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Bridgeway Church  
Gospel of John #12

**The Spirit-Filled Life of Jesus (and yours and mine too)**  
**John 3:31-36**

In his book, *Rediscovering Holiness*, J. I. Packer makes the point that being a Christian is largely concerned with living our lives as Jesus lived his. Therefore, says Packer, Christians are to:

consecrate themselves totally to God the Father, as Jesus did;  
say and do only what pleases the Father, as Jesus did;  
accept pain, grief, disloyalty, and betrayal, as Jesus did;  
care for people and serve their needs without compromise or ulterior motives, as Jesus did;  
accept opposition and isolation, as Jesus did.

And the list could on seemingly without end. In other words, *Jesus is our role model*. We seek to do what he did, say what he said, love like he loved, believe what he taught, and relate to others in the same manner as he did.

***But what about our Lord's miracles?*** What about his healing of the sick and his casting out of demons? Surely, we can't be expected to do as Jesus did in these matters. After all, he was God, and we are not. Isn't that what we were told in the first chapter of John's gospel: He is the Word of God, present from the beginning with God, equal with God, and the creator of all things?

It is true, of course, that Jesus was God incarnate, God in human flesh. He was and is the God-man. But there is something about Jesus and his earthly ministry that I discovered which thoroughly and radically changed my life and the way I pursue ministry as a Christian. Let me explain.

*How* did Jesus perform his miracles? Most Christians think that's a silly question to ask. He was God, for heaven's sake! He is omnipotent. Whenever the sick needed healing or the demonized needed deliverance, he simply drew upon the immeasurable strength of his divine nature to accomplish the task at hand. Or, at least, that's what I used to think. But no more.

Before I go any farther, let me set one thing straight so that there can be no doubt as to where I stand on the person of Jesus Christ. He was and is and always will be God! God the Son, the second person of the holy Trinity, became human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, but in doing so never ceased to be fully divine. There may be occasions as you continue listening to me today where you wonder if I really believe that. Trust me, I do.

Now we are prepared for the answer to my question. Here it is: ***It was not primarily by virtue of his divine nature that Jesus lived the kind of life he did and ministered in power to the sick and demonized, but rather through his constant and ever-increasing reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit.*** Why do I say this? There are numerous texts that confirm this truth, but let me begin by citing three foundational principles.

First, consider what is said here in John 3:34-35. "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand." Who is it that "gives" the Spirit and who is it that receives?

Some insist it is Jesus, the Son, who gives the Spirit to those who receive his testimony (v. 32). But more likely God the Father is "he" who gives the Spirit without measure to Jesus, the one "whom God has sent," the one who "speaks the words of God." I say this for the following reasons. First, this view alone makes sense of the first half of v. 34; i.e., the words of Jesus are to be identified with the words of God *because* Jesus receives the Spirit without measure. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires and enables Jesus to speak the very words of the Father.

Furthermore, this view connects v. 34 with v. 35. Preeminent among the "things" given by the Father to the Son is the Holy Spirit. This view also sets up a contrast between Jesus and all who preceded him. In other words, however much of the Spirit the OT prophets and kings and priests may have had, Jesus has him all! Jesus, unlike those who came

before, has received of the Spirit “without measure” (which is to say, superabundantly, bountifully, completely, in unlimited fullness). Finally, if Jesus spoke the words of God because he was God, if he acted and served and ministered solely by virtue of his own native or inherent deity, why would he be given the presence of the Holy Spirit (least of all “without measure”)? What would be the need?

The second foundational principle has to do with the reality of *our Lord’s human nature*. Don’t simply take this for granted, for the fact is that many evangelicals think little of the human nature of Jesus. They often fail to reckon with the fact that he had a true physical body. Indeed, the confession that Jesus was Christ come “in the flesh” became the touchstone of orthodoxy (see 1 John 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; Luke 24:39,43; Jn. 20:17,20,27). Jesus *experienced hunger* (Matt. 4:2), *he thirsted* (John 19:28), *grew weary* (John 4:6), *wept and cried aloud* (John 11:35; Luke 19:41), *sighed* (Mark 7:34), *groaned* (Mark 8:12), *glared angrily* at people (Mark 3:5), and he felt *annoyed* by them (Mark 10:14).

