



Chapter 4

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, holy Wisdom, true God. The Spirit moves through and sustains creation; endows the church for mission; frees the world from sin, injustice, and death; and transforms disciples. Wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control, there the Holy Spirit is working.

Introduction

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners — Isaiah 61:1

When we speak of the third person of the Trinity, our words often fail us. Clear affirmations and precise statements must give way to poetry and paradox. How can we even find words for the powerful, intimate presence of God? And yet, how can we not speak of the ever-flowing divine presence that is everywhere at work? In the Christian tradition, Spirit-talk has often signaled or accompanied new, fresh understandings of our faith. We speak of the Spirit at times of change when things are shifting, and we need to discern the Holy Presence in the chaos of that uncertainty. We speak of the Spirit also to express our experience of the constancy and reliability of the love of God. We also speak of the Spirit when we look back and discover we were mysteriously, silently empowered for some difficult task. Finding words to describe these experiences challenges us. But thankfully, scripture and tradition have

gifted us with many names for the Holy Spirit and many metaphors for thinking about this elusive person of the Trinity.

Biblical Foundations

Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament refer to the Holy Spirit with words that have multiple meanings. In the Hebrew Bible the word *ruach* means Spirit, wind, or breath. In the New Testament the Greek word *pneuma* has these same associations. In the original languages of the Bible, then, words for “Spirit” have rich, suggestive meanings, rooted in the dynamic experience of what is most essential to life: breath. This richness of meaning suggests that the term “Spirit” already signals God’s freedom to act in surprising ways.

Spirit-talk in scripture begins, of course, at the beginning, when the Spirit hovers over the waters of chaos at creation. In verse 2 of the first chapter of Genesis, “the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God [or the “spirit of God,” or “a mighty wind”] swept over the face of the waters.” The aforementioned Hebrew term for Spirit, *ruach*, is a word of feminine gender. This means that speakers of ancient Hebrew referred to *ruach* as “she.” This *ruach*, present at creation, proceeds to blow throughout the long story of the Hebrew Bible. She shows up in both communal and personal situations. She is the Spirit who empowers judges and prophets. She is the life-restoring wind or breath Ezekiel experienced in the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37). Psalm 139 celebrates that there is nowhere one can go to flee from the Spirit (verse 7), and that God’s Spirit is present even when we ourselves are formless substance (verses 15–17).

In Proverbs 8 that Spirit is introduced as Holy Wisdom. Holy Wisdom was present in creation and abides today, guiding our lives and decisions. Proverbs is a book that comes from the genre of wisdom literature. Other cultures and religions have comparable literature, in which people try to distill patterns of meaning from everyday life. Wisdom, the Spirit of God working in our ordinary lives, is therefore not the property of one religion or of a select group of people. In wisdom literature throughout the world we see signs of how Holy Wisdom-Holy Spirit unites human beings beyond our differences in common pursuits of justice and compassion and in living lives that are wise. Spirit/Wisdom is a concept that is easy to translate when in dialogue with other religions.

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit pervades the story of Jesus and the early Christian church. Mary is touched by the Spirit at Jesus’

conception (Matthew 1:18). Matthew, Mark, and Luke testify to the Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove after his baptism. The Spirit “drives” Jesus into the wilderness, according to Mark 1:12. Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah as he begins his ministry, saying, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because [it] has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. ...” (Luke 4:18). Near the conclusion of the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples that even though he will no longer be with them, he will not leave them orphaned but will send them the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to remain with them (John 14:26). The author of John here uses the Greek word “Paraclete” as a title for the Spirit. This title was commonly used as a legal term; it referred to the role of an advocate, one called forth to stand beside another for support and guidance. Jesus promises his disciples on his last night with them that he will not leave them without direction or his sustaining presence.

The most unforgettable encounter with the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is Pentecost, as narrated in Acts 2. At this Jewish festival 50 days after Passover, the Spirit dramatically appeared to the first disciples as wind and fire, and in the sound of the many languages of the Jewish diaspora being spoken by the Galilean disciples. In this story the remarkable rushing of the Spirit upon the fledgling Christian community unites them in global mission. The miraculous gift of tongues symbolizes the promise that the Spirit will transform the church into a worldwide community of great cultural diversity, in which all may hear the good news in their own tongue. Part of this promise is that the Spirit itself will help the church bridge and include cultural differences.

