Sermon – The Spirit Strengthens
Sunday June 21, 2026

Father's Day Message

Before we begin, I just want to take a moment to say—Happy Father's Day!

Today we honour and celebrate all the fathers here. Thank you for your love, your leadership and the many ways you provide and care for others.

We also want to honour all the men in our lives—grandfathers, brothers, mentors, friends—who reflect strength, kindness, and faithfulness.

We also recognize that for some of you, today can be a complicated day.

So wherever you are today, we're really glad you're here. And we want you to know—you matter deeply to God and to us.

Introduction

I became a Christian in my second year of university. That summer, I was asked to lead a small group in my Christian fellowship.

How many of you are in a small group?

Now, there was one person in my group who would make rude and dismissive comments whenever others shared. Have you ever had someone like this in your small group? Don't look at them!

- Someone would share about a breakup, and he would say, "just get over it."
- Someone would share an opinion, and he would say, "that's really dumb."

It didn't happen every week, but it happened enough that people in the group began to feel unsafe.

Now remember: I was a brand new Christian. I had never lead a group before. And I had no idea what I was doing. But even I realized I needed to do *something*.

And every time I thought about it, I would think:

- What if I mess it up?
- What if I make things worse?
- What if he gets angry and leaves the group?

I replayed these conversations in my mind, trying to figure out what to say. And every time I would rationalize why I shouldn't do anything.

- Maybe this isn't that big of a deal.
- Maybe it will sort itself out.
- Maybe someone else will do something.

But if I'm being honest, the issue wasn't that I didn't know what to do. The issue was, I just didn't want to do it.

Have you ever felt like that? Is there something right now you know God wants you to do but you're resisting because you don't want to do it? Maybe it's…

- A difficult conversation you've been avoiding.
- A relationship you need to mend.
- An outcome you need to trust God with.
- A step of faith you need to take.

Because here's the thing: **The hardest part of following Jesus isn't knowing what to do. It's finding the strength to do it.**

Because in those moments, something inside you will resist. A voice will tell you:

- Not now.
- It's not that serious.
- Someone else should do it.

And this resistance makes perfect sense. Why? Because God wired us with instincts for self-preservation. You and I naturally move *away* from pain, not *toward* it.

- It's not natural to forgive someone who hurt you.
- It's not natural to give sacrificially when you'll have less.
- It's not natural to take a step of faith when you don't know how it will turn out.

You and I naturally move *away* from pain, not *toward* it.

And that's why our faith gets tested. Because sooner or later, you will come into a moment when you need to choose between following your comfort and following your calling.

Maybe some of you are there now. Maybe some of you are wondering:

- How can I remain faithful to God when the path ahead is so hard?
- How can I find the strength to move forward when everything inside me wants to give up?

Sermon Series

We're in a series called *The Holy Spirit Series: Book of Acts edition.* We've been learning what it means to be a Spirit-led church by seeing how the early church was filled, shaped and sent out by the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 20, we come to a moment where Paul is confronted with a hard choice. The Holy Spirit tells him to go to Jerusalem. But the Spirit adds that there will be hardship, suffering and imprisonment waiting for him... Isn't that fun?

So what does Paul do? Does he go or does he stay put? He goes.

- But where does he find the strength to do that?
- Does he find it in his willpower? In his personality? In his determination?

No. Paul's strength doesn't come from himself, it comes from the Holy Spirit. Today we're going to look at three ways the Holy Spirit does that.

1. The Spirit strengthens us to obey when obedience is costly.
2. The Spirit strengthens us to persevere when the mission gets hard.
3. And the Spirit strengthens us to care for God's people when it gets messy.

First, **The Spirit strengthens us to obey when obedience is costly.**

Paul says in verse 22: **And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem… (Acts 20:22a)**

But then immediately he says: **not knowing what will happen to me there. [23] I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. (Acts 20:22b-23)**

What's happening? The Holy Spirit is doing two things.

- He's telling Paul to go to Jerusalem.
- But he's also warning him that he will suffer there.

This is really interesting. Because it corrects a misconception many Christians have and that's this: **If something is hard, it must not be God's will. (Common Christian misconception)** We often think that if God is in it, it should be easy. Because:

- If God is in it, the doors should just open up for you.
- If God is in it, you won't face any obstacles.
- If God is in it, everything will work out smoothly.
- If God is in it, you'll never be afraid.

But Paul shows us something different. **Hardship is not always a sign we're outside God's will; it's often a sign we're in it.**

So what do you do when the Spirit calls you to do something hard? What does Paul do?

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me… (Acts 20:24)

What's Paul's focus here?

- It’s not his comfort.
- It’s not his self-preservation.
- It’s not what he gets out of it.

Paul’s focus is being faithful to Jesus. Because when your goal is faithfulness, his Spirit will strengthen you to do it.

This is an encouragement to us as a church as well. Because as God leads us into a new season, we can expect that we’ll need to:

- Step out of our comfort zones
- Try things we’ve never done before
- Make sacrifices of our time and resources

And the question will be the same: Will we focus on our comfort or on our faithfulness?

