

[Come Holy Spirit]

Speakers in the audio file: Tim Mackie

[EMSB Theme Intro]

Hey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, "Exploring My Strange Bible." I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last 20 years' worth of lectures and sermons where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you, too. I also helped start this thing called BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at [bibleproject.com](http://bibleproject.com). With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[EMSB Theme fades out]

I'm really excited about sharing because when Tyler asked me to share, he didn't tell me what to talk about. And I really wanted to experiment and grow in the practice of learning to listen to God. And so I try—I'm not trying to sound pious—what I'm telling you is that I'm like a "baby Christian" in many ways, which is: I just put before God for a long season of months, so, just like, "What should I say? There's a lot of things that I could say that I think are interesting, but is there something I'm supposed to say? And if so, could you let me know what that is?"

And so I think—I won't talk about the long process of how it got there, but I think—and maybe more importantly than "I think," I *feel* what I want to share is something that I'm supposed to say, and it's not something I would have thought to say at the beginning of a process like that.

So what I feel like I'm supposed to say is something about a three-word phrase we use constantly in the life, culture, and liturgy of our church community. And I was counting last night—it's the number one, three-word phrase used last night, aside from Tom's five-word phrase—a working model of new creation, which came in "silver;" it was a hot second.

But this three-word phrase—it definitely takes number one—spot number one. And certainly today—"God's homecoming," which was Tom's two-word phrase—he repeated that a lot—but this three-word phrase, maybe you're already kind of intuiting what it is—has been the number-one "runway winner," and that phrase is, "Come, Holy Spirit."

My friends, what on earth do we think that we mean when we pray, "Come, Holy Spirit"? It's the number one thing that we have been saying together as we've been gathering over the last almost twenty-four hours. Yeah? And you know what's really interesting is: this is, actually, a conversation that I've had—spontaneously, independently—not me initiating it, but with many of

you in our church community. Like, it's just come up at some point. Like, the thing that we say all the time when we're together? What do we actually mean when we say that?

And I'm honestly surprised at the conversation we end up having. And it just occurred to me that I think we should talk about it a little bit more, like, make it a point of focus. And sometimes it is clarified: what it is we *don't* mean and what it is that we *do* mean—that's happened before. But I just felt like there's really something here that's powerful.

And as I spent a few months, now, praying and thinking about what it is that I'm supposed to say about that three-word phrase, I have been surprised [by] the layers of depth and meaning in this three-word phrase. So that's what I want to talk about. It's pretty simple, actually. You guys with me? You ready to rock?

Now knowing me, it's going to be a lot of Bible—so you're not surprised, probably, about that one there. But first: so I think the first thing to say about this three-word phrase, "Come, Holy Spirit," the first thing that I want to say is that we actually don't mean what we're saying when we say that three-word phrase. [Laughing] And if you do think you mean what those words are saying, then I'm gently going to try [to] encourage you that you actually don't *want* to mean what you think that you're saying. [Laughing] And so here's what I mean when I say that.

One of the most incredible things that has happened to me and my family over the last six months is something I've never experienced before, and that's: we invited a dog into our family. And I'm not going to show you a picture because I felt that would be self-indulgent to force that upon you all.

But if I did, he would have the effect on you that he has on every human being that he meets when we're on a walk around our neighborhood—which is people "melt" and they smile, and they can't believe the six pounds of fluffy, just . . . love and snuggle. And Pippin is his name, and we—I don't know what else to say.

I'm not trying to convince you, though you might think that I am—and you might be convinced in a minute from now about inviting a dog into your life—but I've never bonded with an animal before. I have bonded with friends. I've bonded, foremost, with my wife, Jessica, over twenty-five years this year. [Audience applause]

And I've bonded with my kids. But I've never bonded with an animal. And so I don't really know how to talk about it, because it's not something that I think about. It's something that I feel—in this area I'm growing in my life, in general. See the theme?

And when I'm out with this little animal, and we're playing, and he just loves to snuggle constantly. He's always happy to see you. It's amazing. [Laughing] I don't know any human, actually, that treats me this way. He's always happy—like, body quivering with excitement to see you every time. Perpetually wants to kiss you, snuggle with you, and be in your lap. It's great. So I love this little creature.

And so one of the most regular things when we're outside, though, that I say to little Pippin—when we're out, like, playing in the backyard and it's time to come inside—you know what . . . what do I say? I say, "*Come*. Come, Pippin." Like, that's the thing that I say.

And so it just kind of struck me as I was praying one morning about the phrase, "Come Holy Spirit." I was like, "Wow, that's so wild. That like—just, the thing that I say to the Spirit, and it's

the thing that I say to my dog. It's just, kind of like, it's kind of weird. But what does it mean? What does it mean? What does it all mean?"

So I'm pretty sure that I don't—what I *don't* mean when I'm saying, "Come, Holy Spirit," is what I *do* mean when I say it to my dog. Namely, that my dog's not here next to me, and I need him to be next to me because he's not here. He's, like, over by the tree, and it's time to go inside now. And so I say, "Come, Pippin." And the whole basis of that interaction between he and I is based on the fact that he's *not* here next to me. Are you with me? This is the normal meaning of the words when we say "Come, Pippin."

