various people – to encourage you, to put some bones on the theory if you like, and with the desire that it will inspire and promote in you a desire to go on with the Lord, to seek him and to settle for nothing less that his spirit bearing witness with your spirit that you are God’s child, that he loves you. I’d like to share first my own first experience of this. Never done this before!

John Flavel Puritan. One day he was riding his horse, thinking about the Lord. He says that as he rode along he felt as if he was lifted up to heaven. He says he forgot his wife and children and longed to immediately be in the presence of God. He was given a glimpse of glory, the love of God, he says, was shed abroad in his heart, he was sure that God loved him and delighted in him.

John Wesley had become a Xian a while before, but on May 24 1738 he says that his heart was ‘strangely warmed’ and he knew for certain that God loved him and had taken his sins away.

Jonathon Edwards, a spiritual genius of the same time “Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk in divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that was for me extraordinary … “I saw the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. “This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. “The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception — which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour. “This kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. “I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated. “I wanted to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him, to live upon him, to serve and follow him, and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure with a divine and heavenly purity.”

D L Moody as he walked down a street in America. *I was crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well, one day, in the city of New York — oh, what a day! — I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name. . . . I can only say that God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand.* (William Revell Moody, 1900, [The Life of Dwight L. Moody](https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=WSRNAAAAMAAJ),149)

Me:

My prayer is that the Spirit will have taken these last 2 sermons to awaken something deeper in us; I hope you’re thinking, I want more of what he's talking about. If so then decide today that you will pursue a sweeter taste, a deeper experience, a clearer glimpse of the love of God and the patience of Christ. Go after it. And don't ever stop.

For others, this message does not so much sound like a church bell drawing you in as an alarm clock waking you up. If you have no response to the love of God, shouldn't you be concerned about the condition of your soul? I hope you'll ask, “What is wrong with me? I have no interest in the love of God. Why am I so satisfied, when others are hungry and thirsty for God?”

Let us take a first step and gaze at Jesus and his love around the table.

When I survey: