



Spirit of God E14: The Spirit of Eternal Life in John

Official Transcript

Speakers

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Credits read by audience members Juliet and Noah, and by BibleProject team member Kyle

[Recap and Jesus Breathing on His Disciples (0:00-15:30)]

[BibleProject theme song, "Defender" by TENTS]

Jon: Welcome to BibleProject podcast. We're in the last few episodes on a series about the Spirit of God. "Spirit" in Hebrew is the word *ruakh*. In Greek, it's the word *pneuma*.

Tim: [audio clips from other episodes in this series] The invisible, personal energy of God that makes all things possible, that originated all things, and that sustains all things.

Jon: In the story of the Bible, humans have life because God breathed his life into us. That is, we live because of God's Spirit. But the story of the Bible is the tragedy of how humans have used God's energizing life to harm each other and to harm ourselves. And so in God's mercy, he only loans his Spirit to us for a while.

Tim: [audio clips from the episode below] But the goal of the biblical story is for God to give the gift of his Spirit to these human partners forever and ever. Amen. And that story focuses in on the hope for a human who could be so aligned with the will of God that

that Spirit that animates them actually generates the desired end, which is love and *shalom* and union with God and neighbor.

Jon: That hope is fulfilled in Jesus, who is the true human fully aligned with God's Spirit. More than that, Jesus is God become human, conceived by God's Spirit. And the hope of humanity is that Jesus is giving us new access to God's Spirit.

Tim: [audio clips from the episode below] Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone's thirsty, let him come to me and let him drink." And what he's talking about is the Spirit, who—those who trusted him were going to receive.

Jon: In the Gospel of John, this access to the Spirit is so new and so vivid and so intense, it's described as if the Spirit has not ever really been available until now.

Tim: [audio clips from the episode below] John wants to draw a radical boundary line between the presence and work of God's Spirit pre-Jesus and post-Jesus. It's so powerful, it's so intense, it's so infinite, it's as if there's never been access to the Spirit before now this stuff is so good.

Jon: After Jesus rose from the dead, he meets with his disciples, and he breathes on them. And he says, "Receive the Holy Spirit," which is a direct hyperlink to Genesis 2 when God breathes into Adam to give him life.

Tim: [audio clips from the episode below] In John 20, when he breathed on them—and that's exactly the verb from the creation of the humans—I think the claim of that hyperlink is: Humans are finally being created for the first time in and through Jesus. It's the creation of the human in terms of the ideal humanity that God purposes for the world.

Jon: We end this episode reading John 14, where Jesus says, "The Father will give you another advocate to help you and to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. And on that day, you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you."

Tim: [audio clips from the episode below] We're talking about cosmic mysteries here. If we are going to enter into that kind of close, personal, intimate union with the source of all life and goodness, it will not only change, like, our moral character, it's actually—will change the fundamentals of how we exist in the world.

Jon: Today, Tim Mackie and I talk about the unique and profound portrait of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical break: BibleProject theme song, "Defender" by TENTS (3:29-3:33)]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hi, Jon. Hey. [jokingly] Hey, *man*.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: Hey, man.

Tim: [laughs] That's actually a normal way that I greet people.

[BibleProject theme song, "Defender" by TENTS, fades out]

Jon: You say, "Hey, man"?

Tim: "Hey, man."

Jon: There was a way you said it: "Hey, *man*."

[Tim laughs]

Jon: Okay. Spirit of God.

Tim: Yeah, the Spirit of God is the Bible's way of talking about how God has shared his very infinite and intimate, personal life energy with creatures to sustain them and keep them alive. And God loans his Spirit to creatures who he wants to share responsibility and authority with over the creation. They're foolish, and they can't handle the Spirit that God's given them. It's, like, too much potential for the state of knowledge and maturity that they're currently at. They make a really dumb choice. And God says, "*Man, it's probably not good if my Spirit is with them forever.*"

Jon: Is that what he says, "It's not good that my Spirit is with them forever"?

Tim: What I'm merging—two moments in Genesis 3 and 6.

Jon: Yeah. Okay. It's not good if they reach out to the tree of life and eat it and live forever.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. That's right. And then what God says in Genesis 6 is "My Spirit won't dwell with humanity forever."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But either way, the point is, the Spirit's too much for us—

Jon: Yeah, when you say that, when you say the Spirit's too much—

Tim: Mmm, mhm.

Jon: —what do you mean?

Tim: Oh, the God-like capacity that humans have—

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: —to exist in the world not just according to instinct, but according to bigger ideas and desires and visions of the good, so that we don't just exist in the world, we remake the world according to these ideals.

Jon: Yeah. So like, a deer is energized by the Spirit of God as well.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: The deer has God's breath in its nostrils.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. It does. But it's not the image of God.

Jon: But it's not the image of God. So there's something about the way that we are inhabited by the Spirit of God that's different.