He also had a true immaterial *soul*. “My soul,” he declared, “is very sorrowful, even to death” (Matt. 26:38). It was to the divine purpose that he subjected his *will* (Luke. 22:42). It was into the Father’s hands that he committed his *spirit* (Luke 23:46). And we read often of a genuinely human emotional life: he *felt compassion* (Matt. 9:36; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; Lk. 7:13; *love* (John 11:3; 15:8-12; Mark 10:21); and *joy* (Luke 7:34; 10:21; John 15:11; 17:13).

Thus, my thesis is that it was as a man, a human being, who depended moment-by-moment on the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus lived and ministered as we read in the gospels. This doesn’t mean he wasn’t also simultaneously God. More on this below.

The final underlying assumption to my answer concerns *the implications of his incarnation and humiliation*. In that famous passage in Philippians 2, Paul says that “though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (vv. 6-8). Paul is not saying that the eternal Son of God gave up or surrendered any attributes of deity. Jesus “made himself nothing” or “emptied” himself *by becoming a man, not by ceasing to be God*. Thus, in becoming a man “the Son of God willed to renounce the exercise of his divine powers, attributes, prerogatives, so that he might live fully within those limitations which inhere in being truly human” (G. Hawthorne, 208). That which he had (namely, all the divine attributes), by virtue of what he was (Deity), he willingly chose not to use. Thus we see a human being doing super-human things and ask “How?” The answer is: *Not from the power of his own divine nature, but through the power of the Holy Spirit*.

The Son chose to experience the world through the limitations imposed by human consciousness and an authentic human nature. The attributes of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience were not lost or laid aside, but became *latent* and *potential* within the confines of his human nature. They are “present in Jesus in all their fulness, but no longer in exercise” (ibid.). The incarnation thus means that Jesus “actually thought and acted, viewed the world, and experienced time and space events strictly within the confines of a normally developing human person” (ibid., 210). In his constant dependence on the Holy Spirit, drawing daily upon the Spirit’s presence and power, Jesus demonstrated how God intends for us to live and minister.

Jesus is our model for how God wants us to live in humble, reliant trust on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we can reasonably expect to “be like” Jesus, to “live like” Jesus only to the degree that we draw from the same divine power on which he faithfully relied: the Holy Spirit.

Let me prove this to you by taking you on a brief tour of the life and ministry of Jesus. Take note along the way of the pervasive, powerful presence of the Holy Spirit at every stage.

### *The Conception and Birth of Jesus*

Even from the conception of Jesus in the womb, we see the presence and activity of the Spirit. Mary “was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18; see v. 20). The source or cause of this miracle is the Holy Spirit. Mary is pregnant *from* or *of* the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, not Joseph or any other man (thus putting to rest Joseph’s natural fears), provided the generative force by which Mary’s pregnancy came to pass and the humanity of Jesus was initiated. It is the Holy Spirit who sets the whole process of this special conception and gestation into motion.

Consider Luke 1:35 where the Spirit is said to “come upon” Mary in order to account for the conception of Jesus in her womb. This terminology is used in the OT of the powerful presence of God’s Spirit at work in the midst of his people. Often the Spirit would “come upon” OT saints to equip them for a special task (cf. Num. 24:2; Judges 3:10; 2 Chron. 15:1; see esp. Isa. 32:15). Thus the conception and birth of Jesus were not a part of the normal course of human events but rather were due to the direct intervention of God the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, the power of the Most High (a reference to the Spirit) will “overshadow” her (v. 35). Again, this word was used of the revelation of God’s glory in OT (cf. Exod. 40:35; Ps. 91:4; 140:7 = God’s powerful presence; see also Matt. 17:5; Luke 9:34). Just as the tabernacle contained the Shekinah glory of God (Exod. 40:35), so Mary bore within herself the Son of God, the glory of God’s people Israel (cf. Luke 2:28-32, esp. v. 32). The Holy Spirit was the divine creative element by which the fashioning of our Lord’s human nature was begun (cf. Heb. 10:5).

We should also take note of Luke 1:15 where John the Baptist is described as having been “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.” If John (the lesser) was filled with the Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb, how much more must it be true of Jesus (the greater). If this is true of the herald of Jesus (see John 3:30; Matt. 3:11), is it not reasonable to suppose it is true of Jesus himself? Since the Holy Spirit “came upon” Mary and “overshadowed” Mary and enabled her to conceive, it stands to reason that Jesus was “filled with the Holy Spirit” no less than he who was his forerunner.

