



Chase the Goose: The Forgotten God

Ryan Miller - April 11, 2010

Almost my entire family lives in Colorado. My grandparents, most aunts and uncles, and my parents all live in the Rocky Mountain state. Every time my wife Liz and I go to my parents place for the holidays I see a whole slew of relatives which makes for a busy but enjoyable visit. It wasn't always this way. While most of my family has always lived in Colorado I grew up in Chicago. Growing up 1000 miles away from your extended family meant I didn't get to see them very often and honestly, I really didn't know them very well. Sure every summer we would head for a visit to Colorado to see my grandparents and other family, but one week a year didn't result in close relationships. This never really bothered me because we had our own "family" in Chicago. There were many families at our church that became our aunts and uncles and grandparents. This may sound unusual to those of you who grew up surrounded by your extended family but for me, it was just life. Now that I'm older it feels a little weird to be related to someone – even pretty closely – and not know them very well.

It even happened in my immediate family. When I was about to turn eleven, I vividly remember watching TV with my brother Brad and my grandparents because on January 16, 1991 the first Gulf War officially began. I watched grainy footage of patriot missiles being launched into the night half a world away. While the start of a war is memorable in some ways the reason it is so vivid in my mind is different. That night my mom went into labor and eventually gave birth to my brother Colin the following day. I felt so cool the next day at school being able to tell people that I had a new baby brother. I soon discovered that carrying my little brother around was a hit with the ladies, so it was pretty sweet. As I got older Colin was at all my track meets and baseball games running around like little kids do. I had to change diapers from time to time and definitely ended up babysitting a lot. While I thought Colin was pretty great most of the time, he was a little kid, and the truth is, it's pretty hard to get to know someone when their conversations consist of one word sentences. When I headed off to

college Colin was just starting 1st grade. As I moved through college and got married and moved to Arizona to start Damascus Road, my brother slowly grew up but our phone conversations weren't exactly full of personal revelation and relational development. The truth is, while I was closely related to my little brother, I am just now starting to get to know him well because he's here in Tucson. It's weird to know something about someone, to be related to them, but not to really know them.

This is how it is with the Holy Spirit – we know something about Him but more in a general sense – not really in a personal sense. The goal of this morning as well as the next couple weeks is to add some head knowledge that will hopefully motivate us to develop some heart knowledge as well. I hope that none of us will be able to refer to the “wild goose” of the early Celtic Christians as the Forgotten God. And that's what He is – we know about God the Father and we talk about Jesus a lot, but the Holy Spirit gets a distant third billing. Alister McGrath says it this way: “The Holy Spirit has long been the Cinderella of the Trinity. The other two sisters may have gone to the theological ball; the Holy Spirit got left behind every time.” The Holy Spirit has been neglected and left at home –and this is tragic. What we know about the Spirit is confusing and mysterious, hard to explain and scattered. What's so crazy is that we are people who are committed to God and are doing our best to live our lives like Jesus but we know so little about the Holy Spirit – the third member of the Trinity that we worship. This needs to change, especially because the Bible tells us that followers of Jesus are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 tells us: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (NIV).

This is just one instance where the Bible makes it clear that the Spirit dwells in us – we are the Spirit's temple, the Holy Spirit makes His home in our bodies. How incredible is this? When people talk about asking Jesus into their heart this is the reality they are referring to – that those who have decided to follow Jesus have God, Jesus, or really the Holy Spirit living in them – but we don't really think about it. Our lives aren't radically different because of this truth. We have neglected this reality.

Think about this for a moment. If the followers of Jesus are the Holy Spirit's dwelling place wouldn't you expect their lives to look radically different? Imagine one of your good friend's, who is an average musician, comes to you and tells you they have experienced an incredible change in their lives – they have met God and he has come to live inside of them to enable them to be a musician of supernatural ability. Wouldn't you expect this formerly mediocre musician – if what they were saying was true – to be radically better? Their songwriting, their execution, the soul of their music should have dramatically improved. If you didn't see that change wouldn't you question either the sanity of your friend or the God who empowered her? This is what the world sees when they look at us. Christians tell them that their life has been changed, that they've encountered God, that they've decided to follow Jesus and the Bible says that the Holy Spirit now lives in them. It's natural to expect their lives to look different than they did before. And when they don't change very much people

naturally question us, our faith and worst of all, our great God. This is partially due to the tragic neglect of the Holy Spirit.

If you feel like living the Christian life is a struggle, if sin dominates your life, if it's hard to serve and give love to others, if you're not sure you have anything worthwhile to offer the people around you, if you long for guidance in your life and clarity when you read the Bible, if you aren't sure your life actually looks different than people who don't know God, you need to learn the truths about the Holy Spirit. If we want more – if we want to experience the spiritual in deeper, transforming ways, if we want to know God, if we want to understand what it means for God to dwell in us we desperately need to learn about the Holy Spirit. We need to chase the “wild goose” that is mysterious and exciting and full of life so that the Holy Spirit will no longer be the forgotten God.

So let's begin this exploration together with the words of Jesus.

In the 12th and 13th chapters of the Gospel of John, Jesus prepares his disciples for his upcoming death. He explains to them what is going to happen and comforts them that this is good. His sacrifice and death has always been the plan but it isn't the end of the story. He will rise from the dead after three days and they will know he is exactly who he claims to be – God in the flesh. He tells them that he will go and prepare a place for them in Heaven and that once he leaves his followers will do even greater things than he has done. Then he tells them about the Holy Spirit:

John 14:16-17 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. ¹⁷ He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. (NLT)

He continues to talk about the Spirit just a few verses later:

John 14:26-27 ²⁶ But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative -- that is, the Holy Spirit -- he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. ²⁷ "I am leaving you with a gift -- peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. (NLT)

In these verses Jesus assures his disciples that while he is going to leave them, the Father is going to send them another Advocate – a counselor who will never leave them - The Holy Spirit - who is with them now but will be in them at a later date. This is not just saying that a representative of God would come or that Jesus would send a friend to help the disciples out. The Greek word *another* (*allos*) here means another that is just like the first – not another that is different in some way but another that is exactly like Jesus. Jesus is telling his disciples that the Holy Spirit is just like him.

There are two really obvious things that I want to make clear here. First, the Holy Spirit is a person. Some people aren't sure how to refer to the Holy Spirit – him, her, it? The Spirit is definitively not an it.

He is not some spiritual force or magical power you can invoke, he is a person. He is described as a person (Acts 10:19-21, Eph 4:30, Matt. 12:31) and performs personal acts like guiding (Rom 8:14; Acts 16:6-11), teaching (John 14:26), and convicting (John 16:7-8). The Bible tells us the Holy Spirit has a will (1 Cor. 12:11), intellect (Rom. 8:27), emotions (Eph. 4:30) and power (Luke 4:14). The Holy Spirit is a person and should be thought of as a person in the same way that we think of God the Father and Jesus as persons.

This concept, as well as the relational aspect of the Spirit, is captured well in the book The Shack. Let me set the stage for you: When MacKenzie Phillips takes his children camping, his youngest daughter is abducted. Evidence that she may have been murdered is found in an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Four years later, in this midst of his grief, Mack receives a suspicious note, apparently from God, inviting him back to that shack for a weekend. When Mack arrives at the shack he meets God the Father, an elderly black woman; God the Son, a middle eastern man named Jesus and God the Spirit, a petite Asian woman. Mack struggles to adjust to this seemingly impossible reality but slowly begins to come to terms with his great sadness and God as well. In this scene he is in a canoe talking to the Spirit.

SHACK READING #1

The Spirit is a person who is drawing us away from rules and laws and into a relationship with the living answer who can change us from the inside out. Some people ask, which pronoun should I use to refer to the Spirit? In The Shack the author uses a female pronoun and this is not a bad choice as the term for spirit in Hebrew and Aramaic is female. In the verses I read earlier from John, Jesus uses a male pronoun to refer to the Spirit so that's what I default to, but God the Father and the Holy Spirit are spiritual beings, not human beings, and as such they don't have gender in the sense that we think about it. The Bible tells us that men and women together reflect God in his fullness – so while we use male pronouns to refer to the Father and the Spirit it is not indicating male superiority or gender.

