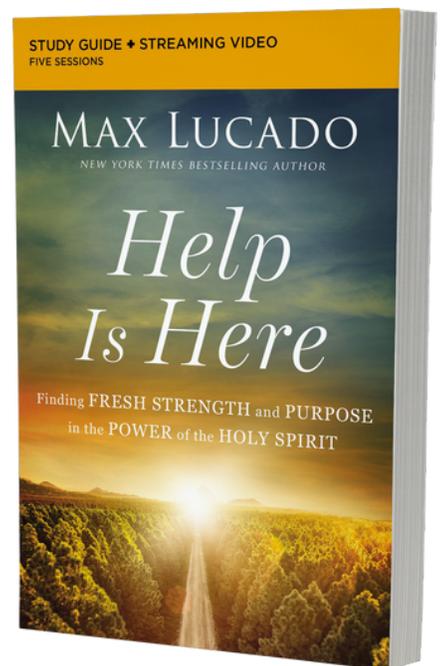


Help Is Here

A sermon outline for helping congregations find fresh strength and purpose in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Based on Max Lucado's *Help is Here* video Bible study.



HELP IS HERE

I. Introduction

Max Lucado shares the following childhood memory:

He was the youngest kid on the field. All the other boys were in middle school. He was in third grade. Everyone else could handle a bat. He had never been able to get a hit. They could pitch, catch, and steal bases. He had a rag arm, slow glove, and bricks for feet. All the other boys were bigger, stronger, faster. He was lacking in size, power, and speed.

When it came time to pick teams, he took his place behind the others and braced for the worst. The selection process began. “I get Johnny.” “I’ll take Tommy.” “I want Jason.” He watched as the three boys chosen strutted and swaggered in the direction of their captains. They struck the cool-kid pose to make sure everyone else knew that they had been picked first.

The winnowing process continued. The boy just knew that on this day, the last kid picked would be him. But then, something miraculous happened. One of the captains looked over at him and called out his name. “I take Max,” he announced.

My eyes opened wide. I wondered if he had heard correctly. After all, there were still plenty of other good players to pick. Boys who were stronger and more skilled. But the one who had called his name was looking at me. Motioning me to come over to his team.

The older boy was Max Lucado’s brother. Where Max was weak in all things baseball, his brother was strong. And on this day, his older brother chose Max.

Followers of Christ can say the same. We have been given access to the Holy Spirit. And like a big brother, he chooses each day to be our help, comforter, and friend. We learn about him through the writings of King David, Isaiah, John, Paul, and Jesus. Yet we often struggle with understanding who he is. God as a Father makes sense to us. Jesus as the Son is no problem. But the Holy Spirit? The term itself seems mystical and otherworldly.

The Holy Spirit doesn't have to be a mystery. You can understand who he is and how he works. And when you do, you will discover—as many before you have—that his help is here when you need it the most.

II. Teaching

The Holy Spirit is our ally, champion, advocate, and guide. He is the executor of God's will, come to infuse me with strength. The One who equips me not to just get by but to actually thrive, shine forth, and live the abundant life that Jesus spoke about so often.

This power is critical in the life of a believer. It was so important to Jesus that his disciples have this power that he did not allow them to begin their ministries until they received it. As he prepared to depart this world, he said to them, "Don't begin telling others yet. Stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven" (Acts 1:8).

By this point, the disciples had spent three years in training. They had sat with Jesus around campfires, walked with him through cities, and witnessed him banish disease and command demons. They knew his favorite food, jokes, and hangouts. They had even seen the empty tomb, touched his resurrected body, and spent forty days listening to the resurrected Christ teach about the kingdom of God. But they were not ready.

So Jesus instructed them, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about." Then he made this important promise to them: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

A. Our Powerful Ally

Mark it down. The Holy Spirit comes with power. Power to make good choices, keep promises, and silence the inner voices of fear and failure. Power to get out of bed, get on with life, and get busy about the right things in the right way. Power to face the unexpected and unwanted passages of time. Power. This is what Jesus promised then, and this is what he promises today.

How is your power level? Perhaps you have all the power you need. Life is a downhill stroll through a pleasant meadow. You never lack energy, enthusiasm, or strength. Your step has a spring to it. You are ever joyful and empowered.

No, I am sure that you are just like the rest of us. You're a little too dependent on that first cup of coffee every morning. And the second cup. You're tired of what seems like walking uphill all the time. It feels like you're dragging an anchor behind you and pushing a cart full of burdens ahead of you. All too often, by the time you've limped your way to the end of the day, you wonder where you'll find the strength to make it through tomorrow.

Consider the possibility of a life-giving relationship with the Holy Spirit. No more walking this path alone. No more carrying weight you were not intended to bear. No wandering and wondering where you are going to get the strength for the day. It's time for you to enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit and experience the vigorous life that only he can offer to you.