Community of Christ has two statements that echo this New Testament experience of the power of the Spirit to unite a diverse community: “We Are One, We Are Many”¹ and “Enduring Principles.”² It is particularly relevant that the Enduring Principle of “Unity in Diversity” identifies one of the signs of the Spirit’s work in our midst as weaving a single community out of a variegated international collection of individual and cultural identities. Indeed, “[the] church embraces diversity and unity through the power of the Holy Spirit.”³ We can be confident that diversity in the church is a potent sign of the Spirit’s presence and action, as we engage in world mission.

¹ *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 68–74.

² *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 27–32.

³ *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 31.

The Pauline letters abound in rich imagery for the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11) and so, for Paul, the Spirit is especially the “giver of life.” Paul also writes extensively in 1 Corinthians 12–14 and Romans 12 about gifts the Holy Spirit gives the church. Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians that the Spirit blesses each member of the body of Christ with gifts to be used “for the common good” (12: 7). These diverse gifts are “all ... activated by one and the same Spirit” (12:11). In Galatians Paul additionally notes how the Spirit works in Christians’ lives to produce community-enhancing fruit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (5:22–23). These fruits of the Spirit are essential for healthy living in Christian community. These same virtues also give us clues about where to discern the Spirit at work in the world: wherever we see people from any background practicing these virtues we can trust that the same Spirit is present, transforming human life. Finally, for Paul the Holy Spirit is God’s liberating power in action. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is,” writes Paul, “there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). The Holy Spirit always points the church ahead, setting us free so that neither our successes nor our failures imprison us in our past.

The power of the Holy Spirit, like the wind metaphor the Bible uses to depict it, is far-ranging: from quiet whispers of acceptance to a gale that calls us to the work of seeking justice and correcting oppression. The gentle peacemaking Spirit gives inner strength to disciples like a refreshing light breeze. But it was this same Spirit/Wind that mightily blew aside the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to flee from slavery in Egypt. In other words, we must be careful not to bind the Spirit’s work to one favorite image. This is true because the Holy Spirit *is God*, at work in creation, unbounded and unlimited. We do a disservice to the scripture’s witness of the Holy Spirit if we overemphasize the Spirit’s role as merely being a “Comforter.” Indeed, the Spirit brings comfort. But the Holy Spirit also inspired the prophets to denounce injustice and shallow, self-serving religion. Community of Christ yearns to be open to the fullness of the Spirit’s activity in the church and the world.

Tradition

In theology “tradition” refers to wisdom the Christian church has gathered through centuries of experience. Disciples, theologians, mystics, saints, and ministers of the gospel return to tradition not to be lost in the past, but to find new paths for the journey ahead. Traditions about the

Holy Spirit can expand our experience of God. They can help us make new sense of the divine mystery that enfolds us. And these traditions offer rich soil for Community of Christ's journey of faith.

Many Christian thinkers have noted that theology in the Western World has tended to pay less attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit than to other doctrines. In response to various issues, Western theology has emphasized the other two persons of the Trinity: Father and Son. Not attending to the doctrine of the Spirit has periodically resulted in movements that seek renewed focus on the person and work of the Spirit. Community of Christ is such a movement. Our current emphasis on practicing discernment and becoming a prophetic people is an example of this renewal of the theology of Holy Spirit. Also, in recent times, Christians searching for a broader understanding of God have returned to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit seeking fresh new metaphors for God.

The plea of the poor, the sick, the exiled, the humiliated, and the marginalized for justice, and the cry of the creation itself for freedom from ecological devastation caused by human greed, indifference, and exploitation have fostered new ways of thinking about the Christian faith. Feminist theologians, ecological theologians, postcolonial theologians (theologians who criticize the ways colonialism destroys people and cultures), and disability theologians (theologians who explore Christian faith from the experience or standpoint of persons with disabilities) have all sought in the Spirit a deeper understanding of divine wisdom and our shared responsibility.

Spirit has been a fruitful place, for example, for theologians concerned to uphold the full dignity and equality of women. They have discovered new ways to understand gender and God, by focusing on the nurturing, indwelling nature of Spirit. These ideas often connect to traditional beliefs about maternal, feminine energy. Postcolonial and disability theologians see in the Spirit's embrace of and celebration of difference new ways to think about human liberation. The Spirit does not hide or fix difference but includes it. This work of Spirit also empowers us to expose and mend Christianity's sad and frequent support of oppressive political systems with their misuse of power.