Tim: Okay, yeah. That's right. Humans have and are destined to have this capacity to mirror, to reflect, to image, to *be* the presence of God in the world but in a creaturely form.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And—

Jon: And that's too much?

Tim: And that—yeah, when you put Spirit in a creature with that kind of capacity—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] —*and* that creature is easily deceived, really selfish—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —and short-sighted and often just plain stupid, then man, that creature probably shouldn't live forever. But God's Spirit is forever because it's *God's* Spirit.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah.

Tim: So God temporarily loans his Spirit to these creatures that come out of the dust and back to the dust. But the goal of the biblical story is for God to give the gift of his Spirit to these human partners forever and ever. Amen.

Jon: Hmm. Yeah. And this is the same Spirit that holds everything together—life exists because of.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Not a different Spirit.

Jon: Not a different Spirit, but a different—intensity? A different—

Tim: Yeah, or what we talked about in the last conversation or two [chuckles] was: It's actually about: Human beings need to change so that they can actually have the capacity to hold that much Spirit. [chuckles]

Jon: Like an alignment with the Spirit.

Tim: Yeah. And bring about what the Spirit of God is aiming to bring about, which is Eden and eternal life in union with God. And so we need to change.

Jon: Yeah. Mmm.

Tim: And that story focuses in on the hope for a human who could be so aligned with the will of God that that Spirit that animates them actually generates the desired end, which is love and *shalom* and union with God and neighbor. And the New Testament authors present Jesus of Nazareth as the first human who ever realized that full God-like potential.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And maybe the claim is even more [laughs] radical than that.

Jon: Yeah. Conceived by the Spirit.

Tim: Yeah. Because he actually is the eternal Son of God become human in union with the Spirit, with a body created by the Spirit in the womb of Mary, to be that God-human, you know, for us and on our behalf. And the Spirit, the eternal Spirit, that raised Jesus from the dead is also breathed onto and shared with his disciples.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: [pause] So actually, where I just ended that little summary is where I'd like to begin, at the end of the Gospel of John. It's a resurrection appearance of Jesus in John chapter 20, verse 19. The disciples are in a room, and the doors are shut because they're afraid. Their leader just got executed by the authorities.

Jon: Mmm. "*What's going to happen to them?*"

Tim: Yeah. What—yep. “*Are they coming for us, too?*” And then all of a sudden, we’re just told: “Jesus came and stood in the middle of them.” Which you’re like: “*How did he get there with the door shut?*”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: There you go. So he says *shalom* to them. They freak out. And he says this very powerful, potent phrase: “Just as the Father sent me”—which is a shorthand to say, “*the Father sent me, the Son, to do all the stuff in the story that you just read.*” “. . . just like that, so also I am now sending you.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So a deep connection between what Jesus was sent to do and now what he sends his followers to do. And here, it’s the smaller circle of disciples, the eleven. “Then he breathed on them, and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” So that word “breathe” is exactly the same verb and form of the verb in Greek as what God does to the human in Genesis 2.

Jon: In the creation story, God molds *adam*, then breathes into him his breath.

Tim: Yep. Yep. That’s right.

Jon: So to be filled with God’s breath, that’s to be alive in the first place.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: And so Jesus breathing on them—we’re picturing that, but they’re already alive.

Tim: Yeah. That’s right.

Jon: So they don’t need to be filled with God’s life in that sense.

Tim: That’s right.

Jon: But they’re being filled with God’s life in another sense.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] They’re being filled with God’s life in a way that will transcend the limits of their mortal bodies. This is the Spirit that links them into an eternal future and identity, I guess, a life that transcends time and place. Or as John and Jesus will call it all throughout John, “life of the age.” It gets translated “eternal life,” but it’s “life of the age to come,” that is, an age that has no end. This is pretty intimate, man. He breathed on them.

Jon: Yeah. [chuckles]

Tim: “*Take my breath.*” You know?

Jon: Yeah, that is. I don't think I've ever done that to someone.

Tim: [laughs] There's CPR.

Jon: Yeah, CPR is the most—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: —obvious application.

Tim: So funny, just, like, a week ago, I was walking through one of the office rooms here at BibleProject, and there was a group of our coworkers getting trained in CPR.

Jon: Oh, really? [chuckles]

Tim: [laughs] Yeah, totally. And it— [chuckles]

Jon: That's nice to know.

Tim: —really startled me because when I walked into the room, there was this human form sitting in the middle of the room on the ground.

Jon: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tim: And they were going to, you know—

Jon: Yeah. Do CPR on it?

Tim: Do CPR on it. [laughs] And I—I didn't know what was happening. And I was just like, "*Wha—*"

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: It really disturbed me for a second—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —because I was like, "What—who is that on the floor?"

[Jon laughs]

Tim: And like: "What is—oh, oh. I see. Yeah." It was like that.

Jon: Oh, wow. Okay.

Tim: Anyway. But then they would kneel down and, like—that's very intimate.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's the picture here.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: That's the picture in Genesis, too. And that's the picture right here.

