

The Mystery of the Third Person

The interview room felt smaller than it actually was. Pastor David Matthews sat across from the search committee, his palms slightly damp despite the cool autumn air filtering through the church's old windows. Gerald Lock, the committee chairman, leaned forward with the intensity of a man who had been asking the same question to candidate after candidate.

"How does the Holy Spirit work in a believer's life?" Gerald's voice carried the weight of genuine curiosity mixed with pastoral concern.

David felt the familiar tightness in his chest that came with moments of truth. Around the table, five faces waited for his response. He could almost hear the theological machinery of his seminary training grinding to life, ready to produce a textbook answer about sanctification, regeneration, and spiritual gifts. Instead, something else emerged.

"I don't know."

The words hung in the air like incense, heavy and honest. David watched Gerald's face, expecting disappointment, perhaps even dismissal. Instead, the older man's weathered features broke into the widest smile David had seen all day.

"That's the first honest answer we've gotten."

Years later, David would reflect on that moment as he stood before his congregation on a Sunday morning, preparing to wrestle with the very mystery that had somehow qualified him for ministry. The sanctuary was filled with familiar faces – farmers and teachers, retirees and young families, all united in their shared pursuit of understanding the God who had called them together.

"The Holy Spirit," David began, his voice carrying across the room, "remains beautifully mysterious to me."

In the third pew, Margaret Thompson nodded knowingly. She had been a believer for sixty-seven years, and the more she learned about faith, the more she realized how much she didn't know. Behind her, college student Jake Morrison shifted uncomfortably. He wanted answers, formulas, certainty. The mystery unsettled him.

David continued, weaving through Scripture like a guide leading travelers through familiar yet ever-surprising terrain. He spoke of the Holy Spirit as a person, not a force, and watched as understanding dawned on faces throughout the congregation.

"You can't grieve a force," David explained, his voice growing stronger with conviction. "You can only grieve a person."

In the back row, Sarah Chen felt a familiar pang of guilt. She had been carrying bitterness toward her sister for months, holding onto anger like a treasured possession. The pastor's words about grieving the Spirit cut through her defenses with surgical precision.

The sermon unfolded like a carefully constructed revelation. David spoke of the Spirit's divinity, His equality with the Father and Son, His role in bringing Scripture to life on the page and in the heart. He described the Spirit's work – guiding, renewing, gifting, sealing, interceding.

"When you don't know how to pray," David said, his voice dropping to barely above a whisper, "when you're so overwhelmed that words won't come, the Holy Spirit is praying for you with groans too deep for words."

Across the sanctuary, tears began to fall. Tom Bradley, struggling with his teenage son's rebellion, felt the weight of countless wordless prayers he had offered in the darkness of sleepless nights. The Spirit, it seemed, had been there all along, translating his heartache into perfect petitions before the throne of God.

But David wasn't finished. He turned to address something that had been troubling him – the confusion between emotional excitement and the genuine indwelling of the Spirit.

"Don't fall in love with the experience," he said, his voice carrying the authority of someone who had seen both the beauty and the danger of spiritual enthusiasm. "Fall in love with the God behind the experience."

The reference to Camp Deerrun brought smiles to several faces. Many in the congregation had children or grandchildren who had attended the camp, returning home with stories of powerful experiences and profound encounters with God. Some of those experiences had produced lasting fruit; others had faded like morning mist.

Jake Morrison found himself thinking of his own camp experience three summers ago. The emotional high had been incredible – he had felt closer to God than ever before. But within weeks of returning home, the feeling had dissipated, leaving him wondering if his faith was real at all. David's words began to make sense. It wasn't about the feeling; it was about the relationship.

As the sermon moved toward its conclusion, David pulled out his phone and held it up.

"I panic with tickets," he admitted with a self-deprecating smile. "Especially with Apple Wallet. I'm always checking to make sure my boarding pass is still there."

Laughter rippled through the congregation. They had all been there – the moment of panic, the frantic search for confirmation, the relief when the ticket appeared on the screen.

"That's what the Holy Spirit does for our salvation," David continued. "He's God's guarantee that you belong to Him. You don't have to keep checking. You don't have to worry about God's love. The Spirit is your golden ticket."

Margaret Thompson felt a deep sense of peace settle over her. At eighty-four, she had lived through seasons of doubt and uncertainty, times when she wondered if her faith was real, if God truly loved her. The image of the Spirit as God's guarantee resonated in her heart like a bell tolling truth.

The sermon concluded with a challenge that was both invitation and warning. David spoke of the necessity of the Spirit, the danger of quenching His work, the command to be filled with Him. He painted a picture of life that was both supernatural and practical – a life marked by love, joy, peace, and the other fruits of the Spirit.

"I don't know exactly how all of this works," David admitted, returning to the theme of mystery that had begun his message. "But here's what I do know: I need Him."

The honesty in his voice created a holy hush in the sanctuary. Here was a pastor who wasn't pretending to have all the answers, who was willing to admit his limitations while still proclaiming the truth of God's Word.

Sarah Chen made a decision in that moment. The bitterness toward her sister had to go. She couldn't continue to grieve the Spirit who had sealed her as God's own possession. Jake Morrison felt a different kind of conviction – not the emotional high he had experienced at camp, but a quiet, settled determination to pursue God through His Word and in community with other believers.

Tom Bradley found himself praying without words, letting the Spirit intercede for his son in ways he never could. Margaret Thompson simply sat in grateful silence, marveling at the God who had given His Spirit as a guarantee of eternal love.

As the congregation stood to sing, David looked out over the faces of his people. They were still mysteries to him in many ways – their struggles, their doubts, their private battles with

faith. But they were also evidence of the Spirit's work, transformed lives that bore witness to the reality of God's indwelling presence.

The mystery remained. The Holy Spirit's work was still beyond full comprehension. But in that moment, as voices rose in worship and hearts turned toward heaven, David knew that the mystery was not a problem to be solved but a relationship to be cherished.

The third person of the Trinity – eternal, divine, personal – continued His work of transformation, one heart at a time, one life at a time, one moment at a time. And in the beautiful mystery of it all, the church found not confusion but comfort, not uncertainty but wonder, not answers but the Answer himself.

The Holy Spirit, David had learned, was not a doctrine to be mastered but a Person to be known. And in knowing Him, they discovered that the mystery itself was the greatest gift of all.