The early church believed the Holy Spirit gave special gifts to God's people. They called these gifts "charisms." The word comes from the Greek word *charis*, which means "grace." The apostle Paul used a related word in his teaching about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, *charisma*. Importantly, the two words are connected: grace is freely bestowed, as are spiritual gifts. But the term "charism" has, in the church's

past, often signified special gifts that enabled people to do remarkable things, occasionally in grim situations.

A chief example was the charism of martyrdom. When the Roman Empire began persecuting Christians on an empire-wide scale in the third century, many Christians were murdered in arenas. The church learned by experience that Christians who volunteered to become martyrs were the most prone to denying their faith. But those whom the Romans seized involuntarily often faced death with calmness and hope. The church saw this as a true witness of the Holy Spirit's encouraging, empowering presence.

One of the greatest theologians of the ancient church, Origen, wrote these words in a book on the nature of prayer: "The grace of God, immense and beyond measure, showered...on [human beings] through Jesus Christ, the minister to us of this superabundant grace, and through the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, makes possible through [God's] will things which are to our rational and mortal nature impossible."⁴ Origen understood that charisms are gifts of the Trinity, and later in this book he asks the Holy Spirit to help him write on a subject beyond his normal ability: prayer. The Holy Spirit, as Paul said in Romans 8, helps us in our weakness.

In third- and fourth-century debates that helped form the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity, the most pressing question was about the relation of the Son to the Father. When in the fourth century attention turned to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the biggest hurdle for the church was to make sure the Spirit was not treated as less divine than the Son or the Father, and not be viewed as merely an impersonal power. By the end of the fourth century, the church affirmed that the Holy Spirit was indeed fully divine, as is the Son and the Father. To encounter the Holy Spirit is to encounter *God* the Spirit. Thus, the church was right to pray not only to the first and second persons of the Trinity, but also to the third. An example of a prayer to the Spirit is a beautiful medieval hymn called the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* ("Come Holy Spirit"). It is from the twelfth century and was used to celebrate Pentecost:

Come thou Holy Spirit
Send from highest heaven
Radiance of thy light.

⁴ Origen, *Prayer, Exhortation to Martyrdom*, trans. and ed. John J. O'Meara; Ancient Christian Writers 19 (New York: Newman Press, 1954), 15.

Come Father of the poor
Come, giver of gifts
Come, light of every heart.
Of comforters the best
Dear guest of every soul
Refreshment ever sweet....
What is soiled cleanse
What is dry refresh
What is wounded heal.
What is rigid bend
What is frozen warm
Guide what goes astray....⁵

Christians may address the Holy Spirit in prayer, for the Spirit is not a thing or a mere energy, but a trinitarian person.

St. Augustine (354–430) is a towering figure in the history of Christianity. He was a North African bishop, pastor, famous orator, and prolific author. One of his important contributions on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is in his work *On the Trinity*. In this book he describes the Spirit as the person of the Trinity who binds the first and second persons together. The Spirit, Augustine taught, is the mutual love between the Father and Son. In God's own being, the Spirit is "their common life... consubstantial [of the same substance] and coeternal with them"⁶ The Spirit for Augustine is the power of relationship in the Trinity. One of his images for the three persons of the Trinity remains memorable: God is the Lover, the Beloved, and the Loving. Thus, for Augustine, as for many who followed his views in Christian tradition, this is the meaning of 1 John 4:8: "God is love." The power of love that unites the Trinity is present in the world and in us. It beckons to us to respond in love for God and for our neighbor. In Augustine's view, the Holy Spirit's main work is to pour the love of God into our hearts (Romans 5:5).⁷ In doing so the Holy Spirit gives us not less than what God is, which is to say, the Spirit gives us itself.

Celtic Christianity emerged from the traditions of Ireland. It experienced the Holy Spirit in a deeply ecological way, as alive within creation. Irish monks were famous for their illuminated manuscripts, such

⁵ *The Oxford Book of Prayer*, ed. George Appleton (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1985), 209

⁶ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, VI.7, as quoted from Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1966; reprinted from the 1912 Macmillan edition), 330.

