


ROBERT MORRIS

How Real Friendship with the Holy Spirit
Can Change Your Life

The God
I Never
Knew



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The God I Never Knew

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ROBERT MORRIS

How Real Friendship with the Holy Spirit
Can Change Your Life

The God I Never Knew



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This book is dedicated to two of my spiritual fathers, Pastor Olen Griffing and Dr. Jack Hayford, who showed me through the Scriptures and their everyday lives that we can have a vibrant, personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, and that people who believe in the person and work of the Holy Spirit can be doctrinally sound, genuinely humble, and not weird!

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The God I Never Knew

The knock at the door startled Irene Adkins. The seventy-nine-year-old great-grandmother wasn't expecting any visitors. A cautious peek through the peephole revealed a well-dressed silver-haired gentleman with a kind face that struck her as vaguely familiar. It was something about the eyes and nose. As she opened the door, her certainty grew—the stranger definitely reminded her of someone. But who?

It would take her a while to realize that the man's face indeed bore an uncanny resemblance to one she knew better than any other—her own. Irene's seventy-three-year-old brother, Terry, had come for a surprise visit. It was quite surprising because Irene never knew she had a brother.

Back in 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression, a desperate and confused young English couple unhitched their tattered camper trailer on the side of the road and drove away. Police later found three small, hungry children inside. Irene, at ten months of age, was the youngest. The three were placed in separate foster homes and grew up unaware of the others' existence. Meanwhile, the young couple eventually achieved some stability a few years later and had another child—their son, Terry.

When Terry was fourteen, his parents revealed their shameful secret. They told him of the desperate straits in which they'd found themselves and of the wrenching decision to abandon the trio of hungry mouths they could not feed. Shortly thereafter Terry began a lifelong quest to find his siblings, especially the sister his parents had named Irene. He searched in vain for almost sixty years. Then came a breakthrough. He learned the name of the

agency that had placed Irene and her siblings in foster homes. Not long thereafter came the day—April 3, 2010—when Irene Adkins discovered the wonderful brother she never knew. In the discovery the rootless orphan found a source of answers to questions she had carried around in her heart all her life.

I believe I know how Irene felt. Several decades ago, after many years of struggling to live the Christian life and even working “successfully” in full-time ministry, I finally discovered the God I never knew. And in the discovery I found not only the source of answers to every question I’ve ever had but a dear friend as well. One who has made my life richer, fuller, and more exciting than I ever dreamed possible.

I am referring, of course, to God—the Holy Spirit.

AN AMAZING RELATIONSHIP

I grew up in church. However, this church was part of a denomination that avoided mentioning the Holy Spirit whenever possible. Our denominational leaders treated Him a bit like the crazy uncle who shows up at Thanksgiving once every few years and horrifies everyone with his inappropriate behavior. You can’t help being related to this uncle, but you hope that if you don’t mention his name or send him a Christmas card, he will stay away.

In fact, many years ago when I prepared to leave home to attend Bible college, my pastor had just one parting word of counsel for me. I had recently given my life to Christ, and I was burning with desire to serve Him. So I eagerly waited to hear what encouragement my pastor would deliver as I entered this season of learning and preparation for ministry.

His only advice to me was, “Watch out for people who talk about the Holy Spirit.”

At the time I didn’t know any better. So I simply nodded and filed his warning away in my mind. Now—after twenty-five years of discovering what a wonderful, kind, helpful, gentle, and wise person the Holy Spirit is; after developing an intimate friendship with Him that has made my life better and more fulfilling in countless ways; after watching the Holy Spirit help and bless people—I am grieved to think back on my pastor’s advice. To be honest, it offends me.

Of course, most of us feel offended when someone thinks badly of a person we love and respect, especially when the opinion is based on lies or misunderstandings. I'm sure you've had the experience of hearing bad things about someone through a third party and forming a negative impression, only to meet that individual later and discover that he isn't the bad person you envisioned at all.

If you're like most people, you've probably been misinformed about the Holy Spirit to some degree. After more than twenty-five years of experience in ministry, I've seen firsthand that most Christians hold a distorted, inaccurate, or incomplete view of the third member of the Trinity. In fact, many frustrated believers are just as Irene Adkins was for most of her life—utterly unaware that a loving and amazing person desires to know them and to fill their empty lives with good things. Too many have resigned themselves to perpetual defeat in their battles with temptation or to stumbling through life, making decisions with nothing more than their own flawed reason to guide them. Others live a dull, powerless brand of Christianity, completely at odds with the picture of the vibrant, overcoming, advancing church of the book of Acts.

