

# UNCOVER to RELEASE

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, January 10, 2021

---

## Looking Back

2020 was a year like no other in our lifetimes! Here are some of the major challenges we faced:

- From January, there was never a week when President Trump was not fighting for his job
- Relations with Iran became more tense after the targeted assassination of General Soleimani
- Australian wildfires devastated 47 million acres, and killed over 1 billion animals
- California experienced its largest wildfire season in recorded history
- Locust swarms consumed large regions of the African continent
- COVID-19 became a global pandemic
- The United Kingdom withdrew from the European Union
- Summer Olympics in Japan were postponed
- Death of George Floyd – surfaced racial tensions and concerns for police brutality
- BLM protests / riots in cities across the nation
- Takeover of downtown Portland / Seattle
- Government tested the boundaries of power in the interest of safety
- Political corruption was discovered on both sides of the aisle
- Political polarization grew, even among Christians who identified with their politics before their faith



As we began the year, we presented our adopted theme: **Uncover 2020** (little did we know what the ramifications would be!)

## What We Discovered

It turned out to be less about what *we* uncovered and more about what was uncovered *within and around us*.

- How fragile we are
- How disunited we are
- How selfish we can be
- How fear commands us
- How easily we might abandon the Church and its mission

What would you add to this list?

Although such things are normal to most, they are aspects of our humanity that reflect the sin that is in us. Would you pause for a moment and whisper a prayer of repentance? Lord, have mercy.

We did also discover some positive traits:

- Persistent compassion in the face of wildfires, hurricanes, health threats, economic losses, social isolation
- How versatile we can be
- How creative and inventive
- How agilely we can pivot
- How enduring is our faith
- Things that make us the church, even when we can't do what we're used to.

What would you add to this list? Pause and whisper a prayer of thanksgiving for God's grace. Christ have mercy.

## **Guiding Words**

I preached almost 50 sermons in 2020, urging you to:

- Have enduring joy, in spite of difficulty
- Abandon the devil's lies about God, your identity, and your destiny
- Discover Christ's activity within and among us
- Recognize the superiority of Christ's reconciling work
- Value the centrality of the cross
- Acknowledge your need for the infilling of the Spirit
- Learn what devotion to Christ really looks like
- Face the pandemic with faith and courage
- Wield worship as spiritual warfare
- Take God's prescription for anxiety
- Learn to wait for God
- Pursue the enduring impact of faith, hope, and love
- Maintain cheerfulness in the storms of life
- Seek God's face before His hand
- Let God's words change you from within
- Develop the character of Christ-followers

- Please God more than yourself
- Root out idols to leave a legacy of faith
- Develop godly values
- Sustain joy in the Lord
- Find your song and sing it
- Accept God's pruning to bear more fruit
- Do your job to love others, with the love Jesus has given you
- Make sacrifices today for a better tomorrow
- Use our scattering for greater Kingdom impact
- Maintain integrity under trial
- Demonstrate the distinctiveness of the Christian faith
- Lament before God, but beware of grumbling
- Know that faith is not just what you say, but how you live

## **Celebrations**

Overall, it was a trying, yet amazing year!

Of course, we also enjoyed water baptisms, a rededication, a wedding, and a new baby. We've met some new friends, and learned we could have worship services outdoors and online, and so much more. Thanks belongs to our Lord Jesus for His amazing grace!

## **What's Next**

Now, as we turn our thoughts to the new year before us, I want to mention a foundation stone of our movement from over 70 years ago.

In 1948, Chinese pastor Watchman Nee preached a series of messages that was published in English in 1965, under the title "The Release of the Spirit."

The sum of his message is that the outer soul (rational mind and sensory desires) of every Christian is in conflict with the inner spirit (which has been made new by Jesus Christ). This outer (self-motivated) life must be cracked and broken to release the inner life of the spirit, much like the husk of a seed must break for roots and shoots to grow.

This breaking (or, knocking out the props of human self-will) is orchestrated by God through the circumstances of our lives—pressure, frustration, disappointment, sorrow, pain—circumstances we naturally avoid or flee, but which have been designed for our benefit and growth. (Remember Joseph's explanation to his brothers, who had sold him into slavery: "*What you meant for evil, God meant for good*"?)

## The Spirit Within Us

Jesus said, *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ”* Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive. (John 7:37-39)

And so, I’m humbled to introduce to you our theme for this new year: **Release 2021.**



This image expresses the release of the Spirit from every individual in the body of Christ.

You may well ask, When the outer shell is broken and the inner spirit is released, what is the result?

I’m going to highlight seven aspects of the Spirit’s release to which we should aspire.

- Spirit of Life

*For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.* (Romans 8:2)

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Life, bringing us spiritual life (that life which is eternal), and enlivening our everyday activities with the grace of Jesus Christ. He sets our conscience free from guilt and shame and fear, providing peace of heart and courage of faith.

- Spiritual Fruit

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.* (Galatians 5:22-23)

The Holy Spirit produces the character of Christ in us, developing those fruits mentioned—seasonally now as situations warrant, and perpetually then (when Christ returns).

- Spirit of Truth

*When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.* (John 16:13)

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, whom Jesus promised to send in His place, for we have so MUCH to learn. Before His crucifixion, Jesus said, *“There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can’t bear it now.”* Later, Paul wrote, *“I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren’t ready for anything stronger.”* God’s Spirit is our faithful

Teacher, who will guide us into all the truth.

- Spiritual Gifts

*A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. (1 Corinthians 12:7)*

Through the Holy Spirit, God gives spiritual gifts to His people, empowering us to make a positive difference in the lives of others, spreading His Kingdom and grace throughout the world.

- Spirit's Presence

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)*

The Holy Spirit is the presence (fellowship) of Jesus Christ in His Church, providing comfort and confidence in any circumstance.

- Prayer in the Spirit

*But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God. (Jude 20-21)*

When the Holy Spirit prompts and guides our prayers, He also empowers us with grace, whether we pray in our mother tongue or in unknown tongues. He always leads us to pray in accordance with the will of God.

- Spirit's Witness

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere. (Acts 1:8)*

The Holy Spirit gives us the power necessary to win others to the faith of Christ. To share our faith, not only with boldness and captivating clarity, but also with effective impact.

The release of these represent the sevenfold impact of the Spirit of the Lord which Christ intends to release through our lives of faithfulness.

In summation, I remind you of Paul's words to the church in Rome:

*Romans 8:16 For His Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> And since we are His children, we are His heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share His glory, we must also share His suffering.*

*<sup>18</sup> Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will reveal to us later. <sup>19</sup> For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who His children really are.*

*<sup>23</sup> We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as His adopted children, including the new bodies He has promised us.*

The release of the Spirit is a partnership between God and His children. He cannot do it without your cooperation. You cannot do it without His grace.

As 2021 begins, will you renew your pledge of devotion to Jesus Christ?  
To search for His presence?  
To listen to His voice?  
To watch for His signals?  
To follow His lead?  
And above all, to glorify His name in word and deed?

If so, then we may expect Him to work again as He has done in the past!

Lord Jesus, do it again, as we release Your Spirit from within us!