The second really obvious thing that I want to point out is that the Holy Spirit is God. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was just like Him. Jesus claimed equality with God the Father and was himself God and the Spirit is also God. When Jesus gives his followers their mission in the world he tells them to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). 2 Corinthians 3:17 says it this way: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” I know that this is confusing so let me try and explain this concept that is called the Godhead or the Trinity. The Bible teaches that God is one but is three distinct persons – The Father, the Son and the Spirit – all at the same time. People have tried a multitude of ways to describe the Trinity so I'd like to offer a few ways that might help you wrap your mind around this Biblical truth.

Some people describe the Holy Spirit like water. Water is one in essence and chemical makeup but in certain situations is different. It can be a solid, a liquid and a gas. It's all still H₂O but can be ice, water or steam. Another metaphor is that of an egg. There's the shell, the egg white and the yolk. One egg,

three parts, but one essence. Or maybe a 3 leaf clover – it has 3 leaves but one stalk. The problem is these are all just metaphors. There is nothing in our human experience that can accurately describe or capture the staggering beauty and complexity of our triune God. The Father, Son and Spirit are all distinct persons but are all one God. He is a being outside of our existence and outside of our ability to comprehend.

Author Brain McLaren talked about the Trinity in his book “The Story We Find Ourselves In” in a way that I found helpful when I read it. Imagine a father with a little baby, helping him stand. A little ways away mom beckons to her child to cross the room and join her. And beside the little baby is big sister who is ready to help the baby cross the room. So dad helps the baby stand and then releases him. Mom calls and invites and beckons her son to cross the room to her and big sister walks beside the baby as he makes his way to mom. He isn’t trying to walk but to accept the invitation of his mother from across the room – to get to her and revel in her presence. God is like dad, mom and big sister and we are the baby who is upheld and released into the future by God, who walks beside us as we cross the room into the future God is calling us into. While this captures a little more of the beauty of the Trinity the book the Shack describes the relational aspect of the trinity as well. In this scene Mack is talking with God the Father – who in the book is an elderly black woman.

SHACK READING #2

The trinity is an incredible picture of love and community all in one being. We are people who were made for love, for relationship, just like the God who made us. While these metaphors or pictures can be helpful let’s not think that it encapsulates God entirely. This is one of the mysterious, mystical aspects of faith - that God is Father, Son and Spirit - and it should draw us to worship our incredible God. A God who has revealed himself to us so that we can understand all that we need to know to have a restored relationship with him through Jesus sacrifice and become the people he created us to be through the work of the Spirit.

The verse from Isaiah that is often read at Christmastime captures this concept of the trinity beautifully:

Isaiah 9:6 ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

In this verse we see names for the Spirit (Wonderful Counselor), the Father (Mighty God and Everlasting Father) and Jesus (Prince of Peace) all in a section foretelling the birth of Jesus. God has come down and he is 3 in 1.

So while the fact that the Spirit is a person and is in fact God is obvious and nothing new to many of us, sometimes we miss the obvious. We don’t live in light of the truth. For instance, have you ever really thought about the idea of having “another” Advocate that is “just like” Jesus? Or pondered the

truth that the Spirit is in us? Imagine what it would be like to have Jesus with you all the time, encouraging you and showing you love and giving you personal counsel that is perfect truth. We could live the life we are invited into so much easier with him right there with us. He could help guide and enable us as we will our lives...if only he was by our side...But Jesus has told us the Spirit is just like him and the Bible tells us that the Spirit dwells in us. We already have Him in our lives but we rarely live like it. We have stopped our ears and hardened our hearts and we live our life on our own strength instead of listening to and relying on the Holy Spirit.

In John 16:7 Jesus tells his disciples "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." (NIV) Jesus says it's better for him to leave so that we will all receive the Spirit. Jesus taught and ministered for 3 1/2 years but he assures his disciples that it'll be better for them once he is gone. They may not have Jesus in the flesh but they will have the Spirit in them – each of them, no matter where they are, close or far apart and they will be able to multiply the ministry that he started across the globe – which is exactly what happened. But I think that many of us, if we are honest, would choose a physical Jesus over an invisible Spirit – and that's the problem. We don't believe the words of Christ and our lives don't reflect this truth.

