

How to be part of what the Spirit is doing

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. When I was a kid, one of the things I loved doing was playing detective. I don't know if you ever played detective as a kid, but I loved it. I remember I had a magnifying glass, I had a Sherlock Holmes hat, I had a pair of handcuffs that we got from the local Chinese store, and I had my trusty sidekick, a life-size pink panther that my mom had knitted for me.

And we solved many cases together, me and, I actually forgot his name, but he was a good sidekick. Anyway, so I love playing detective. I grew up watching and reading some of the great detectives, you know, obviously Sherlock Holmes, and his deductive skills, and how he managed to work things out and deduce things from clues, little clues that no one else would have spotted.

He was brilliant at that, and it always fascinated me how he could spot what he could spot. Or, someone who also, I think, makes the list of one of the great detectives was Columbo.

You know Columbo? Who knows Columbo? Put up your hand if you know. You know Columbo, that old, scruffy old guy in a trench coat. But he had this amazing ability, Columbo did, to read people and ask good questions.

And his secret weapon, of course, was that he acted much dumber than he actually was and put people off their guard. I loved watching Columbo and how he solved cases. But I was always fascinated by detectives.

[1 : 2 5] In fact, my grandfather was a police detective, and that's probably what made me even more interested in it. But just the idea of solving mysteries, working out things that you can't see based on what you can see.

Because that's really what a detective is. He detects or she detects the unseen. That's the job of a detective. Well, this morning, as I said, we're looking at our second in the series on the Holy Spirit.

Now, I want to suggest this morning that part of being a Christian and part of working with the Holy Spirit in this world is learning how to be a spiritual detective.

What I mean by that is learning how to spot clues in the world, in the visible world around us, spotting clues to work out what's happening in the spiritual world.

That is a skill that Christians need to develop. Because as Christians, we know there is an unseen world out there. We were reminded about it in Ephesians. There is an invisible world. There are spiritual forces and spiritual beings that you can't see, but they are affecting this visible world every day.

[2 : 3 6] We also learned last week that God's Holy Spirit is here in this world working to bring new life and to bring light and order into the darkness and chaos of this world.

That is his job. So that's what we saw last week. Just like he did at creation. He is doing that today. He's bringing light into the chaos and the darkness. But he is doing it through his church today.

And so we as Christians, one of our main jobs in this life is to get on board with what the Holy Spirit is doing behind the scenes in the lives of the people that we come across every day.

You know, we see them on the surface. These people in our lives that God has put in our lives. You see, God has placed us each with a circle of acquaintances and colleagues and people who he has called us, if we are Christians, to influence for the good, to be light in the darkness.

And we see people on the surface every day. We see what they're saying. We see, we have conversations with them. We see them.

[3 : 39] But what's going on behind the scenes with those people spiritually? And how do we engage with that? Well, that's really what I want us to look at this morning.

And to do that, we need to become good spiritual detectives. We need to learn how to spot clues of the Holy Spirit's work in your world. And that's what today's sermon is about.

The Holy Spirit's work. And that's the thing. First, we need to understand just what the Holy Spirit's work is before we can understand how we're to get on board with that. So that's how I want to start, by looking at what the Holy Spirit's work is.

Because unless you know what he's doing, you're not going to be able to get on board with it. And God wants us to know what he's doing. The Bible tells us a lot about the work of the Spirit in our world today.

But one of the clearest teachings comes from Jesus himself, which we read earlier from John. It says this, But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away.

[4 : 40] Unless I go away, the advocate, that's what he called the Holy Spirit, will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.

About sin, because people do not believe in me. About righteousness, because I'm going to the Father where you can see me no longer. And about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. That's what Jesus taught us about his Holy Spirit. And so in this passage, we learn about one of the main jobs of the Holy Spirit, who Jesus was about to send into the world.

And one of his main jobs is to convict. You see that? To convict the world. To show people where they are wrong.

That's what the word convict means. To realize where you're in the wrong. And the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, is going to come in and has, because we're on this side of the cross, has come into this world.

[5 : 47] And one of his main jobs is to help people see where they are wrong. Because let's be honest, people are very stubborn about views that they have decided to hold, which best suit their lifestyle, right?

And let's be even more honest, most views that people hold, they are held because they help people to live the lives they've already decided to live.

Lots of people's views aren't based necessarily on truth, but on what's comfortable, what suits them. Even if those views are plain wrong, people who have decided to hold those views won't see it.