### *The Childhood and Youth of Jesus*

The same principle continues into the childhood and youth of Jesus. Luke tells us that “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). We might translate this more literally to say that Jesus was growing strong “by being filled with wisdom” (the latter phrase tells how and with what Jesus was made strong). “Being filled” is in the present tense, likely pointing to a steady, continuous experience (“by being ever more and more filled with wisdom”). Also, he was “being” filled (passive voice) by someone other than himself (no doubt, the Holy Spirit; cf. 1:35). That with which Jesus was being filled was “wisdom” (most likely an allusion to Isa. 11:1-2). And “the favor (or grace) of God was upon him”, a reference not only to divine favor but also to exceptional and enabling gifts. Luke may have meant by these words that “God was even then in the process of graciously fitting Jesus out with those special powers requisite for the unique role he was to play in redemptive history, bestowing upon him the gifts he would need to be the Messiah, the Savior of the world” (Hawthorne, 101).

In the passage that immediately follows, Luke 2:41-52, we read of our Lord’s encounter with the teachers of Israel in the Temple. What accounts for his precocious knowledge (v. 47) of spiritual things? Luke is probably referring implicitly to the Holy Spirit, having drawn again from Isaiah 11:2, “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding.” Observe also that they were “amazed” (v. 47) at his understanding. This verb (*existasthai*) is used frequently in Luke to describe the reaction of people to the operation of divine power, which is to say, the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 8:56; 24:22; Acts 2:7,12; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16).

### *The Baptism of Jesus*

We turn next to the baptism of Jesus by John in the river Jordan. Several things are worthy of note. According to John 1:32, the Spirit not only came down upon Jesus at his baptism, the Spirit “remained” or “abided” on him, an indication of his continuing, ongoing, abiding presence. Unlike those of the OT on whom the Spirit came but for a time (1 Sam. 16:14; 2 Kg. 3:15) to equip them for a task, only then to depart, in the case of Jesus, the Spirit remained permanently, perpetually equipping and enabling him for ministry.

In Mark’s account (1:10), the Holy Spirit did not simply come “upon” Jesus but came “into” (*eis*, not *epi*) him. Perhaps this is Mark’s way of indicating that the Holy Spirit *entered into* Jesus, an indication that the relationship is not one of mere external enablement but internal intimacy and empowering. Jesus was now the permanent bearer of the Spirit. Even if “filled” with the Spirit from Mary’s womb, he now sustains a relationship to the Spirit unlike anything that has preceded.

Finally, we know that this descent of the Spirit upon/into Jesus constituted his “anointing” or empowering for public ministry (see Luke 4:18-21, fulfilling Isaiah 61:1-2). Peter says the same thing in his sermon to Cornelius: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were

oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Here we see that to be anointed with the Holy Spirit is to receive that power which accounts for the “good” works of Jesus’ ministry, his healings and his delivering of those oppressed of Satan. Thus, what he did, he did primarily because “God was with him” in, through and by means of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

### *The Temptation of Jesus*

It is in the temptation narratives that we see most explicitly this relationship of the Spirit to Jesus. It was not by accident or even his own initiative that Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Mark (1:12) says the Holy Spirit “drove” or “thrust forth” Jesus into the wilderness. Whatever other plans Jesus might have had, the Holy Spirit overruled or in some way pointed out and directed him to his encounter with the enemy. We don’t know by what means the Spirit communicated this to Jesus, but it may well have been by an audible voice, or perhaps an inward impression, or even a vision. Matthew (4:1) and Luke (4:1) both use a milder term (*agein*; to lead or guide), reinforcing the point that Jesus willingly submitted to the Spirit’s guidance. Even here at the beginning of his ministry Jesus says, in effect, “not my will but thine be done.”

Jesus was not only led *into* the wilderness by the Spirit (Matt. 4:1) but was also being led by the Spirit *in* the wilderness during the entire course of the forty days (Luke 4:1; it was, no doubt, the Spirit who led Jesus to fast). Their point is that Jesus met and resisted Satan’s temptations not by his own power alone but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was fortified and energized by the continual infusion of divine power from the Spirit of God.