"Hey, could you come over to our house tonight and let's, like, play games and have dinner?" And that's because you're *not* here, and I would like for you to be here. That's the normal meaning of when we use the word "come." Are you with me?

So do you see where I'm going here? When we say "Come, Holy Spirit," the number one thing that we certainly do *not* mean is that the Holy Spirit isn't already here. Are you with me? And so it's actually kind of a *weird* thing to say, if you stop and think about it. Because what we are saying means that the Holy Spirit isn't here, but that is certainly the one thing that we do not mean—but it's the number one thing that we say. Are you with me? So that's just kind of interesting.

Now here's the thing: I'm kind of problematizing the whole thing—and where I'm going to lead us today—I think it's a beautiful thing and I love how much we say it. I say it a lot more in my life, and I want you to begin saying it a lot more in your life—but I just wanted to make clear from the very beginning what you certainly don't mean or shouldn't mean when you say, "Come, Holy Spirit." Are you with me?

Okay, so that leads to the interesting question: what is it that we do mean when we pray, "Come — come, Holy Spirit"? And so I think if what we *don't* mean is that the Spirit isn't already here, what is it that we *do* mean?

So one of the other three-part things that we say a lot in our church community is, kind of like, one of our "guiding lights," or to use a different metaphor, it's our "true north on our compass." And it's a three-step phrase that we use to talk about who we are and what we're doing as a community. Our goal as a community is to be *with*, so that we can *become like Jesus*, so that we can *do what he did in the world*.

So part of becoming like Jesus—it's a whole life thing. One thing that it involves—not the whole package—but one core piece of what that involves is learning to share Jesus's view of reality as we see it expressed in his words and his teachings and his behavior.

And a key part of how Jesus's view of reality was shaped was by being immersed in the Scriptures of Israel—what we call the "Old Testament" or the "Hebrew Scriptures." And it was shaped by his relationships, and it was shaped by his community. But Jesus grew up in a community that's really hard for us to comprehend—just how immersed and saturated they were in the stories and the poetry and in the language and the worldview of Scripture.

And Jesus, actually, had a short list of [the] most influential books from the Hebrew Scriptures that shaped his imagination. And you know this by just counting, like, which books of the Bible—his Bible—does he, like, quote from the most and use language from the most? And it's a pretty short list.

Do you guys know what's number one? The book of Psalms. Do you guys know what's number two? [in an exaggerated British accent] The book of *Isaiah*—as Tom would say, *Isaiah*. [Audience laughing] So the silver for Isaiah—Tyler, that's pretty good. And then coming in bronze—and whatever—[are] Deuteronomy and Genesis. Yeah? So he's got the whole—he's got the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms. The Psalms are number one if you just do, like, a count.

And so one of the most helpful practices to begin to see reality the way that Jesus did is to immerse ourselves in the scroll of the Psalms—and to pray and meditate our way through them many, many times over the course of a lifetime. And as you do that, you actually begin to be able to make sense of so much of what Jesus said and did.

And so if you were in that habit, like Jesus was, and we were to ask Jesus, "What would you mean when you use the phrase, 'Come, Holy Spirit,'" I can't predict, but I'm pretty sure that he would turn our attention to the poem that Tyler read for us that we call "Psalm 139," yeah?

So, just, real quick refresher—here it is in front of you again. "Where can I go from you"—oh, yeah, real quick Hebrew lesson here that Tom already gave. I don't have to give it. I just got three minutes back right there. "Where can I go from your *ruakh*?"—yeah—"your *ruakh*," right? *Breath, wind, presence*: the invisible, real, energizing presence of God. It's the same thing animating the trees outside if we were to go outside. And it's the same thing that's hovering, invisibly, in and among us all that we are all inhaling every five to ten seconds. That's God's *ruakh*.

"And where can I go from your *ruakh*?" Nowhere. And there's nowhere that you can go. "Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the skies, guess what? There you are. If I make my bed in the deepest part of the earth, guess what? There you are. Hello." [acknowledging production team] Thanks, Felix. "If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there, your *hand* will be right there guiding me, and your right hand will hold me fast."

It's a very simple point: there is *nowhere* that you can ever go or be, apparently, in God's good world, where the Spirit is not. Are you with me? There's *nowhere* that you can ever go or *be* where the Spirit is not. So whatever I mean by the phrase, "Come, Holy Spirit," I certainly do not mean that the Spirit is not already here. It's a figure of speech. It's an agreed-upon metaphor because the reality is [that] if I share Jesus's view of reality, there actually isn't *anywhere* that I can go.

But that raises the more interesting question, if you're an inquiring mind, which is, "Okay, so that's cool to say, 'The Psalm says that,' but what does that actually mean? *How* is God's *ruakh* present everywhere?" And if you pore through the Psalms, you'll find, actually, many different angles of a way to respond to that question.

One angle is given by a beautiful poem that we call "Psalm 33," and I'm just going to do what I recommend people never do, which is just take one part of Scripture out of context and put it in front of you, but that's what I'm going to do. So "By the word of Yahweh, the skies were made; by the *ruakh* of his mouth, all of their inhabitants." Are you with me? Tracking?