The dynamic, full life Jesus promised to believers is a natural outgrowth of intimate friendship with God, the Holy Spirit. Today I have an amazing relationship with the Holy Spirit, though that wasn't always true. By the time we're finished exploring this topic, you'll realize what an amazing relationship you can have with Him too.

The **DYNAMIC**, full life Jesus **PROMISED** to believers is a **NATURAL OUTGROWTH** of intimate friendship with God, the **HOLY SPIRIT**.

PART 1

Who Is This Person?



Helper

Like a lot of newly married couples, Debbie and I didn't have much at first. Even the possessions we could call our own were mostly hand-me-downs from our parents.

Our financial situation improved after a couple of years of marriage, and one day Debbie asked if I was okay with her buying a new comforter. Our current bedcover was so faded and threadbare that you could practically read the newspaper through it. Being a typical guy, I thought we'd buy a plain bedspread. So when we went shopping, I was shocked to learn that the comforter Debbie had in mind might require taking out a second mortgage on the house. Of course, I'm exaggerating. But the big and soft and puffy and colorful comforter we purchased was much fancier and more beautiful than I could have imagined.

Despite its cost, I was excited about our new acquisition. On the day we bought it, several times I caught myself imagining what it would feel like to slip beneath that soft comforter and be all toasty warm.

At bedtime I walked into our room and, to my horror, the beautiful new comforter was gone. With my best exasperated yet perplexed voice, I asked Debbie, "Sweetie, where's the new comforter?"

She gave me that look. You know the one—the "you can't seriously be that dense" look. The truth is, yes, we husbands really can be that dense! Realizing the level of my denseness in this moment, Debbie explained, "That new comforter isn't for use. It's for looks."

In the years since that night, we've accumulated many household items that I've discovered are for looks, not use. We have plates I'm not allowed to eat on and fancy goblets I can't drink from. We have beautiful towels that *you* can use if you stay at our house, but *I* can't. In fact, there are towels hanging in my bathroom right now that I'm not allowed to use.

In the same way, millions of Christians have been given a comforter, but they treat Him as if He's just for looks. If we think that way, we're wrong. The wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit is meant to be so much more than an ornamental feature in our lives.

INTRODUCING A HELPER

Just who is the Holy Spirit? That's a big question—one as big as God Himself.

When you want to get to know someone new, often the first step is to be introduced by someone who already knows that person well. During His years of ministry on earth, Jesus knew the Holy Spirit better than any human ever had or has since. So perhaps the best place to learn about the Holy Spirit begins with Jesus and the words He used to introduce the Spirit to the disciples, as recorded in John 14.

It's helpful to know chapters 14–16 of John's gospel contain a record of Jesus's conversation with His disciples at the Last Supper. Jesus isn't publicly teaching a large crowd of casual followers and curious gawkers on a Galilean hillside. He's not debating the Pharisees or speaking cryptically in parables to the Sadducees. Instead, Jesus is in a small room, having dinner with His closest friends. He knows that in just twelve short hours, He will be put to death on the cross. In this unbelievably serious moment, a leader who knows He is about to be killed gives vital instructions and information to His followers.

Jesus begins with words of comfort: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. I'm going away, but I will come back" (paraphrased). Then, in John 14:16–17, Jesus gets to the core of what He wants these men to understand:

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world

cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

Don't get hung up on the fact that Jesus says, "I will *pray* the Father." Using the word *pray* this way sounds a little odd to our modern ears. But the Greek word translated "pray" here is translated "ask" in many other parts of the New Testament. Jesus is simply saying, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper."

Note the word "Helper." The person the Father will send sounds mysterious, but Jesus tells the disciples that the role and nature of this person is to "help." Jesus also assures them that the Helper won't be a complete stranger. "But you know Him," Jesus says.

How could they already know this coming helper? Jesus explains by saying, "For He dwells with you and will be in you." The verb "dwells" is in the present tense, while the phrase "will be in you" is clearly future tense. At the moment Jesus was speaking, the disciples had experienced the Helper dwelling "with" them to a certain extent. But the Helper was about to be sent in a way that would make Him not only "with" them but "in" them.