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: So then if you really meditate on what Jesus is doing by sharing his breath, this gives a new appreciation, at least for me, for these powerful handful of comments in the Gospel of John where Jesus says, like, "Hey, when I ascend after my resurrection to go back to the Father, I'm going to send you the Spirit. And"—this is in John 14. We'll do a whole episode on this conversation in the future. But he says, "You know the Spirit, actually, because he has taken up residence within you, and he will be in you." You're like, "*Whoa, okay. So the Spirit's going to be in me.*" "In a little while, nobody's going to see me anymore, but you guys are going to see me. And because I live, you all are going to live, too. And in that day, you will know that I am in my Father and you all are in me and I am in you all." [pause]

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: [pause] Okay. [laughs]

Tim: [laughs] And you're just like, "*What—what?*"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "*So who's in who?*"

Jon: Right—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: Like—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You know?

Jon: It's a lot of sharing of identity.

Tim: Yeah. The Spirit—and remember, "spirit" means "breath."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So: "The breath will be in you." And you're like, "*Okay. All right.*"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "*I can get there.*"

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: “*The breath is in me. I can inhale it.*” I can—in a way, if I were [laughs] to do CPR on you— [laughs]

Jon: Mhm. Your breath could become my breath.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And in a way, that’s becoming one. That’s the image here. It’s really powerful stuff. Joining together.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So that’s John’s way of—the Spirit of Jesus going into his followers is a way of saying: We become so closely, intimately united with Jesus that you could say I’m in him and he’s in me.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So it’s this type of union that other apostles are going to take this Spirit-and-intimate-union and one-body language and dev—think of all the ways you can develop this imagery. [laughs]

Jon: Okay, so you just said one body. So you’re saying in—

Tim: I’m bringing the body in now.

Jon: [Tim backchanneling throughout] Yeah, because—okay. When you’re talking about me being in you and you being in me, it’s like: What does it mean to be *in* something?

Tim: Mhm. [laughs] Yeah. Yeah. Right. [laughs]

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] I have a body. I could breathe into my body something. If suddenly, I’m in you and you are in me and we’re in the Father, it’s like we’re sharing a body.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That’s right. That’s exactly right. Yes. So this moment where Jesus breathes on them has actually been anticipated and talked about and pointed to all throughout the Gospel of John. Like, it’s cool when you see it happen, but you as a reader have been prepared for it because either Jesus has mentioned something like this needs to happen or is going to happen, or John himself. And there’s this really interesting dynamic in John—we’re going to look at an example right now—where you’re just reading along in the story, and you’re just immersed in the narrative, and then all of a

sudden, the narrator’s voice will break into the story. And oftentimes, our translations will mark these comments in parentheses. And the narrator will just talk to you, the reader, and say: Here’s something about what was going on here. And often what these comments are—they’re little comments that say, “*Hey, dear reader, when we heard Jesus say this, we actually had no clue what he meant.*”

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: “*But later on*”—

[Music fades in]

Tim: —“*after the resurrection? That’s when we got what he meant here. And so that’s why I’m telling it to you.*”

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: And then, like, the story will pick back up.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: So here’s an example of one of these.

[Musical break: “Joy” by Lofi Sunday feat. CRFT (15:06-15:30)]

[Living Water and “The Spirit Was Not Yet” (15:30-34:11)]

Tim: This is in John chapter 7, where Jesus has gone to Jerusalem for one of the pilgrimage feasts.

[“Joy” by Lofi Sunday feat. CRFT fades out]

Tim: This is in the fall, the Feast of Tabernacles. And lots of cool background to why he's there and what the rituals and traditions were around Sukkot. But the priests would do something with jugs of water because it would often be about prayers for rain or celebrating the gift of rain that God brought—to bring because it was a fall harvest feast.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And so there would be priests and water rituals and prayers for rain happening. And John tells us, “On the last great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone’s thirsty, let him come to me and let him drink. Namely, the one who trusts in me, just like Scripture says, from his belly will flow rivers of living water.’” [laughs]

Jon: Hmm. And so he’s quoting something there?

Tim: Yeah, he’s quoting from Scripture, but the actual form—precise form of the words [chuckles] that he’s quoting doesn’t match any single text—

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: [laughs] —in the Hebrew Bible. [chuckles] So it seems like what he’s doing is quoting an idea or quoting a theme.

Jon: Hmm. “From his belly. . .”

Tim: “From his belly. . .”

Jon: Whose belly?

Tim: Exactly.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: Now, right then, John stops the story.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And in John 7, verse 39, the narrator breaks in and starts talking to you, the reader. And this is what he says. He says, “Now, dear reader, you should understand: Jesus—what he’s talking about is the Spirit.”

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: “The Spirit who—those who trusted him were going to receive.” It’s the same words as the story in John 20, when Jesus said—

Jon: Oh, “receive the holy spirit”?

