

# *the Father's Gift:*

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**the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**



By Paul Anderson



*The Father's Gift: The Empowering Presence of the Holy Spirit*

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## **contents**

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Dedication	v
Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix

### **the Father's Gift: the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

1.	<b>Receiving the Father's Love</b>	1
	<i>Accepting the grace that comes freely from God</i>	
2.	<b>The Great Commotion</b>	6
	<i>Pentecost brought major changes—and they are still with us today</i>	
3.	<b>Overcoming the Hindrances</b>	13
	<i>Dealing with the obstacles to being touched by God's Spirit</i>	
4.	<b>Be Filled with the Spirit</b>	23
	<i>Appropriating the power of the Spirit—today</i>	
5.	<b>Spirit Mission</b>	34
	<i>Coming to terms with why we need to be filled with the Spirit</i>	
6.	<b>It's Sunday...But Monday's Coming</b>	41
	<i>Living in the valleys after an experience on the mountain</i>	
7.	<b>The Gifts—Toys, Trophies or Tools</b>	49
	<i>Learning about spiritual gifts as tools and how to serve others with them</i>	

8.	<b>God's in the Fruit Growing Business</b>	58
	<i>Cooperating with God in becoming a fruit-bearing Christian</i>	
9.	<b>What Do You Mean You Speak in Tongues?</b>	69
	<i>Learning about a special gift God gives to strengthen the recipient</i>	
10.	<b>Is the Church a Non-Prophet Organization?</b>	77
	<i>Prophecy—a needed and timely gift for building up the Church</i>	
11.	<b>How Do You Get There From Here?</b>	90
	<i>Understanding how the Spirit guides us into truth</i>	
12.	<b>Jesus, The Spirit-Filled Man</b>	98
	<i>The same Spirit that empowered Jesus empowers the people of God</i>	
	<b>And in Conclusion</b>	109
	<b>End Notes</b>	111
	<b>About the Author</b>	113
	<b>For Further Reading</b>	115

*For our children...*

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**Andrew  
Naomi  
Gabriel  
Erikka  
Israel  
and Karis**

**Your mom and dad pray that you will all live  
by the empowering presence of the Spirit.**

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and to the Father for His incredible love  
and for His gift of the Holy Spirit.

Paul Anderson  
Roseville, Minnesota  
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## Introduction

### **PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW...**

A pastor had prepared his catechism class for Confirmation Sunday, the culmination of two years of study. Students had been practicing the different parts of the catechism to recite publicly. Three had been chosen to recite the three articles of the Apostles' Creed. The pastor introduced the recitation with, "Do you believe in God the Father?" and the first student would answer, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth." The pastor followed with, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" and the second student would respond. Then, "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?" and the answer would come.

The big day finally arrived. Family and friends gathered for the special event. When the pastor got to the third article and asked, "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?" there was no response. He tried again: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?" Silence! Embarrassed looks crossed parents' faces and grandparents squirmed in their pews. The pastor tried once more: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit." Finally a student answered, "Pastor, the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit is sick today."

Down through the centuries the Church has often been embarrassingly quiet about the Holy Spirit, and, as a result, it has left many sick. The Apostles' Creed, the most popular of historic creeds, is symptomatic of this disease. It includes ten statements about the Son, but only one about the Spirit. The "third" person of the Trinity has come in last place more often than not. Not that He's looking for attention. His singular mission is to point people to Christ, but that mission is hampered when people don't have a clue about His ministry. If the devil can make the Spirit little understood or received, he will have done an effective job. The Spirit has been ignored, quenched, depersonalized, denied, resisted, vexed, provoked, lied to, blasphemed, grieved, and insulted. And, as a result, the Church misses out on the very gift dispatched to empower it for ministry.

When Paul came to Ephesus, he asked some people if they had received the Holy Spirit. Their answer is humorous: "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:2b). If you were to ask people today what they knew about the Spirit and they answered, "I think He exists," they would know more than the Ephesian disciples. But some know little more.

## PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY...

At a rally of Lutheran Renewal, the organization I work with, we gave an altar call after a message on the Father's love. One woman said, "I want to be filled with the Spirit." A young man requested, "I just want more," while a teenager responded, "I need healing. My heart was ripped open by my father, and it's hard to think God loves me." The ministry time lasted for about three hours, as men and women, young and old—people with all kinds of needs and desires—came forward to meet with prayer counselors.

Clearly, one common need characterized this diverse group: they were all hungry. Some hungered for what they had never tasted before or had tasted long ago and had turned away from. They were sick of what they had been feeding on; they were empty inside and wanted something to fill the deep yearnings of their hearts. Others had tasted of God's goodness and were coming back for more. Some had never experienced the power of the Spirit in their lives and knew they needed it. Others had been touched by the Spirit's love and power, and they were returning for a fresh refill.

I've written this book for those who are hungry for the life of the Spirit, whether this is your first meal or whether you have received much and want more. I've wanted to make the meals readily available to you, especially that you might eat and not just read about eating. If you are hungry, reading a menu won't satisfy your appetite; it will just make you more hungry. If this book is like a menu, the questions at the end of each chapter and the suggested prayers are opportunities to do some eating. I trust that the menu will increase your appetite and that your hunger will be satisfied.

I want to help people say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," to *know* what that means, and to *experience* the reality of it rather than just to talk about it. It is not as important to have the right answers as to have the real thing. The answers can certainly help us enter into the reality, but sadly, many who can correctly articulate the theology stop short of actually encountering God the Holy Spirit. It is one thing to say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit..." and quite another to live in the experience of the Spirit's power, guidance, and comfort. It is my earnest prayer that this book might help us do both.



## Receiving the Father's Love

I'd just finished playing a vigorous game of tennis with our two older children when our son Israel, then three, bounded to my side. "Daddy," he pleaded, "could we go jogging? Just you and me?" One glance into his eager eyes and I was hooked.

We took off running, side by side, his short, stubby legs paralleling my long, lanky ones. After two blocks I was concerned about his stamina, so I made a proposal. "How about it, Israel, shall we turn back?"

"No, Daddy," he puffed, "let's keep going." One more block and Israel offered a compromise. "Okay, now let's walk," he said. We headed back, the two of us striding along together. As we did, I was aware of a deep, deep sense of love that seemed to overshadow us right there on the sidewalk.

In terms of a workout, it wasn't much. No heart rate acceleration. No significant distance. I didn't even get sweaty. Yet inside me, I experienced something more exhilarating than any aerobic "high" I'd ever known. It was as if God had grabbed my heart in His hands and poured liquid love into it as I walked along with my little son. When Israel and I reached our front porch, I wished that the local TV news crew would show up to record this unexpected but defining moment.

*"How great  
is the love  
the Father  
has lavished  
on us, that  
we should  
be called  
children of  
God! And  
that is what  
we are"*

(1 John 3:1 NIV).

### **A MOMENT OF TRUTH IN THE VAN**

Something significant had happened to me, and I needed a few moments to ponder it.

"Israel, go on in the house," I said. "Daddy's going to sit in the van for a little bit." I hopped in the front seat, pushed back against the head rest, breathed deeply, and turned to the Lord. "Father, I sure do love that boy. I enjoy just being with him. Is this the way You love me?"

"Yes, only infinitely more." I heard the Father's answer deep within me—and it moved me. It targeted my heart with laser precision, the same way it would have targeted your heart if you'd asked that question. Joy flooded the van while I sat motionless, hemmed in by a net of tangible love far beyond my ability to

understand or explain. But because of my love for Israel, and all our children, I had caught a glimpse of it.

What impressed me that day was that Israel wasn't doing much to make me want to love him and be with him. He was my son and that was enough. He wasn't breaking any speed records picking up his clothes or even telling me how much he loved me. He simply expressed the desire to do something with me. Could it be that my desire to be with God would have that kind of impact on the Almighty? As impossible as it sounded, God seemed to be saying, "Yes, Paul, that's exactly what I mean. Let your heart take it in."

How easily I slip back into thinking that the Father loves me more when I'm "doing it right" or when I'm "getting sweaty" serving Him. Perhaps you, too, wander down that dead-end road from time to time. A good test is to ask yourself how you would finish this sentence: "God would love me more if I would...." If we can put anything in that blank, we are making God's love conditional. As a friend of mine says, "God's love comes at the front end." It's like equating it to the unconditional love of a parent for a child. Jesus came from a place of intimacy to bring us to a place of intimacy, to the heart of the Father. This was the profound sense of what I experienced that afternoon in the van.

## **THE BEST GOOD GIFT**

When you're in the family of God, you never need to try to get the Father to love you. God pours His love on His children based on the work of His Son Jesus, not on your works or mine. Remember the words the Father spoke to affirm Jesus at the beginning of His ministry before He had ever raised a dead person or healed a leper: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17). In the very same way He affirms us as His children because we are accepted "in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

*"This is my  
beloved Son,  
with whom  
I am well-  
pleased"*  
(Matt. 3:17).

As pastor friend, Morris Vaagenes, says, "The big word from the cross is not 'do' but 'done.'" Our main job as God's children is not to *do* something but to *believe* and *receive* the Father's love because of what Jesus has done. The words of an evangelist I once heard underscore this message succinctly: "We are human beings, not human doings."

If you were not appreciated as a child or if you were ignored or even abused, and you wonder now if you have value as a person, be encouraged. Your heart can hear another message, the truth of the Father's love for you. Jesus heard it as He stood in the waters of the Jordan. My heart heard it clearly as I sat in the van outside my house. Yes, the Father loves us! And, yes, infinitely more than we can imagine.

So how is this love communicated to us? How do we *get it*? St. Paul gives us

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

our answer in his letter to the Romans: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). *We get it as a gift!* Yes, love is a *gift* from God, delivered to us via the *gift* of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Spirit is the Father’s promised gift to His children. The Spirit enables us to come to the Father, to receive His love and grace. Jesus said to His followers, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). What a comparison! Any parent can relate to the joy of giving gifts.