This is more than just information that we need to learn, this should impact our everyday life. The truth is, most of us are champions at living our lives in our own strength. The gifts and natural abilities and intelligence that we have make it possible for many of us to achieve some success in our world, but we lack the power to find freedom from sin, to live the Christian life, or to be truly, supernaturally different. This is all the work of the Spirit. God doesn't want us to live our lives independently of Him. He wants to work through us in ways that the world around us will look at our lives and declare "God is real". We all need more of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

This is one of the reasons that after his death and resurrection Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit. He was leaving them but the Spirit was going to come to them and they should wait for that empowering. Here's how Acts records it:

³ During the forty days after his crucifixion, [Jesus] appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God. ⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere -- in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:3-5, 8 NLT)

So the apostles believed Jesus. Just after this promise of the Spirit and the power they would receive, Jesus ascended to Heaven but the apostles stayed in Jerusalem and waited. Then on the day of

Pentecost, which at the time was a part of the Jewish feast that commemorates God giving Moses the Ten Commandments, the disciples received the Holy Spirit:

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. ² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. (Acts 2:1-4 NLT)

In a way that had never been seen before, and must have been a shock to the disciples, the Holy Spirit came upon each of them and filled them. There was no doubt to the people who were around that something crazy was happening. Many of the witnesses thought that the disciples were drunk but Peter stood up and addressed the crowd explaining Jesus life, death and resurrection as well as the amazing promise that anyone who believed in Jesus would not only receive eternal life but the Holy Spirit that had just been poured out on the disciples as well. Throughout the book of Acts we see a new development in Christian history. The early community of Jesus followers were the first generation in history to have the Holy Spirit living in them. In Acts we read about an outpouring of God's power that made it clear to all that something supernatural was going on. Many people read the accounts and focus on the miraculous but what was miraculous both then and now is the power of the Spirit to transform people, to move them from death to life when they believe in Jesus, to live as he did, to progressively find more and more freedom from sin and the gifts that the Spirit gives to each of us as the rest of the new Testament teaches.

This is the type of miraculous life the Bible says we can live but we often don't think we need the Holy Spirit that much or we just ignore him. We don't really expect the Holy Spirit to act – we don't really believe that what the Bible tells us about living in step with the Spirit is possible and we default to living on our own strength. And we wonder why we so easily burn out or stall in our spiritual life. With this reality it is not surprising that it's hard to tell the difference between people who believe in Jesus and those who don't.

We aren't made to live ordinary lives that are explainable by our natural gifts and talents – we are invited into the possibility of living supernaturally because of the Holy Spirit in us so that the world will have no doubt that God is real, that Jesus is risen and that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We should be living in a way that can only be explained by the Holy Spirit – both as individuals and as a community.

This is one of the main areas of struggle in my spiritual life. I find it far too easy to just rely on myself – on the natural gifts and abilities that God has blessed me with – instead of relying on my Creator. The longer I live on my own strength the more tired, and the less effective I am. My ability to extend grace and mercy to others evaporates and I find myself being selfish and judgmental instead of loving. For some reason it seems easy to just do it myself – but the truth is it isn't easier at all – I just feel like I'm

in control – and control is a very hard thing to let go of. When I live this way I am just like everyone else and my life is dry and empty.

Jesus talked about this very issue in John 7

"Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. By this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive...' 7:37-39 (NIV)

When was the last time you felt like rivers of living water were flowing out of you? This incredible promise is available to us all if we accept the gift and truth. I need to embrace this truth and so do you. In Galatians Paul describes what our lives should look like if we are truly walking in the Spirit:

Galatians 5:22-23 ²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. (NIV)

Now normally we look at this list and evaluate where we are at on these things. How is my self-control? Do I feel at peace? Am I patient most of the time? And then we decide to be better – to do better. And we try and try and try and through willpower we may improve a small amount, but the truth is we don't really get that much better – certainly not supernaturally better. We can think of many people, even people who aren't Christians, who are far better than us in all of these areas. So we become a little disillusioned with ourselves and the Bible and God and we aren't sure what to do. Our problem is that we are living a lot more like the prophets of Baal than we are Elijah – the prophet of God. Didn't see that coming did you?

