

Sunday 23rd February 2025 - Know My Name: Holy Spirit

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[0 : 00] So, over the last few Sundays, we have been talking and exploring our Know My Name series, a way for us to unpack the importance and significance of names.

We've been looking at some names and titles for God, and different ways in which the fullness of God's character and identity are revealed to us. Some of those names identify God in a big, cosmic, we might say macro way, and other names relate to God in a more intimate, personal, we might say micro way, like Jesus who comes to be alongside us, the down-to-earth way in which we see God's character lived out in the flesh.

But another really important way that we relate to God is through the Holy Spirit, the way in which the Bible describes God's spiritual presence as being here with us now.

And this morning, we'll explore the significance of knowing God in this Holy Spirit way, looking at who the Holy Spirit is, what the Holy Spirit does, how Jesus relates to the Spirit, how the Spirit's at work in our lives, and how we might be filled with God's spiritual presence on a daily basis.

And some of what we look at might be really familiar to you already, but some might be new, and the hope is, my hope is, that God will use our time together to deepen awareness of the ways in which he's already present, and he's already working in our lives.

[1 : 37] So, as we've seen in previous weeks, we're able to understand and relate to God as Father, as Jesus, and as the Holy Spirit. Three ways which combined are known as the Trinity, and this whole library is written about the Trinity, and we're not going to be able to kind of unpack all of that today, but in general, the Holy Spirit is thought of as the third person of the Trinity.

The one about whom Jesus said, Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Spirit will not come to you.

It was actually beneficial for us, for Jesus to leave, as in return the Father sent us the Spirit who would dwell within us forever. And we read about this in Acts 2.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place, suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the house where they were sitting.

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to work, began to speak, sorry, in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

[2 : 51] But this isn't the first time that we meet the Holy Spirit. We're actually introduced to the Holy Spirit on page one of the Bible. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was formless and deep. Darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. At the beginning of the Hebrew Bible, what we call the Old Testament, God's Spirit is hovering over the chaos, ready to bring beauty and order and life.

The Spirit is the way the biblical authors talk about God's personal presence. A presence which seemed to be with specific people for specific tasks in the Old Testament, but is now available to all of us.

But what does the Holy Spirit do? Well, we see that the Holy Spirit creates. We see this in Genesis 1, as God through His Spirit brings all things into being.

And breathes His breath, the Hebrew word is ruach, into us. And whilst ruach means breath, it also means spirit. So the two are very much related.

[4 : 00] Take a big breath. That's the ruach. That's the Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers, filling us with skills and power beyond our abilities.

And we see this in Exodus, when God fills a man called Bezalel with His Spirit to work as an artist, and in particular to design the tabernacle, which was where God's presence was dwelling when the Israelites were wandering around in the desert.

And we see this same Spirit empower people in a different way at Pentecost, when the Spirit descends and enables Spirit people to speak in all sorts of different languages, if only being multilingual were that easy.

But from artistry to language, the Holy Spirit is described as empowering people to do extraordinary things. The Holy Spirit inspires. God through His Spirit used human authors to write what is revealed to us in the Bible.

Timothy tells us that the Scripture is God-breathed or God-inspired. The biblical authors didn't just write down God's dictated Word. They partnered with Him to reveal His truth.

[5 : 13] The Holy Spirit restores. In Ezekiel 36, we see that the Spirit renews and heals our inner being, bringing us back into alignment with God through acts of repentance and forgiveness and a conscious effort to live according to God's will.

The Holy Spirit opens our hearts. We see in Acts 16 that the Lord opens Lydia's heart to Paul's message and her whole family are baptized as a result.

And immediately afterwards, Lydia says to Paul, come stay at our house. In learning about our need for God, we recognize the need in others as well.

The Holy Spirit transforms. In the Gospels, we learn about the way in which fishermen and tax collectors and violent revolutionaries become disciples. Matthew 4 says, at once they dropped what they were doing and followed Him.

Their lives were never the same again. The Holy Spirit transforms our priorities and helps us to choose to follow Jesus in a more wholehearted way. And the Holy Spirit breaks in, bringing heaven to earth.

[6 : 29] Every act of kindness, every act of compassion, every sacrifice is a slice of heaven meeting earth. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, your kingdom come, and this is achieved through partnership with the Spirit.

So these are just a few ways that we know and experience the Spirit in our lives. But today, we're going to focus on one name that Jesus used several times in the Bible to refer to the Spirit.

And that name in Greek, the language that the New Testament was written in, is Paracletos. In John 14, 26, Jesus tells us, the Paracletos, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. This Greek word, Paracletos, means the one called alongside to help.