I know how to give good gifts to my children. In fact, I love doing it. When I gave Andrew his first bike, I tied a piece of string to it, walked the string up seventeen stairs and into the living room. When it was time to open Christmas gifts, I handed him the string and told him to follow it. Andrew’s heart was bursting with excitement but not as much as mine. When he found the new bike, I could hardly contain myself. Our whole family got excited. “*If you...how much more will our Father!*” What a good gift we are offered in the Holy Spirit! He is the Father’s answer to our cry for love, for healing, our call for help, our desire for life, our need for power.

## **THE MOST TENDER TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE**

The people in the Old Testament knew God, but they had never seen Him. When Jesus finished His ministry, His followers were left with a first-hand description of who God was because they had “seen” Him in the person of His Son. “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (John. 1:18). Jesus didn’t come to talk about God, He came to reveal His Father. Nevertheless, even the disciples, as close as they were to Jesus and as long as they’d been with Him, were slow to get it. Remember how Philip pressed Jesus to show Him the Father? In responding to him, Jesus, in essence said: “The Father and I are exactly alike. If you have seen me, you’ve seen Him.” (See John 14:9.)

While Old Testament saints were reluctant to call God “Father,” Jesus taught His followers to do just that. He wanted them—and all the believers who followed—to know God intimately and personally, as their heavenly Father.

Over and over the Fatherhood of God comes to us as one of the warmest and most inviting truths of Scripture. In the Gospel of John alone, the word *father* is used 126 times. Of these, 115 of them refer to God the Father. This is our Father, the One who has numbered all the hairs on our head and who values us much more than anything else in creation. He knows us at the core of our being—our strengths and weaknesses, our dreams, hopes, and fears. He knows

our needs. His father-heart is bent “kid-ward.” We are “the apple of His eye,” and He never takes His eyes off of us.

Jesus, our elder brother, came from the bosom of the Father to tell us how wonderful His Father was. His death rent the veil which separated unholy people from a holy God, providing us access to the Father. Jesus told us that when we come before God to pray, we should say, “Our Father...” A real shocker for His Jewish listeners. No one in their tradition ever got that personal with God. But Jesus wasn't into tradition or religion, He was pointing the way to what we were designed for at the moment of creation—an intimate relationship with Father God.

The first word the Spirit teaches to God's adopted children is “Abba.” It is one of the few words borrowed from the Aramaic that stuck in the Hebrew language. Today if you were in Israel, you would hear Jewish children calling their father “Abba.” The clearest translation is “Daddy.” And that's the term Scripture uses in describing our heavenly Father. He is up close and personal!

We have an argument in our family over whether our infant children say “Momma” or “Dadda” first. Of course, I think it's “Dadda.” The first time little Karis said that word, the whole family knew it and perhaps some of the neighborhood. Why? Because she was doing so much? No. It was because she was somehow recognizing me as her father and I couldn't keep quiet about it.

God is eternally The Father, and Jesus is eternally His Son. Those who are brought into the family through faith in Jesus Christ share the love that is eternally poured upon the Son by the Father. It is not a case of God's loving us more if we do more, or serve more, but of remembering that we are His children and receiving His love.

I recently spoke with a pastor friend, Mark Anderson, who couldn't wait to tell me about “the more” of God's love. He was discovering, “Paul, the Father's table is a bigger banquet than I've ever imagined,” he said. “It's bigger than the gifts of the Spirit. That is one part of the great feast, but there's so much more.” He went on to describe the healing taking place in his emotions that was enabling him to respond more freely to the Father's love. He was telling me what I've heard a hundred times over in the past few years: “There's much, much more. We are receiving a greater and greater release of the Father's love.”

Yes, that's what is happening in the Body of Christ today. The Holy Spirit is awakening us to the reality of God's love at a deeper and more intimate level. It is as if the Father's heartbeat for His children is being heard with an accelerated clarity in this hour as millions of believers around the world are experiencing renewed life in the Spirit—and all His fullness.

*“God's love has  
been poured  
into our hearts  
through the  
Holy Spirit  
which has been  
given to us”  
(Rom. 5:5).*

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

I trust that the following chapters will challenge and encourage you as you read about the powerful provisions the Father has given us through His gift of the Holy Spirit. Truly God has spread a banquet table bigger than any of us can ever imagine. And, I believe He's calling us to sit up to this great table and enjoy the feast, to receive His love to the fullest possible measure, and to enjoy His empowering presence in our lives and in our churches. He is calling us to leave scarcity and live into abundance. No one needs to go away hungry.

**TO REVIEW:** Above all else, God is first and foremost our Father. He longs for us to experience His unconditional love in the depth of our hearts. And to this end, He has sent His Holy Spirit as a gift to us, to reveal His fatherly heart in a dimension of His intimate presence and empowerment.

### **NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. We probably know some things the Bible says about God, but that doesn't mean that we experience Him. What is my personal picture of God? How would I describe Him, based on my experience of Him?
2. When I pray, whom do I address? Why do I pray this way?
3. Am I comfortable picturing God as my Father? Why or why not?
4. Have I experienced God as a generous Father? If so, how? If not, why not?



### **WILL YOU OFFER THIS PRAYER?**

“Dear Father, It's sometimes hard for me to think that I am important to You, that I matter as much as Your Word says. I am sorry, but I have learned to trust my experience more than the Bible. Please work Your healing in my life, so that I can receive the love You have for me. Sometimes it seems too good to be true, but I want to believe that it is true. In Jesus' name, Amen.”



## The Great Commotion

**“...I will  
pour out my  
Spirit on all  
people”**

(Joel 2:28 NIV).

Pentecost was nothing new to the Jews. They'd been celebrating this agricultural and spiritual festival for eighteen centuries. Every Jewish male was required to go to Jerusalem for three feasts, one of which was Pentecost. Although the Jewish dispersion had made it difficult, the celebration still drew multitudes to Jerusalem. Such was the case in the Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection and ascension: "There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). The believers were there, too, a hundred and twenty of them, "all together in one place" (Acts 2:1).

Then, without warning, the sounds of a mighty wind rushed in to fill the room where they were gathered. Tongues like fire appeared over their heads. The promised Holy Spirit had come in all His power, filling these believers with His very life. They began speaking in languages they had never learned. This was no ordinary Pentecost; a spiritual revolution had just broken loose.

Pentecost, indeed, was revolutionary. But not for people who wanted their religion comfortable and ready-made. Jesus Himself refused to be held captive to tradition. One could never guess how He would answer a question or whether He would answer it at all. His healing ministry couldn't be reduced to three easy steps. He'd trained His disciples to be men of the Spirit, not men of technique. Still, they didn't learn overnight. While they were saying, "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6), Jesus was saying, "Go into all the world..." (Mark 16:15). They had *restoration* on their minds while Jesus had *revolution* on His. It was as if they were singing, "Give me that old-time religion," while God was declaring, "Behold, I do a new thing."

**We have the tendency to turn movements into monuments.** We may picture God, the Ancient of Days, as the old fogey grandfather type. But, in fact, we are the old fogies, experts at maintaining the status quo. God's problem with us is not that we are too radical for Him. Hardly! We're the ones dragging our reactionary heels while He's waving us forward into a whole new dimension of life.

**Christ's last mandate called for mission, not maintenance.** What could be more radical to a group of provincial Galileans who'd never been more than one



## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

hundred miles from home than a call to head out to the regions beyond with a message from God? They would have settled for a little rebuilding of a nation, but Jesus expected them to turn the world on its head.

Without a doubt, history took a turn at Pentecost. As we see just how radical it was, we observe something of how God operates with us. This chapter points out the new things God initiated at Pentecost and challenges us to respond to the moving of the Spirit in our day.

## **THE NEW IS CONNECTED TO THE OLD**

God works like a good teacher. He brings out both the old and the new from His treasure. (See Matthew 13:52.) It was fitting that God should bring in the first fruits of the Christian church at the time of the harvest festival. God is no anti-traditionalist. He established the Pentecost festival in the first place, and then, at the appointed time, He brought forth His new work to initiate a new harvest, a spiritual one. God's new works are always related to His old ones.

**In His creativity there is continuity.** Christ is not named Omega, but Alpha *and* Omega. This should comfort us. The better we understand the past, the better we can live in the present and prepare for the future. God had spoken about His new thing through Joel in the Old Testament: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28). When the Spirit came with all His supernatural power, Peter said, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). Orthodox Jews must have appreciated the connection of the old with the new. That's a strong clue for us: when we have a hard time stepping into God's new things, we need to try understanding some of His old ones.

## **NEW BREAKTHROUGHS ARE GOD'S BUSINESS**

In the very beginning God broke the silence with His Word. His voice trumpeted forth from heaven, "Let there be..." and there was. The psalmist wrote: "He commanded, and they were created" (Ps. 148:5). God's voice thundered again when He gave the law at Mount Sinai.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of "the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them" (Heb. 12:19).

A glorious multitude of angels sounded forth from heaven at Jesus' birth. And when the Lord makes His re-entry, it will be accompanied with "a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God" (1 Thess. 4:16).

Breakthroughs of the eternal into our world of time and space are announced by a sound from heaven. No wonder, then, that the birthing of the Church

should be heralded by such a magnificent sound as from heaven "like the rush of a mighty wind" (Acts 2:2).

**Renewal, like creation, is God's business.** It is initiated not in the human mind, but in the heart of heaven. The disciples were commanded to wait. If

*"like the rush  
of a mighty  
wind"*

(Acts 2:2).

God hadn't stirred them up with the wind that blew earthward, the people of God would likely still be waiting. Earthlings can do nothing substantial until heaven sounds forth. The disciples hit the streets because the Spirit of God had moved upon them. If you don't like what Pentecost did, if you're uncomfortable with all that went on that day in Jerusalem, remember this: it was all instigated by God; He started it. If you like what happened at Pentecost, pray for the wind to blow again.

