

Is the Western Church Misunderstanding the Role of the Holy Spirit?

Pastor Tyler Staton, lead pastor of Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon, believes many Christians misunderstand and neglect the Holy Spirit, to their spiritual detriment.

“Some of us think that the Holy Spirit is a force or a box of magical powers ... others believe the Holy Spirit was that, and now we’re beyond the need for that today,” Staton told The Christian Post.

But Jesus describes the Holy Spirit in John chapters 14 through 16 as “the One who will not teach anyone anything new, but remind them of the things that He has been teaching them.” Staton sees the Spirit as a translator, bridging head knowledge and heart transformation.

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Staton argues Western culture’s focus on cognitive learning has shaped a church that values theology over lived experience.

“If the primary way the Holy Spirit teaches is not cognitive learning, but through experience in relationship, then ... we have been culturally set up with bias against the Holy Spirit and bias toward the Holy Bible,” he says.

Staton also critiques modern discipleship, often reduced to

Bible studies or small groups.

“‘Disciple’ is a noun, not a verb. It’s an identity, not an activity,” he says. Jesus didn’t just teach; He sent disciples to live out His works. “Jesus seems profoundly concerned with His disciples having the lived experience of His life.”

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His message isn’t theoretical. Battling cancer, Staton experienced the Holy Spirit’s presence in suffering. “Talk to God like you think you’re not allowed to, and give Him the chance to surprise you,” he advises.

Leading a church in Portland, Staton sees hope in younger believers’ openness to experiential faith. As reported by The Christian Post, he notes, “There’s much more openness ... a growing safety and hunger with interacting with ideas that are not a part of one’s tradition and upbringing.”

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