So notice how the parallel design of those two poetic lines—so much so that there actually is no action in the second line because you're just supposed to imply the action made of the first line

*into* the second line. You with me? It's very common in biblical poetry. The lines are designed in parallel to each other.

And so notice that what we're meditating on—what the poet's guiding us to meditate on—is creation, yeah? Like the origin of all things. And the origin of all things is traced to *Yahweh*, like “the one who is.” That's what the name means: *Yahweh*, “the one who is—the one who is above and beyond and transcendent and above all.” But yet, in generous love, has—from the outpouring generosity of God's own infinite being—gone out into the nothingness, the raw potential of nothingness, to make something that is *not* God, and to hold it in precious existence before God.

And the main images or words that the biblical authors use when they want to talk about that “God going out from God,” to make and sustain what is *not* God, are “word” and “spirit,” yeah—did you see them right there?

And then notice what “word” is coordinated with: word is coordinated with “skies.” You see that? So when we're talking about skies, we're talking about the “blue dome” up there. Like, the “blue roof” that we rarely see here in Portland. Some of you came from really sunny, beautiful places . . . to Portland—in February. [Laughing] You could have watched online. I'm just saying. [Audience laughing] It's a lot warmer, probably, where you are.

Anyway, the whole point is that wherever you are, you would be under that blue roof too, just like we are here. It's just blocked most of the time in February. But the point is that it's about the word. The word speaks to the “mind” and the “purpose” and the “plan” of God that orders things: the structure of reality. And so the word of God is associated with one of the most important structures in the cosmos, which is the big, blue roof up there.

But then notice the second line of the poem, which attributes all of the inhabitants under that blue roof to—not the word—but to the *ruakh*, to the Spirit of God. Now here's one thing about all of the inhabitants under the blue roof, is that we move around, yeah? Like: we're creatures. We move around. And so it's precisely the “spirit” that is associated with the animated, energized, living creatures under the blue roof that are all generated by God's Spirit, yeah?

“By the word of *Yahweh*, the skies were made, and by the *ruakh* of his mouth all of their inhabitants.” So one way to think about why or how it is that God's *ruakh* is present in all of creation—and that there is *nowhere* the Spirit is not—is because there is no *when* in which the Spirit is not. Are you with me? The fact that there is anything at all is because of God's Spirit. So you can't go *anywhere*, and you actually can't go to any *when*, in which the Spirit—are you with me?

So now there's, like, multiple ways in which the Spirit is already here, and which, kind of, makes it a weird thing—I think we should still say it—which is “Come, Holy Spirit,” because the Spirit is *everywhere*, and the Spirit is every *when*. Are you with me?

And it gets even more interesting because you can turn to another poem that's meditating on creation in the book of Psalms. And this one Tom already alluded to a little bit earlier: Psalm 104. Yeah—anybody's favorite? It's a remarkable poem. And the section I want to show you is right after the poet has spent a number of lines meditating on the nesting and feeding patterns of storks and wild donkeys. [Laughing] But also lions and some badgers or something. It's really cool.

But after meditating on all those creatures, the poet goes here—it's really neat—the poet says, “All of your creatures are waiting for you to give them their food at the proper time. You give it to them; they gather it. You open their hand; they're filled with what is good. You hide your face, and they're terrified. You take away their breath; they die and return to the dust. You send forth your *ruakh*; they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.”

There's much to meditate on here, friends—yes? More than I have—we've just spent a whole session meditating on that paragraph right there. But notice how every single living creature, under the blue roof, is said to be in a personal, intimate relationship with the creator. Do you see that?

And do you see how the giving and taking of *ruakh* is a personal interaction between God and every living creature? Do you see that in the poem, too? And what's so interesting, actually, is the word used right there—those two words used right there in the last line: “creation” and “renewing.”

Creation tends to be something that, in modern Christian vocabulary, and in Christian apologetics, and so on, we think of as the event that happened, like, “way back when,” right—at the origin of all things? And do you see that that's not how this poet is using the word create? Do you see that? So the word create actually refers to my little puppy, Pippin—when he was born six months ago on August third. And I wasn't there—I wasn't there—but we got videos of him, like, right after he was born—just a little, tiny creature.

And what I'm invited to see is that every new birth and cycle of generations of every species—the first breath that they take is a personal, intimate kiss of *Yahweh*. Are you with me? It's God's *ruakh*.

Now it's also the case that creatures here, under the sun and outside of Eden—we'll talk about that a little bit more in a minute—outside of Eden, that once we've fulfilled the time and used our hardware to the extent that it can be used, then we have to give back that *ruakh* to God. And God takes it, and we return to the ground from which we came.

But that giving and taking of *ruakh* is a firsthand, intimate experience in every single life cycle and generational cycle of every species on the planet. Which means this: that there has *never* been a moment in the history of reality in which there hasn't been creation happening. Do you see that? I'm pretty sure *everywhere* on the face of the planet right now, there is a creature dying—like it just happened. It just happened again. It just happened again. Are you with me? Like, somebody could just repeat that now.