## **GOD MAKES NEW TEMPLES BY HIS SPIRIT**

"Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting " (Acts 2: 2). God has had a history of filling houses. From the time of the building of the tabernacle, God found a place on earth for His glory to reside. His presence filled these places, and He invited His people to meet Him there. The glory of the Lord so filled the tabernacle that when it was dedicated, the priest couldn't even minister.

While the disciples stood around admiring the beautiful stones of a soon-to-be obsolete temple, Jesus told them about a new kind of holy house. At Pentecost the Spirit filled the believers, and *they* became the *temple*. God made His children into living stones which grew together and became a spiritual house. Remember Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman? He told her that a time would come when the issue of worship wouldn't be settled by geography, but by the Spirit. That time came with Pentecost, and it revolutionized worship.

**The early Christians did not just go to church - they were the Church.**

We build structures and say to the world, "Come!" The gospel says "Go!" The building can witness to our immobility rather than our mission. The more the people of God build churches, the more institutional they grow. We may meet in a beautiful building that is a fitting house of worship, but if you want to find God, find His people, the Church. God dwells in us. And Pentecost made it that way.

## **GOD GIVES PEOPLE A NEW LANGUAGE**

The Spirit is a demonstrator. The history of the Jewish people is full of examples of the Spirit of God manifesting Himself in supernatural ways. We know His presence by the signs that accompany Him. When the Spirit came

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

upon Saul he prophesied. When the Spirit came upon the judges they did mighty acts. At Pentecost the Spirit comes, and we hear the gift of tongues for the first time. “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). It is as if God were reserving this gift for the Church’s birthday.

**Pentecost is like the reverse of the tower of Babel, where God used language to divide.** At Babel, one people became many nations, scattered throughout the earth. At Pentecost God used the gift of tongues to let the multitudes in Jerusalem hear of His great deeds, and it brought the nations together. Notice two things about this gift: It praises God for His works and it inspires mission. We may be a bit radical to speak a language we don’t understand, but Pentecost is radical. A gift from heaven is radical stuff. It was then and it still is today.

## **GOD STARTS A NEW MISSION WITH NEW MINISTERS**

In one Spirit-empowered swoop, God gave the newly-formed church a taste of what her calling would be. The harvest had begun. Asians are gathered in with Arabians. The apostles were to begin their work in Jerusalem and then they, and others who followed, would travel to the outer limits of their world. This mission was no longer the Jewish thing. Instead of restoring the kingdom to Israel, God was sending His new troops to the ends of the earth. He sent them from the upper room to the “uttermost.” They went from the inside to the outside and they turned the world upside down. Pentecost was a street movement, a new mission which required new ministers.

Under the Old Covenant God anointed only a few leaders with the Spirit, and everyone knew who they were by the things they did or said. They performed mighty acts, prophesied, or displayed supernatural wisdom. But the Spirit didn’t always stay with the people He came upon. If grieved, He would depart. Thus we see David, weighed down by the guilt of his sin with Bathsheba, pray, “Take not thy holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11).

The prophets longed for a new age and foretold a time when God would deal powerfully by His Spirit. Joel prophesied that God would pour His Spirit upon *all* flesh. (See Joel 2:28.) Ezekiel prophesied that God would put a new spirit in His people and cause them to know His ways. (See Ezekiel 36:26.) Their knowledge of what the Spirit could do made them long for the coming age.

This new age arrived at Pentecost. The Spirit was given not only to the leaders, but to all: “And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them” (Acts 2:3). Not for a short time, but “sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). The Spirit cuts across age, gender, and national

differences. It includes the sons and the daughters, not just the men and not just the elders. Even the menservants and the maidservants would prophesy. The Spirit first fell upon “uneducated” fishermen and tax collectors, not the trained religious leaders. Pentecost brought the Spirit not just to a certain few but to *all* believers.

**Pentecost was a lay movement.** One of the biggest heresies in the Church today is the division between professional clergy and the so-called lay people, the non-professional. Pentecost means that every Christian has the Spirit thus is called to do ministry.

## **GOD GIVES GIFTS TO EQUIP HIS PEOPLE FOR MINISTRY**

Peter quotes Joel in saying that “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17). We thought the prophet was the guy with the beard, but it’s a new day. All are ministers and all have gifts, because God poured His Spirit out on “all flesh.” So “I got gifts, you got gifts, all God’s children got gifts.”

*“your sons and  
your daughters  
shall prophesy”*

(Acts 2:17).

**God’s not the reluctant giver; we’re the reluctant receivers.**

He’s not a foot-dragger for our visions. He’s the vision-giver! Pentecost speaks of visions, dreams, and prophecy – a breakthrough of divine revelation mediated through ordinary people like you and me. Jesus had promised that the Spirit would guide His followers into all truth. The book of Acts tells the story of His doing it. And one of the beautiful ways He does it is through the gifts of the Spirit.

## **GOD BRINGS HIS PEOPLE INTO A FAMILY**

Pentecost takes people from every tribe and nation and brings them together in one family. We see Peter no longer doing his own thing, something he often did just weeks before. When he gets up to preach, he is “standing with the eleven” (Acts 2:14). When the convicted hearers respond, they speak “to Peter and the rest of the apostles” (2:37). When the converts give themselves to the Lord, they also make a commitment to the community: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42).

Bringing Jews and Gentiles into the same house was such a radical move that even the apostles resisted it. God had to show Peter and others His intention for doing this. Still, the controversy was so great that it split the new and growing Church. Some never did join.

### WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING TODAY

It is one thing to look back and see what the Spirit did at Pentecost. It's another thing to acknowledge His presence *now* – to know that He is still here, moving in the world and among the people of God. Sadly, the greatest threat to His activity is not the world but the Church, always in danger of doing its bureaucratic thing, trying to continue carrying the new wine in outdated ideas and methods, insensitive to what the Spirit is saying today.

**Sometimes the rival to a new work of God is the previous work.** God instituted the Old Covenant. Now it was becoming obsolete. Those comfortable with the old and who were not about to change were passed by. We can put up our sails and move with the wind of the Spirit, but we will not change its direction. Those ready to go with the Spirit will see the mighty works of God, while those who resist the Spirit will think with nostalgia of the days gone by.

And yet Peter's Pentecost message did not center on the Spirit. His two-point sermon explained what the Spirit was doing, using Joel for evidence, and what Christ was doing, drawing from the Psalms. His conclusion focused on the lordship of Christ. He did not proclaim, "Oh, this feeling is so wonderful. You must feel as I feel. I love God, I love everybody. I love me." You don't see much of Peter. Instead, you see Christ, the Lord of the universe, crucified, risen, and exalted, who has poured out the Spirit, proving His lordship. He's left us with only one response: Repent and come under His rule.

Frank Bartleman, an eyewitness to the 1907 Azusa Street revival in California, wrote these words of warning in a tract: "Any work that exalts the Holy Ghost or gifts above Jesus will finally end up in fanaticism. Whatever causes us to exalt and love Jesus is well and safe. The reverse will ruin all. The Holy Ghost is a great light, but focused on Jesus always for His revealing. Where the Holy Ghost is actually in control, Jesus is proclaimed the Head: the Holy Ghost, His executive."

**Some need answers to baffling situations in order to confirm their prejudices, while others can risk the unknown.** For instance, we observe two very different responses by the Jerusalem crowd when Pentecost hit the streets. Scoffers had their minds made up about those experiencing the Spirit: "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13). Others more open to this upper room overflow pondered, "What does this mean?" (2:12).

**Pentecost is for common people who are willing to step out of their fears long enough to let the Spirit do a new thing.** It is for you to open the way for God to make changes in your life. He comes with the wind of His Spirit to make your body His temple, to give you a new language of praise, to send you on a mission, to install you into the ministry, to give you His gifts, all so that

you may participate in God's plan to share the revolutionary good news of Jesus, to a broken and desperate world.

No parade, no political rally, no organized protest movement in the history of the world can ever compare to what God initiated that day in Jerusalem when the Great Commotion ignited the Great Commission, when the Holy Spirit was loosed. Yes, Pentecost was revolutionary! That was the moment in time when God empowered His Church to go forth into the world filled with the very presence of the resurrected Jesus. And He is still doing that.

**TO REVIEW:** When Jesus ascended, the Spirit came ten days later – and He has not left since. He turned bodies into temples, He gave gifts to God's people to enable them to carry out the ministry started by Christ. The book of Acts (also called the Acts of the Apostles) is really the acts of the Holy Spirit.

### **NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. What new things did Pentecost bring? How would I connect the power of Pentecost to the suffering of Calvary?
2. How are things different now from the way they were before Pentecost?
3. In what ways was the New Testament community a Spirit-filled community? Is the Church today living in the reality of the Pentecost Revolution? How about my church? And how about me?
4. Exit Savior - enter Spirit. Picture the changing of the guard. Why did it need to happen that way? Did it work?
5. What changes came with Pentecost that have especially touched my life? How am I different because of Pentecost?



### **WILL YOU OFFER THIS PRAYER?**

Thank You, Father, for sending the Spirit at Pentecost. I thank You for the Church that was birthed at that time. And I thank you that the Spirit who came has never left. He is just as available to Your people today as He was in the early Church. Forgive us when we have not relied on His presence and power. Fill me afresh with Your life-giving presence. Fill my church with the Spirit. May we discover the same mighty power the apostles did. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.”



## Overcoming the Hindrances

It was just plain frustrating for the Pharisees. When they played the flute, Jesus didn't dance. When they sang a funeral song, He didn't mourn. (See Matthew 11:17.) They wanted so much to have a God they could be in charge of, One they could leash up and lead about. But they couldn't tame Him. For the Pharisees, being in control was the issue.