Tim: Breathed on them, receive the Spirit. Yeah. So “*Jesus was saying this thing about coming to him and drinking, and then rivers flowing out of his belly*”—“Jesus was saying

that about the Spirit that the disciples were going to receive because the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And then the story continues on. [laughs]

Jon: Picks back up?

Tim: [laughs] Yeah, totally. Yeah. Classic—

Jon: Yeah. What a riddle.

Tim: —cryptic John.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: And Jesus.

Jon: In what sense do rivers flow from bellies?

Tim: I know.

Jon: At all?

Tim: Yeah. Right. That’s a great question. Well, if we’re referring to the literal belly of a human—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: —that’s a weird image. If you take “belly” in its metaphorical sense, which it often is used—

Jon: What—what a funny word. [chuckles]

Tim: Belly?

Jon: [jokingly] *Belly*.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: The Greek word’s *koilia*, and it can metaphorically refer not just to a human belly, but to the land. So “from the belly of the land. . .” Used throughout the Psalms and Prophets to refer to the deep recesses of the Earth.

Jon: Oh. That’s cool.

Tim: Mhm. So the idea—you can find it in, boy, Psalm 104, Genesis 2—depictions of rivers and springs coming up out of the ground you could describe as water flowing up from the belly of the land or the belly of the Earth.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So in that sense, Jesus is tapping into a theme or an idea that actually begins life in the garden of Eden story—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: —which is that spring of water that comes up out of the ground that allows plants to grow, and then clay for the human to be formed and so on.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What's great about the Gospel of John is it's truly like Jewish meditation literature. There's a trail of breadcrumb hyperlinking different stories and sayings of Jesus together throughout the Gospel, and you kind of have to hold them all in your mind as a tapestry linked together, and then the Hebrew Bible hyperlinks that he wants you to see. And this whole thing of water in the Gospel of John, it starts with the Samaritan woman. She's at a well, and it's a whole big thing.

Jon: Mhm. Yeah.

Tim: In this context—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —what I wanted to draw attention [laughs] to is that John explicitly says, “Listen, Jesus is speaking symbolically. He's talking about the Spirit. The water that he's referring to is the Spirit. And the water flowing out of him is the Spirit he's going to send and give into his disciples. But the Spirit was not yet.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And you're like, “*What does that mean?*”

Jon: Right. That's like saying “God is not yet.”

Tim: Right. So he cannot mean “the Spirit didn't exist.”

Jon: Right. Because I can't exist without the Spirit.

Tim: Yeah, that's an incoherent thing to say. What he means is “not yet.” So this was a passage that did prompt me to start using these categories of Spirit 1.0 is like just Spirit that keeps you alive—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Spirit 2.0 is like Spirit of eternal life that comes through Jesus. That kind of thing. John wants to draw a radical boundary line between the presence and work of God's Spirit pre-Jesus and post-Jesus in a way that is different.

Jon: Yeah. Hmm.

Tim: It's just a different type of emphasis. You don't quite find anything like this in Luke, Acts, or in Paul. So because the Spirit that God gave to humans is taken away when they die, that's such a temporary, short duration. It's basically like nobody has the Spirit because you live and then you die.

Jon: Mmm. Mhm.

Tim: And what God's ultimate purpose is is to give eternal life. *That's* Spirit.

Jon: So having a connection to the Spirit that leads to eternal life, that Spirit does not yet exist.

Tim: Mhm. Exactly.

Jon: Or that connection to the Spirit does not yet exist.

Tim: Yeah. Because he says "Jesus was not yet glorified," which, in the Gospel of John, is the key word to talk about the moment as Jesus is high and lifted up on the cross, dying, and then being raised up to a state of glory and status. So the death and resurrection are—

Jon: Together.

Tim: —two sides of a coin.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's Jesus's glory. And until the eternal life unleashed into the world like a flood happened through Jesus in his resurrection, it's as if the Spirit was not yet [laughs] before that moment.

Jon: That—yeah. That connection to the Spirit.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Because Jesus talks about the Spirit earlier in John when he's talking with Nicodemus. He says, famously, you know, "Unless somebody is born of water and Spirit —"this is John chapter 3—"he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] And when he's talking to the Samaritan woman, he says, "God is Spirit, and if you want to worship God, you need to worship in Spirit and truth." In chapter 6, he says, "The Spirit is the one who gives life." There's Spirit right there. So that's all before this moment. So this is just significant. You don't see any of the other apostles quite making a statement as radical as this. Pre-Jesus, it's as if the Spirit was not. Post-Jesus, now we've got the full package deal, the Spirit of eternal life.

Jon: Hmm. Okay, so when you were using 2.0 before, you were using it before Jesus to just refer to—

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: A level of intensity—

Tim: Oh, yeah. I was. Hmm.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] —that someone can encounter with the Spirit. So it's more than just keeping you alive. It's like supercharging you for a task.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. And the task is to create a bit of Eden life, the life of the eternal age, to break out in the life of this age.