Although Jesus spoke these words to a small group of His closest friends and followers, they are also meant for us. The truth of the Holy Spirit's living with and in us assures us that we never have to feel alone.

HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS

What kind of "help" will the Holy Spirit provide? Jesus gives part of the answer in John 14:25–26:

These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name,

The **TRUTH** of the Holy Spirit living with and in us **ASSURES US** that we **NEVER** have to feel **ALONE**.

He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

This is the second time Jesus chooses the word “Helper” to describe the One the Father is sending. Here Jesus lists two of the many ways this person will be of help.

First, “He will teach you all things.” What an incredible promise. There’s no subject in which God isn’t an expert. He has all the answers. The second way the Holy Spirit helps is by bringing “to your remembrance all things that I [Jesus] said to you.” This is one reason the Gospels are so detailed and in such agreement about the words of Jesus. The Holy Spirit helped the disciples remember everything Jesus said to them.

JESUS MUST LEAVE

A little later in this conversation with the disciples, Jesus gives the third mention of the coming Helper being sent from the Father:

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. (John 15:26)

Notice that Jesus calls Him “the Spirit of truth.” Jesus presents the Holy Spirit to us as the ultimate answer to overcoming and undoing the work of Satan, the great Deceiver and “the father of lies” (John 8:44, NIV). For thousands of years, since the fall of Adam and Eve, mankind had stumbled in the darkness of the devil’s lies. Then Jesus, who declared Himself to be “the way, the *truth*, and the life” (John 14:6), announced He would soon be sending a helper who would make it possible to live a life free from deception.

In John 16, Jesus gives the disciples His most thorough introduction to the Holy Spirit. “So wonderful is this One who will be sent,” Jesus tells them, “that it is a much better thing for you if I go away. Because if I don’t go, He can’t come!” That’s how I like to paraphrase it—here’s the actual translation:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. (John 16:7)

The first thing that always strikes me when I read this passage is that Jesus feels compelled to say, “Now, I’m telling you the truth here.” He knows that the next words He speaks will truly seem unbelievable to the disciples. The disciples were grief stricken at the idea that Jesus would be going away from them. They loved Him. They depended on Him. He was their miracle-working leader. How could it possibly be good that He is about to leave them? Jesus immediately explains that only if He goes to the Father can the Helper be sent.

How could it **POSSIBLY**
be **GOOD** that He is
about to **LEAVE** them?

Jesus continues by explaining some more ways the Holy Spirit will provide help, and we’ll look at those in a moment. Right now, notice John 16:12–14. There, Jesus says,

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.

These verses contain an amazing promise. Jesus wants to tell the disciples the whole amazing story of what lies ahead, but He knows that the truths He wants to deliver would just overwhelm and confuse them at this moment. But He has good news for them. Who better to deliver important truths than the Spirit of truth? “When He...has come, He will guide you into all truth,” Jesus says. “All truth.” That’s quite a benefit of friendship with the Holy Spirit. No wonder Jesus refers to Him as the Helper.

But Jesus mentions yet another form of help the Spirit will provide: “He will tell you things to come.” Let me put it a little differently. Jesus is saying, “The Holy Spirit will tell you the future.” Would it occasionally be helpful to know what’s around the corner? Have you ever been blindsided by some

event and thought to yourself, *If only I’d known this was coming, I’d have been better prepared?*

JESUS is saying, “The Holy Spirit will tell **YOU** the **FUTURE.**”

One of the elders at the church I pastor is a wonderful model for allowing the Holy Spirit to show us things to come. Steve built a large and successful

business in the ultracompetitive construction industry, largely by regularly getting alone with God and allowing His Spirit to direct him where his business is concerned.

In addition to having daily quiet times of Bible study, private worship, and prayer, Steve makes it a point to go away two or three times each year for several days at a time. He rents a cabin or lake house and takes little more than his Bible and a notebook. His testimony is that he invariably receives instruction from the Holy Spirit in these sessions of private communion about what lies ahead and how to lead his business accordingly. Steve can share instance after instance in which a seemingly counterintuitive instruction from the Holy Spirit resulted in a profitable breakthrough. Or in which a warning enabled him to avoid unnecessary losses or bad hiring decisions.