And then I could flip it over, and I could say there was a creature that just took its first breath—oh yeah. I just—I met a crew that's here from Victoria, British Columbia. And I met a little—Shepherd. Shepherd—ten months. [Calling into audience] *Where are you? Where are you?* Whoa, nosebleed. Nosebleed seats. Yeah, little Shepherd. Yeah, Shepherd. Okay, yeah—so Michaela, you labored. [Laughing] You labored to bring Shepherd into the world.

And you remember, because it was just like weeks ago—you watched him take his *first* breath, yeah? And this is so beautiful. Such a beautiful view of reality—that when you witness that moment, you were watching the creator give your son a gift. It's so remarkable. And then, like, every single breath that he's taken ever since then is just this kiss of God to your precious son—are you with me? Like, this is such a beautiful way to exist in the world.

And this is the way Jesus saw the world so clearly. Like, what else would inspire somebody to say like, “Do you know, every time a sparrow falls to the ground, my dad *knows* everything about it?” That’s something that Jesus said, didn’t he? Like that’s somebody whose imagination has been *totally* shaped by the poetry of Psalm 139:33 and 104. How you guys doing?

So not only is there *nowhere* in which the *Spirit* is not, there is no *when* in which the *Spirit* is not. There is no *what* in which the *Spirit* is not, and there is no *who* in which the *Spirit* is not. And this goes—all the way back for slides. I’m actually going to skip a slide and go right to Genesis 2 right now, and, just, it’s already been alluded to. [Laughing] Thanks, Tom—saved me another minute.

Genesis 2, verse 7, “When Yahweh God formed the human of dust from the ground, he exhaled into his nostrils the breath of life”—that’s not the word *ruakh*. It’s the closest synonym in Hebrew: *nephesh khayyah*, but it means essentially the same thing—“and the human became a living being.” *Nephesh khayyah*, a living being.

There is *nowhere*, there is no *when*, there is no *what*, and there is no *who* in which the Spirit is not—are you with me? This is what it means, I think, to become like Jesus in how we see reality. And so if all of that is the case, then what on earth do we mean when we say, “Come, Holy Spirit”—are you with me? I’m just trying to set it out as clearly as I can—put a logical puzzle in front of you.

Because one thing that we certainly don’t mean is that the Spirit is no *when*, because now is a *when*, yeah? And the Spirit is in no *who*, because I’m a *who*. And as I say the words, “Come, Holy Spirit,” I’m exhaling breath that I didn’t manufacture for myself, and I sure didn’t get it. Where did I get it from? I got it from, like, out here. [Gestures to atmosphere]

And what’s crazy is: where are you getting your breath from right now? Like you’re getting it from out here. In other words, we’re all sharing the same breath. [Laughing] Hopefully we’re not sharing a bunch of other things too as we share the same breath. But we’re sharing the same breath. And we could, like, all go walk outside the doors right now, and we would look at the trees blowing, animating, and dancing in the wind. And it’s very intuitive to say, “Whoa, the same stuff that I’m, like, inhaling and you’re inhaling—it’s keeping you alive, [it’s] making that tree move.” Yeah?

And then you look up at the blue roof, and you see the white, puffy things up there, and those are all moving around, and you’re like, “Dude, there is no *where*, and there is no *when*, and there is no *what*, and there is no *who* in which the Spirit is not”—are you with me? Have I made my point?

Okay, great. All right, that’s step one. Step one was demolition, all right? [Laughing] So demolition. So if that’s the case, should we say this three-word phrase? I think that we should. I think it’s a beautiful phrase. And like Jesus, the Riddler, who was constantly meaning all kinds of things that were deeper and above and beyond what the surface-level meaning of his words are—yes? Does anyone ever experience this when you’re reading the teachings of Jesus? You’re like, “I have no clue what he meant, but I can see what he’s saying,” yeah? No one said—am I alone here? I’m not alone here. Okay.

So it makes sense to me that we would pray a riddle, as it were: “Come, Holy Spirit.” Because at least one layer of what I think what we *actually* mean when we say, “Come, Holy Spirit,” is

actually not about the Holy Spirit coming anywhere. It's about *us* coming somewhere. And you could say it's, like, about us coming to our senses. It's about us coming into contact with reality. And what reality is—there has never been a *moment* of my existence in which the Spirit is not.

In fact, every moment and every molecule of my existence both exist and have been sustained in the loving presence and Spirit of God—every moment. And even the words that I say when I say “Come, Holy Spirit” are really about *me* coming into contact with reality, to see past the veil that Tom was talking about.

And so the first thing, at least that I think that we mean, is “Holy Spirit, would you please give us an increased awareness of your presence”? This is point number one for the slides: an increased awareness of your presence in every single part of my life. Are you with me? That's at least one layer of what we mean.

But as I sat and pondered on it more, I realized, like, “But I mean a lot more than that when I say those words.” And I think you should mean a lot more than that too. What is that “more”?

