

God in Us, God with Us, God Transforming Us SNEAK PEEK



SCOT McKNIGHT

## Praise for Open to the Spirit

"Frederick Dale Bruner once called the Holy Spirit the 'shy member of the Trinity.' Scot McKnight draws on his learning and his life to help us know better the One who 'transforms and transcends' mere human abilities."

— JOHN Ortberg, senior pastor of Menlo Church and author of *I'd Like You More If You Were More Like Me* 

"This biblically rooted, honest, and impressively comprehensive account of the person and work of the Spirit should persuade all Christians everywhere of the need for more of the Spirit in our lives. It is exciting to have a book that brings together the Word and the Spirit, making such a persuasive case for the need of both and rooting it all in real life. It is a gift to the whole church."

-Lucy Peppiatt, principal of Westminster Theological Centre

"Reading Scot McKnight's latest book evoked within me a renewed openness to the Holy Spirit. Combining his usual astute biblical and theological wisdom with his accessible and down-to-earth stories and personal anecdotes, he whets our appetites to live more responsively to the Spirit. He reminds us that when we live wide-open lives to the Holy Spirit, we step into God's world of newness and re-creation. May the Lord who is Spirit use this book to reflect his glory among his people!"

—Trevor Hudson, Methodist minister in South Africa and author of eighteen books, including *Holy Spirit Here* and Now

"McKnight has done it again—he has provided the church with a rich resource for personal and communal growth. *Open to the Spirit* provides a guide for exploration into how God communicates, indwells, and empowers Christians for lives of holiness and mission."

—Dr. Sara Barton, Pepperdine University chaplain



"In *Open to the Spirit*, the eminent New Testament professor and scholar, Scot McKnight, offers a breathtaking invitation to an interactive life with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is often the most neglected member of the Trinity (unless you are Pentecostal or charismatic!). This book puts the Spirit front and center. As in all his works, Scot brings a balance of scriptural truth, sound theology, and practical application. I found this book particularly, of all of his, more focused on Christian spiritual formation and experiential transformation, which makes it an important book that should be required for seminarians, pastors, spiritual directors, and Christian educators. But then again, I cannot think of a single type of Christ follower who would not be blessed by this deep dive into life in the Spirit."

—James Bryan Smith, author of *The Good and Beautiful God* 



#### BOOKS BY SCOT MCKNIGHT

The Hum of Angels: Listening for the Messengers of God Around Us

The Heaven Promise: Engaging the Bible's Truths About Life to Come

The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others

Embracing Grace: Discovering the Gospel that Restores Us to God, Creation, and Ourselves

Praying with the Church: Following Jesus Daily, Hourly, Today

The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible

Fasting

One Life: Jesus Calls, We Follow

The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited

Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church

A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together





God in Us, God with Us, God Transforming Us

# SCOT MCKNIGHT

FOREWORD BY DAVE FERGUSON





#### OPEN TO THE SPIRIT

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked ( $\kappa$ JV) are taken from the King James Version.

Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.

Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

This book is not intended to replace the medical advice of a trained medical professional. Readers are advised to consult a physician or other qualified health-care professional regarding treatment of their medical problems. The author and publisher specifically disclaim liability, loss, or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the use or application of any of the contents of this book.

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-1-60142-634-5 eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-636-9

Copyright © 2018 by Scot McKnight

Cover design by Kristopher K. Orr

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

WATERBROOK® and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

The Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress.

Printed in the United States of America 2018—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

#### SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail specialmarketscms@penguinrandomhouse.com or call 1-800-603-7051.



Almighty God, Unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

-THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER



# CONTENTS

Foreword by Dave Ferguson	xi						
Introduction: First Words	xv						
I. Open and Shut	Ι						
2. Jesus Was Wide Open to God's Spirit	9						
Part 1: Open to the God Who Speaks							
3. Open to the God Who Speaks in the Living Word	10						
4. Open to the God Who Speaks in the Elving word							
•							
5. Open to the God Who Speaks in the Prophetic Word							
6. The Spirit of God Intercedes for Us	45						
Part 2: Open to the New Creation							
OF THE SPIRIT							
7. Open Yourself to the Work of the Spirit as a New Presence	55						
<ul><li>7. Open Yourself to the Work of the Spirit as a New Presence.</li><li>8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit.</li></ul>							
8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit	62						
8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit	62 71						
8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit	62 71 79						
8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit	62 71 79						
8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit	62 71 79						
8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit	62 71 79						
8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit	62 71 79 88						
8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit	62 71 79 88						
8. Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit	62 71 79 88						

