

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

By Dr. Jason J. Nelson
Genesis 1:1–2

When was the last time you took a few moments to look up at the night sky and stare? The other night, I spent about 10 minutes just gazing at the moon. While I was moon gazing, Psalm 19:1 came to my mind. It says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.”

The moon was magnificent and seemed so close, even though it was a quarter of a million miles away. That sounds far, right? Well, it’s nothing compared to the distance between earth and the sun.

The sun, which is at the center of our solar system and 93 million miles away, and is, on the surface, 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit (and we thought Houston was hot). But we love the sun, don’t we? It’s our sun, our very own star. Of course, it’s the only one we’ve got, and I’m glad we’ve got it, because the closest star next to our sun is Proxima Centauri, which is 25 trillion miles from earth. The heavens declare the glory of God.

**“GOD’S GREATNESS ISN’T TIED UP IN CREATION.
HE IS GREAT NOT JUST BECAUSE HE HAS CREATED GREAT THINGS.
GOD IS ALSO GREAT BECAUSE OF WHO GOD IS!”**

And if you feel like life is moving really fast, that’s because it is... literally. Right now, our solar system is traveling through space at 134 miles per second, but we’re not really in danger of running into anything for a very long time because we sit in a corner of the galaxy called the Milky Way. We’re out on the perimeter. So, we’re in a very remote, somewhat boring section of the galaxy with not much going on. There aren’t any stars exploding or imploding near us, and there’s no threat of colliding with the nearest galaxy, Andromeda — at least not for 5 billion years. The heavens declare the glory of God.

But the cool thing is we do have an awesome view from where we sit. Within our galaxy alone there are between 100 and 200 billion stars, so whichever ones we see in the night sky are from within the Milky Way, because the naked eye can’t see anything beyond our galaxy. But thank God for technology. Thank God for the Hubble Telescope, which allows us to see way beyond the Milky Way.

Imagine placing a grain of sand on your finger and then holding it out at arms-length toward the sky. The patch of sky that grain of sand blocks out is the field that the Hubble Telescope focused on when it took a magnificent snapshot. At first glance this phenomenal photo seemed to contain images of stars, when in fact every single speck of light in the picture reflected a different galaxy.

In this one galactic glance of the universe alone, astronomers estimated there to be over 10,000 galaxies. All of that in a patch of sky the size of a grain of sand held at arms-length. Based on this image, scientists estimate there are over 100 billion galaxies in the visible universe with each galaxy containing, on average, 500 billion to 1 trillion stars! The heavens declare the glory of God.

How small do you feel right now? Like a grain of sand? The whole purpose of talking about this isn't to make you feel small, but to remind you of how big God is. God's so big and so great, and our Great Big God created all of existence (Ex Nihilo) out of nothing! Now, I don't know about you, but that blows my mind.

A few years ago, I heard an older Southern pastor tell the story about the time he preached a sermon on how great God is and how God created the universe out of nothing. After the sermon, a man came up and tried to trap him by asking, "Preacher, you say that creation came from God, but where did God come from?"

After a pause, the preacher, in his little Southern accent said, "Well God came from nowhere, and coming from nowhere, He stood on nothing. And standing on nothing, He reached out where there was nowhere to reach and He grabbed something when there was nothing to grab and He hung something on nothing and told it to stay there!" God is so great. And creation is the proof of His greatness! The heavens declare, creation reflects, the glory, the greatness of God!

But here's the thing: God's greatness isn't tied up in creation. He is great not just because He has created great things. God is also great because of who God is! What's even more intellectually stimulating, mind-boggling, and mysterious than the reality that God created everything out of nothing is the reality that there is One God, and that One God exists in three persons. Mind blown again!

**In the next few minutes, we're about to ride a mental roller coaster.
Are you with me?**

As Christians, we believe in the Trinity — we believe there is One God in three persons. When the Bible talks about God, it always refers to God as One. There is always and only One God acknowledged throughout the Bible. At the same time, it talks about Him in three persons, which is what Paul does in Ephesians 4:4–6.

Paul says there is One Spirit, One Lord, and One God and Father of all, and together they are One! One God in three persons — not three different gods who made an alliance and divided up their phenomenal cosmic powers.

“AND THE TRINITY IS THE HIGHEST, GREATEST, MOST PERPLEXING AND PROFOUNDLY COMPLEX CONCEPT IN ALL OF EXISTENCE.”

This is the Christian concept of God, and this concept of God is unique to Christianity. There are no traces of it outside of Christianity. You can't find hints of the Trinity in any eastern philosophy or within ancient Greek or Roman thought. The idea of the Trinity doesn't come from Plato or Confucius or Buddha. No! It comes from one book, the Bible, and it is made plain through the person of Jesus Christ, the teachings of passages like Ephesians 4, and the theologically sound Creeds of the Christian faith.