It's so easy, isn't it, to spot that tendency in someone else? But the truth is, we may be more like the Pharisees than we think, preferring a God who will do what we want Him to do, when we want Him to do it. Yet, God resists us in our efforts to "run the show" and to stay in control. Instead, He keeps inviting us to reach for something far more than bound-up, barren lives, devoid of His presence and power. And so He comes with a tremendous offer: the unleashing of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Unleashing the Spirit simply means giving God permission to do what only He can do: save, heal, restore, deliver, fill, and empower. When this happens or when, as my friend Mark says, "We let God out of our God box," we are in for real living.

Some years ago I received an invitation from a pastor friend to speak on this very subject. As we talked, his voice exuded eagerness. "Paul, we really want you to come over and share on the Holy Spirit at our church." Before I could even respond, he expanded his invitation. "Then, after you speak, we want you to unleash the Spirit."

I cleared my throat and grabbed for a familiar scripture. "Well, as you know, 'the wind blows where it wills,' but we'll see what we can do." I hung up the phone and called my friend Herb Mjorud, a veteran in the ministry of the Spirit. "Can you come and help me unleash the Spirit?" Herb, however, was booked and couldn't come. But since a team from Lutheran Renewal was available, we accepted my friend's invitation, and on the appointed evening, we arrived at the church bearing our Bibles, notes, holy expectations—and a healthy dose of fear and trembling.

I spoke that night on what follows in this chapter: "Overcoming the Hindrances to Receiving the Holy Spirit." Then we gave two altar calls. The first was for those needing prayer to remove any blockages that might stand in the

*"Let us  
also lay  
aside every  
weight, and  
sin which  
clings so  
closely"*

(Heb. 12:1).

way of receiving a fresh touch of God's love. Over thirty of the hundred or so present stood up and walked to the front of the church. There at the altar, with hearts open and tender, they confessed sins, fears, bitterness, disappointments, depression, and wounds. Many of them, men included, were in tears. By the time we gave the second call to pray for the release of the Spirit, these folks were ready. Their "walls" were down and their hungry hearts receptive to the Father's touch. When we prayed, "Come, Holy Spirit," He came. I learned something significant that night: it is easier to pray for the infilling of the Spirit after you've dealt with the obstacles in people's lives.

This chapter defines the problem of "our hindrances" to receiving the fullness of the Spirit, and then looks at the four major obstacles that can often get in our way.

## **CLOGGED PIPELINES**

Maybe it's something as simple as a clogged pipeline in your basement. Or maybe it's really serious, like a blocked artery in your heart. In either case, whether it's the flow of water or blood that's blocked, the clogged pipes have restricted life in some crucial way. In much the same manner, the emotional wounds, the sins, the fears, and the distorted pictures of God have "clogged up the pipelines" of many believers' hearts, making it difficult for them to receive the life the Spirit wants to give.

Many have come to the Lord with great expectations for a fresh work of grace in their lives and, sadly, have left altars and prayer sessions deeply disappointed. We can hardly overestimate the pain people feel when this happens and the subsequent anguish they experience when the inevitable barrage of negative questions assaults them: "Where is God anyway? Why does He bless some people and not me? What's wrong with me?" Or worse, "What's wrong with God? Is He punishing me for something I did twenty years ago? Or did I just not do something right when we prayed?"

It takes only one or two negative experiences for a person to conclude that "this thing with the Spirit" is simply not for them. They've been hurt and disappointed, and they don't want to be let down again, especially by God. Mention praying for the Spirit's infilling, and they freeze, run, or change the subject. Their minds hear the "love talk" about God, and it sounds so good—so inviting—but their hearts give them another message: "God loves others more than He loves me." Their proof? "He gave others what they asked for, but He skipped me." What appears to them like the cold decision of an impassioned God is very likely some kind of "clogged pipeline" or personal block *in them* that needs to be acknowledged and removed. Not everyone has obstacles to overcome, but most people probably do.



## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

Think about it for a moment. God the Father pours out His love to us through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), but sometimes we keep Him at arm's length because of the obstacles and blockages—the sins and sorrows—of our lives. We may sing: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so,” but if our experience doesn't tell us so, we easily believe our experience rather than the Bible.

I have prayed for scores of people in recent years who know they are going to heaven when they die, but meanwhile, life is pretty bleak. They doubt God's love, either because of their feelings of guilt or remorse over what they've done or because of hurt brought on by what others have done to them. One young man I prayed for grew up on a diet of neglect and criticism. He felt like he was dirt. Even though God's Word said he was precious, he believed his feelings instead of the truth.

In another situation, a woman in Norway came forward for prayer. As a child she used to ask her dad, “Father, are you fond of me?” He would joke with her: “Now let's see, what time is it? What day is it?” He never gave her a straight answer. She's struggled with depression much of her life, wondering about her dad's love—and God's. To her dad their little dialogue was just harmless bantering, but twenty years later she's left with a void in her heart—and she isn't laughing.

St. Paul says that it takes a “spirit of revelation” for us to know how wonderful it is to be claimed by God (Eph. 1:17, 18). He goes on to pray that we will *know* (i.e., experience) His love in its fullest dimension. (See Ephesians 3:14-19.) If we are going to let this continuous flow of love reach us, the pipeline to our hearts must be “unclogged.” We must deal with any obstacle that hinders our ability to receive the Holy Spirit in His fullness. Once we've done that, we can be prepared for the prayer, “Come, Holy Spirit.”

The first obstacle is **wounding**.

*“...that the  
God of our  
Lord Jesus  
Christ, the  
Father of glory,  
may give you  
a spirit of  
wisdom and of  
revelation in  
the knowledge  
of him...”*  
(Eph. 3:14-19)

## **EMOTIONAL WOUNDING**

Emotional wounds are just as real as skinned knees and broken arms—and usually last longer. It's not limbs they cripple, but lives and relationships. They're a kind of “deep heart hurt” that, when not dealt with, blocks us from experiencing the natural give and take of healthy interaction with those around us, and most especially, with God.

It is helpful to identify the kinds of wounds we experience.

Many suffer from a **father-wound**. Our father—someone we had every right to trust—let us down. He violated our confidence, and a wound penetrated our

heart, a wound that doesn't go away with time. Sadly, when we are wounded by our earthly father, it often directly colors our ability to trust our heavenly Father.

This is also true of a **significant-person wound**. Someone who played a vital role in our young lives—a parent, sibling, relative, pastor, teacher—has access to our hearts in a unique way. Because we trusted them and opened our hearts to them, we can, in our vulnerability, be deeply wounded. Sad to say, this kind of wounding often exacts a heavy toll, carrying our pain over into adulthood.

**Well-meaning people who pray for us** can wound us on occasion. Perhaps it was someone you didn't know, but who left you feeling that if you had just more open or had more faith, then you would have received from God. Naturally, it hurts us when we think we're asking for a blessing and get a curse instead, when we feel we're opening to God and the door is slammed in our face by someone less understanding than He is.

Countless seekers have been offended by **people who didn't know any better** (or should have known better). Evangelicals have been put off by

charismatics, who, at least to them, exhibited pride. Evangelicals have often judged the entire charismatic movement based on a television evangelist who rubbed them the wrong way. Charismatics have been judged to be "on the fringe" and thus cut off by those from the mainline churches. Unfortunately, when bad experience is planted in the soil of misunderstanding, bitterness easily sprouts up. Without realizing it, we can let these judgments close off our hearts to God's gracious visitation in our lives.

When we are wounded, we need help to heal, but like an injured dog cowering in the woods, we often "growl" and "snarl"

at the very ones who reach out to us. We're in so much pain and so afraid of encountering more that we resist the help we need. But the good news is that no one has to live with deep emotional pain! God wants to "heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3). Yet, if we are ignorant of His incredible mercy and if our fists are raised in defensiveness or our hearts are closed in judgment, we can't reach out to receive the healing love we need. What will open us up again to the Father's love? Only one thing: forgiveness!

The process of forgiveness begins when we acknowledge our wounds. Although we are the wounded ones, we're responsible to God for any reaction we may have held toward those who have hurt us. We need to set aside the "blame game" and turn the searchlight of truth on ourselves. A good question is: "Am I holding any anger or resentment toward those who have hurt me or who are presently hurting me?" If the answer is yes, you need to honestly deal with what's in your own heart. When you're ready, ask the Lord to forgive *you* for harboring the hurt that invaded your heart at the time you were wounded. Then

*"He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds"*

(Ps. 147:3).

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

with the forgiveness and grace you've received from Him, release the offender and forgive the debt.

Forgiveness is never easy, and it often takes time, but it's the only avenue guaranteed to open us back up to the Father's love—and His healing.

The next obstacle to deal with is **sin**.

### **THE SIN BARRIER**

There are two kinds of sin barriers in our lives. **The first is the kind we think God can't forgive.** We usually have a difficult time forgiving ourselves and others, and because of this, we assume God has a tough time forgiving us. A case in point is a woman from Los Angeles who asked a pastor for prayer after a seminar. He felt as if he wasn't getting through to her. Finally, as he prayed silently, asking the Holy Spirit's help, a question came to mind: "Have you ever had an abortion?" he asked.

The woman immediately burst into tears. Pregnant at sixteen, she'd had an abortion, and now, thirty years later, she was still struggling to forgive herself. God, on the other hand, was not struggling. He was there for her with His grace and healing love as the pastor prayed for her. After all those years, she opened her heart wide and received God's forgiveness.

Periodically, my wife and I have times of intense Christian fellowship. Translate that "argument." After one such occasion, Karen asked for my forgiveness, and I snapped out a quick, "I forgive you."

"Why did you say it like that?" Karen responded, aware of my obvious insincerity. I knew instantly why I'd done it. She had hurt me, and I wanted to hold her responsible, so I cut a little deal. I gave her 75% forgiveness and withheld the other 25%.

