



Life in the Spirit

Robertson McQuilkin



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Contents

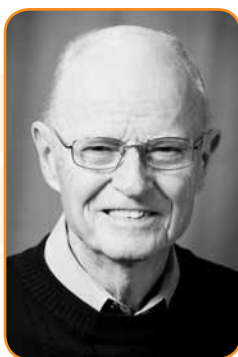
The Author	4
Preface	5
Week 1: The Holy Spirit and the Spiral	6
Week 2: The Holy Spirit Creates and Reveals	36
Week 3: The Holy Spirit Redeems and Indwells	66
Week 4: The Holy Spirit Transforms and Fills	98
Week 5: The Holy Spirit Overcomes and Gifts	128
Week 6: The Holy Spirit Sends and Consummates	160
Christian Growth Study Plan	192

The Author

Robertson McQuilkin is a writer and speaker, engaging in an extensive conference ministry across America and overseas. His writing has appeared in numerous journals and periodicals. Among the books he has authored are *Life in the Spirit* (LifeWay, 1997; B&H, 2000), *A Promise Kept* (Tyndale, 1998), *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Tyndale, 1995), *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Moody, 1983, 1992, rev. 2009), *The Great Omission* (Baker, 1984; OMLit, 2001), and *The Five Smooth Stones: Essential Principles for Biblical Ministry* (B&H, 2007).

McQuilkin served as the headmaster of Ben Lippen School, then for 12 years as a missionary in Japan. Next he served for 22 years as the president of Columbia International University. One of the foremost missionary-training centers in the world, Columbia has prepared thousands of men and women for ministry in North America and abroad.

McQuilkin resigned that position in 1990 to care for his wife, Muriel, who had Alzheimer's Disease. Muriel died in 2003, and in 2005 McQuilkin married Deborah Jones Sink, a professor at the University of South Carolina School of Nursing. Deborah also ministers through teaching and writing.



Preface

Something happened to me in preparing this study, something I never expected. When asked to write, I was excited—hadn't I spent my whole life teaching about life in the Spirit? And yet ...

During World War I a powerful movement was born that emphasized a victorious Christian life. My father was a leading spokesman in the movement, so I drank the teaching in, along with my mother's spiritual instruction. This experience left me with high expectations for the Christian life. All my life I've been exposed to the teachings of Spirit-filled living, and for several years I even taught theology at the college and seminary levels. I knew all about pneumatology—the study of the person and work of the Spirit. As I look back, however, I see times when I allowed the busyness of life and knowledge of the Spirit to crowd out actual time spent with the Spirit. Sometimes He was more like a friendly stranger than an intimate companion.

As I began again to focus on the person and work of the Spirit in preparing this study, I quickly rediscovered that His activity appears everywhere in Scripture—and in my life! I became more and more excited about our relationship. Every morning I awoke with high anticipation of what would happen between us that day. Often I'd awake early—at three or four in the morning—and couldn't sleep again, so consuming was the desire to see what new treasure the Spirit would uncover in Scripture that day. To my surprise I found myself developing a closer relationship with Him—something we will call spiraling up. As a consequence I began to notice His working in me to make me what He created me to be—like Jesus.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit has been no more than a friendly stranger to you, a name you knew from the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Ghost." Wherever you are today, you can experience a wonderful new relationship with a dear, personal friend—the Spirit of God. As a result, you can anticipate a powerful transformation of life, becoming more and more what God created you to be.

Week 1

The Holy Spirit *and the Spiral*

The 20th century could be called the century of the Holy Spirit. In 1901 the modern Pentecostal movement was born, and for the first time some Christians identified speaking in tongues as the necessary evidence of being filled with the Spirit. The Pentecostal movement experienced phenomenal growth worldwide. Then in midcentury it broke out into mainstream denominations in what came to be called the charismatic movement. Finally, toward the end of the century, the missionary enterprise was inundated with an emphasis on power encounter, stressing the need for visible demonstrations of supernatural power to accomplish world evangelism. Many in that movement seemed to focus more on the Enemy, the unholy spirits, than on the Holy Spirit. Still, power encounter grew directly from the Pentecostal and charismatic context.

In reaction to this movement, many Christians have rejected all demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's activity and have been afraid to emphasize the ministry of the Spirit at all. This attitude is a tragic loss, since the Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual blessing. We humans find it easier to take one side of biblical truth to one extreme or the other, neglecting the balancing truths of Scripture rather than finding the center of biblical balance. In this study we will try to discover core biblical teachings about the person and activity of the Holy Spirit. We will explore glorious truths about the Spirit on which we can all agree. And we will learn how the Spirit enables us to grow in the image of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Activities of the Spirit

CONSUMMATING

SENDING

GIFTING

OVERCOMING

FILLING

TRANSFORMING

INDWELLING

REDEEMING

REVEALING

CREATING



Day 1: God's Standard for a Spiritual Life

Jesus taught that God is a spiritual Being: “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). The Bible also teaches that people are spiritual beings like their Creator:

God created man in His own image;
He created him in the image of God.

Genesis 1:27

What does it mean to be a spiritual being? Three approaches to understanding the word *spiritual* coexist in our society. Generally, people use the word *spiritual* in one of the following ways.