In 1 Kings 18 there is a story of a showdown between Elijah, the one true prophet of God in his generation, and the 100s of prophets of the false Canaanite God, Baal. The Israelites weren't being faithful to God and were often worshipping Baal instead. So, despite the danger, Elijah set up a trial. Whichever God could light fire to a sacrifice would prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was real. Naturally, he let the prophets of Baal go first. So the 450 prophets of Baal got their sacrifice ready and began to call on their God to consume it with fire. This is what the text says:

1 Kings 18:26-29 ²⁶ So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made. ²⁷ About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself.¹ Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!" ²⁸ So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. ²⁹

They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response. (NLT)

Then came Elijah's turn. Elijah wanted to make sure it was clear that he wasn't performing some trick or cheating in any way so he even drenched the sacrifice in water so that it was impossible for a mere human to light the sacrifice on fire. Then he prayed:

1 Kings 18:36-39 "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. ³⁷ O LORD, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself." ³⁸ Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The LORD -- he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!"

The Bible invites us to live a life like Elijah – a life that when the people see God work in our lives they respond – “The LORD – he is God!” Now before you are tempted to dismiss Elijah as some incredible example of faith that we can never aspire to let me read you James 5:17 “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently.” James is telling us that this prophet of God – this man who lived a supernatural life was just like us – but what he did that many of us fail to do is pray fervently. He relied on God's strength and not his own. This is how we need to live our lives. This is how we live in step with the Spirit that dwells in us.

Often times in our lives when we face challenges and circumstances that are overwhelming, we deal with them in exactly the same way everyone else does. We worry, and strive and grieve no differently than people who don't have the Spirit of God in them. Far too often we look a lot more like the prophets of Baal, running around in a frenzy trying to fix our problems on our own and don't take time to pray to the One that can take care of the problems we face and is eagerly awaiting a conversation with us.

We simply can't do this on our own – we have no ability to live the supernatural life that the Bible says is possible for us apart from God. If you look at the traits that should be displayed in someone who is filled with the Spirit we shouldn't be discouraged, we shouldn't set new goals or new plans in motion to get there by ourselves, we can simply turn to God in prayer and ask Him to help us display the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit is a work of the Spirit – not of our own striving and we need to depend on Him for them.

And while we pray for this in our lives let me encourage you to do one other thing: spend more time with the One that you want to be like. I know that when I spend more time with people who love and challenge me to become the man God has made me to be, I find myself growing to be more and more like them. We all naturally become similar to the people we spend the most time with. Married

couples become more similar, friends use the same phrases, siblings have the same mannerisms. For us to become more like Jesus we need to spend time with him – in prayer and in studying the Bible, which is His communication with us. We need to find ways to draw near to Him and when we do so we are promised that He will draw near to us. While our own efforts will bear little fruit, Jesus tells his disciples in John 15 that when they are connected to Him they will bear much fruit – fruit that will last. We need to depend on God more and more – both in prayer and in relationship

Pastor and author Francis Chan encourages all of us with this:

“If you have not known and experienced God in ways you cannot deny, I would suggest that you are not living in a needy and dependent way. God delights to show up when His children call on His name and when they are trusting fully in Him to come through, whether that is in relationship, in battling sin, in strength to make sacrifices, or in endurance to be faithful in daily life. Are you living this way? Or are you surviving only by your own strength, by your own wits?”

“No matter where you live and what your days look like, you have the choice each day to depend on yourself, to live safely, and to try to control your life. Or you can live as you were created to live-as a temple of the Holy Spirit of God, as a person dependent on Him, desperate for God the Spirit to show up and make a difference. When you begin living a life characterized by walking with the Spirit, that is when people will begin to look not to you but to our Father in heaven and give Him the praise.”

“May we not merely gain knowledge. Instead, as we learn, may we grow and confess and change more into the people we’ve been created to be by the power of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us. ‘For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17).

Let’s pray

*“The Forgotten God” by Francis Chan was significant in the preparation of this message.