Born of the Spirit Oct. 29, 2025

1 of 5 in *The Holy Spirit Series: Gospel of John Edition* John 3:1-8, etc.

It was a cold, blustery morning in early January—the kind that makes you pull your coat tighter and quicken your step as you walk from the parking lot to the front door. Our Ministry Staff had gathered at Cornerstone Centre for our first team meeting of 2025. Pastor Jeremy began the meeting with an intriguing invitation. He asked us to spread out through the church building and find a nook of solitude—a place where each of us could pray and listen for a personal "word" from God for the year ahead.

I descended from our upstairs meeting room and wandered the hallway until I found myself in Room 101. As I stepped up to the tall south-facing windows, the sound of wind suddenly filled the silence. Outside, the trees bowed and swayed beneath its force, moving together like a troupe of dancers choreographed by an unseen hand. Immediately I knew that God had given me a word for the year: *Wind.*

At the very same time, I sensed this word wasn't just for me. It was also for Cornerstone—for *all of us* as a congregation. In this season of prayer and discernment, as we've been seeking God's direction for our next decade of ministry as a church, it seemed clear that God was calling us to depend more deeply on the guidance, fullness, and power of his Spirit—*the Holy Spirit*—so often portrayed in Scripture as wind, the very breath of God.

You see, Christians believe that the one true God exists in a loving community of three divine persons called the Trinity—*Father*, *Son* and *Holy Spirit*. So, the Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity—not a vague force or distant power but the personal presence of God himself, active in the world and in the hearts of all those who follow Jesus.

We read in Acts chapter 2 that as Jesus' disciples huddled in prayer on the day of Pentecost:

> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting… All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit… [1]

As the Holy Spirit came upon those disciples, the church of Jesus Christ was born. And from that day forward, the Spirit has been propelling the church into the world for the sake of God's mission to restore all things in Christ.

Now, it's as if God is saying to us at Cornerstone, "The wind of my Spirit is coming afresh. Get ready to move with it." It's as if God is preparing to breathe new life into us, and propel us forward as a church—all through the life-transforming power of his Spirit.

Of course, it wouldn't be right to chart a direction for the church solely on the basis of a word I received in a moment of private prayer. So, I shared the word *Wind*—and this sense of God's invitation for Cornerstone—with our staff and several others in the congregation. To my encouragement, it resonated deeply with many. This, along with some other notable signs of affirmation, has led to plans for an extended journey of biblical teaching about the person and work of the Holy Spirit here at Cornerstone.

[1] Acts 2:2, 4a (NIV)

Through this journey, our prayer is that we will not only come to *understand* the person and work of the Holy Spirit more clearly, but also come to *experience* His presence and power more fully— all for the sake of the mission God wants to accomplish in the greater Markham-Stouffville community and the wider world through you, through me, through Cornerstone.

We start our teaching journey today with the first of three envisioned sermon series on the Holy Spirit—a series of series that we're calling, quite fittingly, *The Holy Spirit Series*.

A second installment is anticipated in 2026, focusing on the movement and ministry of the Spirit in Luke's two-volume story which includes his gospel and the book of Acts. A third series is likely to follow in 2027, exploring the empowering presence of the Spirit as revealed in Paul's letters.

But for the next six weeks, we will begin with the *Gospel of John Edition* of The Holy Spirit Series. In John's Gospel, Jesus lifts the veil on the Holy Spirit's work, showing us how the wind of God brings new birth, fills our hearts with divine life, and sends us into the world as bearers and sharers of that same life.

Are you ready to get started?

Please open your Bible or your Bible app to the gospel of John, chapter 3, and follow along as I read verses 1-8:

> Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."
>
> Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."
>
> "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"
>
> Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." [2]

The heart of Jesus' invitation to Nicodemus—and to all—is to be *born of the Spirit*—the Holy Spirit. In our text, Jesus also calls it being "born again," and other New Testament writers sometimes refer to it as the "new birth".

In the time that remains, we're going to explore what it means to be "born of the Spirit" by asking four questions.