Yes, a key role of the Holy Spirit is to lead us supernaturally into truth and reveal what lies ahead. No wonder Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Helper four times in three consecutive chapters! The promises in these passages are absolutely incredible. In each of these four instances, the Greek word translated “helper” is *parakletos*. The Greek word appears only five times in the entire New Testament, and we’ve just looked at four of them.*

When the typical first-century Greek speaker or writer used this word, he was talking about a person who pleads your case like a lawyer before a judge, or someone who goes before you to intercede with someone on your

* The fifth appearance of the word *parakletos* is in 1 John 2:1, which says, “And if anyone sins, we have an *Advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

behalf. What an amazing way to think of who the Holy Spirit is and how He is our helper!

THE BOTTOM LINE

The key message about the Holy Spirit's role is very simple: *He helps me*. He helps me know what to say when I'm speechless. He helps me know when to speak and when to keep my mouth closed.

I'm sure you can think of situations where both kinds of help would be welcome. For example, a friend shares a serious problem and you have no idea what to say that will help or encourage her. Then a thought suddenly comes to mind, you speak it aloud, and the person says, "Wow, that's exactly what I needed to hear!" That's what the Holy Spirit can do—giving you the very words you need to say.

Sometimes He tells you what *not* to say. Have you ever had that happen? Maybe you've been involved in a conversation with someone who got a little emotional. Just as you are about to throw out a really clever comeback, you have a little cautionary thought: *I shouldn't say that*.

Of course, the problem is that most of us say what we're thinking anyway. Invariably, we end up concluding, *I shouldn't have said that!* This happens a lot in marriage. Maybe you come home from work, and although you don't know it at that moment, your spouse has had a tough day. You start to say something, and the Holy Spirit nudges you and whispers, *I wouldn't go there if I were you, My friend*. Sometimes He adds, *As a matter of fact, if I were you, I'd take her out to dinner*. If you're smart, you'll listen and choose wisely in that moment. If you're not so smart—like me sometimes—you'll ignore that advice and speak your mind.

I've learned to listen to that voice. I've discovered how wonderful it is to have a helper.

You might be wondering if the Holy Spirit really speaks to us in such clear ways. The simple answer is yes. The truth is that most of us don't have any trouble believing that God speaks to us. We just get frustrated because we don't know exactly what He's saying. Almost every one of us has a desire, even a desperation, to hear with confidence the voice of God. Who wants to

stumble through life without the benefit of the clear direction and inward peace that comes from hearing God's voice? The great news is that God doesn't want that for us either.

Hearing God's voice is vital to breaking out of old comfort zones and into exciting new levels of effectiveness. Hearing God and responding to Him can take us to new places of intimacy and purpose in Him.

Hearing God's **VOICE** is vital to breaking out of old **COMFORT** zones and into exciting **NEW** levels of **EFFECTIVENESS**.

Hearing God's voice begins by recognizing which member of the Trinity is tasked with speaking to us in this season of history. It is, of course, the Holy Spirit. The Father is on His

throne. Jesus has been seated at His right hand and, according to Hebrews 10:12–13, will remain there “waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.” The Holy Spirit, however, is active and present and commissioned to interact with us on the earth today. As we've just seen, Jesus went away so the Spirit could come to us and live *in* us. He leads us into all truth, shows us things to come, reveals heavenly mysteries, and imparts vital direction.

The main reason many people aren't sure if they can really hear the voice of God is because they have refused to engage and embrace the member of the Trinity whose job it is to speak to them.

OTHER WAYS THE SPIRIT HELPS

Let's look at John 16:8–11. In these four verses Jesus gives additional detail about how the Holy Spirit helps us. In fact, He mentions three more key aspects to the Helper's ministry. Let's look at the whole passage and then analyze it one piece at a time:

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe

in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Conviction

Jesus names three areas in which the Holy Spirit will “convict” the world: sin, righteousness, and judgment. What does Jesus mean by the word *convict*? To our modern ears this word conjures up thoughts of a criminal prosecution. However, Jesus is talking about conviction in the sense of “belief” or “persuasion.” Simply put, to convict means to convince. And in this role of helping, the Holy Spirit will convince the world of God’s truths concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. He will persuade people that certain things are true.

In verse 9, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world “of sin, because they do not believe in Me.” We need to understand that when the Holy Spirit convicts lost people of sin—in other words, *convinces* them that sin is ruling their lives—that’s a good thing! This conviction is the only way people become aware that they need the Savior. The truth is that no one ever comes to believe in Jesus as Savior without first coming to the conviction that he or she needs the Savior. That’s the Holy Spirit’s job.