⁷ Augustine, *The Enchiridion [Handbook] on Faith, Hope, and Love* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1961), 135–36.

as the book of Kells. Here one sees art that embraces the goodness of a creation filled with the divine presence of Spirit. In its use of nature symbolism and attention to seeing God within the routine tasks of daily life, Celtic Christianity offers valuable possibilities for thinking about Spirit today. Writings such as the ninth-century “Breast-plate of St Patrick” also can guide our spiritual lives. The Breastplate is a morning prayer that celebrates the presence of the Trinity with and within us:

I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
through belief in the Threeness,
through confession of the Oneness
towards the creator. ...
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.⁸

Celtic spirituality combines the Spirit, the practice of trinitarian prayer, and deep attention on the natural world. In our era when the earth “shudders in distress because creation’s natural and living systems are becoming exhausted from carrying the burden of human greed and conflict” (Doctrine and covenants 163.4b), there is much wisdom for us to learn from this ancient tradition.

The Christian mystical tradition from the medieval period can further deepen our understanding of the Spirit. One example from this tradition deserves special attention in this chapter. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) was a Benedictine nun who lived in what today is the west part of Germany.⁹ In her early life she was quiet and withdrawn. Later, she became a productive writer, artist, musician, herbalist, and theologian. She was renowned as a leader, both as abbess (the head) of her monastic order and in the church and political world. Hildegard experienced Spirit both as a voice that enlightened her mind with words, and also tangibly as the source of her visions about the Christian life.

In the medieval world women had very low status. But Hildegard’s contemporaries treated her as a prophet and her writings as prophetic.

⁸ *The Works of St. Patrick; St. Secundinus, Hymn on St. Patrick*, translated and annotated by Ludwig Bieler; *Ancient Christian Writers 17* (New York: Paulist, 1953), 69.

⁹ See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Visionary Women: Three Medieval Mystics*, Facets Series (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 1–29.

Hildegard uses Earth-based metaphors for Spirit: water, wind, fire, and dove. In these metaphors one hears echoes from Celtic Christianity, other Christian mystical traditions, and from the Bible. She speaks of Spirit as the source of the fertility of life on earth, and the earth as a source of healing and blessing for people. Hildegard was a noteworthy example of how the Spirit works to create new ways of seeing and understanding God's work in the world. Many contemporary Christians find Hildegard relevant to the church as it seeks to speak faithfully to the Earth's present environmental emergency. Hildegard offers ways to think about the Holy Spirit that link Spirit to the flourishing of our planet.

Other traditions are nearer to us. Memory of the early Restoration Movement, especially from the Kirtland period, still stirs Community of Christ today. In spite of their struggles and failings, the earliest generation of our church experienced Spirit as an outbreak of transforming power. They knew the thrill of the Spirit's presence, revealed in miracles, healings, and prophetic gifts. To our ancestors in this movement, these events were signs that the same power for mission the earliest Christians received at Pentecost was still available. Our ancestors did not interpret these experiences of spiritual power as merely preparing the individual soul for heaven beyond earth, but as God's call to make a different kind of earth here and now. They believed that "the road to transformation travels both inward and outward" (Doctrine and Covenants 161.3d). Thus, they labored intensively to build gathered communities. When these communities knew tragedy, failure, and loss, they experienced Spirit as the force that united them and restored their vision. This is why, even to today, Community of Christ still sings as one of its anthems a song from Kirtland: "The Spirit of God like a Fire Is Burning."¹⁰ This hymn preserves a dangerous and radical memory: the Spirit, like fire, *changes things*. It transforms a landscape so that the new can grow.

In our time, even amidst loss and struggle, we see the fire of Spirit burning ever more brightly. Movements for justice for the poor and brutalized of the world reflect the prophetic Spirit of the Bible and of radical Christian traditions. From the adoption of Exodus stories of liberation that graced African-American slave communities, we witness a bursting forth of Spirit through music and rhythm. *Community of Christ Sings*, the church's current hymnal, richly expresses how song can empower a global community to dream about and create a world where shalom is at home. While in parts of the world traditional worship and

¹⁰ *Community of Christ Sings*, 384.

church-related activities are in decline, there is deep thirst for a spiritually satisfying life. Practices and images from First Nations and indigenous cultures throughout the world inspire the rise of Spirit-centered “green” versions of Christianity that honor Spirit as connection to earth.

The once-strong boundaries between denominations have become open, as Christians across traditions borrow ancient and medieval spiritual practices to deepen their openness to Spirit. New ways of being the church, beyond traditional congregations, are appearing. We hear the Spirit of Wisdom, amidst the chaotic ferment of our time, addressing us in the globally shared concern for a more just and sustainable world and in our yearning for fresh new ways of understanding the gospel.