But it's often translated in our Bible as comforter or counsellor or advocate. So the Holy Spirit comforts. In John's Gospel, we see Jesus associate the way the Spirit comforts with having a sense of peace.

[7 : 49] The peace that helps us to know that no matter what life throws at us, God, through the Spirit, will be with us. The comfort comes, therefore, from knowing that we're never alone, that God's presence is always more powerful than our pain.

The Holy Spirit counsels. Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will teach us all things. The Spirit will continue the teaching that Jesus started. The Holy Spirit will bring God's word to us if we are careful to receive it.

And the Holy Spirit advocates. Advocates. And a common way to understand advocate is a legal term. Someone who's on our side, defending us and championing us against false accusations or the lies of the enemy or our inner critic that we learnt about a few weeks ago.

I've always known this word, Paracletos, as a lawyer or an advocate. Someone who speaks on our behalf. But what I discovered during my research for this sermon was that in the Greco-Roman world of the first century, it also means a rescue boat that pulls alongside a boat that's lost at sea to tow it back into harbour.

The Paracletos is a rescuing spirit that draws alongside and brings us back to a place of safety. I quite like this idea of the Holy Spirit being a boat that leads us through the storms of life and directs us back to shore.

[9 : 19] And if we think about this idea of a safe haven, a harbour is a place to kind of regroup and rest and re-evaluate. And sometimes in the harbour, the boat needs to be completely pulled out of

the water and supported by blocks.

The whole vessel gets cleaned and repaired. But ships don't remain in a harbour. A harbour's just a pit stop. It's not a permanent home. Safe harbours prepare us and restore us and equip us to go back out into the open ocean and be Jesus vessels in the world to partner with the Spirit to do God's work.

But what does this look like practically? I remember when I first started going to church and people were talking about listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit. And I was like, what does that even look like?

How would you do that? Are we listening for an audible voice? I mean, sometimes. But mostly I think that God speaks through the Bible. When we're reading the Bible, He speaks through our spirit, through prompts or nudges, like call that person.

Or through our circumstances when we just happen to be in the right place at the right time to do something. Or through other believers, like in my story. So in January 2022, my vicar stopped me at the door when I was leaving church and said, have you ever thought about becoming a vicar?

[10:45] I actually just laughed. I mean, who does? I'm a secondary school teacher of languages and have been for 28 years.

I was turning 49 that year and honestly thought the idea was ludicrous. My eyes were firmly fixed on retirement, not retraining for a new career and certainly not becoming a vicar.

Through a series of what can only be described as divinely orchestrated events, I very reluctantly decided to weigh out whether God was calling me to this ordained ministry.

And in May of that year, I went to Wildfires Festival in the south of England and I watched a talk about women in ministry, which was quite revolutionary for me because I had read in the Bible that women were not to speak in church.

At the end of that talk, I sat down and in prayer said to God, if you want me to do this, can you just make it clear? And almost immediately, a young woman came over to me, which was about late teens, early 20s.

[11:59] And she said, I really hope you don't mind me speaking to you, but I feel like God's asking me to say that he's not keeping you in the classroom. He has a ministry for you. She started crying, I started crying.

It was a mess. But it appeared to be a very clear and quite immediate answer to prayer. Despite this, I still felt completely ill-equipped and I very despondently, honestly, continued the discernment process.

And during the course of that year, I had clear sign after clear sign after clear sign and I continued to keep asking God for another one until one day, a retired vicar who's a really good friend of mine said, how many more signs do you need?

And so I went home from church that day. I laid down on my face on the floor and just cried and said, I can't do this. Like, I just don't see this, God.

I don't get it at all. And I felt this weight lift off me and the Lord picking me up gently from the floor and I sat down in front of my computer.

[13:09] I watched a service every week with my sister. She's in Stratford. We watched it together from a church in Portland, Oregon and I said, okay, God, last time I'm going to ask, but can you make it clear in this service, in this church on the other side of the world, that you want me to do this and I'm not going to accept any wishy-washy women in ministry talk.

It has to be for me personally that you want me to go into ministry. Well, they say, be careful what you ask for, don't they? Because this is the group of people who were talking that day.

Gerald Griffin is one of the pastors of the church and he had called Bethany Allen onto the stage to thank her for 10 years of service at their church. And he said that she'd inspired him, inspired his wife, his daughters, their congregation and even a woman at Wildfires Festival who had approached him in the coffee queue to say thank you for Bethany Allen.