In fact, I find when I challenge people's views, the more wrong they are, the more angry they become, and the more violently they defend those views. Because people are stubborn.

And they will often, people will often rather hold onto a wrong view than be willing to change. And so that's why one of the Holy Spirit's main roles in this world is to make people willing to change their views.

[6 : 52] He helps us to see where we are wrong, which is the first step to real change. And there are three areas in particular that He does this. They are, we're told, sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Those are three topics, three areas in our life that the Holy Spirit works very hard to show us where we are wrong. In that He works to convict us that our sin is more serious than we think it is.

Typically, we think our sin is not as bad as the Bible says it is. And the Holy Spirit works to convict us. Well, it is. That we have sinned more than we know, and it has far greater consequences than we like to admit.

He also shows us the nature of true righteousness, namely that we are not by nature righteous in God's sight, even if we think we are in the world's, by the world's standards. We are not by God's standards.

The Holy Spirit works to convict us of that. And He shows us that judgment is coming, and that unless we are saved from our sin, we are in big trouble. The Holy Spirit works to convict us of those things that we don't want to admit.

[8 : 01] Because this world is happily having a party on the train track, the Holy Spirit is the one who turns us around and points out the huge freight train that's bearing down on us, which is God's wrath, so that we will get out of danger.

That is the Holy Spirit's role. Because it's only when you understand the true nature of those things, of your sin, of righteousness, God's righteousness, and of the inevitability of judgment, it's only when you understand those things that you will see your need for Jesus, and you will truly get what He did on the cross to save you, and you will subscribe to that, and you will follow Him.

You will not do that unless the Holy Spirit convicts you of your sin, righteousness, and judgment. And if you have no time for Jesus, if you are not interested in Jesus, if the words of the confession that we said earlier were just mouthed words, they meant nothing to you, it's probably because the Holy Spirit hasn't yet convicted you of the reality of the danger that you're in eternally.

So that's the first main job of the Holy Spirit. He convicts. He shows us to be in the wrong, which we need. The second main job of the Spirit is not only to show us where we are wrong, but to show us what is right.

And that's why Jesus calls Him the Spirit of Truth. Spirit of Truth. And listen to 1 Corinthians chapter 2. No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

[9 : 21] What we have received is not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. We may understand what God has freely given us.

The gospel, salvation, grace in His Son, eternal life, undeserved. God has freely given us. How do we know those things to be true? How do we understand those things?

Well, the Holy Spirit helps us to understand those truths from heaven. The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the truth about Jesus and why He died on the cross and what that means for our eternity.

And to magnify Jesus and make Him real and important in our lives. That will not happen without the Holy Spirit illuminating us to that fact. And we wouldn't even believe it, let alone understand it, without the Spirit helping us to do that.

In fact, Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians, a few verses later, he says, the person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness.

[10 : 26] Foolishness. Many people think that the Bible is foolishness. It's gobbledygook. That it makes no sense. They read it and they say, what is this?

It means nothing to them. Maybe you know people like that and you wonder, why don't they get it? Well, they consider it foolishness because they can't get it. They cannot understand it and neither can you unless the Holy Spirit helps you to.

You see, reading the Bible is a very spiritual activity. It's not something that you can just rely on your mind to work out and get. You have to have the Holy Spirit illuminating these spiritual truths for you.

Helping you to get them and helping you to believe them. So that's the second thing the Holy Spirit does. The second part of His work is He illuminates. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit works to recreate people.

And so, conviction, illumination, and recreation are a summary of the Holy Spirit's work. So, Titus 3.5 tells us about His recreating work.

[11 : 33] It says this, He, that is God, saved us not because of righteous things we had done but because of His mercy, He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. So, God saves people and He brings new life into people through the Holy Spirit. Regenerating them.

Renewing them. Literally, the word is recreating them. It's what Jesus spoke about when He was talking about being born again. And so, just as you know, you remember from last week, just as the Holy Spirit was hovering over the uncreated world to bring creation at God's command, He is still doing that.

Today, that is still His job. He is hovering over people and societies who are dying, whose thoughts and desires are worldly and selfish and destructive and He's entering and recreating people from the inside out.

Giving them new desires. Giving them new birth. In other words, the Holy Spirit is in the extreme makeover business. And I say extreme because when the Holy Spirit works on someone, He doesn't just change their behavior on the outside, He changes their heart on the inside.

[12 : 59] And everybody who is a Christian can testify to that. the Holy Spirit changed my heart when I was at university. I was raised, many of you know my story, I was raised in a Christian home.