As Jesus promised the disciples in John 16:13, the Spirit he would send them would ever bring the gift of new understandings of the divine mystery. Paul spoke truly when he wrote, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Application for Discipleship

Community of Christ believes that the Holy Spirit continuously opens new possibilities for us. It helps the church experience God and the world anew and allows space for each other’s journeys and for difference. We have historically seen ourselves as a Christian movement shaped decisively by the Spirit. We have experienced the Spirit as the power of love for one another in community as we have confronted issues of justice related to gender and sexual orientation. The Spirit has emboldened us to see our interrelatedness to the earth and to feel the pain of those the world excludes. By the Spirit we understand ministry as the work of the whole church, and discipleship as the call to radically live out the reign of God on earth. The work of the Spirit never ceases to surprise and delight us, whether in campfires at reunion, difficult decisions in business meetings, or creative new ways to live our cherished principle of the Blessings of Community.

As noted above, in 2 Corinthians 3:17 Paul insists, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” Human beings are prone to distorting our freedom. We need not look far to find stories both from our tradition and from elsewhere, of persons who claim to follow the promptings of the Spirit but engage in acts of violence, oppression, coercion, and even death. The tragedy at Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978 is an example. A community begun by a charismatic leader’s responses to Spirit sank into paranoia and mass suicide. Our challenge is to not just open

ourselves to Spirit, but to discern wisely, communally, and carefully when and where the Spirit is truly speaking.

How do we rightly perceive the action of Spirit? This task belongs in part to the work of theology. We look together to scripture and Christian tradition to discover where our ancestors discerned Spirit, as individuals and as communities. We look especially to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who breathed the Spirit on the church. We look to common consent in the church to help us identify where gifts of the Spirit align with the best we know about God's desire for justice and peace to flourish. We look to spiritual practices, learning to connect with breath and therefore more truly with the Spirit. We look to our best understanding of human experience and reason, which includes the language of science. All these tools can clarify our discernment. A beautiful hymn by James K. Manley, "Spirit of Gentleness," illustrates how the same Spirit that has been working since the dawn of creation still calls us today to new possibilities:

Refrain: Spirit, spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness, calling and free,
Spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.

1: You moved on the waters, you called to the deep, then you coaxed up the mountains from the valleys of sleep; and over the eons you called to each thing, "Awake from your slumbers and rise on your wings."

2: You swept through the desert, you stung with the sand, and you goaded your people with a law and a land; when they were confounded by their idols and lies, then you spoke through your prophets to open their eyes.

3: You sang in a stable, you cried from a hill, then you whispered in silence when the whole world was still; and down in the city you called once again, when you blew through your people on the rush of the wind.

4: You call from tomorrow, you break ancient schemes, from the bondage of sorrow the captives dream dreams; our women see visions, our men clear their eyes. With bold new decisions your people arise.¹¹

Spirit presses us onward toward New Creation, as it gently stirs us to action. Where for the sake of a more just world hearts are softened and change embraced, the Spirit is at work.

The still, small voice of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to be our companion and advocate stirs us to mission. The Spirit prompts us to hear God weep "for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering" and to "open [our] ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately

¹¹ Reprinted with permission of the author and copyright holder, James Manley.

seek a future of hope for their children” (Doctrine and Covenants 163.4a). As we hear cries of injustice, the Spirit urges us to stretch and grow as disciples into our common work of making a new world. Its voice encourages congregations to open their doors to their neighbors. Its voice calls each of us to see strangers as kin and fellow travelers. Its voice compels us to dismantle structures of racism and oppression. Its voice invites us to see our connection to creation, and to see with God’s eyes ways that lead beyond the callous destruction of earth to the promise of a new relationship with all things. In the endless ways the Holy Spirit prompts us there lies the possibility of abundant life in the family of God.

Conclusion

The experience of Christian discipleship can be wild and tumultuous. We should expect this because the Spirit “blows where it chooses” (John 3:8). But the Spirit creates this verdant chaos so that we will learn more about God, community, and shalom for our planet. From this chaos God’s Holy Spirit teases hope from us: the life-giving embrace of new possibilities. As God’s creative work continues to unfold, these words from a Randall Pratt hymn express our prayer to enter more fully into God’s own life:

Spirit fill us, Spirit will us,
to come to God, be in Christ, and
live in you always.¹²

The Spirit refreshes like a cool breeze as the church journeys toward God’s promised shalom. It sometimes blows like a strong wind, and other times whispers like the voice of a lover. Do you feel it, that tickle in your ear? Listen, breathe, sense Spirit.