So here's what's—something that's interesting. There's this enduring pattern throughout Scripture—especially in the narratives of Scripture—where you can watch a biblical character, in whatever story you're reading, and there'll be a moment where this person says or does something. And the people around them—the way they respond is really disproportionate to the thing that the person said or did, because the people around them—when that person said or did that thing—what the people around them experienced was *God* saying or doing that thing. Do you know what I'm talking about? This happens a lot in the Bible.

And what's very interesting is: one of the most common words that, somewhere, comes into play in those stories is the “Spirit of God.” The first person that you could say is an example—or a narrative of a Spirit-filled human being is—you start from page one of the Bible; it doesn't come until, like, in the chapter of the forties—it's a Hebrew slave.

There's this really powerful guy: the king of Egypt; he's called the Pharaoh. And he's been having these nightmares about cannibalistic cows that, like, devour, like, really healthy cows. And he wakes up freaked-out every morning, and no one can help him, you know, like, psychoanalyze his nightmares.

And so . . . long story—but this Hebrew slave, named “Joseph,” ends up in front of this Egyptian king. And not only is he able to discern, under the empowerment of God's presence, the meaning of this nightmare that the king is having, but then also, it occurs to Joseph, that something really terrible is about to happen, and that the Pharaoh should probably adopt the following economic policy-package [Laughing] that Joseph puts in front of the king—which is essentially what he does.

And the king is both blown away by the fact that, like, this kid just “read his mail”—like just, like, understood the dream and told him what it means. But then, he's also *really* impressed with the policy proposal that Joseph just put in front of him. And what the king says is this—this is in Genesis, chapter 41. What he says is . . . [Referring to slides] waiting for it . . . there it is: “So Pharaoh asked, ‘Can we find anybody like this man, Joseph, one in whom is the *ruakh* of God,’” he says.

So interesting that the word that the king of Egypt chooses, the moment that he hears this Hebrew slave talk, he hears *God* talk—in and through this brilliant policy idea that this Hebrew

slave—are you with me? This is really fascinating. And just as a little side note, may God have mercy on our world: we need so many Spirit-inspired economic policy nerds right now, amen? So let's just: "Come, Holy Spirit." [Audience laughing]

So here's what's very interesting is that: this is the first example of a Spirit-filled person, and this is what it does—he's, like, an economic policy nerd. The second example of a Spirit-filled person—where people encounter God when this person does their thing—is not an economic policy nerd; it's an artist. A guy whose name is "in the shadow of God," or, we know him as Bezalel, which in Hebrew means "in the shadow of God."

And Tom was talking about it last night: he's this artist who—[referring to visuals] let's get the passage up on the screen. This artist who is said to be—he's Bezalel, the son of Uri, and God fills him with his Spirit, "with wisdom and skill and knowledge and every kind of craftsmanship."

So what's really cool about this example is: it's very unlikely that Bezalel just woke up one day and, like—let's say he was like a farmer—and then he was just like "zapped." And it's like, "Whoa, now I know how to, like, sculpt elaborate cherubim, like, out of gold and, like, you know . . . gold filigree of the chest-plate of the priest, so . . ." Are you with me? It's highly unlikely.

What's more likely is that this guy was an artist and that from his youth, he had been weaving and making all kinds of things. And then there was this *moment* when the poetry of this guy's life came together. And the *whole* set of gifts that God had given this boy, from birth, came to fruition for this moment in his life. And this guy got the privilege of creating a sacred tent that resembled the reality of Eden and of Heaven on Earth. Are you with me? Oh, he's pretty remarkable.

So this guy became a vehicle—Joseph becomes a vehicle of heavenly wisdom, appearing in a human form, and out of a human mouth here on earth. Bezalel becomes a medium through which the symbols and the reality of God's presence become real here on earth—you guys tracking with me?

So this is very consistent throughout the Scriptures: the Spirit is connected with moments when God's heavenly reality gets "incarnated," or "embodied," in the words and the actions of a human being. These are just the first two examples of that. We could do a long thing and trace a whole lot more.

What's also very interesting, in terms of a pattern in the Scriptures, is that there are first-person accounts of people who had this experience. And when they talk about it, it's really quite remarkable. I'm going to show you just two examples—how you guys doing? Fire hose? Okay.

So one really powerful example comes from the poetry of an eighth-century Hebrew prophet, named *Mikha*—"who is like Yahweh," the meaning of his name. But we know it as "Micah," short little, seven-chapter book of Hebrew poetry. And right near the center, he talks about the experience that he had—his calling, as it were.

And just a bit of commentary around the calling, because it's really powerful. What he noticed happening in Jerusalem was that the handful of leaders—you know, who got to live in the capital and in the palace—and they got together with their most wealthy buddies, and they began to buy up land from Israelites who had been living on their family, like, tribal land, since the days of Joshua.

For one reason or another, they hit hard times economically. And so what this crew in Jerusalem started doing was buying up land from these poor farmers, in and around the Jerusalem area, sometimes illegally. And then Micah began to notice, *illegally*—like engineering the “surprise accidents” that happened to a farmer so he can’t afford to work on his land anymore. And “Oh, lo and behold, so-and-so from Jerusalem will be happy to buy your land.” And he noticed that more and more of Israel’s land and resources were getting concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer individuals. Are you with me?

