



Here in Spirit: Knowing the Spirit Who Creates, Sustains, and Transforms Everything

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Who is the Spirit?

Can we pray to the Spirit?

Can we worship the Spirit?

Is he present in culture?

Will we need the Spirit after we die?

What does being filled with the Spirit look like?

Sizing Up the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit. Three words couldn't divide the church more. I suppose "I hate you" is up there, but that's more of a division between people rather than churches. Entire swaths of Christianity have divided over the third *person* of the Trinity. This division, over the place of the Spirit in the Trinity, left the Eastern Church (Orthodox) on one side and the Western Church (Roman) on the other, which, among other factors, eventually led to what was called *the Great Schism*.

Doctrine does divide. Attempting to forge unity, I've heard some people say, "Doctrine doesn't matter." Typically, they mean if we would all lay down our doctrines and just focus on Jesus, we would all get along. But that assertion is also doctrinal. It's saying to everyone else, if you lay down what you hold dear, and believe in the Jesus-only doctrine I consider precious, then we can all get along. This approach is well meaning but exclusivist, privileging its own view. It also leaves out the Father and the Spirit. We need to dig deeper. Why does doctrine over the Holy Spirit divide?

The fault line of division over the Spirit today is quite different from that of the early Church. The "great schism" affecting most of the modern church is over the *gifts* rather than the *person* of the Spirit. The division falls rather neatly along just a few of the Spirit's more effusive gifts, things like speaking in tongues, prophecy, healings, and miracles. To simplify it for the moment, there are *charismatics* who treasure and practice these gifts, and *cessationists* who adamantly insist most of these gifts are no longer in effect. The groups shore up, take sides, and accuse one another of wary extremes. Some remain in the middle, self-described "open-but-cautious." Entire denominations, seminaries, and churches divide over their views of these gifts of the Spirit.

Wherever you fall in this debate, I think there's a *deeper issue* at stake. It's interesting that we don't divide over spiritual gifts like service and mercy. We don't part company over whether mercy is still in effect or if service is still valid. And there aren't too many divisions over faith, hope, and love, what Paul called "the higher gifts" (1 Cor 12:31). Everyone believes in those. Maybe, just maybe, we're fighting over the wrong gifts. Certainly, there are things worth debating. Paul opposed Peter for his gospel-compromising racism. But what is the greater issue at stake here? Quibbling over a few of the Spirit's choice gifts, we've missed the most important gift of all — *the Holy Spirit himself*.

Pigeonholing the Spirit based a few of his gifts is like sizing someone up after a single conversation. I'm not a big Quentin Tarantino fan. His films are too violent for me. I've seen clips here and there, and at the behest of several friends I did watch *Inglorious Bastards*. I'll admit the initial interrogation scene is riveting, but I still find the flippant ultraviolence deplorable. So my initial impression of Tarantino was not positive, but that was before I met him in person.

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Alisse Wissman, print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or awissman@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, broadcast and online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com

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“Sizing the Holy Spirit up based on a few of his gifts is a big mistake. If we relate to the Spirit primarily regarding miraculous gifts and whether they are operative today, we distort and limit our understanding of the third person of the Trinity.”

One afternoon as my wife and I were waiting to be seated in a hole-in-the-wall Mexican restaurant, I glanced over the hostess’s shoulder. Recognizing a guy sitting by himself in the bar, my wife turned to me and said, “Honey, I think we were in college ministry with that guy.” I smirked and said, “Honey, that’s Quinten Tarantino.” Lunch was dominated by debate over whether we would introduce ourselves to Tarantino after we were done. My wife won the debate, so we walked over to say hi.

To my surprise, Tarantino was quite affable. He asked our names. My wife made a quip about having a guy’s name, and when Tarantino heard her name is Robie, he leaned in. He asked how she got the name. As Robie told the story, Tarantino tracked the plot, asked questions, and laughed along the way with two complete strangers. After a bit more chit-chat, he invited us to stay for a drink. We gratefully declined, but I walked away shocked by how kind and inviting he was. Based on his filmography, I figured he’d be a total jerk. If I’d stuck with my initial impression of Tarantino, I would have been wildly wrong.

Sizing the Holy Spirit up based on a few of his gifts is a big mistake. If we relate to the Spirit primarily regarding miraculous gifts and whether they are operative today, we distort and limit our understanding of the third person of the Trinity. He should be known for *much more*. Who is the Spirit? Is he a person or a spiritual force? How are we meant to relate to him? Can we pray to the Spirit? Can we worship the Spirit? What is his role in creation? Is he present in culture? What will he do in the future? And what does being filled with the Spirit look like after all? These are some of the questions I’d like to explore. Instead of relating narrowly to the Holy Spirit, I’d like to broaden our engagement with him by touring aspects of his vast character that are often unexplored. In focusing more on *who* the Spirit is, we may find ourselves less divided.

— From chapter 1, “The Greatest Gift”



Jonathan K. Dodson

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Jonathan K. Dodson (MDiv, ThM) is the founding pastor of City Life Church in Austin, Texas, which he started with his wife, Robie, and a small group of people. He is also the founder of Gospel-Centered Discipleship and author of *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, *The Unbelievable Gospel: Say Something Worth Believing*, and *Raised? Finding Jesus by Doubting the Resurrection*.

jonathandodson.org

Who Is the Spirit?

Why did you decide to write *Here in Spirit*?

Jonathan Dodson: I have several motivations in writing the book: pastoral, cultural, relational.