I was saved in a shabby little motel room. Of course, you don’t have to be in church to be saved. After all, you’re probably not going to die in a funeral home. It’s convenient if you do, but it probably won’t happen. More than anything else, during that life-changing moment in a run-down motel, I remember the conviction of the Holy Spirit. I’d been in church my whole life, but in that encounter I was completely and thoroughly convinced—to the very core of my being—that I was a sinner and needed Jesus. That conviction was the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and I am more grateful than words can express that He brought it to my life.

We **NEED** to understand that **WHEN** the Holy Spirit **CONVICTS** lost people of sin, that’s a **GOOD** thing!

Think about the hour you were saved. Do you remember the conviction, your overwhelming sense of need? That was the Holy Spirit leading you to Jesus! In fact, 1 Corinthians 12:3 says that “no one can declare that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

Righteousness

The Holy Spirit also convicts us of righteousness. Before we explore this particular ministry of the Holy Spirit, we need to have a clear understanding of what the word *righteousness* means. Contrary to common belief, righteousness doesn't mean “right behavior.” Perhaps you've even heard someone with high moral standards referred to as “a righteous person.” Of course, it's good to have high moral standards, but that's not righteousness. Instead, righteousness means having a “right standing” with God.

Please note that this verse doesn't say the Holy Spirit will convict us of the need for righteous living. While a right standing with God will indeed lead to righteous living, that's not the message in John 16:8–11. Rather, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world of righteousness because, “I go to My Father.” The reason we can have a “right standing” before God is because Jesus ascended to the Father and sits at His right hand as an eternal reminder that our sins have been paid for (see Hebrews 10:8–14).

Understanding that
YOU have been made
RIGHTEOUS is a
wonderful **GIFT**.

When Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict us of righteousness, He is referring to the fact that we all need to be convinced that righteousness exists—that it's even possible to have a right standing with God. In addition, once we're born again, the Holy Spirit's role is to convince us that we have been

made righteous through the blood of Jesus Christ. He helps by providing an inner confidence of the wonderful reality of 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For [God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Understanding that you have been made righteous is a wonderful gift. The Holy Spirit helps you become fully convinced that you have a right standing with God, and you can come to His throne with confidence and the full assurance that you are received, welcomed, and embraced by Him.

Judgment

Finally, the Holy Spirit was sent to convince the world of “judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (John 16:11).

To understand this aspect of the Holy Spirit’s activity, we need to know who Jesus refers to as the “ruler of this world.” A number of Bible passages establish that He is talking about Satan. For example, in John 12:31, Jesus says, “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” In John 14:30, Jesus says, “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”

This is clearly the enemy Jesus is talking about. Satan was the ruler of the world, but he was judged two thousand years ago through Jesus’s sacrifice and subsequent victory over death, hell, and the grave. The Holy Spirit convicts us of this truth by convincing us that the former ruler of this world, Satan, has been judged and kicked out. He no longer has any authority in our lives. He’s an outlaw.

A PROPER UNDERSTANDING

It can be easy to misread and misunderstand the Holy Spirit’s role. We’ve just looked at how the Holy Spirit comes to *convince* us of sin, righteousness, and judgment. But many people interpret these verses to mean the Holy Spirit’s basic message is, “You’re a horrible person. God is mad at you. And He’s going to get you.”

That’s not the Holy Spirit’s ministry at all! In fact, that is Satan’s role. The Bible calls him “the accuser of our brethren” (Revelation 12:10). If you allow him, Satan will keep you feeling unworthy of God’s acceptance and unwelcome in His presence by reminding you of every time you’ve blown it.

The Holy Spirit was sent to make us aware that we're lost and in need of Jesus; to lead us to Him; then to persuade us that we are in right standing with God through Him; and, finally, to fill us with the conviction that Satan is a defeated enemy who no longer has any authority over us.

When you open yourself to this ministry of the Holy Spirit, you'll find that He helps you in every area of your Christian life. That makes sense, because the Holy Spirit is our helper. But that's not all He is. He is also our friend, which we will explore next.



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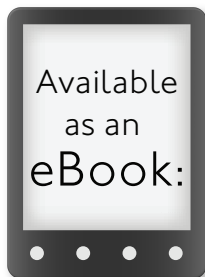
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