[2] John 3:1-8 (NIV)

Being "born of the Spirit":

1. Who is it for?
2. Where is it from?
3. What does it do?
4. How does it come?

We start with the question:

1. WHO IS IT FOR?

The fact that Jesus is speaking with Nicodemus actually tells us a lot about that.

Verse 1 of our text tells us that Nicodemus is a Jewish religious leader—a Pharisee, to be specific. He would have been a rabbi of some status— a respected scholar and teacher and spiritual guide who others looked up to for his clear-thinking wisdom and high standards of morality.

Nonetheless, he seeks Jesus out for spiritual conversation, even though Jesus has none of the formal religious credentials that Nicodemus does. Cutting right to the chase:

> Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." [3]

Now Jesus is saying this to a man who has all the religion and morality in the world. But as far as Jesus is concerned, none of it counts. According to Jesus, in order to see the kingdom of God, even a guy as religious and moral as Nicodemus needs to be spiritually reborn. Nicodemus says he doesn't get it, so in verse 5:

> Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. [4]

Later, we'll talk more about the meaning of that phrase "born of water and the Spirit."

But for now, can you see from Jesus' statement who this spiritual rebirth is for? In saying that *no one*—not even Nicodemus—can enter the kingdom of God without being born again, or born of water and the Spirit—Jesus is also saying that the kingdom of God is open to *anyone and everyone* who has been spiritually reborn. Indeed, later in Joh chapter 3, Jesus says explicitly that it's for "everyone who believes." [5]

So, no matter your pedigree, no matter how much you've achieved, no matter how much you feel like you have your act together, you *must* be born of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. But at the very

[3] John 3:3 (NIV)
[4] John 3:5 (NIV)
[5] John 3:16

same time, no matter how checkered your past, no matter how messed up and broken you are, you *can* be born of the Spirit.

This is exceedingly good news.

Next, when it comes to being born of the Spirit, we must ask:

2. WHERE IS IT FROM?

That may not be the first question you'd think to ask when you read this text—but it's an important one. Why? Because it helps us understand the kind of power that's at work in the lives of those who are born of the Spirit.

In verses 3 and 5, Jesus twice mentions "the kingdom of God." That phrase appears often in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but almost never in John—so when it shows up here, it's meant to grab our attention.

A Pharisee like Nicodemus would have understood the kingdom of God as something still to come—a future event when the Messiah would appear, the dead would be raised, and the whole world would finally be set right.

But Jesus surprises him. He tells Nicodemus that to *see* and *enter* that kingdom, a person must be born of the Spirit. In other words, the life of that future kingdom begins now, through the Holy Spirit's work in the human heart.

Later in the same chapter, Jesus speaks again of that future renewal, saying these words, which have perhaps become overly familiar to many of us:

> "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." [6]

The Greek term for "world"—*kosmos*—which Jesus mentions no less than three times in these verses—refers to the entire created order. And the phrase "eternal life" literally means *the life of the age to come.* So, when you are born of the Spirit, you are receiving the future life of God's kingdom breaking into your present reality.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus refers to the full arrival of that future kingdom with the Greek word *palingenesia*— which means "the renewal of all things." [7] But in Titus, Paul takes the very same word and applies it to how God has made our own personal salvation possible, saying that:

> He saved us through the washing of rebirth [*palingenesia*] and renewal by the Holy Spirit. [8]

[6] John 3:16-17 (NIV)
[7] Matthew 19:28
[8] Titus 3:5 (NIV)

Do you see the connection? When you become a follower of Jesus, the same Spirit who will one day renew the entire creation begins his renewing work in you now.

So, "being born of the Spirit": Where is it from? It's from the future.

It's God's future invading your present—His coming kingdom breaking into your ordinary life through the Holy Spirit, right here, right now.

When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, the power that will one day make all things new has already begun to make *you* new. Not only that, the Holy Spirit also desires to work through you—through all of us together—making us channels of his renewing and restoring power to others.

Because the Spirit who will one day heal the whole world is already at work healing hearts. There is no wound He cannot touch, no bondage He cannot break, no flaw He cannot begin to mend.

If you follow Jesus, the same power that will resurrect the world has already begun its work *in* you, as well as *through* you for the sake of others.