Is that our picture of how God forgives? Reluctantly and painfully?

What a contrast to what I'd received years earlier as a sophomore in college. I'd spent time working with Campus Crusade for Christ and within a few short months, thought I could instruct my father, a man with thirty years of pastoral experience, on how to run his church. Years later and a pastor myself, I realized the folly of my immaturity, confessed my pride, and asked Dad to forgive me. "Of course, I forgive you, Paul," he said. He made it sound so easy, and he never brought it up again.

That was a true picture of how God forgives—extravagantly and lavishly (according to Ephesians 1:8). In fact, He hosts a party in heaven when we repent. Jesus says, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). I've always pictured heaven as a happy place, but think of it: our repentance increases the joy there! When we start confessing, God doesn't hold

His head and moan, “Oh, you again. You’re back at it.” Not at all. He gets ready to apply the blood of His Son—and celebrate. And, Scripture tells us that Jesus sees “the fruit of the travail of His soul and is satisfied” (Isa. 53:11).

**The second kind of sin is the kind we hold on to.** If we pray to be filled with the Spirit but are hanging on to unconfessed sin, we won’t get filled.

That’s just the way it works. As the psalmist says, “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Ps. 66:18). Our instructions are pretty clear: the Spirit is poured into empty vessels, not those full of sin and self. Jesus told His disciples that obedience opens us to the experience of the Father. “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21). In other words, God makes Himself known to those who confess their sin.

In God’s order, letting go precedes receiving. James underscores this sequence, “Therefore, put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word” (Jas. 1:21).

Is there a sin barrier in your life? Whether it’s the kind of sin you feel God can’t forgive or the kind you’re not sure you want to confess, don’t let it keep you from receiving all that God wants to give you. Before praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you need to get cleaned out. Whatever it is, let it go!

Another barrier that prevents openness to the Spirit is **fear**.

*“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance”*  
(Luke 15:7).

## **FEAR AND ITS FACES**

Ever counted all the “fear nots” in the Bible? It’s an impressive sum with a revealing two-fold message: (1) God knows how easily we get scared, and (2) He’s urging us to trust Him. But trust doesn’t come easily for us, even as believers. Like an intruder, fear stalks us at the most unlikely times, limiting our ability to open our hearts and receive what God wants to give us. That’s why it’s so important to acknowledge our fear and to deal with it.

Fear wears many faces. Here are some that may seem familiar:

**Fear of what might happen.** “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). Why is this so fearful? Because we are no longer in control. Asking the Spirit to fill us is saying that we want to let Him be in control. “Let go and let God” is easy to say but harder to pull off. That change is a slippery one to negotiate because most of us really want to be in control! If you have this problem, be assured; you’re not alone. I suggest this prayer: “Dear God, I resign as chief administrator of the universe. I release the controls to you,

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

for my life as well as the lives of others. I trust you as a good Father. Amen.”

**Fear of what might not happen.** If you’ve prayed for the infilling of the Spirit and didn’t see anything happen, you may naturally fear repeating that experience. Rather than be disappointed again, most of us prefer not asking one more time. It’s easy to rationalize or to make our sin or our situation the exception to the rule: “Maybe God isn’t all that interested in empowering me, or healing me, or granting me victory, or giving me more freedom or peace. Maybe it’s not for me.”

We can even change our theology to accommodate our disappointment: “Well, those things aren’t for today anyway,” or “God just doesn’t work that way anymore.” Never mind that the Bible says, “In thee they trusted, and were not disappointed” (Ps. 22:5). We’re convinced that it doesn’t include us. Sometimes when we ask for prayer, our minds switch to overtime. All sorts of fears surface, like: “God just doesn’t care for me that much,” or “Maybe I’m a special case because I can’t get my act together,” or “Maybe I’m unworthy because of what I’ve done.”

If you’re afraid nothing will happen when you ask for the Spirit’s empowering, I suggest you stop and pray: “I find it hard to trust You, Father. I want to believe Your Word is true, but my experience causes me to doubt. Forgive me for doubting You. Take me past my fears to a place of faith so that I can receive what You have to give. Amen.”

**Fear of emotions.** Our eight-year-old has no fear of emotions. She laughs and cries freely now. But give her eight years, and she’ll likely develop a new self-consciousness as her teenage inhibitions move in to crowd out the present delightful expression of her God-given emotions.

My sons and I love basketball. Living in Minnesota, we have now become Timberwolf fans. If you want to see emotions peak, join us at the Target Center in downtown Minneapolis. Macho men who sit on their hands in church are out of their seats in a flash if their favorite player blocks a shot or slam dunks past an opponent. No fear of emotions here.

Yet when it comes to church or spiritual things, we don’t always give ourselves permission to be real people, with real feelings. We put up our guard and stiffen our resolve to be stoic. What is it we fear? Looking weak? Being embarrassed by tears? Getting out of control? More than likely we fear emotionalism, being ruled by our emotions. While this can be a legitimate concern, we don’t want to react so strongly that we put the lid on our feelings.

The truth is that when the Spirit comes, we *will* know it. He will impact our joy, our peace, our freedom. As a pastor friend of mine once said, “If you get encountered by the God of the universe, there might be an internal response.” If so, it’s probably appropriate.

During my last two years of ministry at a church in San Pedro, California, I saw more tears among the men of our church than I had seen in the previous twenty. God's Spirit was touching some of them in a deeply personal way, at the heart level, and they were responding appropriately. It was not only okay to cry, but it was also healing. Remember, God created our emotions. Why not take a moment to thank Him and to ask Him for the freedom to express them fully.

**Fear of failure.** When the Spirit moves on our lives, we can easily become afraid, thinking that what happens next is up to us. That's why I like to tell people I pray for, "Now don't go out and try to make anything happen. 'He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it'" (1 Thes. 5:24). The difference between the Old Covenant and the New is that in the New Covenant God guarantees success by putting His Spirit within us. He even uses our failures to draw us close to Him.

If you are overly conscious of your failures, thank the Father that it is easy for Him to forgive you for your past. Tell Him you are willing to believe that failure is really the back door to success.

**Fear of people.** Many of us are more concerned about what others think about us than what God thinks about us. A healthy fear of God can overcome these fears, but if we are gripped by people-fear, we may not let go and surrender to the Spirit. The first step in overcoming this obstacle, is acknowledging our fear. Then, as we are open to God, we can invite Him to fill our hearts with His love and thus help defeat the people-consciousness that has made us so fearful.

John encourages us at this point when he writes: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18 KJV).

**Fear of deception.** A childhood memory of being freaked out by a weird religious meeting can carry over into adulthood with vivid overtones. Many of us have heard graphic stories about such gatherings and are not eager to experience them for ourselves. In such cases, it's normal to fear letting things get "out of control." We could worry about being opened up to the devil's deception if we received prayer from someone else. It's at this point we need to remember that Jesus encouraged His disciples to ask for whatever they needed and that He challenged them to rely on God's trustworthiness: "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?" (Luke 11:11).

The heavenly Father, Jesus assures them, is totally dependable—and will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (v. 13). So, friend, if you ask the Father for the Spirit, who will you get?

The last obstacle we need to overcome is **any wrong picture of God.**

*"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?"*

(Luke 11:11).

## **OUR PICTURE OF GOD**

In Chapter One we discussed the tender love of God the Father. And here we are again, back to this crucial issue. We need to ask ourselves, “What is our picture of God?” Not what the Bible says about Him, but what our *heart* tells us about Him. Jesus came, not to talk about God, but to tell us about His Father. If our picture of God is distorted by life’s sins or sorrows, we will have difficulty receiving from Him.

I spoke at a conference about the Father’s healing love and closed with an invitation for prayer. A girl from the worship team came forward. She looked like a light had just been turned on inside her. “I guess I have seen God more as a judge than as a loving father,” she said. “Maybe it has something to do with my own father.” She had seen the obstacle of her wrong belief and wanted to deal with it; she was ready to respond to the “real” God, the Father Jesus talks about.

John Wesley once said to his opponents, “Your god is my devil.” As Luther looked back on his earlier life and was asked about God, he said, “Love God?—I hated him.” We may worship a monster, but we won’t love him. The elder brother in the story of the Prodigal Son believed his father was a stingy boss, so it never occurred to him that he would ever want to give him anything.

The way we understand God can keep us from receiving His love. If we read the Bible through a legalistic filter, we will fail to apprehend His grace and mercy. If my theology says that God doesn’t move on people in a personal way and doesn’t work miracles today, or that the gifts of the Spirit in First Corinthians 12 are not for today, or that the Spirit doesn’t fill people in an experiential way, then my theology will affect what I’m prepared to receive from God.

If your picture of God is different from the Father that Jesus came to reveal or that the Bible talks about, confess the difference and ask Jesus to reveal His Father to you. He wants to do it!

## **ONE MORE WORD**

You may not have any barriers to acknowledge or pray about. If that’s the case, don’t feel that you need to create one. God is fully able to bring to mind anything you may be unaware of. Meanwhile, thank Him and move on to enjoy the fullness of the life of the Spirit.

**TO REVIEW:** God is a giving Father who, according to Jesus, loves to bless His children with His presence and power through the Holy Spirit. But because of what we've done (our sins) and what's been done to us (our sorrows and wounds), we often resist the very grace that we need so much. As we identify these hindrances, however, we are able to receive more of what the Father wants to give us: His strength and His compassion.

**NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. Are there any barriers in my life right now that block me from receiving the Father's love? If so, what are they?
2. What must I do to overcome them? Do I need help from others? Can I remove them alone through prayer?
3. Are there sins I think God can't forgive? Any I am holding onto?
4. Do I believe God loves me unconditionally? If not, why not?
5. What steps can I take to be ready to receive more of God's love?
6. What hopes/expectations do I have as I ask others to pray with me?