We should not overlook one more important thing that Luke makes clear to us. The coming of the Spirit upon and into Jesus led Luke to describe him as being “*full of the Holy Spirit*” (4:1). The stunning thing is that these are the same terms used to describe the experience of Christians after Pentecost! Stephen, for example, was selected for the diaconate precisely because he was, among other things, “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5).

### *The General Ministry of Jesus*

Following his victory over the temptations of the enemy, “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee . . . . And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all” (Luke 4:14-15). In what “power” and by virtue of what resource did Jesus begin to teach, preach and perform miracles? It was not through his own initiative or by virtue of his own inherent skills alone or even because he was God incarnate. Rather, Luke identifies Jesus’ power as the power of the Holy Spirit. Those things Jesus did, which led to his fame throughout the land, were due to the “the power of the Spirit.”

We then read in Luke 4:16-21 (cf. Isa. 61:1-3; 11:1-5) that Jesus himself was conscious of the fact that he had been anointed with the Holy Spirit and in this way was empowered to “proclaim good news to the poor” and “to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind” and “to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” Again, if Jesus did all this in the power of his own divine nature, why was the anointing of the Holy Spirit necessary at all?

Finally, could it be that Jesus’ exhortation that we pray for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) flowed from his own experience of the Spirit? Could it be that he himself prayed for continued, repeated anointings or fresh waves of the Spirit’s presence and power to sustain him for ministry, and here encouraged his followers to do the same? Yes, I think so.

### *The Miracles of Jesus*

In Matthew 12:22-32 Jesus delivers a demonized man and heals him of his blindness and his inability to speak. The Pharisees accused him of doing this through the power of Satan himself. Our Lord’s response to this scurrilous charge is that it is absurd to think that Satan would fight against his own demons and thus contribute to the dissolution of his own kingdom. Jesus declares that “it is by the Spirit of God” that he casts out demons and by this they can know that “the kingdom of God has come upon” them (v. 28).

Clearly, Jesus himself understood that his ability to heal and to restore sight to the blind and speech to the mute and to overcome and destroy the power of Satan lay not in himself or the strength of his own person but in the power of God provided to him through the Holy Spirit. In other words, *Jesus was himself consciously aware of the ultimate*

***source of his power. He knew himself to be dependent on the power of the Spirit. The Spirit did not work secretly through him.***

It's also important to note why Jesus called their sin in this case blasphemy against the "Holy Spirit". Think about it: If Jesus *himself* performed this miracle, in the power of his *own* divine nature, would not their sin have been against him? They blasphemed the Holy Spirit because they were attributing the *Spirit's* work to Satan. As far as Jesus is concerned, the proof of the presence of the kingdom of God is the power of the Holy Spirit to bring deliverance to those in bondage to the devil. Jesus did *not* say the kingdom was present because *he*, Jesus, was present (although that *is* true). In this context, Jesus asserts the presence of the kingdom based on the presence and power of the *Spirit*. It is less *his* performance of an exorcism and more the power of the Spirit through which the exorcism is achieved that attests to the in-breaking of God's kingdom rule.

Often the word "power" is used to refer to Jesus' works and words. The significance of this is that ***in Luke's writings "power" is synonymous with the Holy Spirit*** (see Luke 1:17,35). We see this especially in Luke 5:17 where "the power of the Lord [i.e., the Holy Spirit] was with him to heal." This is why people were desperate to touch Jesus, "for power came out from him and healed them all" (Luke 6:19; see 8:46). Indeed, often the miracles of Jesus are simply called "powers" (Matt. 11:20; 13:54). The miracles of Jesus were expressions of the *Spirit's* power (see 1 Cor. 12:10a).

#### *The Inner Emotional Life of Jesus*

One particularly fascinating text is Luke 10:21 where Jesus is said to have "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit." In some sense, even the emotions and passions of Jesus were evoked or stirred or aroused and sustained by the Holy Spirit. Here we see the exuberant joy of Jesus inspired by the Spirit! Would this not also be true of other emotions, stirred up at other times during the course of his earthly life? Note also that Jesus here "praises" the Father (v. 21). Surely it was the Spirit in and through whom Jesus worshipped (cf. Phil. 3:3).