So truly, I’m not trying to offer social commentary. I’m just saying: *read the book of Micah* and, like, this is what he’s observing. And he’s so angry because this violates the *basic principle* of why Israel was brought into this land in the first place. And he says: “It was so that *every* Israelite could sit under their own vine and fig tree. And we could have a little working model of new creation, where every human has a chance to contribute meaningfully to the value generated out of our community.”

And so here we are—Micah 3 verse 8: he names the *moment* when he decided to start speaking up and speaking out. And this is how he describes it. He says, “As for me, I’m filled with power. I’m filled with the *ruakh* of Yahweh. I’m filled with justice, and I’m filled with strength.” Four things, yeah?

So what’s so powerful here is that there’s no differentiation between the moral obligation—right?—like, the moral intensity of what Micah felt when he looked out at what was happening in his city. There’s no differentiation between that and being filled with the very life-breath of God—are you with me? That’s so profound. There’s like a great mystery hidden in this set of four terms that are all put in parallelism with each other.

And not only was he filled with a sense of moral obligation and with the power of God, he’s pretty worked up about it. Like he’s got some power to his words. And what’s so interesting is: you can trace, 100 years later in Jerusalem, and you can look in the poetry and the writings of the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah, and he quotes from Micah. And he says, “Man, you know what’s crazy? Micah was talking about things 100 years ago, and we still haven’t gotten these things right”—are you with me?

So Micah made a *huge* impact. And I have to imagine there were—well, however many mornings there were—of him sitting, hungering and thirsting for right relationships in his community, and it wasn’t happening. And so he began to speak up. It’s very, very powerful.

There’s another moment that’s first-person like this, that describes a totally different type of experience, where King David, who lived about a century and a half before Micah—and David’s known as a poet. He’s connected to almost half of the poems that are in our current book of Psalms. And he wrote a poem, near the latter end of his life—it’s a super awesome riddle that we don’t have any time to talk about.

But as he began penning one of his last poems, he reflected back on his whole career of being able to both rule Israel and, like, kill all kinds of people in battle—and that’s a whole, weird thing you got to sort out—but he also wrote a lot of poetry. And what he experienced when he was writing poetry is the *ruakh* of Yahweh “speaking through me and his word upon my tongue.” How you guys doing?

So, just as a quick remark on the poetry of David: can you think of *any other* human poet in human history whose poetry has been read consistently by millions—hundreds of millions—billions now at this point—of human beings across the globe in every language you could possibly imagine? Can you think of that poet? I think there's one, and I think his name's David.

So let's just notice that this is a person who said, "It's so weird when I write this poetry. I feel like it's me . . . and *then some*. It's me *and more*." He doesn't say it's *not* him—do you hear that? He doesn't say "it's God and not me." What he says: he says, "This is God *and* me. And we're working on this together." And I'd say "the proof is in the pudding." Are you with me? We're still reading—in fact, David is my prayer coach now, multiple mornings a week, and I think he should be yours too.

So here's my whole point, is: I think this is another layer of meaning, at least what I mean when I say the phrase, "Come, Holy Spirit." What I think that I mean, also, is not just "increase my awareness," but as I go into this day, there's going to be all kinds of words that I say. There's going to be all kinds of choices that I make, and some of those choices are going to be really small, and some of the choices are going to actually be really big—and they're going to impact people and have a big effect on them.

And what I want, more than anything else, is for those words and the actions that come out of me today to contribute to the reunion of Heaven and Earth—are you with me? I think that's what we want. I think that's what we mean when we say, "Come, Holy Spirit." It's not what the words say. But I think it's what we, at least, *ought* to mean.

But here's another thing that's really interesting—and this one's a little more disturbing. I just want to take that guy, whose poetry we just read, who said he felt God "speaking through him" when he wrote that poetry—the guy named David. And you know what's also true about David was that, at the height of his power, he looked out his window one day, and he saw a woman bathing on a rooftop—because he had the tallest building in the city—and he was so ignited with desire for her, he seized this woman [and] had sex with her.

And she ended up getting pregnant. And then it was one of his soldiers who was married to this woman. And so he arranges a battle where this guy—this husband of this woman that he slept with—is going to get killed. He orchestrates the murder and assassination of this guy. And that's the guy who wrote those words that we just read—how you doing? [Audience laughing]

It's like, what on earth? It's so, like, Jekyll-and-Hyde, you know? And so not just are the people . . . Like, if we could have lived with Micah—like, here's one thing that's true: none of us was married to Micah, you know what I mean? And, like, I bet Micah's wife would have a whole bunch of things to say if she could add some color to the picture, you know what I mean? [Laughing] Jessica could get up here and do very much the same thing right now.

So I mean, the fact is that every one of—Joseph, right? And Bezalel, like—they're humans. And these were *moments* in their lives that were so special and so unique because they became the chosen vehicle for a time and for a place, for Heaven and Earth to unite, where they became hyper-aware of the pervasive presence of God's Spirit—and what they said and what they did has, like, this disproportionate effect on people.