This book was inspired by a formative encounter with the person of the Holy Spirit in my twenties, during which I repented for ignoring the third person of the Trinity my whole life. Afterward, I began to search the Scriptures to reacquaint myself with the Spirit, which has led to a transformative, though up and down, relationship with the Spirit. Thus, the book carries a pastoral burden – to acquaint or reacquaint people with the Spirit.

The more I have come to know and understand the Spirit, the bigger and smaller he gets. He's as big as the cosmos and as small as you and me. My hope is that readers will be inspired by the cosmic and creation-perfecting work of the Holy Spirit, and that this inspiration will lead them to create great culture, redeem social ill, and share a whole gospel with the whole world. He moves me to write about great ideas, form sentences, love my wife, serve my kids, pastor my church, and renew my city.

A third motivation is to help people realize that they are often dislocated from the present. How often are we absent when talking with others, due to a preoccupation with what they think of us, the pull of social media, or the desire to find something more entertaining? The Holy Spirit relocates us in the present by indwelling us and prompting us to be fully human, to engage others as we walk in step with him. The Spirit eagerly reproduces the image of Christ, which was present-tense and pastoral, engaged with those in front of him.

What do you want people to grasp about the Spirit?

Jonathan: The most meaningful, creative, satisfying life is the one lived here in Spirit. This is distinct because the Spirit is typically associated with bland inspiration of the Bible or explosive spiritual gifts. While he certainly is involved in those, he's up to much more.

What do you want readers to take away from *Here in Spirit*?

Jonathan:

- The Spirit is as big as the cosmos and as small as you and me.
- The Spirit is more than a few of his gifts; he's person to know, a power to rely on, and deity to honor.
- The Spirit inspires us to create culture worthy of tribute to King Jesus.
- The Spirit is a person to be known, heeded, and relied on for everything.

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“This book will remind you to see God around every corner.”

“Too often, we Christians are content settling for weak, anemic, and un compelling versions of what is meant to be a strong, healthy, and life-giving expression of life in Christ. Jonathan does a great job drawing us into this more robust, Spirit-led vision for what life can be in the here and now. God has given us an inner resource to help us be and become the very best version of ourselves. It’s time we started drawing on that resource!”

—Scott Sauls, senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church, author of *From Weakness to Strength*

“Warm, pastoral, and filled with scriptural truth and wisdom, Here in Spirit reintroduces us to the Holy Spirit so that we come to love him as a person and depend ever more on his power.”

—Trevin Wax, Bible and reference publisher at LifeWay Christian Resources, author of *This Is Our Time*

“As its name suggests, Here in Spirit is a thoughtful discussion of why Christians should not only live in the moment, but in the Spirit as well. Each chapter unveils another revelation of what the Father wants for and from the followers of his Son and why his Spirit is key to it all. Well organized and illustrated, Dodson has gifted the church with a user-friendly pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit) that seeks to motivate church members to grow in their understanding and experience of the third member of the Holy Trinity. An important book, I heartily recommend it!”

—Gary Tyra, professor of biblical and practical theology, Vanguard University, author of *Getting Real: Pneumatological Realism and the Spiritual, Moral, and Ministry Formation of Contemporary Christians*

“As a trusted guide, Jonathan helps us recover the beauty of a life lived with the Spirit of God inside us. This book will remind you to see God around every corner.”

—Jennie Allen, author of *Nothing to Prove*, founder and visionary of the IF:Gathering

“Jonathan Dodson’s voice is one I trust, and he has written a helpful resource for anyone seeking to understand and know the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has confused Christians on all ends of the theological spectrum, but this book helps us see the Holy Spirit as he’s unpacked in Scripture. As the title states, he creates, sustains, and transforms – and we have access to him! I highly recommend this book!”

—Matt Carter, pastor of preaching and vision at the Austin Stone Community Church



ENDORSEMENTS



"In Here in Spirit, Jonathan Dodson invites us to look up from the usual squabbles over the role of the Holy Spirit, and drink in a grander, richer view of the third person of the Trinity. From the cosmic span of the Spirit who sustains all creation, to his involvement in the ordinary rhythms of our daily lives, this book offers us a deep and yet readable account, which invites us not just to learn about the Spirit but to fall deeper in love with him."

—Mark Sayers, senior leader at Red Church, Melbourne,
author of *Strange Days* and *Disappearing Church*

"John Stott began every day from his waking moment with a prayer to each person of the Holy Trinity, specifically greeting the Holy Spirit and asking him to go on growing his fruit in John's life. And God answered that prayer abundantly! This book would commend such practice, with its strong call to know the Spirit of God in much more personal and intimate terms than before. I am grateful for Jonathan Dodson's challenge. His book is very easy to read, but not at all just an easy read. I have been reminded of things I'd forgotten and rebuked for things I've neglected. The book has blessed my life this very day and will impact the sermon I have to preach in ten days time. That's because it is resonant with multiple scriptures, rich in honest, personal experience, and constantly relevant to everyday life."

—Christopher J. H. Wright, Langham Partnership, author of *Knowing the Holy Spirit Through the Old Testament* and *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*

"I've lost count of the number of books I've read on the Holy Spirit. I've even written a few myself. After a while they all start to sound the same, and I lose interest. Trust me when I say that this will most assuredly not happen to you on reading Jonathan Dodson's excellent book, Here in Spirit. It is a surprisingly fresh, exquisitely written, biblically rooted, and experientially honest presentation of the Spirit of God as a person with whom we commune right here, right now. Dodson doesn't avoid the controversial elements in the Spirit's work, but that isn't his focus. His aim is to help us grow in our relationship with the Spirit and to open our eyes and hearts to the multifaceted ministries of the third person of the Godhead. I can't recommend this book too highly."

—Sam Storms, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City