#### *The Teaching Ministry of Jesus*

Jesus was widely known and praised for the authority and accuracy of his teaching. In the opening verses of Acts 1, Luke declares that it was "through the Holy Spirit" that he issued his commands and offered his instruction to the disciples (v. 2; cf. also Luke 24:19). From this we see that *after* his resurrection Jesus was filled with the Spirit, and from the reservoir of wisdom and power supplied by the Spirit he issued new commands to the disciples. If this be true of Jesus *after* his resurrection, how much more so *before* it! The Spirit of God communicated the words of God the Father to the Son of God that he in turn passed on to his followers. In some sense Jesus depended on the Spirit to supply him with the wisdom and insights into the mind of God that formed the substance of his teaching. In this regard, see especially John 5:19-20,30-32; 7:16-18; 8:26; 8:38; 12:49; and 14:10.

#### *The Death of Jesus*

The author of Hebrews tells us that it was "through the eternal Spirit" that Jesus "offered himself without blemish to God" (Heb. 9:14). The "eternal spirit" most likely refers, not to Jesus' own eternal spiritual nature, but to the Holy Spirit. If he had meant "human spirit" he would have said "through *his* eternal spirit" (cf. Mark 2:8; 8:12). Thus, just as Jesus drew on the power and strength of the Spirit to teach, to perform miracles, to resist the temptation of Satan, so also he drew on the Spirit's power to find courage and resolve to offer himself a sacrifice for sin.

#### *The Resurrection of Jesus*

What power raised Jesus from the dead? Was it his own inherent divine nature or power, or that of the Holy Spirit? In John 2:19 Jesus declared, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." But then note v. 22 where it is said that Jesus "*was* raised," suggesting that his resurrection was attributed to another power, probably that of the Spirit. Also, in John 10:17-18 Jesus declared that he would not only "lay down" his life but that he would also "take it up again." Yet even this, he says in v. 18b, was because of the "charge" that had "received from" his "Father". When we look elsewhere in the NT, we see that the vast majority of texts indicate that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, raised Jesus (see 1 Cor. 15:14-18; 1 Peter 1:21). In fact, 17 times in Acts and the Epistles it is said that God raised Jesus (see especially Acts 17:31). If God the Father did it, how or by what means? Most likely, through the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 1:1-4; 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 1 Tim. 3:16)!

### Conclusion

In closing I want to make one primary point of application. We should not read this text in John or the many texts cited as if they were only a historical relic, a by-gone record of ages past in the experience of one man. The fact is, ***the Holy Spirit that was in Jesus is also the Holy Spirit in us!*** We see this in numerous places, not least important of which is John 20:22 where Jesus “breathed on” his disciples and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Hawthorne is spot on in his analysis of the significance of this event:

“The very first thing Jesus did immediately after he was resurrected from among the dead and reunited with his followers was to pass on to them, as a gift from his Father (cf. Acts 2:23), that same power by which he lived, triumphed, and broke the bands of his own human limitations. On the very day of his resurrection, he came to them locked in by their fears, ‘breathed’ on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22)” (235).

John’s point is that the mission of Jesus is not over. It merely passes into a new phase. Jesus continues the mission given him by his Father by sending forth his disciples in the same power with and by which the Father sent him forth, i.e., the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul echoes this truth in 2 Corinthians 1:21 where he deliberately juxtaposes two words to highlight our position and power as the called of God: “And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ [*christen*], and has anointed (or ‘christed’) [*chrisas*] us.” Or one could even translate it this way: “Now he who establishes us with you in *the anointed one* and *anointed* us is God.” Thus, just as Jesus said of himself, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me” (Luke 4:18), so likewise Christians are spoken of as anointed ones because we too have received the Holy Spirit and are thus set apart and empowered to serve God and authorized to act on his behalf.

Similarly, John says in his first epistle (1 John 2:18-22, 27-28) that although we are humans, not gods, yet in a sense we may rightly be called God’s “christs”, his “anointed ones”, because we have received the same Spirit as did Jesus, *the Christ*. What conclusions may we draw from this? I leave it to Gerald Hawthorne to answer that question, and with his words I conclude:

“The significance of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus extends to his followers in all of the little and the big things of their existences. The Spirit that helped Jesus overcome temptations, that strengthened him in weakness, that aided him in the hard job of taking on himself the hurts of the hurting, that infused him with a power to accomplish the impossible, that enabled him to stay with and complete the task God had given him to do, that brought him through death and into resurrection, is the Spirit that the resurrected Jesus has freely and lavishly . . . given to those who would be his disciples today!” (242).