**WILL YOU OFFER THIS PRAYER?**

“Dear Father, I realize that I sometimes resist Your love because of my sin or my situation. I often find it hard to believe that You love me as much as the Bible says You do. Please break through my resistance and love me. Allow me to cooperate with You in removing any barriers to Your love. For Jesus' sake. Amen.”





## Be Filled With the Spirit

Most of us know what it feels like to come to the end of our resources with nothing more to give. Our personal “tank” is empty, and even without a gauge, we know we’re out of fuel. We can relate to times when we’ve tried to serve the Lord in our own strength and discovered—experientially—what powerlessness really is.

God never intended for us to serve Him without providing the resources or the power to do it. He never intended for His followers to be “burned out” in their attempts to work for Him.

Many Christians—and I include myself—have traveled that well-worn road of self-effort that ultimately deposits us into the valleys of Frustration and Fruitlessness. Tired and worn down, we have to admit that even our most valiant efforts have made little impact for the kingdom. Discouragement and despair unpack their bags and move in on us. As grim as this location is, however, it may actually serve as a turning point rather than as a dead end. For, it is often here, in the place of utter dejection, that we finally identify our powerlessness and come face to face with our desperate need for God. We just don’t “have the stuff” to serve Him in our own strength. We need help, big time help.

It’s one thing to have the Holy Spirit, quite another to be *filled* with the Spirit. The disciples had the Spirit before Pentecost. But in Acts 2, Luke says that “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” when the wind blew from heaven. What does it mean to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit? And how can I be filled? This chapter deals with those two crucial questions and the issues related to them.

*“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth”*

(Acts 1:8).

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?**

The book of Acts paints a clear picture of what it meant for Jesus’ disciples to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In the first chapter, we see them meeting with the resurrected Jesus, unsure of their mission or their future. And then, before their very eyes, Jesus ascends to heaven, leaving them behind. How could they ever carry out their Lord’s commission to go into the world and make disciples,

baptizing them in His name? Jesus had left them, and their enemies were eager to eradicate them as well. Preaching the gospel in such a hostile environment could easily cost them their lives. In the face of all this, they had only one thing to hang on to, and that was the promise Jesus gave them before He ascended: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

At Pentecost that promise became a reality for the disciples, and they were never the same. The Holy Spirit was poured out on them, filling them to overflowing with the very life of Jesus. These men who were to represent Christ to the world could now minister in a dimension that far exceeded their own strength. Now they could trust in Christ’s love and power within them rather than in their own wisdom and abilities. Empowered by the Spirit they began to:

- Preach with power
- Witness with conviction
- Bring healing to the sick
- Discern true and false spirits
- Pray effectively and
- Endure hardship.

The disciples were sure they were going to miss Christ desperately after He left. When the Spirit came, however, they never longed for the good old days. A new era had dawned, and they were walking in the power of the Spirit. The civil authorities resisted them, and the ecclesiastical leaders forbade them to witness to Christ. Still these men—untrained, uneducated, ordinary men—kept preaching and teaching the gospel, with many miraculous signs following. They didn’t do all this with academic degrees; they didn’t do it with political presence or with religious finesse; they didn’t do it with social status or institutional position. They did it in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the words of their enemies, these Spirit-filled believers “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

*...these  
Spirit-filled  
believers  
“turned the  
world upside  
down”  
(Acts 17:6).*

What difference did the Spirit make? The record in Acts is clear: the Spirit made the difference between failure and success, between human results and divine results. The Spirit made a “rock” out of Peter, the very one who had denied Jesus three times. And as the early church witnessed in the power of the Spirit, “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Those Christians lived out the truth that the only person capable of living the Christian life and doing the work of Christ in the world is the Holy Spirit. It soon became obvious that the Spirit was sent to take up where Jesus had left off (Acts 1:1,2).

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

Nothing's changed. We are still living in the "Age of the Spirit," and that same Spirit is still available to us today. If we are to impact the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to reflect the character of Christ in us, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit.

To be filled is to be "under the influence of." When people who drink have car accidents, they are booked on drunk driving. Their drinking had an adverse effect on the way they drove. The crowd that saw the disciples on Pentecost praising God in loud voices thought these men were drunk. Something was affecting the way they were operating. St. Paul writes, "Do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Drunkenness causes us to live in dissipation. When we are controlled by the Spirit, however, the effect is not debauchery but thanksgiving and praise. A person filled with the Spirit is careful how he or she walks and talks. There is a sense of the ordering of life and speech as the Spirit helps control the most unruly member of our body, the tongue.

If you squeeze a toothpaste container, toothpaste comes out. Every time you squeeze it, you get the same thing. What comes out when life squeezes us? Whatever is inside. If we are filled with the Spirit, the Spirit is what comes out.

Although the Spirit is sovereign, what we do does make a difference in being filled. Jesus said that the Father gives the Spirit to those who ask. (See Luke 11:13.) That suggests that if we don't ask, we don't receive. Some might say, "If God wants to fill me with His Spirit, He can do so." But if Jesus said to ask, maybe God won't if I don't.

The apostles said that God gives the Holy Spirit "to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32). This may mean obedience unto salvation or unto sanctification, but there is a condition—obedience. Disobedience, then, can block the reception of the Spirit. It does make a difference what we do. God is not looking for infallibility; He is looking for integrity—a heart that is open to be changed and empowered.

### **HOW AM I FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

At this point a natural question would be, "How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?" While God does not lock us into formulas or set patterns, the biblical record and experience suggest the following as helpful steps to pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit:

**Confess your sins.** The Spirit fills empty vessels. If you had a glass full of water, you wouldn't ask someone to fill it. Only what is empty is capable of being filled. Your first step, then, in preparing to be filled is confession, or in other words "getting empty" of self. Confess sins of the heart as well as sins of commission and omission—pride, insensitivity, indifference. Be as specific and as thorough as you are able to. This would include confessing any involvement,

done innocently or by choice, in the occult, witchcraft, or fortune telling. This is a good place to reaffirm your answer to one of the questions asked at the baptismal service of the Church: “Do you renounce all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises?”

**Ask someone to pray with you.** We can certainly go directly to God, but He often uses people to help us receive His gifts. In the Scripture, the gift of the Spirit (and the spiritual gifts) are sometimes imparted through the laying on of hands. Ask someone who understands this dimension of the Christian life to do so, or go to a meeting where personal prayer and ministry accompany the preaching of the Word.

**Ask to be filled.** Jesus said that if we know how to give good gifts to our children, “how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). We can ask boldly, knowing the Father wants to give us a good gift.

*“...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

(Luke 11:13).

**Ask in faith.** I taught my youngest daughter to jump to me. She did so because she trusted me to catch her if I said I would. If Karis said, “Daddy, I really don’t believe you will catch me,” she would be insulting my word and my father-love. If Jesus said that the Father will fill those who ask, we can put absolute confidence in His words. Faith pleases God and brings to us what we request from Him. Come expectantly, believing that a good Father gives only good gifts. “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...” (Jas. 1:17 NIV).

**Keep asking.** Some may wonder, “If I am filled by asking, why should I keep asking?” In the context of Jesus’ promising the Spirit to those who ask, He tells the story of a man getting bread from a friend late at night to serve to his guest. Then He says, “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9), suggesting that there will be times when we don’t simply ask once for something. We demonstrate our need by pursuing our request until we have all that we need. What we ask for, we seek after. If we come to any closed doors as we seek, we knock—sometimes more than once—before we see them opened for us.

Asking for the Spirit is not the casual request or whim of a Christian who thinks it might be interesting to be filled. It is the urgent need of the Christian convinced that he or she cannot possibly function apart from the Spirit. It is the desperate cry of the powerless for God’s might, the impassioned request of the poor for God’s supply, the critical need of the midnight friend for food, the longing of the hungry to be filled. And Jesus promised that those who hunger

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

and thirst after righteousness “shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). One prayer may do it, but repeated prayer may show you mean business.

I would rather not say to someone who has asked to be filled with the Spirit, “Just take it by faith.” I would rather have the Spirit do the convincing. If the Spirit didn’t come after an initial request because the Father is teaching an important lesson of perseverance, I ought not announce the Spirit’s coming prematurely. If I as a father have withheld something I have promised, it could be because I wanted to give it at just the right time in just the right way for just the right reasons. It’s good to remember that we do not serve a reluctant God, but One Who delights to give to His children.

Ask like a child. Children who ask for something like to think of all the reasons why they will receive what they are requesting. Adults, on the other hand, sometimes think of why they won’t receive. Children are believers, while adults tend to be more skeptical. Children are humble about their need and persistent in their request. They ask and keep on asking. When my son wanted a slingshot, one request was insufficient. He kept after me until he had his slingshot in hand. His repeated asking did not demonstrate unbelief. On the contrary, it expressed assurance that eventually I would give him his request. Children are great models for our receiving the kingdom. As you think of this truth, try to dispossess yourself of your adult freight and simply be a little child. Our identity in eternity, after all, will be that of the Father’s child.

*“be filled with  
the Spirit”*  
(Eph. 5:18).

### **AFTER I AM FILLED, DO I ASK TO BE FILLED AGAIN?**

There is an initial filling and ongoing fillings. The disciples who were filled on Pentecost were filled again (Acts 4:31). When Paul wrote to the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), he was actually saying, according to the original language, “Be continually filled with the Spirit.”

There are many ways to ask for the Spirit. God answers our prayer for power with the Spirit. In answer to our need for guidance, He sends us the Spirit. The essential issue in being filled is trusting more than trying. The Spirit doesn’t come to show our adequacy but to overcome our insufficiency. The Spirit is God’s solution to our problem, God’s fullness for our emptiness, God’s wisdom for our ignorance, and God’s power for our weakness. The prayer of the Church down through the ages has been, “Come, Holy Spirit.” And for good reason! It is the plea for an empowered Church, one which can minister to the world in the fullness of Almighty God.