But those are also people who are really, deeply flawed human beings, just like you and me. And there were all kinds of days—I'm certain—when Micah and Joseph and Bezalel were *not*

aware of the Spirit, and their words and actions were not contributing to the reunion of Heaven and Earth. And we know, *certainly*, that was the case for much, if not most, of the mornings that David woke up.

So what do we do with that? Like, how do we process that? And perhaps that's a part of what we're also asking for when we say, "Come, Holy Spirit," is that, if you're self-aware about your own moral character, you also know that what you probably hunger and thirst for is a world set right, and for God's kingdom to come "on Earth as it is in Heaven."

We so long that the words that I say and the actions that I contribute to this crazy ecosystem of human relationships today be a part of the reunion of Heaven and Earth. But if we're self-aware, we know that that's also going to *not* happen, and that probably half of what we say or do is going to work *against* the reunion of Heaven and Earth—you tracking with me? So what do we do with that?

Another layer of what is true about all of the four examples of spirit-filled human beings that—I don't think this should be very hard for us to process—is that they're all dead. Like every one of them is dead. And not only are they dead, but they've also been dead for, like, a really long time . . . dead. Yeah? And so we've got this problem, you know?

Not only are we morally compromised, but actually that moral compromise is deeply connected to the fact that mostly our lives are contributing to the *opposite* of the reunion of Heaven and Earth—and then we just die. And when we die, what we have to do is surrender our *ruakh*—remember Psalm 104?—we're surrendering. We're giving it back.

And this is so cool—about what Tom was talking about, because I didn't know what he was going to talk about, but there's so much alignment—because what's *not* happening is God taking away his Spirit from the world, because it's just a trashed and ruined project, hopelessly beyond repair.

What God is doing is taking away his infinite, eternal *ruakh* because, let's just be honest, it's *too much* for us. It's actually too real. Like you and I come into this world, like little Shepherd did ten weeks ago, and we take this borrowed breath—like, it's not even ours. The whole thing is given to us as a gift from the beginning.

And this is what the Hebrew Bible is trying to tell us in its portrait of the human condition—in the Jekyll-and-Hyde portraits of someone like David—is that we have, like, *God-like potential* as we come into this world. The biblical authors use the phrase "image of God." Like the closest thing, actually, that you have to encountering God, who is above and beyond all, is the person sitting next to you right now, and the God-like capabilities and the potentials that they possess to contribute to the world.

And in the *same* breath and in the same stories and in the same human life, the Scriptures want to tell us, "and there is no one so gloriously stupid as the person sitting next to you right now," including the *you* that's, like, saying those words. [Laughing] We're just insanely ignorant. We're biased—are you with me? We're selfish, and our motives are all compromised and confused.

And that, actually, *is* a major contributing factor to why we're all dying out here, is because we're killing each other. And we may not be killing each other on an individual level, but the moment you get a group of people together and you threaten their safety or you threaten their access to

resources, something really, really violent comes out— probably of every single one of us—that you never even knew was in there. Are you with me?

Every single one of us in this room is just a few crisis decisions away from taking the life of another human being—and you know that that’s true. And so, actually, our moral compromise and our mortality are closely bound together, as they are in the biblical story.

And so there comes this point—this is exactly why God exiled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden—he’s just like: “If humans in this condition had eternal life, it would not be good. That would be like the *worst* nightmare you could possibly imagine.” And so God taking our rule—it’s this weird, like, *severe mercy*.

It’s God taking away from us what we *think* is life. We think it’s life. And in one sense, it *is* life. But the weird, distorted, mutated version of life that we have created here outside of Eden is just as much a distortion of reality as it is a signpost and a pointer to God’s goodness and God’s truth. Are you tracking with me?

And so I guess where the whole story leads us to—and this is the crisis of the biblical story and the crisis that the biblical authors love to explore—is this paradox of, like, okay: God’s not going to trash the human partnership project. He will take away our *ruakh* when it needs to happen and when our time is fulfilled. But it’s not, like, the end of the story, I guess? “Just outside here? And we go back to the dust, and that’s the end of the thing?”

Emphatically, “No.” The Hebrew Bible is trying to point us towards some kind of resolution. To say, “You guys, what if—what if there was a human image of God who was so saturated with the *ruakh* of God that every single second of their existence—every *when* and every single part of that human’s existence—every *where* and every breath that they took was in perfect union with God, in and through the power of the Spirit—what if someone like that came along?” Are you with me?

So it’s like, this is the “glove” that the Hebrew Bible is trying to paint for us. And there are four portraits, in the New Testament, of the “hand” that fits the glove. And the “hand that fits the glove” is this person that people encountered 2,000 years ago—and we have the accounts of it. There’s four of them that come from that earliest circle of followers. And what people experienced when they met Jesus of Nazareth was a human, where it was so difficult to tell apart whether I’m encountering a human or God right now—are you with me?

And it was so remarkable, but it was also, at the same time, so offensive to so many people, especially Jesus’s generation of the elites in Jerusalem—like what Micah faced in ancient Jerusalem. And so Jesus was simultaneously the loving, generous expression of God’s *ruakh* to the poor and to the hurting and to the sick. And his very existence and what he was doing and what he was claiming about himself was also deeply offensive and scandalous and dangerous to those who were currently invested in the structures of economic arrangements and power in Jerusalem as it existed in the first century. How are you guys doing?