Would you pass a message on that I'm grateful for her ministry because I'm thinking about going into being a vicar and she's the only person I've ever seen doing it who's a woman, prayerfully and faithfully and can you tell her she's an inspiration?

That person was me. I hijacked him in the queue and said, please thank Bethany Allen for me. I still get goosebumps thinking about it and just a real sense of gratitude for his kindness to keep talking to me in a way that made sense to me.

[14:52] So at that point I really just had to say, okay, fine God, I'm in. And sticking with the marine terminology from earlier, I wish I could say it's been plain sailing since then, that following God and choosing to put him first makes life easy.

But it hasn't and it doesn't. But I think I do know that he honors every act of obedience however small and that if he calls he promises to equip and empower you to do his work.

We are his children, beloved and chosen and filled with the power of the same energizing spirit that raised Jesus from the dead.

and I know that in this harbour that he's preparing me to go out and do his work with his support. I think that making space every day to meet intentionally with God, expectantly with him through his spirit is one of the most important things that we can do as followers of Jesus.

But how do we do that? So I'm going to give you four ways that you could have a try. We know that it says in Paul and Paul's gospel Holy Spirit fill me afresh but the tense that Paul uses in that gospel is to go on being filled.

[16:17] It's the continuous present tense because we're broken vessels and we leak and we need to ask for the spirit to keep filling us every day. So you could start your day with Holy Spirit fill me afresh.

We know that the spirit is a comforter and a counsellor and an advocate so if you're in need of comfort you can say Holy Spirit come find me.

Draw me back to the heart of the Father and need that paracletus that rescue in spirit. None of us are called to do this alone. He brings us back to the harbour.

He encourages us to abide and to rest in him to be comforted and restored. When we need a counsellor or some guidance we can pray Psalm 51 Create a pure heart in me God and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not leave me or take your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of salvation and a willing spirit to sustain me. When we need an advocate we can pray Romans 8 Spirit help me in my weakness.

[17:26] I don't know what to pray but you know and I know that you'll intercede for me. So we're going to finish today with something practical and we're going to invite the Holy Spirit to be tangibly present with us and this isn't a way to bring the Spirit closer because there isn't anywhere that we can be that he isn't but it's just a way to be more present to his leading.

So please don't feel obliged but if you want to I would warmly invite you to give this meditation a go. So can you begin by closing your eyes or focus on the image on the screen if you'd prefer?

Then if you feel comfortable turn your palms face up in your lap as a sign of receiving. start by taking a few slower deeper breaths and as you breathe out let your shoulders and your face relax. Come Holy Spirit come Holy Spirit to our hearts to our minds to our being we know that you are ever present but we intentionally make space for you now.

fill us afresh with your comfort your guidance and your peace.

[19:12] if you're currently feeling lost at sea battered by the waves needing the harbour use these next few minutes to call out to the spirit to come find you and draw you back to the heart of our father visualise him pulling alongside you and towing you back to the safety of the shore.

If you're in the harbour grateful for a place of safety and peace after a time of chaos or in preparation for work to be done thank the spirit for the sanctity of the shore and use this time to settle peacefully abiding in and enjoying his presence.

For those of you leaving the harbour remember that you're strengthened by the spirit's power able to do far more than you could ever imagine visualise the spirit pouring into you power and peace to bring God's kingdom here on earth and we'll hold a moment of silence to invite the spirit to speak near Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[22:50] Thank you. Let us live expected that you love us and want to reach out to us in order that we can love and reach out to those around us.

Amen. Amen. Thank you. so just a couple of resources to kind of help people to dig in a bit deeper if you like to read and you want to learn a bit more about the spirit I can highly recommend Tyler Staten's new book called The Familiar Stranger if you are a busy person who wants a bit of God's transforming presence Ruth Haley Barton wrote a great book called Invitation to Silence and Solitude and every chapter in the book is a different way to meet with God or you could join us on

Sunday on Saturday mornings or Wednesday evenings there is an online meditation group a Christian online meditation group that's free that meets for 45 minutes on a Wednesday evening or an hour on a

Saturday morning for a short time of reflection and silent meditation and conversation so I've been doing that for about 18 months it's really good okay let's close with a prayer spirit of God you are our comforter come Holy Spirit and bring us peace spirit of God you are our counselor come Holy Spirit and guide us spirit of God you are our advocate come Holy Spirit and intercede for us ever present God as people filled with your Holy Spirit let us partner with you to be comforters counselors and advocates for those in need in your world Amen Eck Eck Eck Thank you.