Jon: Yeah. And that, though, creates a problem, a crisis, of sorts, in the same way the tabernacle creates a crisis.

Tim: Oh, yeah, that's right.

Jon: Right?

Tim: *"It's great that God's living in our midst, but we are in a state such that it's actually dangerous for us to be near that."* Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: *"Because of our sins and impurities."*

Jon: Mhm. And so you get a character like David—

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: —where it's, like, working out because he's so aligned with the heart of God.

Tim: Mhm. For a while.

Jon: For a while.

Tim: Yeah. Mhm.

Jon: [Tim backchanneling throughout] So then there's this messianic hope of, like: "*Well, maybe someone can be so aligned that the Spirit can fully do its thing.*" And that, being so aligned that the Spirit could fully do its thing that leads to union with God, eternal life, that's Spirit 2.0. That's what we're talking about?

Tim: Yeah, or maybe we—a couple hours ago, we abandoned the one, two, 3.0 model—
[Jon laughs]

Tim: —and you just talked about a sliding scale. Baseline, way on the left, is just: Spirit keeps you alive. It's breath in your lungs. Far right end of the scale is: Spirit of God's eternal life, and you're so in union with it that Spirit is your Spirit, and you're one with God.

Jon: Yeah. God's life is your life.

Tim: You're joining to God's eternal life. And you know, you can find yourself at different points along the scale, both in terms of the intensity of life and duration of life, but also your desires and will and purpose—

Jon: Aligning with it.

Tim: —need to be aligned with God's Spirit because you can have an intensity of Spirit but a heart that's not aligned with God—we've talked about—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And that's like a Samson or a Saul, and it goes terribly, and they abuse their power, and it ends up hurting themselves and other people.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So you need both.

Jon: So I like that.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And then John will say, "Hey, dear reader, the Spirit did not yet come." Something fundamentally new is happening.

Tim: Yeah, yes.

Jon: So it's almost like: Finally someone got the sliders all the way to the right.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: And not only did they do it, but now it's bursting out from them, and it's available to everyone else.

Tim: Yeah. That's the version of the Spirit—

Jon: That has not yet come.

Tim: —that Jesus, risen from the dead, makes available.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And it's so powerful, it's so intense, it's so infinite, it's as if, in a rhetorical overstatement, say, it's as if there's never been access to the Spirit before now—

Jon: Yeah. Right.

Tim: —this stuff is so good.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's exaggerative—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: —but it is making an important point. And no other apostle makes the point quite in this exaggerated of a way. And I think that's just what I wanted to note. It feels very significant.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Which is why, then, when Jesus actually does give the Spirit, he breathes on them —certainly, that's why he's using the language of the creation story, of God breathing into the Adam. It's as if there's never been any other humans before. In John 20, when he breathed on them—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —and that's exactly the verb and the form of the verb from the creation of the humans—I think the claim of that hyperlink is—

Jon: “*You’ve never really been alive.*”

Tim: Yeah. Humans are finally being created for the first time in and through Jesus.

Jon: Mmm. Oh.

Tim: It's as if—

Jon: If you're using the same hyperbolic language of “*The Spirit didn't exist,*” in the same way, it's like, “*You kind of really didn't exist.*”

Tim: There was never even really a human around until [laughs] Jesus rose from the dead.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: Yeah, it's the creation of the human in terms of the ideal humanity that God purposes for the world.

Jon: And so then, is that what Jesus means by "born of Spirit"?

Tim: Of water and Spirit.

Jon: Of water and Spirit.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, when he's talking to Nicodemus.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Right—the next thing he says is—to Nicodemus in John 3 is: "Whatever's born from the flesh, well, that's just flesh."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "That which is born of the Spirit, that is Spirit." He's addressing issues that we talked about in our very last conversation about the resurrection body as being a Spirit-sustained, Spirit-mode body, which is material in some way.

Jon: [Tim backchanneling throughout] This is how I would say it: That which is born of the flesh has God's Spirit but will not be able to contain it and will go back to the dust and then be done. Is that what he means by "born of the flesh is flesh"?

Tim: Yes. Mortal flesh, a dying body.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yep.

Jon: [Tim backchanneling throughout] So then, to be born of the Spirit, I still have some sort of materiality, but born into something that can actually contain and be in union with the Spirit.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: And so if I'm born of that—

Tim: Yeah. Then your most fundamental way of describing how you exist isn't material or flesh independent of God. It's: God's own life presence *is* me. That's the basis of what I actually am. That's what it means to exist as a resurrection person.

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: And I guess that's what Paul meant. We looked at it in our last conversation in First Corinthians 15, where he said, "The resurrection Jesus is a life-giving Spirit," which doesn't mean he's immaterial. It just means it's a mode of material existence that we can't imagine because no human before Jesus [laughs] ever existed in that form.

Jon: But Jesus also was embodied—

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: —and remains embodied.

Tim: That's right. That's right. So it's a changed form of body—Spirit body.

Jon: Spirit body.

