**An Interview with: Mike Nappa**

bestselling author of *It Doesn’t Have to Be This Hard*

“I’m not a great dancer,” Mike Nappa warns with a laugh. “In fact, my dancing has been known to frighten small animals. I think that’s probably why I became a writer—because I knew these wobbly legs would never make it on Broadway.”

Well, Broadway’s loss is Christendom’s gain, as Mike Nappa’s writing has spread the news of Jesus Christ across the world—literally—and been translated into many languages including Turkish, French, Korean, Dutch, and more. An award-winning theologian and bestselling author, he’s known for creating the genre of “coffee-shop theology,” for writing helpful Christian Living and devotion books—and even for scripting a few popular *VeggieTales SuperComics*.

Today he’s answering questions about his book, *It Doesn’t Have to Be That Hard* (Whitaker House)—the result if his intensive study of all 246 New Testament Scriptures that make direct reference to God’s Holy Spirit.

Let’s dive in right in.

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Q: You studied 246 Scriptures about the Holy Spirit? How does someone even approach a huge project like that?

A: Well, for me it meant having a lot of 3x5 note cards nearby! First, I researched the New Testament to find all the direct references to the Holy Spirit, and cross-checked Greek terms (the language of the original texts) and multiple Bible translations. When I was done, I had a list of 246 direct references to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, so that’s where I started.

I copied down the text of all 246 passages, and asked myself, *What does the Holy Spirit actually DO?*

To find an answer, I went through all those Scriptures, verse by verse, and underlined verbs associated with the Holy Spirit in them. Verbs tell us what the subject is doing—so when the Spirit is the subject, underlining the verb reveals what he is doing in that Scripture.

Finally, I printed out all 246 Scriptures , with verbs underlined, and glued them to 3x5 cards—one Scripture per card. After a few days of organizing, I’d stacked my cards into eleven categories of what the Holy Spirit actually does in our lives. I took those stacked cards and turned them into the main chapters of the book, *It Doesn’t Have to Be This Hard*.

Q: Were you surprised by anything in your study?

A: You know, I’ve taught for a long time that God’s Holy Spirit is active in our everyday lives, so I thought I’d already figured that out. But when I started going verse-by-verse through these New Testament Scriptures, there was a moment where I felt a little overwhelmed by what I was discovering. God’s Spirit is not just passively interested in our faith and well-being; he’s *actively* involved in every little detail, in every moment, in the best and worst of who we are. I wasn’t prepared the fact that he’s *constantly*, proactively, living the Christian life in, with, and through us. That, I think, was most surprising for a jaded theologian like me.

Q: You have a unique perspective on how the Holy Spirit helps us to resist temptation. Can you tell us a little about that?

A: Sure. I think you’re referring to a section in chapter five, “The Holy Spirit Lives Your Daily Faith.” The big idea there is that we’re incapable of simply forcing ourselves into holy self-discipline, as an act of the human will. That’s just not a sustainable strategy, and when employed it always results in bitterness, failure, and aggrandizing self-righteousness. Fortunately, God knows this about us, so he acts aggressively within us to guide us toward his holiness.

One way the Holy Spirit does this is by *using desire to overcome desire*.

Typically, there are just a few persistent temptations that lead to a ruined life. The top three tend to be sexual temptation, power temptation, and greed temptation. The pull on those kinds of recurring sins can be very strong and human nature will always pursue that which the human person desires. With the Holy Spirit’s help, though, we can identify our higher desires, and then pursue those when the lower desires tempt us to sin.

So, for instance, if you’re tempted by sexual infidelity, take a moment to make a list of five or six things you desire more than sex outside your marriage. Maybe that includes your own self-respect, or an honest, transparent life, or whatever. Then, when the persistent temptation arise, you can ask the Holy Spirit to point your attention away from the sin and toward the things you honestly desire more.

Q: All right, our time is almost up! How can readers contact you if they have more questions?

A: You can always reach me through the “Contact” page on my website, Bible-Smart.com.

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