I went to church growing up. I sang all the songs. I said all the right things. I was a Christian on the outside for all intents and purposes. And so when I was converted in 2000, my outside behavior actually didn't change much at all.

I was already doing Christian things. But on the inside, it was night and day. I was completely transformed. Because that's where the Holy Spirit works on the inside.

He doesn't work to change our behavior on the outside only. But to change our hearts on the inside. And the outside behavior then follows. But then He doesn't stop there.

The Bible also says He doesn't just kind of recreate people, give people new birth and illumination and conviction and then move on and leave us alone. No, He stays with us.

[14 : 10] The rebirth that He gives us is the beginning of a lifelong building project that the Holy Spirit continues to oversee in a person's life. He's the foreman of the rebuilding of your heart to make you more like Jesus bit by bit, day by day, piece by piece, until you attain to the full measure of Christ.

The Bible says that's His goal for you. That's His blueprint. In fact, it's in Galatians towards the end that we read about the blueprint for what the building is going to look like.

And it's called the fruit of the Spirit. Right? You're familiar with the fruit of the Spirit? Many of you can actually rattle them off by heart. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Now, it's funny, if you're familiar with the fruit of the Spirit, we sometimes read that list and how does it make us feel? We go, man, I'm obviously not filled with the Spirit if that's the standard.

Love, patience, faithfulness, self-control. No, I just shouted at that taxi in the traffic two minutes ago. That's not me. But you see, when we read that, that's the wrong way of reading the fruit of the Spirit.

[15 : 23] When we read that list and we go, well, obviously I'm not filled with the Spirit, you know what that's like? That's like standing on a building site, looking at the blueprints, then looking at the construction site and saying, oh, it's pointless, it's nothing like the blueprints.

Well, obviously not because it's still being built, right? The blueprint's not there. The blueprint of the Holy Spirit's work is not there to discourage you if you're a believer.

On the contrary, it's there to keep you on track with the building project. It's there to encourage you. The fruit of the Spirit is God's blueprint for the lives of His people. It's there to show you what His plan is for you if you're a believer so that you can get on board with that, so that you can be encouraged, that you can keep on being driven forward.

And that you can get excited to see these things, the fruit of the Spirit, take more and more shape in your life as the Holy Spirit works, which encourages you if you're a believer.

He shows you a growing love, a growing joy, a growing sanctification, peace, patience, kindness. It's not perfect and none of us, those things will be perfect for none of us this side of heaven, but we start to see, if the Spirit's working, we start to see the building project building up more and more when we see these things evidenced in our lives for our encouragement, not for our discouragement.

[16 : 49] Okay, so that's what the Holy Spirit's work on earth is in a very summarized form. He convicts people where they are wrong about God and themselves and eternity.

He illuminates them to what is true about these things. He recreates people from the inside out and he causes them to produce fruit in their lives.

And so, if he's done that for you, if you can look back on your life and you can say the Holy Spirit has done those things for you, then realize that was not of you.

The fact that you believe what you believe, the fact that you have new inner life and new patterns of living has nothing to do with you. It was the Holy Spirit working in you by his power.

And so, why pressure yourself to do these things more when you didn't do them in the first place? You know, Christians, we try so much, don't we, to drum up holiness in our lives and to drum up a greater love for God within ourselves and then we feel guilty when we can't do that.

[18 : 02] As if it's within ourselves to do that. But you don't. It's not within yourself to be able to do that. None of us have it within ourselves to do that.

We need the Holy Spirit to do those things for us just as much as we needed him to do them in the first place. And so realize he is the foreman of the building project, not you. And learn to work with him.

Learn to follow his lead and let him do the work in your life. With his chosen tools and equipment which is the word and the community of believers.

Those are the things that the Holy Spirit uses to work on you. And so stop trying to change yourself. That's what I'm saying. Rather, allow the Spirit of God to change you as you read his word in your daily life and as you meet with other Christians and as you pray and let the Holy Spirit do his thing through that.

You see, I think a lot of Christians fail to do these things because they think they need to change themselves and they can't and so they get discouraged and they stop going to church and they stop meeting with other Christians because they feel guilty.

[19 : 16] And I think I'm talking to you this morning, whoever you are, you're feeling guilty inside you for not being as holy and as Christian as you want to be. Well, I want to tell you this morning that's not up to you.

It's the Holy Spirit's work. Just get on board with what he's doing. Use the tools he's given you. Don't put pressure on yourself to change yourself because you never did in the first place and you can't. But if he hasn't done that for you, if you are not spiritually alive, now, it's unfair to ask you if you are or not because if you're not, you won't be able to know that you're not.