16.	Open Yourself to the Spirit in a New Assurance .					133
17.	Open Yourself to a New Freedom					140
18.	Open Yourself to the Spirit for a New Holiness .					148
19.	Living in What Is Good While Rejecting All					
	That Opposes the Good					155
	PART 5: OPEN TO THE VICTORY OF TH	Е	Sī	ΊR	ЛT	
20.	Open to New Victory over Sin					167
21.	Open to a New Victory in Communication					174
22.	Open to New Victory over Sickness and Death .					180
23.	Open to the New Victory over the Powers That					
	War Against God					187
24.	Wide Open to the Spirit in the Worship of $\operatorname{God}\nolimits$ .					198
Last	Words					205
	es					

# **FOREWORD**

# Open to the Spirit: God in Us, God with Us, God Transforming Us

ave you ever had a brush with greatness? It's that moment when you see or meet someone famous or influential. Maybe you've seen this person in the movies or on television. He or she may be a sports star, a celebrity, or a world-renowned author. You've heard about him, read about her, but then suddenly, you have the opportunity to meet the person!

I had a brush with greatness when I was on a field trip with my high school German class to The Berghoff Restaurant in Chicago. I had just finished my Wiener schnitzel and stood up with a classmate to leave the restaurant. As I opened the door to leave, guess who walked in? Ernie Banks! Now, if you don't know Ernie Banks, it just means you've never lived in Chicago and don't know much about the Chicago Cubs (Scot's favorite team!).

Ernie Banks is a Hall of Fame first baseman who hit 512 home runs and was an eleven-time All-Star. He is beloved by Cub fans for his consistent positivity when times were tough. He was known for saying, "Let's play two!" instead of just one game! Respected for being a kind man and a model citizen, fans simply referred to him as "Mr. Cub." So when he walked through that open door, I turned to my friend and said, "That's Ernie Banks!" Immediately we pivoted and said, "Excuse me, Mr. Banks, could we get your autograph?" He not only signed an autograph for my friend and me but began to make the rounds and talk to every kid in our

class. Then he said to our teacher, "Hey, how about I take you to Wrigley Field and give you the tour!"

I was very familiar with the legend of Ernie Banks, but I never imagined I'd get the opportunity to meet him in person. For years I had read the *Chicago Tribune* sports section and knew all his stats and respected his glowing reputation. What an unexpected surprise to not only meet "Mr. Cub" but also to discover he was everything I'd always heard.

What Scot McKnight does in the remarkable book you're holding is to open the door for you to experience a brush with greatness. *Open to the Spirit* is about someone most of us have heard of and many of us have read about for a long time, but maybe you never got a chance to know. He is one of only three persons consistently present throughout the entire story of Scripture, yet there remains so much mystery and intrigue. The Bible begins by describing his moving over the earth (Genesis 1:2), and it concludes with him speaking to us (Revelation 22:17). We know *about* him, but too often we don't really *know* him.

By now you know that I'm talking about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is a mystery to so many of us. Most of us can get our heads around God the Father, and through the account of Jesus's life, we have a good picture of God the Son, but the Holy Spirit seems so much more mysterious.

With a scholar's mind and a pastor's heart, Scot opens up the Scriptures and introduces us to the greatness of God's Spirit. With the credibility of a professor and the authenticity of a fellow Christ follower, Scot takes us on a journey in these pages by sharing from his life. He tells about being closed to the Holy Spirit, which allows many of us to identify with him. He then goes on to describe bravely opening himself up to whatever God has for him and challenges us to do the same.

*Open to the Spirit* is a rare kind of book, one that is grounded in solid biblical theology but at the same time, very accessible and readable. It is refreshing to learn from someone like Scot, who has the authority of an intellectual but writes as if you are reading from his journal.

I was talking to my wife, Sue, about the Holy Spirit and we both agreed that "open" is probably not the word we would use to describe our



early understanding of the third member of the Trinity. When I was a kid, a renegade group in my home church started asking God's Spirit to do miracles; they were then politely asked to leave and find another church. When Sue was young, her family attended a local Bible church. On one unusually lively Sunday morning, someone started speaking in tongues, and her reflex was to pray, "God please don't let me speak in tongues, please don't let me speak in tongues," afraid she would burst into a foreign language and embarrass herself.

