

The Secret Identity of the Holy Spirit

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Introduction

What draws you out of yourself?

When I was working with the poor in Honduras, it was nature. In college I read the book, "City of Joy" about the poor in India. I realized that my experience of life was lacking. Most human beings on this planet did not live like I did. So, after college, I decided to go to Latin America see the world through the eyes of the poor.

It was very hard. The island of Amapala was a very poor place whose population consisted primarily of refugees from the turmoil in El Salvador. The low lands of the island, around the volcano which had given it birth, were almost completely deforested. It was extremely hot as my friend and I walked from village to village to work with the churches there. We slept in hammocks, drank questionable water (with iodine added in the hopes of purifying it, and ate beans and moldy bread for most meals. I lost 30 pounds during my 3 months there.

But I found a black sand beach, with a huge piece of drift wood on it. The drift wood was shaped perfectly for me to lay on it, to look out at the ocean, to read my Bible and to pray. This was my sanctuary. This was the place where the beauty of nature drew me out of the challenges of Amapala. This was where I found strength to continue with life there.

There are many things that draw us out of ourselves. Mountains, and forests, as well as oceans. Paintings, sculpture, and architecture draw our attention. Music, movies, television can draw us out of our lives. Perhaps most powerful of all, love of another person can draw us out of ourselves and give us a "laser-like" focus on the other.

In these experiences we are drawn out of ourselves, sometimes to the point of losing ourselves. We are drawn out of ourselves by seeing "the other", clearly and powerfully; whether it is a person or an object. In

these experiences we relate deeply to this “other”.

Such experiences are the result of the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Such a statement may surprise us. But drawing us out of ourselves to experience “the other” is what the Holy Spirit does. We may not have associated these experiences with the Holy Spirit. This is as common as the experience itself. Drawing us out of ourselves is the secret identity of the Holy Spirit.

Move:

Being drawn out of ourselves is a spiritual experience.

In 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 Paul says, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know—God knows—was caught in paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.”

World religions spring out of such experiences. This was a significant event in the life of Paul, without whom Christianity is unimaginable. A central concept of Indian religions is Nirvana. Nirvana in Buddhism is the experience of being free from suffering. In Hindu philosophy Nirvana is union with the supreme being through moksha, which literally means “release” from the cycle of birth, life and death. In both cases Nirvana represents a form of being drawn out from oneself, similar to Paul’s experience.

Other, more ancient religions, among human beings have focused on the experience of being drawn out by nature. Mountains, the sun, and many other things in nature have been imbued with the power and even lifted up as gods because of their power to draw us out of ourselves.

In our day we are drawn out by other individuals—actors and actresses, musicians, artists—who by their gifts draw us out of ourselves. And

because of this we shower them with gifts of fame and fortune.

Being drawn out of ourselves is a spiritual experience.

Move:

We respond to such experiences with religious devotion to the “other” which drew us out.

What do we want to do after being drawn out of ourselves? We want to do it again! We try to recreated the experience by revisiting the object. If we lose ourselves in friends, chicken wings and football one week, we quickly arrange our schedules to get together again next week. When we are drawn out of ourselves by a particular song, we listen to it again and again. When a person draws us out of our problems and concerns, we will do what it takes to see them again and again.

We respond to such experiences with religious devotion to the “other” which drew us out.

Move:

It is the Holy Spirit, not the objects, which facilitate such experiences.

After seminary I went with Cheryl to Mozambique. One of my jobs there was to go to villages in the north of the country and facilitate a mapping process. I would gather with a key group of village leaders and teach them a process by which they could draw a map of the resources of their community. This map was a tool that would help them to identify and solve threats to the food needs and health issues in their community.

The goal of my being there was not to promote myself or to make these people somehow dependent upon me. The goal was to offer them a way to engage each other and their community more deeply. The best experiences of facilitation were when the villagers would take the process over. I would slowly move to the back of the room. The discussion would continue. That was success.

Like any good facilitator the Holy Spirit does not work to promote himself or to make us dependent upon him. The Holy Spirit works to help us get out of ourselves and engage “the other”. He often does this through mountains, through the flow of creativity, and through music and art. We associate our experience with the means that the Holy Spirit uses. This is why I call this the secret identity of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who draws us out and focuses us upon a deeper appreciation of the other.

The Holy Spirit, not “the other”, draws us out of ourselves.

Move:

The Holy Spirit is pointing us to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit flows out of the relationship of love between the Father and the Son. This love between Abba Father and Jesus the Son is so powerful and so pure that the person of the Holy Spirit flows from it—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit hovered over the waters before the creation of all things. The Holy Spirit sustains all that has been created. The Holy Spirit permeates everything and gives gifts and abilities to human beings.

In our experience of nature, in our experience of the work of artists and good leaders, in our walking through the interactions of each day, the Holy Spirit is at work drawing us out of ourselves and into relationship with “the other”.

The Holy Spirit does this to draw us beyond the objects and experiences. The Holy Spirit gives us these experiences to draw us more deeply into the ultimate “other”. The Holy Spirit seeks to draw us into the love of the Father and Son from which He flows.

Application:

There are three things about the Holy Spirit we need to be clear on:

The Holy Spirit is all around us. He is creating, he is sustaining, he is drawing us out of ourselves in all sorts of ways.

The Holy Spirit draw us out of ourselves and into relationship with “the other”. Rather than praying for more of the Spirit, we should pray to be drawn out of ourselves and into relationship with others. This is what "more of the Spirit" looks like.

The Holy Spirit seeks to draw us into relationship with God through Jesus Christ. If we follow the experience of being drawn out of ourselves we will praise God for the experience of the other. And as we worship God we will be drawn into the service of others. We will come closer to God and closer to one another if we follow the Spirit's lead.

Conclusion:

During my drive to church this morning, I put in a CD with some of my favorite music. The music drew me outside of my self. I was about to play the song again when I realized that it wasn't the song itself that gave me this experience, but the Holy Spirit. As I thought about the God I have come to know in Jesus Christ, I began to praise him. Rather than singing the words of the song, I began to think on the love between Father and Son which has given me this experience of joy in music. I praised the God who loves me and wants to be in relationship with me. Then, over time, my mind moved to serving others. I began to think about preaching this sermon and to serving you out of the love I have experienced in Christ. It was a wonderful experience. I want to do it again. And I can. We can. And I will. We will. The love between the Father and the Son is eternal. Our experience of the Holy Spirit is always available. And it is good.

Brothers and Sisters, give yourselves over to the Holy Spirit. In the midst of our fear and anxiety which drives humanity toward selfishness, self-defeating habits, and escape, God is every working to draw us out of

ourselves and into what is good and right and healthy. Let go of your old ways and join in with the work of the Holy Spirit. You will find what is faithful, what is joyful and what is real!

Amen.