God does not want his children to be a bunch of stressed-out, worn-out, done-in, washed-up representatives for Christ to the world. He wants us to be fresher. Active. Alive!

The Spirit of God longs to give you this power. He wants to guide, teach, and energize you. He wants to shoulder the burdens you were never intended to carry. Challenges come with life, but they need not define your life. Help is here. And he comes with the promise of power.

B. Our Strength and Guide

Lucado tells the story of Nicodemus who approaches the upstart teacher with words burning in his chest. Had he spoken these words during the daylight, with the other leaders close at hand, they would likely have ex-communicated him. Yet as he looked at the teacher there in the darkness, the words finally tumbled free. “Rabbi,” he began, “we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2 NKJV).

Nicodemus was obsessed with what a person can and cannot do. He was all about human effort, human gumption, human achievement. In his view, the gate to heaven was opened with elbow grease. He represented all the well-meaning, God-fearing, Bible-toting, tithe-giving, pew-sitting, Scripture-memorizing, boat-rowing folk of his day. And of our own.

The funny thing is that Nicodemus was aware this kind of rowboat faith doesn't work. He had tried it himself and found it wanting, draining, and exhausting. This is why he decided to speak with Jesus. It was evident to him that Christ, this “teacher come from God,” was offering something quite different. Jesus did not promote a rowboat kind of faith. He was keenly aware of all the things that we as human beings cannot do and cannot accomplish through our own efforts. This is why Jesus was intent on teaching Nicodemus about the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus teaches the teacher. “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit,” he says, “he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5 NKJV). In our first birth, we become brand-new humans. In our second birth—the birth of the Spirit—we become brand-new creations. And who oversees this second birth? The Holy Spirit! Indeed, were it not for the work of the Spirit, the new birth would be impossible. This is why Paul wrote, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3 NIV).

Where rowboat Christianity fails, powerboat Christianity thrives. Instead of relying on our own efforts, we rely on God. The Holy Spirit is the spark in our engine that drives us forward and equips us to do all the things that God wants us to do.

We have his unseen power residing within us. We host the mystery and majesty of God. Just stop for a moment and think about something you struggle to do. What uphill climb is taking your breath? Forgiving an enemy? Solving a problem? Breaking a habit? You can't do it. But the Spirit can. You have the force of heaven's engine within you.

C. Our Peace and Guarantee

Our stress-laden society has developed many skills for dealing with anxiety. We have breathing exercises. Meditation techniques. Medications and seminars. These tools have their place. But the person in whom the Spirit dwells has the greatest of resources. We can turn to him for help. We can go immediately to the Spirit in worship when the waves of anxiety begin to roll.

Paul wrote, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18-19 NIV). The apostle contrasts two strategies for facing chaos: inebriation and celebration. Many numb themselves. If not with liquor, then with long weeks of work, bouts of shopping, or hours of playing. The better option? Celebration. Fill the air with "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." Constant worship clears the debris from our hearts. Praise flushes the trash of worry and anxiety.

The Spirit of God soothes us in this present world filled with chaos. But he does even more. He soothes our anxieties of the world to come. Paul notes, "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:13-14 NIV).

The Holy Spirit's work is in sealing not only your present salvation, but also your future blessing. The word guarantee is important. We view a guarantee as something that is, well, guaranteed. It's bound to happen.

The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of all the wonderful things you will receive, experience, and become in heaven. He is the down payment on your eternal inheritance.

“When you accepted Christ, you didn’t receive all the blessings of heaven right away. You’re not walking on streets of gold. You haven’t received your new, perfect, heavenly body. And you don’t have the incredible privilege of walking and talking with Jesus face to face. Not yet!

But when you accepted Jesus, you did receive a down payment on those future blessings. The Holy Spirit cocooned you, assuring your safekeeping. Satan might woo you, discourage you, and, for a time, influence you. But he cannot have you.

Paul said it this way: “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39 NIV). Your salvation, and your eternal inheritance, are guaranteed by God’s Spirit. You will never lose them. You will never be separated from God. You can take that truth to the bank.

D. Our Intercessor and Advocate

The apostle Paul was no stranger to setbacks, sadness, and suffering. He understood the pain that comes from living in this world. As he wrote, “The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22 NIV). But he went on to add, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27 NIV).

Each of us has a way that we would like to pray when we are in need. We want to pour out clear, eloquent, and passionate petitions before the throne of God. We desire to pray with power and confidence, shaking the rooftops and forcing the enemy to flee. We know that some followers of Christ excel in such prayers. They seem to inhale heaven and exhale God. They are the spiritual Marines, conquering territory from the enemy wherever their feet land.