While I wasn't very open, God's Spirit was gently knocking, wanting to give me a brush with his greatness. When I was in college, I started going to "Spirit-filled" churches, mostly because they had better music and were less boring. I was becoming open.

When I ruptured my anterior cruciate ligament playing basketball in a church league, I collapsed to the hardwood in serious pain. It was the opposing Assembly of God team that gathered over me, laid hands on me, and started praying for healing. I immediately felt better, looked up, and said, "You guys better stop praying like that or I'm going to believe in this stuff!" The doors to my heart and mind were opening.

When my cousin, who grew up in a church like mine, suddenly became Spirit-filled and his whole life was clearly transformed, I became even more open.

For the last twenty-five-plus years as a pastor, I've found myself becoming more and more open to whatever God has for me. Just this week I sat down for a lengthy conversation with some friends more experienced than I am to learn about the Holy Spirit's work in healing prayer. I would like to think I'm now wide open.

As you prepare to read *Open to the Spirit*, let me challenge you to make this your prayer: "God, I'm open to whatever you have for me." Just say that prayer as you turn from one page to the next and move from one chapter to another.

And as you pray and read, be prepared for a brush with a great God!

—Dave Ferguson, coauthor of *Finding Your Way Back to God* and *Starting Over* 



# FIRST WORDS

The most passionate, the most intimate, and the most significant element of the Christian faith is that God—the creator of all and the world's redeemer—has chosen not only to communicate with us but also has chosen to indwell us. I sometimes marvel that the vastness and immensity of God could become an infant, then a child and a youth, and then a young man who would die and be raised for us. That same God takes up residence in you and me, not just once but permanently.

A famous Christian, Augustine, once said that we, in our innermost being, cannot find rest until we come to rest in God.¹ Let's turn this around: we cannot find rest until we rest in God's own resting in our hearts.

I hope you will pause with me to consider the immensity of the privilege we share, in that God indwells us in the Holy Spirit. I hope you will bow before God in thanks and praise.

In making us for himself, God made us Spirit-receptive, or what is sometimes called "spiritual." We are created with a spirit, which means we are created by God to be Spirit-receptive. To be Spirit-receptive means that we are open to God, to God's own indwelling presence. We are open to releasing the grace and power and glory of God in our lives. It is not just that we are empty vessels in need of a filling. We also are created to be Spirit-receptive in the sense that God's presence is in us and ready to display God's glory through us.



In writing this book about the Holy Spirit, I have examined what the Bible says. At times I will have to pause to discuss difficult ideas and some texts that are in need of explanation. But don't lose contact with the book's seminal idea: God is alive and well and indwells us. And God wants to transform us into persons who demonstrate the grace, love, peace, and justice of God. Hence, I urge you to pray the prayer at the end of this short prologue.

Before you embark on reading this book, I'd ask you first to consider three words: *Spirit*, *Bible*, and *open*. These words form the heart of what this book is about.

We will focus on the Spirit. This is not a scholarly treatment of the Third Person of the Trinity, though I have read a good number of the scholars' treatises. Nor is this a systematic theology of the Holy Spirit.

Which leads to my second word. We will take a close look at what the *Bible* says about the Holy Spirit. This is not a book about books about the Holy Spirit, but a book about what the Bible teaches. My specialization is the New Testament, so there will be an emphasis on New Testament teaching. But I also draw at times from the Old Testament. More could be said about the Old Testament, but it would surely have made this book half again as long as it is already.

Which brings us to our third word, *open*, which captures my top concern as I write. This book will encourage you to be open to the Holy Spirit every moment of every day. What you or I may know already, combined with what we hope to learn about the Spirit, will do nothing in our lives unless we become increasingly open to the Spirit. Remember, we are talking about the Spirit of God, the One who was sent by God to transform us into Christlikeness.

This is my prayer for you, for me, and for all who read this book. I urge you to pause and pray this along with me:

Lord, I am open to the Holy Spirit. Come to me, dwell in me, speak to me so I may become more like Christ.



Lord, give me the courage to be open. Lord, I am open to the Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.

# OPEN AND SHUT

f you want to strike up a conversation with a stranger, carry a book about the Holy Spirit. Make sure the title is visible to those around you.

I was on a flight from Colorado Springs to Chicago, and a book about the Spirit was fully visible in the net pouch in front of me. The woman seated next to me was reading a book about finding a new spouse, and during a lull when neither of us was reading, she said something and I said something back and then she tapped my Holy Spirit book. She mentioned that she had grown up in a church that *never*, *ever* talked about the Spirit.