Tim: Yeah. [laughs] Yeah.

Jon: One thing you've said throughout this whole series is: The most real thing—

Tim: Yes. Yes.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] —is not this table I'm touching or this body. It's whatever is holding it all together—God's breath and energy that's making this be able to exist. That's the most real thing. Okay, I exist because of that. But I guess I've found so much wisdom in *not* thinking of myself as a soul trapped in a body that needs to just escape.

Tim: Mmm. Right.

Jon: But that I am a body.

Tim: Yeah. [emphatically] Yes. Yes. Right. But what mode of body are we talking about? Because if you are essentially identical to the body that I'm looking at right now, and the body that you are looking at me at, we're screwed, man, because this thing's dying. It's getting sick. It's going back to the dust. Humans are meant to be embodied, but because of our choices and the environments we inhabit—right?—the way we exist as bodies is as these really corrupted versions. But there's also—we're aware of and have this capacity and live in realities that are not limited to this dying body at all. And when we are encountering goodness and truth and beauty in relationship with each other, that is in touch with something, like, divine and eternal and true, right? And that's Spirit as John is defining Spirit. That's real life. Whatever kind of bodies are required to live forever in that kind of reality, it *is* a body. So it has continuity with the body that I'm looking at right now for you. So you should be wise with the body that you have, while also recognizing that it has to be changed fundamentally. [pause] Either I'm not making

any sense at all—and I should be honest when I say: What I’m saying to you is me trying to inhabit—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —what I think is the mindset and the view of reality that the biblical authors and Jesus and the apostles have just through reading these texts.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: I’m not saying this immediately resonates with me in that I believe this all the time every second. But I’m trying. I’ve been trying for a long time. I hope it’s taking an effect, but— [laughs] I—I think this is how it works.

Jon: Okay, so back to—well, back to what Jesus said: “That which was born of flesh is flesh.”

Tim: Right. And that flesh has—

Jon: Again, my interpretation of that is: What’s born of flesh is a body which is sustained by God’s Spirit but cannot sustain that existence.

Tim: Yeah. Mhm. Not in its current form because it’s dying.

Jon: Okay. Because it’s dying.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So that which is born of Spirit is a new type of body.

Tim: Is Spirit. A new type of, yeah, bodily existence.

Jon: But that’s not what he says. He says, “That which is born of Spirit is Spirit.”

Tim: Mhm. Mhm. Spirit, here, is functioning as the most real thing that there is. And we know that that real thing has to involve *some* kind of material, physical form because the resurrected Jesus *is* that. And that’s why Paul, coming—circling back around, can call the resurrected Jesus—just call him—to both have a body and be a body and to be a life-generating Spirit. He has a body, and he exists in a mode that you could just say is pure spirit—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —which doesn’t mean non-bodily.

Jon: [inhales] Okay. Spirit-body.

Tim: But because that version of humanity has actually never existed before the risen Jesus, it makes sense to me why we're having a nearly impossible time trying to wrap our minds around it.

Jon: Because we're talking about something that's never existed, only exists in Jesus—

Tim: Mhm. Adam and Eve didn't even exist in that form.

Jon: Right.

Tim: They had the opportunity.

Jon: Whatever that meant.

Tim: Whatever that meant to—whatever might have happened when they ate from the tree of life—

Jon: Yeah. What could have happened?

Tim: They would be changed. [laughs] I'm just following the logic of Paul in First Corinthians 15—

Jon: You changed.

Tim: —and John right here.

Jon: Well, and it seems really important to try—

[“afternoon reads.” by Lofi Sunday feat. PAINT WITH SOUND fades in]

Jon: —to understand it a little bit because what Paul seems to be presenting to us is: You can live into this right now.

Tim: Yes.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: Yes. Okay. Sorry, I don't want to cut you off—

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: —but should we just hold that unresolved for a moment?

Jon: Yeah. Yes.

Tim: Because Jesus picks exactly this up later on.

Jon: Okay. Well, let's look at it.

Tim: Okay.

[Musical break: "afternoon reads." by Lofi Sunday feat. PAINT WITH SOUND (33:40-34:11)]

[Jesus Promises the Spirit (34:11-47:50)]

Tim: So in the Gospel of John, the Last Supper takes up a big, central portion of the Gospel account—

["afternoon reads." by Lofi Sunday feat. PAINT WITH SOUND fades out]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] —in a way that's different than Matthew, Mark, or Luke. In Matthew, Mark, or Luke, Jesus makes one trip to Jerusalem, and it's at the climax at the end, the Passover meal. In John, Jesus visits Jerusalem multiple times. And the Passover where he gives a long speech that we call the Upper Room Discourse. It goes from John 13 to 17. I mean, it's just— [chuckles] it's a lot of material, the biggest speech Jesus gives. And he frames it all by saying, "Hey, I'm about to go away back to my Father. I'm going to leave the world." But then, he keeps talking about how—there's two things he starts saying. He says, "I'm going to come back to you." And he says, "I'm going to send someone to you." And that someone he calls by two titles: that he's going to send "the Spirit." "The Spirit of truth"—this is in John 14. But he also calls this Spirit "the *parakletos*," or "paraclete" is how it gets transliterated into English. And it literally means somebody who's called alongside another. "*Para*" means "alongside," "*kaleo*" means "to call."