Following Jesus doesn’t mean God will make the way easy. But it does mean his Spirit will give us strength to walk it.

Second, The Spirit strengthens us to persevere in the mission God has given us.

If the first point is about obedience, this point is about perseverance. Because faithfulness is rarely tested at the beginning; it’s usually tested over time.

Because starting is easy. Finishing is hard.

It’s like a relationship. This week Jo and I celebrated our 21st anniversary. At the beginning of our relationship, everything was exciting and new. But our love has been tested over time. Because that’s when the excitement wears off, misunderstandings happen and someone wonders why their spouse is so obsessed with shawarma!

That's why Paul reminds the Ephesians:

You know how I lived the whole time I was with you… I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing… (Acts 20:18-19)

By this point, Paul has been

- Beaten
- Imprisoned
- Falsely accused
- Shipwrecked
- Stoned and left for dead

And yet, he can still say:

I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you... (Acts 20:20)

I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. (Acts 20:27)

I did not hesitate. I did not shrink back. You can't do this through willpower alone. Because eventually:

- Your enthusiasm will fade.
- Discouragement will set in.
- Quitting will start to feel tempting.

So where did Paul find the strength to persevere? Through the Holy Spirit.

I think many of us need this reminder today. Many of you have been carrying burdens for a long time that no one else sees.

- Supporting a child through ongoing challenges.
- Caring for an aging parent.
- Fighting the same battle and struggling with the same challenges.

You're tired. You're discouraged. You're wondering:

- Does what I do even matter?
- Does anyone even see me?
- Will I get through to the other side?

Now if that's you, I believe that God has a word for you today. He wants you to know that **The Spirit won't just give you strength to start an assignment; he'll give you to strength to finish it.**

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion… (Philippians 1:6)

We need this reminder when it comes to the challenges we face: in our relationships, our health, our finances and our work.

We need this reminder as a church as well. Because we sense that God is leading us into an exciting new vision for the years ahead. And let's face it: it's easy to get excited at the beginning. But the truth is, it's harder to stay faithful when it gets hard.

My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me... (Acts 20:24)

The Spirit strengthens God's people to persevere when it gets hard.

Third, The Spirit strengthens us to care for God's people.

At first glance, this point might sound like it's only for pastors and church leaders. After all, Paul is speaking directly to the Ephesian elders.

But the principle is much broader than that. Because every one of us has people God has entrusted to our care.

- It could be our children, spouse or a family member.
- It could be a friend, a small group, a ministry team.
- It could be a neighbour, a colleague, a classmate.

In different ways, God calls all of us to care for people. And the truth is: caring for people can be difficult.

- People are messy.
- Relationships are complicated.
- Helping others takes time, patience and sacrifice.

That's why we need the Spirit's strength.

As Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders, listen to what he says in verse 28:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers... (Acts 20:28)

Notice something important here. Paul doesn't say that the elders appointed themselves. He says the Holy Spirit appointed them.

In other words, the same Spirit who calls people to leadership is the Spirit who strengthens them to fulfill that calling.

Then Paul continues:

Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Why does Paul use such strong language? Because the church is precious to God. How do we know that?

Because God purchased them with his own blood. And because God's people are so precious to him, they must be cared for and protected.

Paul knows that after he leaves, false teachers will come. So he warns them:

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. (Acts 20:29)

Paul's concern isn't for himself. It’s for the people. Even as he faces imprisonment and suffering, he's thinking about the well-being of others.

That's the heart of a shepherd. And it's a reminder that caring for people isn't always easy.

- Sometimes it means having difficult conversations.
- Sometimes it means walking patiently with someone through a difficult season.
- Sometimes it means protecting people from harmful influences.
- Sometimes it means loving people when they don't make it easy.

And no one can do in their own strength. We need the Holy Spirit.

This is an important reminder for us as a church.

Because as God leads us into this new season, He is going to bring more people into our lives and into our church.

- People who are searching.
- People who are hurting.
- People who are confused.
- People who are carrying wounds and burdens.

And they won't just need programs. They'll need people.

- They'll need small group leaders who care.
- They'll need ministry leaders who notice them.
- They'll need friends who will encourage them, pray for them, and walk with them.
- In other words, they'll need shepherds.

And that's not just a calling for pastors. That's a calling for all of us.

The good news is that the Holy Spirit doesn't leave us to do this alone. The same Spirit who appoints people to care for God's people also strengthens us to do it.

Conclusion

As we said before, the hardest part of following Jesus isn't knowing what God wants us to do. It's finding the strength to do it. And that's what we've been talking about today.

- When obedience became costly, the Spirit strengthened Paul to obey.
- When the mission became difficult, the Spirit strengthened Paul to persevere.
- When God's people needed care and protection, the Spirit strengthened Paul to shepherd them well.

And the same Spirit who strengthened Paul is the same Spirit who lives in every believer today.

- Maybe right now God is calling you to take a step of obedience.
- Maybe He's calling you to keep going even though you're tired and discouraged.
- Maybe He's calling you to care for someone who needs help.

Whatever that next step is, you don't have to do it alone. Because the same Spirit who strengthened Paul is able to strengthen you as well.

Let's pray.