But it turned out that the pastor at her new church in Dallas recently did a sermon series on the Spirit. My fellow passenger said, "I never knew how important the Holy Spirit is, and it has rocked my world."

I'm not a person who welcomes commercial-airline conversation. I much prefer silence and even distance from a stranger sitting about as close as the airlines consider tolerable (which is not the same as comfortable). But God's Spirit used the cover of that book and the few things I had told my flight-mate in response to her questions for the woman to tell me about some struggles in her life. Years ago there had been a divorce. My fellow passenger had three daughters, one of whom had been starting a business when her husband "came out" and abandoned her daughter and their son. With misty eyes, my fellow passenger told me an amazing story of redemption involving her grandson.



I listened (wishing my psychologist wife, Kris, were present to hear more of what the woman was saying). I felt gratitude to God for caring for this family. The woman finished with, "I've learned to hand this all to God and trust God to take care of us all." I had wanted silence in the airspace between Colorado and Illinois, but the Spirit opened me to a story of redemption.

The Spirit is like that. That is, if we are open to the Spirit.

As it turned out, the woman seated next to me was more open than I, but the Spirit opened me up to what the Spirit was doing during the flight.

A sticking point when it comes to our understanding of the Holy Spirit is that humans are *not* open to the invasive, transcending, and transforming presence of the Holy Spirit. There are, of course, reasons why we are not open. Two that come immediately to mind are (1) we don't want transcending power, and (2) we don't want the transforming presence of God because we'd rather stay the way we are.

### A LITTLE SHUT, AND PRETTY MUCH NOT AT ALL OPEN

I encountered the Holy Spirit before I knew the Holy Spirit even existed, and back then I was definitely not open. My mother, bless her youngmother heart, believed the Spirit would guide me in my decisions even when I was a preschooler. I was four years old and my family lived in a sleepy village in central Illinois, not far from the Mississippi River.

Our village wore the name of Roodhouse. My father was a high-school teacher who coached the track-and-field team, and my mother's major responsibility was managing and nurturing three children. I was by far her greatest challenge, not least because our safe village made my wandering away commonplace.

I was behaviorally conditioned in midafternoon to walk to the high school to join the track team at practice, which is a way of saying my mother was behaviorally conditioned to find some respite from keeping an eye on me. One day she told me there was no track practice that day, and so I was not to walk to the high school. (I failed to mention earlier



that walking there entailed crossing a [mostly] sleepy highway.) Sleepy or not, it was a highway, and at age four I was trusted to cross it alone.

I walked over to the high school three or four times a week during track season, but I was told not to on that particular day. My mother knew I would want to go, so she countered my anticipated wandering by saying, "Just listen to the little voice inside you." The little voice was important to my mom. It was her way of referring to a combination of memory, conscience, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. She believed this little voice would remind me to stay home. Which, of course, it did.

I went to the high school anyway. Once I got there I realized I was alone, but I preferred being alone at that moment. I ran on the dusty grit of the cinder track, imagining some grand victory. Then I jumped into the long-jump pit with the gusto of a four-year-old, and I did some shadow high jumping, since the contraption wouldn't go as low as I could jump.

I was having a jolly good time at my own Olympics when I noticed my mother pull up in the family's Nash. She got out abruptly, and this four-year-old knew he was in deep doo-doo. I don't remember the details, but I do recall—nearly sixty years later, mind you—what my mom said.

My mother said, "I told you to listen to the little voice inside. Did you?"

I came back with, "Yes, I did."

"And what did that little voice say?"

A four-year-old's disarming moral argument popped into my head: "It told me I could go!"

My mother would have none of it, my father would have none of it, and it created a family story that also included my mother's lack of faith in the little-voice theory of moral guidance. On the plus side, though, the little-voice theory was my first encounter with belief in the Holy Spirit. When I told this story to my granddaughter, who is nearly the same age I was at the time of the event, she said, "Papa, you didn't have your Listening Ears on!" She's right. My ears were shut.

Even at the tender age of four I wasn't open.



## WEIRDNESS LED ME TO BEING SHUT RATHER THAN OPEN

Move forward about five years. It was a hot Sunday summer evening, and the Apostolic Holiness Church in Herrin, Illinois, was holding services. (Herrin was another sleepy town deeper into southern Illinois, near where my grandparents lived in Johnston City.) The service began in a predictably similar fashion to our Baptist church, with greetings, a prayer, and a hymn or two. I had been warned that there would be noticeable contrasts with our anti-charismatic Baptist church. But all I observed was that the Apostolic Holiness folks did what we did but with a little more verve and verbal interaction with the leader.