Jon: Mhm. Okay.

Tim: So like, "*Hey, Jon*" —

Jon: Call alongside.

Tim: —“*could you come here?*”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Now, I could ask you to come here and say, “*Hey, Jon, could you come here and help me with this difficult legal case [laughs] that I have?*” [laughs]

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: And that’s a very common use of this word.

Jon: Okay. Oh, so you would call, like, a—someone you’d hire to help—

Tim: A lawyer.

Jon: A lawyer?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: A paraclete? Okay.

Tim: To advocate for you.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: This word is used in ancient Greek to describe one military commander bringing a group of soldiers to help another.

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: So we might call that “backup”—

[Jon and Tim chuckle]

Tim: [laughs] —military backup or something.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: If someone’s grieving or in a place of need, you can *parakaleo* someone, and they can come bring you emotional comfort.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And it seems like John actually is aware of the multiple nuances of this word, and he’s kind of activating all of them based on what he says.

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: But here’s where my mind went—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —a couple minutes ago, what made me think of this. Here's John 14, verse 16: "I'm going to ask my Father, and he will give you another *parakletos*."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So "*You already have one.*"

Jon: "*In me.*"

Tim: "*And he's talking—he's talking to you right now.*"

Jon: Okay. [chuckles]

Tim: "*It's me.*" [laughs] "*But another one*" —

Jon: Okay.

Tim: ". . . in order that he may be with you forever." You're like, "*Oh, wow.*"

Jon: "*Because I'm leaving.*"

Tim: "I'm leaving." "This is the Spirit of truth whom the world is not able to receive because it doesn't see him. It doesn't even acknowledge him. But you guys know him because he resides with you, and he will be *in* you."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So he just says, "I'm going to ask the Father. He *will give* you the Spirit to be with you forever." But then he just said, "He *already is* residing [chuckles] with you, and he will be *in* you. I'm not going to leave you as orphans. *I am coming to you.*"

Jon: [laughs] Now, it's Jesus coming. [chuckles]

Tim: Yeah. "*Wait, but I thought you just said you're going away*" —

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —"*and then you're going to send this other one.*"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Then he says, "I am coming to you."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "In a little while, the world won't see me anymore, but you will see me."

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: “Because I live, you also will live. And on that day, you will know that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you.”

[Jon chuckles]

[Tim laughs]

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: This is classic Jewish meditation literature, cryptic speak.

Jon: Mhm. Yeah.

Tim: So he begins by saying, “Hey, me and my dad are going to send someone to you, and he’s going to be with you, even more, *in* you. Oh, yeah, and in that happening, *I* am coming to you.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [laughs] “And I am in my Father, and I’m in you, and you are in me.” So the union that God’s creatures are brought into is so intimate and so close that the only language available is a language of space, to be inside of.

Jon: Mmm. Mhm. Yeah.

Tim: So we’re talking about cosmic mysteries here, which isn’t just to say we can’t understand it, but it’s trying to name something in light of categories we do have—inside, outside—and name something we truly don’t have categories for. [chuckles]

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So the biblical story is trying, I guess, to say that if we are going to enter into that kind of close, personal, intimate union with the source of all life and goodness and the sustainer of everything that’s beautiful and good and true, it’s to be so closely joined to an infinite, eternal source of love and generosity and life. That kind of relationship is going to change us in more ways than we can imagine. It will not only change, like, our moral character, it’s actually—will change the fundamentals of how we exist in the world. Even our material mode of existence will undergo a change. And in John, that’s what it means to be born of the Spirit so that you could just say, “I *am* spirit.” But an embodied [laughs] form of spirit. Or Paul will say, “Flesh and blood can’t inherit the Kingdom of God.” But we need to have a spirit-body. And that’s hard to wrap our minds around.

Jon: Hmm. So Adam and Eve are born of flesh.

Tim: Of dust.

Jon: Of dust.

Tim: That is, flesh.

Jon: Yeah.

[Tim laughs]

Jon: And so they are flesh.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: But then they are offered something more.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. An opportunity.

Jon: And so this story is short, it's a riddle, it's cryptic, and we keep coming back to it, but if I take Jesus's statement, "To be born of flesh is to be flesh, to be born of Spirit is Spirit," the opportunity that Adam and Eve had was to be born of Spirit?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah, you could say: To eat of the tree of life would have been akin to Jesus's phrase "being born of Spirit."

Jon: And then to be born again—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: —in some sense. To be changed.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: So that was always the trajectory, was to be born of flesh and then to be born again into some other mode.