That's the hope of being born of the Spirit, and it's exceedingly good news, amen?

That brings us to our third question about being born of the Spirit:

3. WHAT DOES IT DO?

We'll spend a little more time on this question, beginning with what Jesus means when he says:

> "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit." [9]

Scholars have long debated what "born of water" means. Does it refer to natural birth—amniotic fluid. perhaps? Or might it refer to baptism? Some think so.

One of the more compelling explanations is that Jesus is drawing on Old Testament imagery—especially passages where "water" and "Spirit" appear together to describe how God cleanses and renews the hearts of His people. For example, in Ezekiel, God says:

> "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart." [10]

So, what does being "born of water and the Spirit" do? It washes away sin, it raises you from spiritual death to spiritual life, and in doing so, **it makes your heart alive to God**.

[9] John 3:5 (NIV)
[10] Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NLT)

Just as a newborn suddenly awakens to a world of light, sound, and color, to be *born of water and the Spirit* awakens you to sense God's presence and movement in ways you couldn't before.

In my high school years, around the time when I first gave my life to Christ, I started attending a Pentecostal church near the little village where I lived in Upstate New York. The people there were alive with spiritual joy—they sang, danced, and raised their arms in worship. It all felt a little wild and weird to me, but I could tell they had something real—something I wanted.

And yet it was like there was a callous over my heart that kept me from experiencing God the way they did. I prayed that God would remove that callous, and in time, He did. That's when my heart came alive with a new awareness of God's love and reality, and a new responsiveness to His leading. I began to serve, to share my faith, and to take responsibility for my actions in a way I never had before—not perfectly, but genuinely, from the heart.

And as my heart came alive to God, the Bible also came alive to me. When you're born of the Spirit, the same Spirit who inspired Scripture now lives in you—and He illuminates the Word as you read and study and meditate on it.

Have you ever heard someone say, "You know, all my life, the Bible seemed abstract, but now it's become real to me." That can be a sign that someone has been born of the Spirit. Remember, Nicodemus was already a teacher of Scripture, but even he needed Jesus to open his eyes to revelation from heaven.

So being familiar with the Bible or growing up in church isn't proof that you're born of the Spirit. The question is: *Has the Holy Spirit made you alive to God?*

What else does being born of the Spirit do?

It gives you a new identity. In John chapter 1, it says:

> Yet to all who did receive [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. [11]

To be born of God, or born of the Spirit, is to receive a new identity as a beloved child of God. Your worth no longer depends on performance, status, or approval, because it's rooted in the unshakable love of your heavenly Father.

Tim Keller tells the story of a woman who had five identities throughout her life. And no, she didn't have multiple personality disorder. It was just that first, she tried to base her identity on being a moral person, then an *attractive* person, then a *successful* person, and then a *helpful* person—but each of those identities eventually failed her, leaving her unsatisfied and hurt.

Then, she gave her life to Jesus, because she finally realized God loved her because of what Jesus had done for her, rather than what she had done. Every other identity on which she tried to build her life

[11] John 1:12-13 (NIV)

had been based on her own performance, and all the ups and downs and pressures that came with them. Now, she could rest, because when you are born of the Spirit, your new identity in Jesus is *received, not achieved*. And when your identity is secure Jesus, you're free to become all God wants you to be.

Here's one more thing that being born of the Spirit does: **it reorders your loves.**

Many people say, "Sure, I'm a Christian. I believe God loves me." But if, in your daily life, what most captures your heart is success, money, relationships, or approval, your loves need reordering.

When I put my wife and kids above God, I actually don't love them well. I become demanding and critical, because I'm looking to *them* to meet the needs of my heart in ways that only God can. But when God's love holds first place in my life, I'm freer to love my family unselfishly, because I know that God's got my heart.

You see, we love others best when we love God most.

Nicodemus's story shows such a transformation. In John 3, he comes to Jesus at night—fearful, cautious, protective of his reputation. But by the end of John's gospel, everything has changed. After Jesus' crucifixion, when others had fled, Nicodemus steps forward—openly, courageously—to help bury Jesus, bringing 75 pounds of spices fit for a king. [12]

His loves had been reordered. He who once feared being seen with Jesus, now risks his life to honour Jesus as King of all kings.