## **SHOULD I EXPECT FEELINGS?**

If I put my finger into a wall socket, I'm going to feel something. If I link up with the power of the universe, I might have an internal reaction. The emotion, however, does not define the event, though it may well accompany it. God deals with us individually. Some who are filled describe an overwhelming sense of peace. Others speak of being filled with liquid love. Still others say they felt nothing, but saw the results of the Spirit's presence in the weeks that followed. The most important thing is to expect to be filled when you ask and not to give any prescription for how that will happen. God is both generous and wise. We can trust Him to give us what we need in the way we need it.

When Denise, one of our staff members at Lutheran Renewal, prayed for the filling of the Holy Spirit, it was not a "crisis type" experience. She really didn't feel anything following the prayer. A short time later, however, after a personal devotional time, she began to speak in tongues, and it was then she knew she had indeed received something of the Spirit from that initial prayer. As a result, she was immediately encouraged in her walk with the Lord.

Mary Ann Herzan, a frequent renewal speaker and writer, shares her experience when she was first prayed for: "When I received prayer to be filled with the Holy Spirit at a neighborhood Bible study, nothing happened. I felt like something was wrong with me or that God didn't want me. For two days I fought an intense battle in my mind as to whether or not this was real. Those who had prayed with me had given me Luke 11:13 to hang on to: '...how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.' In the evening of the third day, broken by circumstances and the battle in my mind, I cried out to the Lord that if He wanted me to live, He would have to do it. Totally spent, I fell asleep weeping. I awoke the next morning filled with joy and the presence of the Lord, and with a deep sense of knowing Him. It was the beginning of a new life lived by the power of the Spirit."

## **WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE SPIRIT'S FILLING?**

In the book of Acts, the Spirit's filling was accompanied by the gift of speaking in tongues. In Peter's Pentecost sermon, he quoted from the prophet Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). So gifts of the Spirit, especially tongues and prophecy, often accompany this filling by the Spirit. We need to be aware, however, that while some people will see immediate "results" after being filled with the Holy Spirit, others will observe a more gradual change in their lives.

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

When the Spirit came upon Jesus, the Father spoke powerful, affirming words to Him: “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). We will often experience that same affirmation of God’s love for us when the Spirit fills us. We may very likely learn afresh one of the first words of a Jewish child, “Abba,” bringing us to a new intimacy with the Father. Another result of being filled is testing. Jesus was filled with the Spirit and then was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

*“Thou art my  
beloved Son;  
with thee I am  
well pleased”*

(Mark.1:11).

### **MUST I SPEAK WITH TONGUES TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?**

When people ask me if they have to speak in tongues to be filled with the Spirit, I invariably say, “No, but you may.” Speaking in tongues was common in the book of Acts, and it is common today among those who are being renewed by the Spirit. St. Paul wrote about its importance and was thankful that he spoke in tongues. (See 1 Corinthians 14:18.)

I often travel on weekends to congregations to speak on spiritual renewal. A pastor in Arizona once invited me to come. He told me on the phone, “Paul, we want everything.” That translates: Holy Spirit and His gifts. What a refreshing outlook! What hunger! Blessed are those who hunger!

Let me share my own experience. I was at a summer family bible camp in the mountains of Southern California after my senior year in high school. I’d heard that there were Lutherans (which is the church I was raised in and now serve in) who spoke in tongues. I remember feeling sorry for them, as if they needed something to spark up an otherwise dull Christian life. There was a little stir at this camp because some of “them” were there.

When a friend of mine returned late one night from a meeting with the camp director, who was one of “them,” my doubt began turning to curiosity and then to longing. I had wondered about “these” people, but I also entertained the thought that they might have what I needed. I could see that something had happened that touched my friend deeply. I searched out the director, Pastor Allan Hanson, and asked if he would pray for me. “Sure. How about tomorrow?” he offered. I wasn’t a pushy kid, but in my eagerness for something more of the Christian life than what I was experiencing, I said, “I really want prayer tonight.” He agreed.

I rounded up nineteen other youth, and we met him at the pool of Camp Seeley. Pastor Hanson explained to us why the Spirit came (to make Christ real to us). He went on to say that when we are filled with the Spirit, one of the results is that we often speak in a language we have never learned, a language of praise. We were ready and eager. We confessed our sins and waited as the pastor

began to lay his hands on each of us and to pray for the Spirit to come.

By the time he got to me, I could hear others speaking out in praise to God, some in English, others in sounds that were new. When he prayed for me, I just knew that if I opened my mouth, I would speak in tongues. How did I know? I'm not sure, but God had already touched my heart significantly on previous occasions (at a Billy Graham meeting, at a Peter Marshall movie, at a meeting when a missionary had spoken at our church), and I had a hunger for more. God gave me faith to believe that what was happening was of Him—and it was real. I ran back to my cabin and woke up my parents, who greeted my new experience in the Spirit with understanding and joy.

Did it make me more mature to speak in tongues? Not a bit. Gifts can be received in an instant, but the fruit of the Spirit (things like love, joy, and patience) take time to develop. But this gift seemed to open a door to a new dimension of the Christian life that had not previously been opened to me. And I chose to walk through that door.

The renewing work of the Spirit is not a tongues movement. The Holy Spirit reproduces the life of Jesus Christ in us. He produces the character of Christ (fruit) and He enables us to manifest the ministry of Christ (gifts). Let your focus be on the Lord over the gifts, not on the gifts. And understand that the gifts are given to enable us to touch the lives of others.

## **SOME ISSUES TO UNDERSTAND**

**Appropriation** comes later than salvation. To have Christ is to have everything. When we are brought into the family of God, we are made joint heirs with Christ. We receive “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3). We are adopted, forgiven of our sins, released from the power of the law, and given access to the Father through the indwelling Spirit.

But having the Spirit does not mean that we live in the *reality* of the Spirit. And it certainly does not mean that we are able to lay hold of all that is ours in salvation. A child of royalty may not realize how rich he is until he grows in his awareness of the family he's been born into. When that time of realization comes and we tap into something new of the Spirit, it may be a crisis experience, almost like a new birth experience. We might call it “the release of the Spirit.” The fact that the Spirit indwells us does not preclude His coming upon us with new power. Jesus gives an apt description of the Holy Spirit when He refers to it as “the wind” (John 3:8). We cannot contain the wind, but we can choose to hoist our sails and go with it.

**Experience is not optional.** James warns us against the deception of knowing and not doing. He would tell us that good theology plus no experience is bad theology. Because we can define a truth doesn't mean that we're living



## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

in the reality of it. It's a lot easier to talk about biblical truth than to walk in it. A cold church that knows little of spiritual power but talks correctly about the Spirit knows less than it thinks. Orthodoxy (right doctrine) has never been a substitute for "orthopraxy" (right practice). Pentecostals have richly blessed the Body of Christ by helping us understand that we can expect the Spirit to break into our lives at any time, under any circumstances. Faith leads to experience; it not only affirms, but it also lays hold of.

**Emotions are a part of who we are.** The Spirit is a person, a someone, not an it. To be encountered by the Spirit is to leave us changed, and there may likely be a subjective response. My feelings are not everything, but they are something. They are created by God and are a part of who I am. They are not intended to control how I respond, but neither are they to be stifled.

Ken Wilson wrote in *Empowered Evangelicals*, "When I had an opportunity to shake hands with a man running for the president of the United States, my heart began to thump. Why would we ever think an encounter with God wouldn't sometimes produce these effects?"

In recent years as a pastor, I see more and more worshipers get misty-eyed on Sunday morning. True worship goes beyond the *reflection* of God to the *experience* of God. Experience will bring emotion, which is different from emotionalism. Webster says that emotionalism is "the tendency to be emotional or to show emotion quickly and easily." That is not the main problem of the church I grew up in or am a part of now. Lukewarmness—or not experiencing the presence of God—is a far greater road hazard.

*"The wind  
blows where  
it wills, and  
you hear the  
sound of it,  
but you do not  
know whence  
it comes or  
whither it  
goes; so it is  
with every one  
who is born of  
the Spirit"*

(John 3:8).

## **HOW HUNGRY ARE YOU?**

There's one word to describe the climate in today's Church: hunger. When I go out and speak, I find that people are *hungry*. When we have calls for personal ministry, people eagerly come forward. They want a touch from God, many, desperately so. People seem to be saying, "There's got to be more—and I want it."

If "hungry" describes you, then come to the table—and eat. And remember, this invitation is extended from Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, who said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5:6).

How about asking yourself right now: "Am I living today in the joyful awareness of God's presence? Is there more to the Christian life than what I am presently experiencing? Is there a power of the Spirit available to me that I have not entered into? Are there barriers in my life keeping me from appropriating

the love of the Father? Are there things that need to change in my life for me to receive a fresh filling with the Spirit? Is there any reason why, right now, I could not yield to the Spirit and walk in a new awareness of His grace?"

But maybe "hungry" doesn't describe you. Maybe you are satisfied rather than starving. God knows where you are, so you don't need to try being where you are not. I have often confessed an indifferent heart and have asked the Heart Specialist, "Change my heart, O God." Or maybe it does describe you, and you came, but there wasn't any meal—at least you didn't find one. You prayed, and as best you could tell, nothing happened. Dear friend, God knows us so much better than we know ourselves. He knows what we need, when we need it. When I have expected one thing and received another, I've said what Mother Basilea, founder of the Mary Sisters, often said, "Lord, I don't understand You, but I trust You."

But maybe something did happen—something too deep for words, too deep to even feel. Maybe a seed was planted that will be evident after it gets watered through daily prayer. God knows what He is doing. He will finish what He has begun in us. That's His promise!

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst, for they shall be satisfied"*

(Matt. 5:6).