Tim: Yes. Yeah, I don't know how else to make sense of the story except that humans were given an origin in the dust and invited into a journey of transformation to become more. And that "more" involved this image of eating life that never ends.

Jon: This sounds so fantastic.

[Tim laughs]

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: Say more.

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: [inhales] To be changed into a spirit-body.

Tim: Mmm. [pause] [inhales] Yeah, part of the hang-up is our word “spirit” and what it means to us in English. Because in the ancient world, “spirit” didn’t mean what it means to us. It means the most real thing. Yeah.

Jon: And what’s the phrase that Paul uses? “Jesus is” —

Tim: “A life-giving Spirit.”

Jon: “A life-giving Spirit.”

Tim: Yep. Yeah. And then “he has a body that is *pneumatikos*.” So: “Spirit-generated” —

Jon: A spirited body?

Tim: “Spirit” —

Jon: A spirit-generated body?

Tim: “Spirit-mode body.” “Spirit-body.”

[pause]

Jon: Man, what are we talking about here?

Tim: [laughs] Mmm. [pause] Maybe—I—all I can think is part of why this is so hard for us is we have grown up immersed in a culture that is under the influence of the most fantastic delusion—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: —that the material world is all that exists.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And it’s taken me many years and a lot of reading of cultural history and philosophy to disabuse myself of this delusion. It’s an utterly incoherent view of reality.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: But until you have the curtain pulled back to see how illogical it is, it actually seems like the most logical, coherent view of reality— [laughs]

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: —because I held it, even unconsciously, for a long time. As a Christian, I didn’t even sense the contradiction in my own thinking, but I could feel it every day.

Jon: Hmm. Hmm.

Tim: But I'm certain that this is the hang-up that we have. Well, at least one key part of the hang-up—why for us, spirit-body, resurrection, it all seems so fantastic.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: It's being invited to know *someone* who's so purely good and generous and infinite-life that just knowing that one will solve the body issue.

Jon: That reality of alignment, of being, as Jesus would call, being born of the Spirit, can—has started, even though this—our bodies are still flesh, mortal flesh.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: And there was that verse we looked at, I think last time, where Paul said, "Hey, Jesus rose from the dead, and so in that same way"—and then you would think, "*Cool, I'm going to rise from the dead.*" And he doesn't say that. He says—

Tim: Oh.

Jon: "You can walk in"—

Tim: Yeah, "Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so you can live a new quality of life."

Jon: "You can live a new quality of life."

Tim: "A new kind"—yes, that's right. Right? Who I am is somebody who's been given the right and privilege to be known as a son of God, to be children of God by trusting that God loves me and has reached out to me even in my folly and ignorance and dying body.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: As you were talking, it struck me that the Gospel of John and the letters of John are the only places where you find two statements that are just three-word sentences. One is "God is Spirit."

Jon: Mmm. Yeah. We talked about that a lot.

Tim: And then, elsewhere in the letters of John, there's the sentence "God is love." And maybe those are not different things. [pause]

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: Whatever God is, he is others-centered, [pause] life-sustaining, creating, generating love. And knowing that one—it just changes not just my heart and mind, but, like, actually will change every part, including my bodily mode. [pause] [exhales]

[BibleProject theme song, “Defender” by TENTS, fades in]

Tim: This is fantastic stuff.

Jon: Mhm. Mhm.

Tim: But I guess fantastic can mean a lot of different things.

Jon: [laughs] Yeah.

Tim: Hmm.

[Musical break: BibleProject theme song, “Defender” by TENTS (45:11-45:15)]

Jon: That’s it for today’s episode. We have one last stop in our conversation before we wrap up this discussion on the Spirit of God. Next week, we’ll look at how God’s Spirit, God’s life-giving personal energy, started to be considered the third person of the Trinity. That is, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

Tim: [audio clips from Spirit of God E15: The Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity] Is the Spirit a person, or is the Spirit more like an energy? There are sometimes where Spirit and power seem synonymous, but then you also have lots of passages where the Spirit is talked about as it were a distinct agent.

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[Phone beep]

Juliet: Hi, my name is Juliet, and I’m from Nairobi, Kenya.

Noah: Hello everybody, my name is Noah, and I'm from Nashville, Tennessee. I first heard about BibleProject as a high schooler wanting to learn more about Jesus.

Juliet: I first heard about the BibleProject in 2015. I was going through YouTube, and I found these videos that explained different concepts so wonderfully.

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[Phone beep]

Kyle: Hi, my name is Kyle, and I work on our People team. I am from Alabama. My favorite place—there's a little Cyprus creek up against bluffs with greens and flowers and trees overhanging. Anytime we'd just get to be outside with the family—just, like, how it was meant to be, in the beautiful things that God has created. There's a whole team that makes the podcast come to life every week. For a full list of everyone involved, check out the show notes wherever you stream this podcast and on our app. See you next time.

[BibleProject theme song, "Defender" by TENTS, fades out]

[BibleProject sonic logo]