Bored as only a preteen could be, I had stopped paying close attention when an odd noise broke out. To swipe words from the inimitable narrative of Andy Griffith,¹ what it was, was Pentecostal worship. The pastor had announced it was prayer time, so everyone prayed—out loud. The place erupted—suddenly everyone was a chatterbox of prayer.

I was now fully alert. Some of the people were raising their hands; some walked forward (far too early in the service, at least according to Baptist custom) and knelt at the platform. Others stood at the front with hands raised. One person flattened himself on the floor. The hubbub continued for about five minutes. It sure broke up the boredom.

While I don't remember a word of the sermon, the invitation was entertaining. Lots of folks came forward to announce they were accepting the Lord's salvation, including a woman whose beehive hairdo drew my attention. My grandmother muttered that it was the woman's third trip to the altar in three weeks. Grandma added that the woman "didn't have enough salvation to last her a week."

Now that I think about it, my father was a mild Calvinist (he was a fan of the English Calvinist Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon as well as Horatius Bonar, another Calvinist). My dad explained that Grandma was an Arminian who thought people could lose their salvation. In contrast, we believed in "eternal security," which meant "once saved, always saved." Our theory was way more comfortable. Anyway, that was my



earliest encounter with Christians who seemed to take for granted that the Holy Spirit was right there during evening worship: they felt the Spirit's presence and acted accordingly.

My grandmother told me later that she wasn't a "charismatic," a word she pronounced with serious displeasure. Rather, she was "Pentecostal," which to her was the most serious sort of Holy Spirit Christian. For my grandmother, charismatics were the soft, modern version of old-time, allin Pentecostals.

That single experience at my grandparents' church just about ruined me on the Holy Spirit. Perhaps because of how I had been nurtured into the faith, that experience struck me as beyond weird. If that was what Holy Spirit religion meant, I wanted no part of it.

### ARGUMENTS FOR BEING SHUT OFF WHEN IT COMES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

The anti-charismatic context of my home church contrasted sharply with the Apostolic Holiness service. They both played a part in my slamming shut any openness to the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Little did I know how eccentric these Pentecostals were, nor could I have anticipated that the broader movement of those who are open to the Spirit would end up nearly 600 million strong.3 So big is this movement that one of America's chief historians of the church, Martin Marty, told New York Times writer Laurie Goodstein, "If I were to buy stock in global Christianity, I would buy it in Pentecostalism."4

But the world in which I was nurtured opposed Pentecostalism and all its kindred spirits. Not only that, we had theology and arguments and slogans to back up our shutting down of the Spirit. (My church upbringing sheds light on the theme of Francis Chan's book that the Spirit was, for us, the "forgotten God."5) About the only mention of the Spirit I heard in those days was on the radio listening to Don McLean's famous song "American Pie." When he spoke of "the three men I admire most," he mentioned each Person in the Trinity, including the Holy Ghost! In his inimitable rhyme, McLean sings: "They caught the last train for the coast."



The Spirit of God might as well have left for the coast, as far as my Baptist fellow believers were concerned. We had a cupboard stocked with arguments against charismatics and their Spirit-based theology. Among them:

- "The (glitzy) gifts (such as tongues, prophecy, and miracles) were for the apostolic period only."
- "In the New Testament, not every conversion led to speaking in tongues, so tongues cannot be seen as the sign of conversion."
- "There are not two baptisms—one by water, one by the Spirit—but just one baptism."
- "The Holy Spirit does not want all this attention. The Spirit gives testimony to the Son, so this charismatic stuff must be wrong."
- "Christians who are obsessed by the Holy Spirit are the most prone to theological error and to chaos. Eventually their enthusiasm and mysticism will cool, and Pentecostals will be like the rest of us. Either that, or they will turn to some kind of heresy."
- "Those who are most enthralled with the Spirit are the most shaped by their inner experiences—emotion and personal feelings. They also are the least theologically trained."
- "Charismatics believe in a two-stage theory of salvation: first you become a Christian; next you get the second blessing or you get filled with the Spirit or you enter into the Higher Life or you get fully sanctified and perfected and become sinless."
- "We need to focus on salvation and justification and the cross. All this talk about the Spirit distracts from that focus."