For Further Reading

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¹² “Spirit Fill Us,” *Community of Christ Sings*, 160.

Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), Chapter 7: "Spirit-Sophia," 124–49.

Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2014), Chapter 4: "The Holy Spirit," 232–58.

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Testimony by Ron Harmon

I vividly remember my first encounter with the Spirit. I was twelve years old and it came during a time of deep searching. I attended a small loving congregation on the west side of Cleveland, Ohio. It was not uncommon to hear a closing prayer giving thanks for the presence of the Holy Spirit. I listened intently and tried to be open to this Holy Spirit but it eluded me.

I did not realize at the time the Spirit had already interceded in my life and was affirming my deepest yearnings to connect with that which is beyond words and human understanding. This Spirit seed had been planted and was beginning to grow as it became the focus of my prayer life each night. I wanted to sense or experience this Spirit and so that became my prayer.

One evening during a youth camp in western Pennsylvania I went out into an open field. I laid down in the grass and looked up into the

immensity and depth of space. By now this prayer no longer needed utterance but was expressed with each breath I took. There were no city lights to hide the vast expanse of the universe. Something not fully explainable but deeply moving occurred that evening as I explored a dimension of creation not often visible to me.

I found myself fully immersed in an awareness that I was not alone. During these moments, I became aware of my connection to an ultimate reality that was beyond my comprehension and yet felt a deeply personal affirmation of divine love and complete wellbeing. Of course, these are the words I use now to describe the experience but its profound impact is felt even as I write these words years later.

Since this time, I have experienced the Holy Spirit in many ways and at times have struggled for any awareness of its presence. During a time of feeling very distant from the Spirit I wrote a prayer that became a plea for spiritual awakening to God's movement all around me:

God, where will your Spirit lead to today?
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.
Grant me courage to risk something new
and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

This prayer captures much of my evolving understanding of the Holy Spirit's function and purpose. I have increasingly experienced the Spirit as disruptive presence helping me to see and understand what was once hidden from view. I have returned to ancient practices that create open and fertile space within for the Spirit to do its transformative work.

This intentional work has created capacity for suffering with those who suffer and courage to speak and act words that lead to God's alternative future. When I cultivate space and receptivity for the Holy Spirit I find myself more willing to risk new conversations, relationships, and ways to embody Christ's love and peace.

There are still those times, however, when I am totally surprised by the Spirit. It moves freely throughout creation and is not constrained by my limited conceptions of its function or purpose. For all these experiences, I am deeply grateful and forever changed.

Spiritual Practice: Breath Prayer

This chapter reminds us that Spirit is often described through biblical symbols of wind and breath. Breath prayer is a spiritual practice that awakens us to the Spirit's life in us and around us here and now.

Begin by observing your breath. Be a gentle observer of your breath as it enters and exits your body, noticing the rise and fall of your chest, the sound of each exhale and inhale. As you continue to breathe, allow a sacred phrase to emerge in you that you repeat silently with each breath in and out. This sacred phrase could take several forms. Choose one that is comfortable for you.

1. Breath in: A word or phrase that describes what you yearn to receive.
Breath out: A word or phrase that describes what you yearn to release.

Example: Breathe in peace. Breathe out fear.

2. Breath in: A name for God
Breath out: A longing for God
Example: Breathe in: "Holy Presence." Breathe out: "Fill Me"
3. You may use a short phrase from scripture, prayer, or song that you repeat prayerfully with each inhale and exhale.

*Example: Breathe in: "Be Still..." Breathe out: "... And know."
(Psalm 46:10)*

*Example: Breathe in: "Search Me..." Breathe out: "...O God."
(Psalm 139)*

Spend several minutes breathing with your sacred phrase until you are no longer concentrating on the words but allowing them to deepen a silent receptivity to God's presence within you. When you feel ready, let the words go and continue breathing as you dwell in the presence of the Spirit with you here and now.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In what ways does this chapter connect to your experience of the Holy Spirit?
2. Which scripture do you find best describes your experience with the Holy Spirit? Explain?
3. In what life circumstances do you experience the Holy Spirit most? When do you usually seek the Spirit's presence or help?