Introduction

- Good morning, for those that don't know me, my name is Dave James and I am one of the Elders here at SVBC. It is my privilege this morning to share with you as we continue the series on the Holy Spirit.
- How many of you during your Christian walk have felt led to get involved in a Ministry, or to contribute to a mission, or go on a mission. How many of you faced challenging situations for which there was uncertainty and you felt led to take a certain path.
- Have you ever been reading your bible and a verse that you have seen a hundred times before suddenly jumps off the page and gives you an insight about God, or the Ministry of Jesus or a pattern in your life that you needed to change.
- In the past few months, and I have shared this with the Elders and some of my close friends, the Holy Spirit led me to verses in the Psalms during the literal "watches of the night" as I wrestled with stress and concerns.
- Passages like Psalms 4:8 "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O'Lord, make me dwell in safety"
- Through that time he led me to see a level of pride and bitterness and a lack of sincerity that was interfering with how I was showing up at work.
- I share this brief example to demonstrate one way the Holy Spirit is still working today, as we explore His work in the early church.
- I want to examine three things from the book of Acts this morning:
    - First, the what - what are those tangible things the Holy Spirit does in the Church and in believers.
    - Second, the how - how does the Holy Spirit direct activities in believers and in the Church;
    - Finally, the why - why do we see the Holy Spirit acting in these ways.

Topic 1: what are those tangible things the Holy Spirit does in the Church and believers.

- Let's begin in **Acts 13:1-4 ESV**

  “[1]Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers” Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manean (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. [2]While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” [3]So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. [4] The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.”

- Here we see early church leaders at Antioch gathered together in worship and prayer when the Holy Spirit in a very tangible way says “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”
  - This wasn’t a gut feeling or emotional sentiment, or a matter of judgement. This was a direct and unequivocal call by the Spirit to set these men apart.
  - There was specific work to which the Spirit was calling them and He impressed upon the leaders and the church that these men were called to a specific mission.
  - It is clear that the direction came as the men were worshipping and fasting - this is important - they were in a posture of worship and engaging with God when they received the direction from the Holy Spirit.
  - The passage above mentions the broader church but singles out a few men who were prophets and teachers. It is not clear whether it is the entire church or these few men who receive the direction of the Spirit. Regardless, it was explicit that Barnabas and Saul were to be set apart.
  - And once this was directed, the church as a whole was gathered together in prayer and fasting as these men were commended to the work that the Holy Spirit had called them and to which the church sent them off.
  - This is the interesting part, in both verse 3 and verse 4 we have the act of sending. In verse 3 it is the church that commends them through the laying on of hands, but in verse 4 we see very clearly that it is the Spirit that sends them out..

- Make no mistake, while the church participated in the collaborative act with the Spirit to commend and send Paul and Barnabas to the mission, the authority under which they were appointed and sent was that of the Holy Spirit.
- Not only were they sent by the Holy Spirit, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to go on mission to proclaim the word of God - first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.
- In the various passages in Acts we see that In addition to appointing Missionaries, the Holy Spirit also appoints overseers and other leaders of the church
    - At the end of his third Missionary journey, Paul notes in Acts 20:28 **"Pay careful attention to yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."**
    - This is associated with Acts 14:23 where we read **"And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed."**
    - And in Acts chapter 6 we see the Holy Spirit at work in the appointment of the Deacons who were men full of the Spirit. We see here again a commending of these men by the apostles and elders through prayer and the laying on of hands.
- These passages suggest that the authority and presence of the Holy Spirit was central in appointing missionaries, overseers (or elders and pastors) and deacons in the church. We seek to appoint leaders in SVBC consistent with this today.
- As we have noted these past few weeks we are currently seeking leaders both Elders and Deacons to lead, shepherd and administer the church.
- As leaders we are currently prayerfully considering, and have invited all of you as members of the body to prayerfully consider,
- …who the Holy Spirit is calling into these roles at this time as we are firm in the belief that it is the Holy Spirit who does the calling - because of everything we see in these passages.