At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus names the members in what is referred to as the Great Commission. And the Trinity is the highest, greatest, most perplexing and profoundly complex concept in all of existence. We can't begin to comprehend and understand it, even with the help of some of the most brilliant people in history. Polycarp, Ignatius and Tertullian? Athanasius, Augustine and Aquinas? Descartes, Kant and Kierkegaard? John Calvin, Martin Luther and John Wesley? CS Lewis, John Stott and NT Wright? None of them — as brilliant as they are — have come even close to grasping this mind-boggling concept.

But it's a good thing that we can't understand the mystery of the Trinity. Because we don't have a god we can understand! We don't have a god we can figure out, define or explain. Because a god we can understand, figure out, define and explain is really no god at all. No, we have a God who is inconceivable, unfathomable and unexplainable. The Christian God - the One we worship - is great. This is the God we believe in, trust, adore and follow. Our God is great not just because of what He has done, but also because of who He is! God is One God in three persons — beyond our comprehension.

And the revelation of the Trinity begins to unfold before humanity's eyes right away in the very first lines of the very first chapter of the very first book of the Bible. Genesis 1:1–2 says these familiar words: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

As Christians, it doesn't seem like we spend a whole lot of time talking about pneumatology — a theological word for the study of the Holy Spirit — in a whole lot of detail, except during certain times or days of the year like Pentecost. For many churches around the world, the Holy Spirit is given the back seat, so to speak, with God the Father in the driver's seat and Jesus riding shotgun.

To be Christian, however, is to be Trinitarian, which means we worship one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are distinct but inseparable, eternally one in essence and power — to paraphrase some of the early Creeds.

And the reality is that since the dawn of Creation, the Holy Spirit has been moving throughout this earth with power, and since Pentecost, the Spirit of God — the Holy Spirit — has been blowing life into Christ's Holy Church like a mighty wind and setting people's hearts on fire with a love for our Savior and for others. From the beginning of time, the Spirit has been moving throughout the earth, maneuvering over the empty, dark and formless places and spaces of this unique ball of creation. From the beginning, the Holy Spirit has been hovering over the surfaces of the deep and over the waters of the world.

The Holy Spirit was actively involved in the world throughout the Old Testament, formally appearing in these sacred writings 88 different times, in each instance giving distinctly different divine gifts to the prophets, to certain Hebrew Kings and to God's people as a whole.

For example, the Holy Spirit was actively involved in the creation of the Universe and everything within it and actively involved in forming us from the dust, from the dirt, from the earth and breathing life into us — so the Holy Spirit is life-giving.

The Holy Spirit offered spiritual nourishment to Hebrew people time and time again and offered them hope in times of despair — so the Holy Spirit is life-sustaining.

The Holy Spirit provided supernatural jolts to the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Elijah — so the Holy Spirit is spiritually, physically and intellectually empowering.

**“THE TRIUNE GOD, WHO CREATED THE UNIVERSE OUT OF NOTHING,
HAS WORKED HARD IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST
(LABORED THROUGH THE BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS OF JESUS)
SO YOU AND I COULD BECOME VESSELS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.”**

The Holy Spirit instilled insight, instruction, wisdom and guidance to Kings like Saul and David — so the Holy Spirit is enlightening.

And the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament directly communicated God's Word to humanity with boldness and clarity — so, just like Jesus, the Holy Spirit delivers and distributes Truth.

In all these cases, as well as the 264 times the Holy Spirit appears within the New Testament, there is a supernatural, formational and transformational work that is being done throughout the earth because the Holy Spirit is on the move, hovering (to use the words from Genesis 2:2) and looking to fill the planet with the presence and power of God!

And do you know what? Nothing has changed. From Genesis to Revelation, from Revelation to today, the Holy Spirit is still moving throughout the earth. For those who feel void and empty inside, the Holy Spirit is still life-giving and life-sustaining. For those who have tough decisions to make regarding work or school or some sort of complicated family matter, the Holy Spirit is still empowering people with insight, instruction, wisdom and guidance from above.

For those who are seeking answers to tough questions in life or are struggling with skepticism or wrestling with doubts, the Holy Spirit is still enlightening and still delivering and distributing Truth.

Most amazing of all? Because of what Christ has done for us on the Cross and because of what God did for us in the grave, the Holy Spirit isn't just hovering over waters of this world but is now within us, hovering over the waters of our souls, ready to fill the empty places and spaces of our lives with power from on high, ready to form and actually transform us more and more into a new creation, more and more into the image of Christ. Think about that! Mind blown yet again!