But if you don't, if you can't say that the Holy Spirit has done anything inside for you, if you're just a Christian on the outside like I was, then realize you can't change that either.

You can't do anything to change that. You can't do anything to change yourself inside spiritually. And I can't. I can't change you no matter how many sermons I preach.

Only the Holy Spirit can change you. And so ask him to. Ask him to. If you realize even just a glimpse this morning that you need the Holy Spirit's work in your life to recreate you, to convict you, to give you the truth, then ask him because that's the business that he's in and he will be delighted to answer that prayer.

[20 : 43] Okay, so that is the Holy Spirit's work and how we get on board with it in our own lives. But now that we understand the Holy Spirit's work in the world and how he works in the lives of the people around us, the question now is, well, how do we get on board with that work in the lives of others?

Because while he does the work we've just learned, one of the tools he uses is us, the church, you and me, Christians in society, are the instruments that the Holy Spirit uses to do that work in the lives of other people.

And so how do we spot clues of the Holy Spirit working in the world around us, in the people around us? And how do we get on board with that?

Well, there are at least three things that I want to suggest we can start doing in our daily lives this week to get on board with what the Holy Spirit is doing. The first is look out for where the Holy Spirit is at work.

Look out. Be aware. So God's Holy Spirit has come into this world as I've said to bring life into chaos and darkness. That is what he is doing. And you know what?

[21 : 53] The Holy Spirit doesn't go on holiday. He doesn't kind of take June, July and go camping like I do when I need a break. The Holy Spirit is always working. He is always working to bring life into darkness.

He doesn't go on holiday. and he is present in us every day and in your life and in mine if we are believers he is looking for opportunities to do that work.

He is constantly on the lookout for opportunities and he wants us to be as well. And what that means firstly is that every conversation you have is actually a potentially spiritually significant conversation.

It means that the Holy Spirit may want to use that conversation that you are having he may want to use it for his work of convicting and illuminating and recreating.

And so keep a lookout for that. Don't be oblivious to when the Holy Spirit is prompting you and is present and is speaking to you in your daily life. Keep a lookout for where he is working through you and in the lives of the people around you.

[23 : 06] But also what that means is thankfully it is not your job to try force the gospel into a conversation as if you are driving it. Often Christians will do that and you may have been exposed to Christians who out of nowhere will start talking about the Bible and Jesus and God and whether you have eternal life or not at work around the water cooler and it puts people off.

You know what I mean? I mean their intentions are good but the way they are going about it is very dependent on themselves to drive the work of the Holy Spirit as if the Holy Spirit has to get in line with what they are doing but it is the other way around.

We need to learn to get in line with what the Holy Spirit is doing. It is not your job to force the gospel into conversations with your non-Christian friends. Rather it is your job to look out for where the Holy Spirit is already at work in their lives and then join into that work.

In other words you need to be a spiritual detective. And so how do you do that? How can you be a good spiritual detective in the week to come and look for clues of the Holy Spirit's work in people's lives?

Well like Sherlock Holmes you look you pay attention to the little things. You look for those little signs on the outside in people's words and behavior that tell you about what's going on on the inside.

[24 : 30] And like Columbo you learn to ask good questions. You know I've come to realize in my years of sharing the gospel with people I'm much more effective at that the less I talk and the more I listen.

The more questions you can ask the easier it'll be to see where the Holy Spirit is causing these sparks of illumination or conviction in a person's soul so that you can fan those sparks into flame.

You know it reminds me of again a thing I mentioned in my sermon before Survivor the TV reality show and one of the first things the survivors need to do when they're stuck on the island is make fire and they spend the first three or four days just trying to make fire and sometimes they'll get flint as a reward and they'll use the flint to spark the fire and everybody is surrounding this little clump of leaves and somebody's sparking this flint and everybody's just getting ready to blow and fan the flame once the spark is there but they can't do that unless there's the spark you need that flint you need the spark to be made and then the flame then the people will come in into play and they'll fan that flame and it'll be a big fire well that's what the Holy Spirit does spiritually he makes the spark he starts the energy process and we've got to be on the lookout for where he's doing that and fan that into flame but we can't there will be no flames there will be no life if the Holy Spirit doesn't work first we can't create that by ourselves remember that so look out be a detector look out for the work of the Holy