- We believe that the Holy Spirit sets apart leaders within the church, and empowers and holds them accountable to do the work for which they were called. So let me continue to exhort you to pray over the upcoming appointment of leaders in the church,
- … and solicit your prayers for the leaders, that we may lead well and in keeping with the expectations in Hebrews 13 and 1 Peter 5 where God clearly lays out that leaders are to look out for the flock and will give an account of their work to the Lord.
- I am going to come back to this in a few minutes, but it is critical to recognize that the Holy Spirit's work was not just appointing and empowering leaders. These men followed the direction of the Holy Spirit to go on mission and to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people throughout the regions they travelled.
- And the Holy Spirit changing lives; people were being added to the Lord, and he was being poured out and indwelling and directing and guiding all disciples throughout the cities and regions where Paul and Barnabas ministered.
- I want to touch on this in more detail when I come to the why of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Topic 2: how does the Holy Spirit direct activities in believers and in the Church:

- But before I do, let's consider how the Holy Spirit directs the actions of believers and the church.
- The Holy Spirit does not leave believers or the Church to navigate mission on their own strength. Throughout Acts, we see the Spirit actively, intentionally directing mission through varied ways: sometimes prohibiting, sometimes permitting, and sometimes constraining.
- Let's look a little closer at these.
- Arthur Pierson in his book *The Acts of the Holy Spirit* describes this working of the Spirit on this missionary journey this way:

> While they [Paul and Barnabas] witnessed to a risen Christ, the Spirit also gave his testimony to them and to their word, by signs and wonders wrought in the power of the Spirit, and by working that greatest of all miracles, a regenerate heart. (Pierson 97-98)

- We can see the work of the Holy Spirit in a few brief examples that occur during the journey in Acts 13 and 14:
    - While in Paphos on the island of Cyprus, Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, made the magician Elymas blind as a rebuke to his interfering with the work of the Lord to share the good news of Jesus Christ.
    - In Pisidia Anitoch, Paul and Barnabas shared the good news with Jews and Gentiles, noting that the Lord commanded them, saying **"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47)** the Gentiles began rejoicing and **"...as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the Word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region." (Acts 13:48)**
    - In Lystra they healed a man who had been lame his whole life and he sprang up and began walking.
- After this missionary journey Paul and Barnabas return to the church at Antioch

  Acts 14:27 ESV

  "...where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."
- Paul and Barnabas humbly report back to the church in Antioch and report back to the church all that God had done, and don't miss the emphasis here - it was what God had done with them, not what they had done with God's help.
- They were aware of and open to and reliant upon the Spirit. The Holy Spirit instructed them and equipped them, and testified alongside them in His power - regenerating hearts, bringing many people to the Lord and showing signs and wonders.

The Holy Spirit as Co-Counselor

- As we shift between his first and second missionary journey, we see another key "how" of the Holy Spirit.
- There was a dispute that arose in Antioch about the need for gentile believers to be circumcised. And the church sends Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders about the dispute.

- This is detailed in Acts 15 where we see that the **“...apostles and elders were gathered together to consider this matter.”**, and at the end of the debate, the apostles and the elders send a letter to the believers in Antioch.
- In this letter they note:

  “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden than these requirements…” (Acts 15:28)
- I want to highlight the work of the Spirit in the debate and decisions by the apostles and the elders. Holy Spirit is a co-counselor working alongside the apostles and elders in leading the church and directing actions and decisions.
- In this case, the language suggests that there is a matter of judgement with which the apostles and elders come to a conclusion after much debate. They are numbering the Holy Spirit as one of them in reaching this decision.
- Luke notes that “After there had been much debate”, suggests that there was no clear and easily discernable outcome or actions in the matter before them.
- As they debate, we see the disciples provide perspectives, describe specific experiences, and test these against the scriptures - all with the presence and co-participation of the Holy Spirit. For these men were all filled with the Spirit.
- In the end of the debate, there is a strong sense of correctness, and consistency with the word of the Lord, but not absolute certainty.
- This section highlights that the Spirit also directs through co-counseling and collective wisdom with church leaders. At the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, after extensive prayer, biblical reflection, and debate, the apostles concluded: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." Here, the Spirit worked alongside human leaders to bring clarity and unity to complex decisions.
- This is instructive as we see similar situations in the church and in our lives today. Sometimes there is not an easily identified solution and the matter takes prayerful and careful consideration.
- So in these situations we as individuals and as a church need to deliberately and prayerfully, with a heart attitude of worship, with active engagement with the Spirit and the word, make decisions on the various matters before us as individuals, families and the church.
- Arthuer Pierson captures this well when he says:

    - When and where he is revered, recognized, and treated as actually present and presiding, leading and teaching, guiding and governing, he actually is exercising all his blessed offices of administration. Where his counsel is sought and waited for in faith, and where every step is taken as under his eye and obedient to his glance, he actually does lead and control. And it is no irreverence to say of any conclusion so reached, " It seemed good;" not only "to us," but "to the Holy Ghost." (Pierson 112)

- We need the Holy Spirit present in our decision-making - we regularly have matters before us for which, only after careful and prayerful consideration, with attentiveness to the leading of the Spirit and the word of the Lord, we need to make decisions that "seems right to the Holy Spirit and us".

- This is not an easy thing, and we all live with ambiguity. Let me encourage you to invest the time in prayer and examination of the word, in seeking advice, and waiting patiently for the Lord to inform our actions and bring a measure of peace to our actions through the Holy Spirit.

- While the guidance of the Spirit was less absolute in these situations, we see him being much more assertive elsewhere.

- Turn with me to **Acts 16:6-10**:

  6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7 And when they had come to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- Candidly, we don't know why Paul and Silas were forbidden to go into Asia or Bithynia. It was certainly a more natural path for them to take and would have included churches from past travel.

- We do see clearly the certainty which they ascribed to the direction of the Holy Spirit, and their obedience to that direction.

- I think the Holy Spirit wanted this ambiguity as to the why here. The Holy Spirit leads through means and can use different situations to orchestrate outcomes or

require actions. If the Holy Spirit had been explicit here, we could perhaps restrict our view of the means by which the Holy Spirit acts in our lives.

- Perhaps there were circumstances they could not control - soldiers blocking travel through the area, or natural barriers such as flooding.
- Maybe they became aware of risks in the region that made clear the Holy Spirit moved them away from Asia.
- While we don't know what the cause was we do know the certainty of the direction. This is also very instructive to us - where there is no ambiguity of the Spirit's leading or direction, including in God's word, we need to pay close attention and be obedient to the Holy Spirit's leading.
- In Paul and Slias' case this obedience extends not only to going away from Asia, but to obeying the vision Paul received immediately upon arriving in Troas to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10).
- The original intent of the missionary journey was to visit the brothers in every city where they proclaimed the word and see how they were. This vision led them into an entirely new mission field and extended their travels substantially.
- A.T. Pierson in his commentary *The Acts of The Holy Spirit* notes the double act of the Holy Spirit to, on the one hand restrain or prohibit a specific action - the sharing of the word in Asia and then again the entering into Bithynia;
- …and on the other hand to permit and in fact constrain Paul to go to Macedonia. Where Paul concludes that God had called them to Macedonia. (Pierson 120)
- Whatever the Holy Spirit's purpose in initially restraining Paul in Asia and then constraining him to go to Macedonia and beyond, it is clear from the passages in Acts that Paul and the Holy Spirit ministered to great effect in these regions where the word of the Lord and the number of believers grew in every centre and region he visited.
- As I noted, the Holy Spirit guides through specific means and actions and it is reasonable for us to believe that the Holy Spirit orchestrated the other times that Paul had to move between locations in a similar fashion to how he orchestrated them staying in Corinth in his second missionary journey.
- In addition to these instances, we see Paul making express reference to the leading of the Holy Spirit in a couple of other passages,

Acts 19: 21 “he resolved in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem and then Rome”

Acts 20:22-23 “he is constrained by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem”.