1. *Some people deny that we have a spiritual nature or that a spiritual world beyond the reach of science exists.* We might call this a naturalistic worldview. With the dawn of the scientific era, many people embraced the scientific method as the only way to valid knowledge and began to view the unseen world as nonexistent or at least irrelevant. According to this view, the meaning of *spirit* must be limited to the processes of the natural world.
2. *Some people recognize our spiritual nature and dabble in the spiritual world.* They choose not to limit themselves to biblical guidelines for dealing with spiritual reality. We might call this a spiritualistic worldview. Today reports of angels, magic, reincarnation, prayer, horoscopes, the occult, and life-after-death experiences fill newspapers, magazines, and talk shows. Maybe the interest came from Eastern and New Age belief systems. Some say it came from widespread disillusionment with a sterile, rational approach to life—a scientific outlook. Science, it turned out, wasn't solving our basic human problems. Wherever this new concept of spirituality came from, it influences many people today. This view recognizes the reality of the spiritual dimension but does not always distinguish between the good and the evil aspects of that spiritual world.
3. *Others recognize our spiritual nature and the spirit world but choose to deal with those realities only through a relationship with the God of the Bible.* This is the biblical worldview. Those who believe the Bible recognize that the material, visible world

is not all that exists in life; it is not even the most important part. To treat what we can see, hear, touch, or taste as if the world we see were everything—or even the most important thing—sooner or later leads to disaster. Paul reminded the people of Corinth of this truth: “We do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). Christians recognize the spiritual world, and they deal with it through obedience to the triune God.

What problems could result when someone denies the reality of the spiritual world?

What problems could result when people connect with the spiritual world without relying on God’s wisdom and guidance?

The first approach denies or ignores the reality of the spiritual world, leaving someone vulnerable to spiritual attack. The second recognizes the reality but runs a great risk of being deceived by evil. Only the biblical view can provide a foundation for building a true and empowering spiritual life.

Created for Relationship

Because we are spiritual beings and because God is spirit, we are able not only to recognize an unseen spiritual realm but also to distinguish between spiritual realities that are good and those that are not. We also have the capacity to have a spiritual relationship with our Heavenly Father through His Holy Spirit and can commune with Him continuously. In fact, God created us for that kind of intimate fellowship with Him. Second Corinthians 3:18 identifies God’s goal for His creation: “We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.” That is God’s standard for us. He created us to be like Jesus.

When humankind rebelled against God, we became broken models of Jesus. Because of sin we fail to act like Jesus, to have His attitude toward other people, and to enjoy the kind of relationship with God that He intended. But when we are redeemed, God begins His reconstruction program to remake us into His likeness. He gives us His Holy Spirit, who lives in us and transforms us into ever-increasing Christlikeness. So if we want to understand spiritual reality and to enjoy a relationship with God, we need to get better acquainted with the Holy Spirit.

Sincere believers differ greatly about how we relate to the Holy Spirit. All of the following attitudes can be found in the Christian community.

Check any of the following statements that express your thoughts about the Holy Spirit.

- I've never spoken in tongues, and I have no desire to do so.
- I'm not sure about speaking in tongues. I feel ambivalent about the experience some believers seem to have.
- I've been baptized by the Spirit, and the evidence was speaking in tongues.
- I think the 20th-century Holy Spirit movement was a grand self-deception or a delusion of the Devil.
- I haven't spoken in tongues, but I have been baptized by the Holy Spirit.
- I don't know much about the Holy Spirit.
- I want to know more about the Holy Spirit. I want to experience all there is to experience of Him.
- I'm satisfied with my present understanding and experience of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever your present knowledge or experience of the Holy Spirit, I hope you'll want to tap into His resources for living the Christian life. He has made full provision for you to do just that. Apart from Him there's no way you can experience a close friendship with God or become the person He intends you to be. I hope this study will guide you to a foundational understanding of what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit and to a rich encounter with the person of the Spirit.

The Challenge of Balance

When we begin building our belief system about the Holy Spirit, we must maintain a biblical tension about Him. To stay at the center of biblical tension means to hold complementary truths in balance. Because Jesus Christ is the center of our faith, we can easily treat the Spirit as if He didn't exist. Or we may go to the opposite extreme and focus on the Spirit so much that we forget His purpose is to glorify the Son. We may even try to use the Spirit by expecting Him to do things He never said He would, such as keeping us on a permanent emotional high.

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus taught His disciples about the work of the Holy Spirit who would come after Jesus had been resurrected and had ascended to the Father. Jesus said,

When the Counselor comes, the One I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—He will testify about Me. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you.

John 15:26; 16:13-14

The Holy Spirit points people to Jesus, and Jesus glorifies the Father. Each member of the Trinity respects the others. They maintain a balance between individual personality and corporate identity. In the same way, we need to have balance in our approach to the Spirit.

Proper theology and proper living are always a matter of balance. We must not focus so completely on the person and work of the Spirit that we lose sight of the central figure of time and eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet we must not ignore the person and work of the Holy Spirit. As we will see, God sent Him to us for very important reasons. To ignore the Spirit is a tragic error.

Check or write a statement that most accurately describes your relationship with the Holy Spirit.

- I tend to ignore the Spirit.
- I concentrate on the Spirit to the exclusion of the other members of the Trinity.
- I am constantly aware of the Spirit's presence and work in my life to glorify Jesus.
- Other:

Jesus consciously depended on the Spirit for everything He said or did (see John 5:30). We require the presence and power of the Spirit no less than our Savior did. We do not have to go to extremes. We can strive to live in the balanced center of biblical truth about the Holy Spirit. I hope this study will help you develop that kind of balance so that the Spirit's presence in your life will always point the way to Jesus.

Read the following prayer and decide whether it expresses what you would like to pray today. If so, use it as your prayer. If not, write your own prayer about your relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, thank You that You are real and that Your unseen world, which goes beyond my senses and beyond scientific measurement, is more important than everything I see. Thank You for giving me Your blessed Spirit. Through this study may I grow to know Him better and to experience His presence and power. Teach me all I need to know about the Holy Spirit, but especially help me learn to walk with Him all my days. I ask this with confidence because I come in the authority of Jesus' name.