Spirit if the Holy Spirit's not at work then no amount of your efforts will change anything and the way we find out whether he is is by asking good questions listening carefully looking out for clues and then secondly we mustn't just look out for where the Holy Spirit is at work we must pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work we must pray for people and we must pray with people because prayer is the primary way we engage in the spiritual world right and prayer shouldn't be something we do kind of once a day at a set time it should be more like breathing for a Christian Paul tells us to pray without ceasing to pray continually in 1 Thessalonians 5 you know I don't have I don't have set times when I talk to my wife I don't I don't kind of remain silent the entire day and never talk to her and then at a particular time in the evening

I look at my watch I give a little sigh and I go okay let's have a conversation and then ten minutes later I go okay that's the end of our conversation and I turn on the TV now we don't treat people we love like that why should we treat the Lord like that prayer should be unceasing something that doesn't have a set start or an end time and we'll find when we pray like that when we are praying continually throughout our daily routines we are addressing God because that is the freedom that he has given us in Jesus for Christians when he has taken our sins away he has opened the lines of communication continually with the creator of the universe with our heavenly father and when we when we learn to pray continually throughout our day then we're already much more in touch with what's going on around us spiritually because we're keeping the lines of communication open and so we're ready much more ready to engage with what's going on spiritually around us you become more aware of the spiritual world around you when you are constant in prayer when you're talking to God about the people around you

[28 : 29] Lord help me to know what's going on in Susan's life who's in the cubicle next to me or whatever Lord you know where Jack is at spiritually I don't so help me to know what he needs to hear right now Lord this person sitting next to me on the plane do you want me to talk to them please give me an opportunity and help me to know what to say Lord this Christian brother or sister of mine they're down they need a word from you help me to know where in scripture I can take them and speak to them we've got to continually pray for the people around us and God loves answering prayers like that he loves for you to get on board with what he's doing in other people's lives but then we've also got to get into the habit of praying with people not just for people and not just with other Christians as well but with non-Christians as well when when appropriate get into the habit I wonder if you've ever done that prayed with a non-Christian friend or colleague to help them to see how God is at work in their lives

I'm reading a book by a Christian evangelist and what he does and this is the reason I mention it is because he makes a habit of doing this of asking non-Christians if he can pray for them and he finds first of all they're often much more receptive to that than you think especially if they're going through a hard time and they've exhausted all the other options what's the harm what's it going to harm if their Christian friend prays for them often they will be open to that but secondly what he finds is not just are they more receptive than you might think but he finds now this is amazing God he finds in his experience of praying with non-Christians God is often much more quick to answer prayers for practical things like healing for them than he is for Christians it seems weird but listen to what he writes we often pray for physical healing for people already in God's family and sometimes

God answers those prayers but actually I have more often seen God work powerfully in prayers for physical healing for my seeking friends there are biblical precedents for this in Jesus ministry and in the book of Acts God wants to make tangible his rule and authority and power especially where people are not following him I think God has a different priority for me God wants a deeper maturity from me and a love that is not dependent on being steered to good parking places and being healed of my sniffles or even of more serious illnesses but God's spirit seems to love to meet seekers and skeptics where they are and to stretch out his hand to minister even miraculously whenever they ask and we get to collaborate with the Holy Spirit when is it appropriate to pray with our seeking friends whenever I have a little deeper conversation with someone who isn't following Christ and he has been honest about his needs if I'm in a place where I can pray with him without drawing attention I will ask if I can do that and you can too get into the habit of praying for people to help them see

God's work in their lives and so those are some of the ways that you can get on board with what the Holy Spirit is doing in your world and in the lives of the people around you to show them truth to bring light into the darkness and to do the work of spiritual recreation and so will you do that will you start even this week if you're a Christian will you start to look out for opportunities in your life look out for clues of the Holy Spirit at work because he is he is at work every day so learn how to spot that be a good spiritual detective ask good questions of where people are at and not just what did you do this weekend or how are you feeling but questions that probe deeper questions that are really interested in what this person is thinking what this person is believing and be constant in prayer for those people and as the opportunities arise with those people and then get ready to see the spirit work in your world and what an exciting thing that is let's pray for him to do that yes holy father we thank you for your word we thank you for this teaching about your spirit holy spirit we thank you for illuminating our minds to understand it and to believe it thank you for this reminder that you are at work every day and so we pray lord would you help us as we go out of this place later would you help us as we go into this new week as we go into the world help us to be aware help us to look out for clues help us to spot where you are at work and give us the great joy of getting on board with that and being used by you to bring light and to bring life into this dark world we pray this in Jesus name amen