- I think it is clear that the Holy Spirit was working very explicitly to empower and to guide and direct Paul and the other disciples - both by way of prohibiting and permitting their actions, as well as baptizing and indwelling the new disciples, and testifying alongside Paul wherever he was ministering.
- These examples of the Holy Spirit working in the life of the church and individual missionaries / leaders is instructive for us today. I think we see the Holy Spirit at various times and for various reasons expressly, subtly, or even co-jointly directing the work of disciples and the church.
- We see the Holy Spirit co-jointly leading the administration and actions of the church:
- And in more subtle ways we see the Holy Spirit guiding us today, calling a verse to mind, providing support and encouragement from other members of the church, illuminating the scriptures as we read and pray over it for some sense of God’s leading.
- Whether through direct prohibition, clear promptings, or subtle wisdom in communal discernment, the Spirit guides believers who cultivate a posture of worship, prayer, and attentiveness to God's Word.

Topic 3 - why do we see the Holy Spirit acting in these ways?

- It is instructive to examine what the Holy Spirit was doing in the early church by way of setting apart leaders, and directing the actions of believers.
- But what is truly critical to understand is why he did it.
- And in Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his apostles,

  “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit (the Paraclete) has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth.”
- In various epistles Paul makes clear that we are baptised by the Spirit into one body, the body of Christ which is his church. Thus when we profess faith in Jesus Chris and accept him as our Lord and Saviour we receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

- As Paul and Barnabas and later Silas and others travelled beyond Samaria to share the good news of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit was with them, empowering them, testifying alongside them, and indwelling believers as they professed faith in Christ.
- What Jesus told the disciples would happen in John chapter 16, that the Spirit would hear and take the direction of Christ and take what was Christ's (what he had received from the Father) and making it known and sharing it with the disciples was happening.
- I said earlier that we can't loose sight of the work of the Holy Spirit to change lives, to regenerate hearts by bringing believers to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and what he had done for their salvation on the cross.
- The acts of the Holy Spirit including the appointing, equipping, guiding and empowering of the apostles and missionaries, and the baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit were to point people to Christ and glorify him. It was the acts of the Holy Spirit to build up the body of Christ, his church, which continues to this day.
- Those of you who know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour, are part of that body, the church which prophets, teachers, overseers and all disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit in Acts began to build and encourage and care for. It was to see people come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour and to serve and glorify the Lord.
- The Holy Spirit continues that work today. The Paraclete is present with the church continuing in its many roles including counselor, co-counselor, advocate, mediator.
- And we continue to be called to share and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ - in the local body, with our families, with other brothers and sisters of Christ, and internationally.

Conclusion:

- The Holy Spirit is so much more than a simple counselor or comforter, He appoints leaders in the church and directs our actions collectively and individually. He equips us, empowers us, teaches us, and guides us in our daily walk.
- His role is ultimately to glorify Christ and build his body, the church of which Christ is the head.
- As a local church we want to be obedient to the Holy Spirit, want to walk as a body and as individual believers in accordance with God's word and the leading of the Spirit, and we ultimately want to see people's lives changed as they come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
- So if you don't know Jesus,

- … the Jesus whose direct intervention on the road to Damascus turned Paul from a life of persecution to being Jesus' chosen instrument to share the good news of Jesus before gentiles, Kings and the children of Israel.
- The Jesus whose sacrifice and testimony brought all believers including Gentiles into the Kingdom of God.
- The Jesus, who for the joy set before him, did not despise the cross but sacrificed himself so that we may be called children of God and co-heirs with Christ.
- The Jesus who sent the Holy Spirit to be present with us, to equip and direct and comfort us, and to build his church and his people
- … I encourage you to seek Him out. Speak to myself or the other elders, or a friend you came with or Pastors Hugh or Justin today.
- Don't wait to open yourself up to the amazing work of the Holy Spirit in your life as you come to faith in Jesus Christ.
- It is a truth and power that transformed the world 2000 years ago and continues to transform lives today.
- Don't miss out on the eternity that God has in store for you as you accept Christ as your Lord and Saviour and receive the Holy Spirit as an inheritance of that gift of eternal life.