But the reality is that all of us encounter times when the words will not come. Times when, as Paul admits, “We do not know how to pray as we should” (Romans 8:26 NCV). At such times, we may worry that our stumbling prayers will not find an audience with God. We can’t even get the cable company to answer us when we are being eloquent in our requests. Can we really expect Almighty God to hear our enfeebled petitions—and actually meet the need that we can’t even express?

Thanks to our heavenly Helper, the answer is a resounding yes. We have the promise that “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26 ESV). The word intercede simply means to stand in the gap. The Holy Spirit becomes our advocate. He knows exactly the right words to say to the Father, at just the right time, to meet our unspoken need. If our lives are like a severed wire, the Holy Spirit provides the energy needed to flow across that gap.

Right now, the Spirit of God is talking to the Trinity about you. The eternal, unending, ever-creating Spirit is speaking on your behalf. Do you not find this amazing? The greatest force in the entire universe is acting as your ally, your spokesperson, and your advocate. What you are praying in the night is being heard in the light of your Father’s heavenly throne. As the psalmist wrote, “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book” (Psalm 56:8 NLT).

The Holy Spirit is working on your behalf. Let this truth reassure you. It certainly reassured Paul. He concluded, “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31, 38-39 NIV).

E. Our Gift-Giver of Life

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate gift from God. A gift he gave to empower you, guide you, bring you peace, intercede and advocate for you.

The gift of the Holy Spirit wasn't unexpected for the disciples. In Luke 16:7, Jesus had promised that he would send "the Advocate" to them. He had told them, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised . . . power from on high" (Luke 24:49 NIV). The gift had been promised. But I doubt any of them understood how much it would change their lives. Or how it would transform the world.

We find the disciples, and others, huddled up in Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension. It is the season of Pentecost, one of three feast days that all Jewish men, at some point in their lifetimes, were required to attend in the city.

Once God had them where he needed them, "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4 NIV).

At first glance, the imagery seems odd. Why would the gift of the Holy Spirit arrive as tongues of fire? Yet the Gospels reveal this is exactly what had been promised. At the outset of Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist had declared, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11 NKJV).

John wanted us to understand that a soul baptized in the Spirit is a soul that is ablaze. Just like fire, the Holy Spirit will not be quenched as long as we provide fuel for him to do his work. He uses his purifying "fire" to separate out the defilements in our lives, just like metal workers use fire to separate out the impurities in metals. And, just like fire, the Spirit melts away our icy hearts and attitudes so we can meet the needs of others in our world.

Peter quickly discovered a new boldness. The disciple who hid in the shadows and three times denied even knowing Christ was soon declaring to the world that Jesus was the promised Messiah. In the days that follow, not even the threat of death will quench the fire that burns within him. The fire spreads in all the disciples. No longer will they cower in the shadows.

The rest of the book of Acts reveals the Holy Spirit to be the ultimate gift-giver. He garnished the believers with supernatural abilities that glorified God, blessed the needy, and edified the church. The gospel spread in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and into Gentile communities.

The disciples received the power of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. We receive the Spirit's power and gifting at the moment of our conversion. We receive them when we receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit also continues to give these good gifts throughout our lives. This is why Paul says we are to "eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 14:1 NIV). Living in step with the Spirit means we can expect His further equipping as we follow Christ.

Remember that spiritual gifts are exactly that. Gifts. When Paul used the phrase "gifts of the Spirit," he almost always used the Greek term charisma or charismata. A charisma is a gift in the purest sense of the word. You receive it, but you don't deserve it. And you certainly do not earn it. It is purely by the grace of God that you receive this supernatural empowerment.

III. Application

When the Living Water of our Lord and Savior pours into our hearts, the Holy Spirit flows out of us and electrifies the dead places of the world. This is how revival happens. We drink Christ and, consequently, leak life. We serve as turbines to amplify the Holy Spirit's power.

Do you desire to see a new day in your life? Do you want to witness the same in your city, your state, and your country? Do you want to experience a revival in this land? Me too. So let's pray prayers like this one: "God, please release living water upon and through your children. Let us be sources of life and love everywhere we go. We want to be useful servants."

When you recognize that he is with you, you will sleep better tonight and smile more tomorrow. You'll reframe the way you face your fears. You'll learn how to talk yourself off the ledge, view bad news through the lens of God's sovereignty, discern the lies of Satan, and tell yourself the truth. You will discover a life characterized by the calming presence of the Spirit.

The world is filled with calamity. It has always been that way . . . and always will be. But you need not shrink back or shirk away from such trials. For you have the Spirit of the living God dwelling within you.

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit into your life. Receive all the power and gifts the Holy Spirit longs to give. He will guide you, teach you, and energize you. He will intercede and advocate for you. He will shoulder the burdens you were never intended to carry on your own.

Challenges will come in this life. But they need not define your life. For you have the amazing promise from God that the Holy Spirit dwells within you. He is a friend who will never fail. His help is always here.