The Triune God, who created the Universe out of nothing, has worked hard in the person of Christ (labored through the blood, sweat and tears of Jesus) so you and I could become vessels of the Holy Spirit. Think about that — you are a vessel of the Holy Spirit! And you thought you were just an ordinary person. You are exceptional! You are, and not just because you are created in the image of God and loved by the God of creation, but also because God now dwells in you. You're not just some insignificant speck of sand in a universe that is vast and expanding. **Every one of us in Christ is a temple of the Holy Spirit!**

As temples of the Holy Spirit, we are called by God to come together and, in the words of Paul, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Why did Paul tell Christians then and why is he telling us now to do this? So, we can come together, hold hands and sing "Kumbaya, My Lord?"

No, it's so we can get outside these walls and get our hands and feet dirty. We are made from the earth and are called to be a force of love throughout the world, to take the message and love of God to its ends and show its inhabitants a love they have never experienced!

Can you imagine what we could do in this world if we came together as One Body, wholeheartedly serving One Lord (Jesus Christ), proclaiming the truth of One Book (the Bible), fueled by One Spirit for the glory of the One true God? We would change the world!

So many people today, even within the Church, look at the pain and suffering in this world and ask, "Where is God?" The real question we ought to be asking ourselves is,

“Where are God’s people?” You and I are temples of the Holy Spirit, being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (as Paul says in Ephesians 2:22), which means 1) we really are exceptional and uniquely empowered to make a difference in this world wherever we go, and 2) when we are united in the Spirit through the bond of peace, we are unstoppable.

“MY PRAYER FOR US AS A CHURCH IS VERY SIMPLE: ‘HOLY SPIRIT COME!’”

Where there is sickness, we can offer healing. Where there is pain, we can provide comfort. Where there is death, we can bring life. Where there is hunger, we can provide food. Where there is thirst, we can offer water. Where there is despair, we can give hope. Where there is deceit, we can proclaim truth. Where there is bondage, we can bring freedom.

And how is it that we can do these things? Because the Holy Spirit is still moving throughout the earth and is choosing to use us as God’s vehicles and vessels so we can become ambassadors and agents of grace, love, hope and peace among the nations.

So, my prayer for us as a Church is very simple: “Holy Spirit Come! Unite these mortal, clay and earthly vessels so that our actions might change the world and, at the same time, declare Your glory in ways far greater and far louder even than the heavens!”

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who is the Holy Spirit?
 2. From your experience, knowledge and understanding, what have been and currently are the activities and/or purposes of the Holy Spirit?
 3. Elohim is the Hebrew word used for God in the English language in Genesis 1:1. It is immediately interesting to note that Elohim is the plural form of the Hebrew word El. How might you make sense of this word choice? Does this surprise you? What, if any, is the significance of this usage?
 4. Read Genesis 1:26. What are your initial thoughts? Who is the “Us” in this verse and how would you explain this verse looking at it through the lens of the New Testament?
 5. Deuteronomy 6:4 is the first line of what is known as the Shema in Hebrew. How would you reconcile this verse with the two verses listed above from Genesis?
 6. In what ways has the Holy Spirit been involved in creating, redeeming and sustaining humanity? How might you support this from a biblical standpoint? What verses come to mind?
 7. What does it mean to be a temple of the Holy Spirit? In what ways has your life changed because you are such? In what ways will your life continue to change? In light of this chapter, how does the Holy Spirit move throughout the earth today?
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QUICKLINKS

Grace Church in The Woodlands, Texas - GraceWoodlands.com

The Forge Journal: A Courageous Online Publication - TheForgeJournal.com

FORGE: Shaping Pastors Who Will Shape Our Nation - ForgePastors.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Jason J. Nelson is one of the teaching pastors at Grace Woodlands Church. He holds B.A., M.A., M.Ed., M.Div. and Ph.D. degrees from Trinity International University, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Houston Christian (Baptist) University, Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, and Destiny Bible College. In the Spring of 2021, Jason was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity (D.D.) degree for his service to the Church, commitment to his community, and contribution to the fields of theological and biblical studies.

For over twenty years, Jason has pastored within four different congregations in the Greater Houston area as both an associate and senior pastor. After graduating from college with an emphasis on pre-law, Jason began ministering to elected officials and is currently Co-Founder and President of Acts 17 Ministries, a non-profit focused on impacting and influencing governance with the values of the Kingdom. Jason has also served as one of the governing Directors on The Woodlands Township Board in The Woodlands, Texas.

Before entering full-time Christian ministry, Jason spent seven years in public education as a teacher, department head, and coach. He is also a published author, as well as an advocate for education, mental health awareness, breast cancer research, and community/global missions. He and his wife Tiffany have six children and reside in The Woodlands, Texas.