And so it’s like Jesus goes to Jerusalem and he “pokes the bear”—like, very intentionally, to try and show them that the whole way that we are trying to preserve our *ruakh* as communities, and protect ourselves and protect what we think is our life—we’re actually killing each other and we’re dying and we’re compromising ourselves hopelessly in the process. And so he walks onto

the scene, and what he does is love his enemies. And what he does is speak the words of God, in the power of the Spirit of God.

This is why I wish we could do a tour through the Gospel of Luke right now, because from the moment of the angel's annunciation to Mary—I have it on the screen here, but also I'm supposed to stop talking soon, so I'll just show you one thing real quick. Think of how this works—from the moment of the angel's words to Mary, that “the power of the Most High is going to overshadow you, because the holy *pneuma* of God”—that's the Greek word—[Speaking to a specific person] thanks Tom, I don't have to spend three minutes on that right now—“will come upon you. And the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

Jesus is introduced as the Father's embodiment and presence in the person of the Son of God, come among us, who's enlivened—holy, even from conception in the womb of Mary—in the power and person of the Spirit. And I could take you on a tour through Luke, of Jesus's growing-up years, where he grew in wisdom and stature, and in the Spirit. We could go to Jesus's baptism, where there's an apocalypse of Jesus's divine identity in and through the power of the Spirit coming like a dove.

We could go to his forty days of fasting in the wilderness, where he's led out there in the Spirit. We could go to his “signs and wonders” that he does in and through the power of the Spirit. We could go to that really, really cool day in the middle of Luke, where Jesus is so overwhelmed by the healing power that came out of him that day, he says he rejoices in the Holy Spirit and just celebrates what God did in and through his life that day.

And it's under the leading and power of the Spirit that he goes to Jerusalem, and he pokes the bear, and then he forgives the people who are killing him—and then what does he do? He says, “Father, into your hands I—I commit my spirit.”

And what he's doing in that moment—he's not afraid of what's going to happen next, very clearly, or else he wouldn't have done everything that he did. It's because Jesus knew—*he knew* that this surrender of a *ruakh*, out of generous love on behalf of the whole failed human family—mortal and morally-compromised as we are—would be something that the Father would see and be, like, “There is a human I can work with. I can work with this human.” God had to become that human—but apparently God's just that generous, you know? Are you with me?

And Jesus knew that his Father was going to give that *ruakh* back. And he knew that when he gave that *ruakh* back, it would mean not just the resuscitation of, like, this version of Jesus of Nazareth. It would be like Psalm 104, yeah? Creation. Creation. We sang last night about the moment that Jesus took his first breath on Easter morning. Such a beautiful moment to imagine: *creation*—or Tom, “new creation.”

So I think that what I mean, on a third level, when I say, “Come, Holy Spirit,” is: I'm saying, “Holy Spirit, please, *please* create me as the ‘Jesus-version’ of me. The most Jesus-like version of me. That is actually the true me. And would you animate *that* me by the power of your Spirit?” I think that's something of what I mean when I say “Come, Holy Spirit.”

The world actually doesn't need a version of me that's driven by fear of death and self-preservation and motive and ego—are you with me? Like the world doesn't need that version of me, or of you, because there's plenty of—there's eight billion of us, you know what I mean?—like, it's just not working out.

But what if—what if something *really* happened in the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus, and in the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost? And what if there is actually a version of you that exists hidden in God? And there actually is no *when* when that person is not, because it's hidden in God. It's hidden in God's future. And that's actually the most true version of you that is really *you*.

This version of *you* and *me* is us—but it's got a lot of issues we've got to work out. And as Tom helped us see, our final breath here, in this version of creation, is going to be saying goodbye to this current version of us, precisely so that we can say “hello” to the real *us*—to the real *you*.

And I think what this city, and what our church community—and what your city, wherever you live, and your church community—needs is actually not quite the version of you that's sitting in the chair right now. What our communities need is the most Jesus-like version of you and me that could exist. And good news: *it exists*. It's actually *more real* than you and I are right now. It's the most real thing about us, because it's the most real thing that exists. Because it is the “you” and the “me” that are carried, in love and generosity, in the Spirit of God.

Why would we keep saying a phrase where we actually don't really mean what it says? “Come, Holy Spirit.” I think it's like a riddle. And every time you say it, I would invite you into the mystery that I've been trying to focus on and ponder in the months leading up to today. It's actually so beautiful. It's so beautiful. When I pray, “Come, Holy Spirit,” I'm actually praying that I would come into a deepening experience of reality. What I'm praying for is that Jesus and the Spirit would make every act and every deed and every word that I say today contribute to the union of Heaven and Earth.

[EMSB theme fades in]

And I really think that's only going to happen if the version of you and me that we're bringing into every day is the most Jesus-like version, that is animated by the power of our true selves that's hidden in the Messiah with God, amen? So instead of just thinking about it anymore, I'm just going to invite us to do it, yeah? So would you stand with me?

[EMSB theme fades out]