That's what being born of the Spirit does.

Before we move on to the last point, let's sum up what we've talked about already.

Being born of the Spirit:

> *Who is it for?* It's for anyone and everyone willing to receive it.
>
> *Where is it from?* It's from the future. It draws on the same power God will one day use to set the whole world right once and for all, and comes into your life in the present.
>
> *What does it do?* It makes your heart alive to God. It gives you a new identity. And it reorders your loves.

We have one more question to ask about being born of the Spirit:

4. HOW DOES IT COME?

[12] John 19:39-42

How do you actually receive this new birth? Jesus makes it clear:

> "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." [13]

In other words, spiritual rebirth comes only from the Holy Spirit. You can't rebirth yourself—any more than you helped your mother give birth to you. Spiritual rebirth is God's work. It can't be manufactured or managed. That's why Jesus says:

> "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." [14]

You can't control the wind, but you can open your sails.

And the way we open our sails is to *repent* and *believe*.

Later in John chapter 3, Jesus gives a vivid picture of what that means:

> "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." [15]

He's referring to a moment in Israel's story from the book of Numbers. When the people sinned, venomous snakes came among them. The poison that began to kill their bodies symbolized the sin that was killing their souls. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it high on a pole. Those who looked at it—*just looked*—were healed.

They didn't have to climb the pole or touch the serpent. All they had to do was look.

Jesus says: *That's what it means to repent and believe.*

Except now, we don't look to a bronze snake. We look to Jesus—the One who was lifted up on a cross, bearing our sin and shame so that we could be forgiven, healed, and made new.

I was there for the birth of all three of my kids. There was only one person in that room doing the hard, painful work—and it wasn't me, and it wasn't the baby. Even the doctors and nurses did far less than Jan.

Jesus is saying, *That's what I've done for you.* You will be born of the Spirit not through your effort, but through my pain and suffering—and not just at the risk of my life, but at the very *cost* of it.

So, look to me. Look to me, lifted high on the cross. Look to me and believe. From there, my Spirit—the Holy Spirit—will do the rest.

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[13] John 3:6b
[14] John 3:8 (NIV)
[15] John 3:14 (NIV)

And here's the amazing thing: when you're born of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit's work doesn't stop with you. The same wind that breathed new life into you now moves *through* you. Those who are born of the Spirit become channels of God's life and love in the world—carriers of God's future into the present. The Spirit who made you new now wants to make His life visible in your words, your actions, your compassion, your witness. Wherever you go—to your family, your neighbours, your workplace—you become someone through whom others can sense the breath of God.

And this is true not just for us as individuals, but for us together as a church. As Cornerstone moves into this next era of mission and ministry, our calling is to be a Spirit-born, Spirit-filled community through whom the life of Jesus flows into our city and beyond. The same wind that stirred Nicodemus to seek Jesus is still stirring hearts today—and God wants to use us to carry that life to others who have not yet been born of the Spirit.

So today, the invitation is simple:

- If you've never been born of the Spirit, look to Jesus. Turn from trying to save yourself, and turn toward Him. Believe in Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to make you new. He will not turn you away. If you would like support from a pastor in taking your first steps as a follower of Jesus, please feel free to reach out to any of us—our email addresses are on the screen. We would be delighted to help you begin your new life as a follower of Jesus.

  Want help to begin a relationship with Jesus? Reach out to any of our pastors!

  - steve@cornerstonechurch.ca
  - jeremy@cornerstonechurch.ca
  - kevin@cornerstonechurch.ca
  - dave@cornerstonechurch.ca
  - andrew@cornerstonechurch.ca

- If you've already been born of the Spirit, let this be a day to open your heart afresh. Ask Jesus to fill you anew with his Spirit, and make you a channel of His life and love, so that others might experience the Spirit's renewing power through you.

The same wind that blows wherever it pleases may be stirring around you even now—calling you to open your heart. Will you respond?

Moment of silent prayer