The sum of the matter in my church context, though not explicitly acknowledged, was this: Our theology was one of the Father and the Son, and the Spirit was ignored, neglected, or minimized. At best the Spirit got "third place" in the God-contest for supremacy.<sup>7</sup> To put all our nervous-about-the-Spirit rationalizations into one tight bundle, we reduced the Spirit by resorting to reason, to intellect, to the mind, and to the Bible. In



doing so, we relegated the Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Trinity, to an idea that our superior logic and careful theology had made irrelevant. Behind our avoidance of the Holy Spirit was the fear that if we were to let the Spirit loose, chaos was sure to result. A free-ranging Spirit was unpredictable and uncontrollable. How could we allow such a Being to intrude on our most cherished habits, routines, and ideas?

Put into another bundle, we believed in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Scriptures.<sup>8</sup> Surely God's revelation in the Scriptures provided all the teaching, all the guidance, and all the insights we needed pertaining to God and God's ways.

The arguments were deeply flawed, and reading them now makes me and those who believed as I did seem embarrassingly naive. But back then, it all seemed quite convincing. It justified my natural inclination to remain closed to the Holy Spirit. I learned in my church world to silence the Spirit.

#### UNLOCKING THE CLOSED-IN WAY OF LIFE

This book attempts to make clear what the Bible reveals about God's Spirit. Readers can also see it as the story of my conversion from the anticharismatic movement to an affirmation of the centrality of the Holy Spirit and the importance of the Spirit for the Christian life. I have come to believe, along with theologian Clark Pinnock, that the Spirit works in "a hundred thousand ways" and that it is not my responsibility to do anything but to be open to the radical and sometimes surprising flow of the Spirit in our world. I believe that is what the Bible teaches, and I hope the time we spend pursuing the truth about the Holy Spirit will lead you to a similar belief.

During World War II, a miracle took place repeatedly in the village of Le Chambon in southern France. Residents of the town, André and Magda Trocmé were deeply committed Christians who lived out their village's commitment to rescuing Jews who had been displaced from their homes.

So open was their own home that they didn't lock their doors. Against the pleading of the Jews who found shelter with them from the Nazis, Magda refused to lock her doors. But because the door was always



open, something quite special happened that can serve as an image of the Holy Spirit for you and me: "A few days after the conversation with the refugees, Magda returned from working all day at the Cévenol School and found flowers everywhere in the house: in the kitchen, in the dining room, in her husband's office." <sup>10</sup>

Here is an image to live by: if we leave the doors and windows of our lives open to the Spirit, we may find surprising flowers in our lives.

Each of us is designed by God to be receptive to the Spirit. We are Spirit-ual beings. We can be open or we can be shut, but we can't deny our design. We are built to be a home for the Spirit. Dorothy Sayers, a brilliant thinker and English novelist, once said, "The spiritual [element in each of us] is so utterly a part of our nature that we cannot cast [that element] out; if we deprive ourselves of the eternal Absolute, we shall inevitably make an absolute of some temporal thing or other."<sup>11</sup>

Sayers was right. I am deeply aware that those responsible for my early Christian training somehow wanted us all to grow spiritually but were nervous about the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We could trust text printed on paper, bound between the covers of a Bible. But the Holy Spirit? How could we ever control a God as elusive as the Spirit?

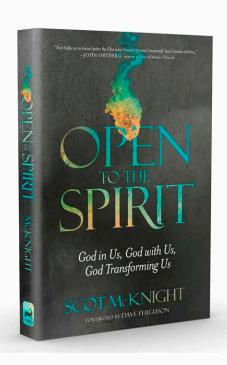
I changed directions on the Spirit because of what I found time and again in the Bible. (Don't be surprised when you see how frequently I anchor my thoughts in the Bible. In fact, be encouraged.) Our faith is grounded first and foremost in the Bible. In the chapters that follow, we will explore more than a dozen biblical themes about the Holy Spirit. Each theme examines a dimension of what the Spirit can accomplish in our lives if we remain open to the Spirit's work.

The Bible points us constantly to Jesus. The Christian faith gathers itself around Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord, the Second Person of the Trinity. These terms point us toward Jesus as being central to all things in the universe. Many today have little patience with the church, but they love Jesus. They have concluded that if Jesus believes it, they are all for it. So let's start there. What did Jesus believe about the Spirit? More importantly, how did Jesus *practice* the Spirit? Was Jesus *open* to the Spirit?



# Continue Reading...

Order
OPEN TO THE
SPIRIT
now!



# **BUY NOW**