Those in liturgical churches may well recall their confirmation service when their pastor laid his hands on them and prayed, as my father prayed over me: "Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, stir up in (confirmand's name—in my case "Paul") the gift of your Holy Spirit; confirm his faith, guide his life, empower him in his service, give him patience in suffering, and bring him to everlasting life." This prayer from the *Lutheran Book of Worship* is nothing more than a prayer for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Many have testified to having it answered years later when they experienced a release of

the Spirit in their lives.

Please remember, God is not cloning you to the experience of anyone else; your encounter will be different from those of others. What God is doing is conforming you to the image of His Son and empowering you with the Holy Spirit for service in His kingdom.

**TO REVIEW:** God has not asked us to serve Him in our own strength. He has given us (His Church) the Holy Spirit to equip us to grow and minister from His resources and not our own. Although we *have* the Holy Spirit as believers, God wants to *fill* us with His Spirit that we may live lives empowered by the reality of His presence and the power of His gifts.

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

### **NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. What does it mean to me to be filled with the Spirit?
2. What changes might I expect from being filled with the Spirit?
3. Is it possible to know if I am filled with the Spirit? If so, how?
4. What experiences have I had of the Spirit in my life, if any?
5. Am I hungry for more of the Spirit? If so, how am I seeking God for more?
6. Am I convinced that there is more to the life in the Spirit than what I am presently experiencing? What might that be?



### **WILL YOU OFFER THIS PRAYER?**

“Father, thank You for the Spirit’s work in my life. Thank You that He has drawn me to You, so that I know You as my Father. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit, so that I can show Your love to people I live and work with. I do believe that You freely give Your Spirit to those who ask. I receive. Amen.”



## The Spirit Mission

What is the purpose of being filled with the Spirit? Why do we need it? What good is it going to do? Does it make me a little happier or more successful or a bit kinder to others?

### WHAT FOR?

The Spirit had just come to Jesus. After some days in the desert, He comes to His hometown, and He answers the question of why He was given the Spirit. He picks what might have been His favorite text, from Isaiah 61, and He reads, “The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to

proclaim freedom to the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn...to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

*“So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power”*

(I Sam. 16:13).

**Isaiah says that the Spirit doesn’t come to make us feel good but to make others feel good.** If charismatic renewal is just for us, gather in the corner, pray together, and have a bless-me club. If it is for others, gather together—then go! The gathering is the equipping time. Isaiah uses the word “anointing.” It’s a religious word. We don’t use it often. But the Biblical culture knew the word well. Prophets, priests, and kings were set apart for service by anointing. And when people got anointed, they knew it. The oil dripped down from their head on their face, beard, and clothes. “So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power” (I Sam. 16:13). **The anointing made a difference.** It equipped people and set them apart for service, not for self.

Jesus was anointed. He said that He cast out demons because the Spirit was present in His life. And when Peter preached in the home of Cornelius because the Spirit led him there, he explained “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Why did Jesus do good? Why did He heal? Not because He was God, but because the Spirit was present in His life. When we are anointed by the Holy Spirit, we **are set apart for service**. That is the purpose of having the Spirit. It is for “them,” not for “me.”

Jesus did no signs and wonders until He was filled with the Spirit. He lived for thirty years without ever doing a miracle. Some didn't like that idea, so an apocryphal gospel was written called *The Gospel of Thomas*, which has the boy Jesus doing miracles. A child pushed him in the mud, so He struck him with leprosy according to *Thomas*. He made a bird out of clay, gave it life, and it flew away according to this legendary book. The truth, however, is that **Jesus relied on the Spirit in the same way we rely on the Spirit**. And that means that the same power that was available to Him after the Spirit came upon Him is available to us. Now that is good news.

### **WHO FOR?**

Which direction is the wind blowing? Out from the upper room and onto the streets. Out from the churches and into the workplace and school. The Spirit is on a mission. It's been happening ever since Pentecost, when He blew the 120 out from a prayer meeting to a street corner, from the upper room to the uttermost, from contemplation to confrontation.

Hey, if we were having a prayer meeting and the Spirit blew in, we would probably say, “What an upgrade on our prayer time! I'm sticking around longer for sure.” But as soon as the 120 got the Spirit, they didn't stay in—they went out! Why? Because the Spirit wanted out. He is the Spirit of Mission!! If we're going nowhere, don't stop at the filling station. But if we are going out there, we need to be filled. And the Spirit takes us to...

**the poor.** Poverty comes from natural disaster, war and oppression. The law commanded care for the poor. Jesus taught that the poor were to be given special gifts and hospitality. The poor had an edge on the kingdom because their condition predisposed them to dependence upon God. The early church had a social program that included the poor, and Paul was concerned for the poor. James denounced the mistreatment of the poor.

But some of us evangelicals and charismatics missed it for years. We thought the liberals were all wrong. We found out that they had part of the answer at least. The psalmist writes, “Blessed is he that considers the poor.” God favors underdogs, and that includes the fatherless, the widow, the orphan, and the poor. Sure, there are some who just need to get a job, but be careful that a

judgmental heart does not make you an enemy of the God who is a friend of the poor. To oppress the poor is to insult their Maker (Proverbs 14:31). The Holy Spirit takes us to the poor. If you care about the poor, it is evidence of the Spirit's stirring in your heart. Then we meet...

**the brokenhearted.** The word literally means "shattered." When a clay pot fell off the ledge, it didn't just break, it shattered. And it was tossed away—beyond repair. It must have happened often, because Scripture talks regularly about broken things—and people. The psalmist wrote, "I have become like broken pottery" (Ps. 31:12).

*"I have  
become  
like broken  
pottery"  
(Ps. 31:12).*

We live in the age of super glue. I occasionally find broken items on my desk with a note, "Please glue." Once in a while I meet up with a something that is not broken—it is shattered. And I write back, "Mission impossible."

Some people have shattered hearts. They are beyond repair. Mission impossible. Too much damage. And the Spirit sends us to them with the message of restoration. God "heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3). There are those reading this who are beyond repair, but you need to know that the sovereign Lord can heal you.

Then we encounter...

**the captives.** Sin is both choice and bondage. You might say to people living with emotions that have overpowered them like fear or anxiety or anger, or addictions they cannot control like gambling or pornography or alcohol, "Get over it." Well, maybe they would if they could, but they are enslaved, and they cannot free themselves. Sermons don't help; advice only condemns them. They need to be freed from their captivity, and the Holy Spirit who sent Jesus to the captives sends us to them as well. You cannot shame them or exhort them or hound them or nag them into freedom. But the Spirit within us can break the power of cancelled sin and set the prisoner free. So He anoints you for the job.

And then we meet...

**the depressed.** They are in a hole and they cannot dig themselves out. They are wearing mourning clothes. They see their life as ugly, and they feel ugly. When life is hard, you don't see yourself as beautiful. They see failure and they feel like failures. The Spirit wants to give them a new set of clothes, and He wants to use you to help them put them on. The Spirit wants to give them new hope in place of their despair. If you are moved by the despair of the depressed, it is the evidence of the grieving Holy Spirit in your life. He engineers "the great exchange," beauty for ashes, gladness for mourning, praise for despair.

## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

### WHY FOR?

It is clearly for them, not for me. **Spiritual renewal easily gets stuck at the altar rather than in the half-way house.** It must have an outward thrust or we will choke on it. We'll suffocate, we'll implode, as some renewal movements have been prone to do. The "why" question speaks to strategy. What is on the mind of the Spirit in this stirring? Jesus announces the year of God's favor. It's Jubilee time; slaves go free, debts are retired. It's good news time. People who had heard only bad news for years now don't only *hear* good news—they *experience* it. The release doesn't just come in their imagination. They are not told to take it by faith and claim it—they walk into it. The poor are out of debt, the captives are free, the brokenhearted are mended, and the depressed have a new set of glory clothes.

And why? People in pain often interpret it as the absence of God, or as God's punishment. They blew it, and now God is angry. Or at least He doesn't love them as much as the person who is getting blessed. Or He is not that concerned about their personal disasters because nothing is changing. But then it does change. And the truth is proclaimed, the year of God's favor. The psalmist writes, "This I know, that God is for me" (56:9). It is one day of vengeance and a year of favor. Oh my, God is on my side after all. He is not mad at me like I thought. Mercy, indeed, triumphs over judgment.

Why? "They will be called oaks of righteousness" (v. 3) and "you will be called priests of the Lord" (v. 6). When we call someone something it is a label, little more. Sure, Jimmy got named after his uncle, or Ben was nicknamed "Slick," but names are not designations of character. However, in Bible days the name spoke of the person. To be called something was equal to being something. God solemnly revealed His name, because in the name was the nature. To give a name was the prerogative of a superior, as when Adam named the animals or when a victorious pharaoh renamed the conquered kings of Israel.

**God's renaming signified radical change.** He selected the name of His Son for this reason; He knew the destiny. There are exceptions. Parents sometimes gave names which expressed hope, but when God gave the name, it was more than hope—it was a prophetic sign. The name is the person. To call upon God's name is to bring His presence. To blot out a person's name is to do away with the person. To have no name is to not exist.

So when Isaiah says, "They will be called oaks of righteousness," he is speaking of a sure destiny, a future. They had been called other things, like

*"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor... For I, the Lord, love justice..."*  
(Isaiah 61:1,8).

wimp, no-gooder, failure, and they had agreed with those names. Now God moves in and changes their names. Why? “For the display of his splendor.” It all comes back to God. It is not so that we feel better ultimately, or even that others feel better, but that God is glorified. He is the center of the universe, not you and certainly not me. He gets credit for the good work He does in peoples’ lives.

**They become trophies of His grace, a tribute to His compassion.**

As oaks, they are solid, stable, able to provide security and shade for younger plants. As priests they have the important assignment of being “ministers of our God.”

Isaiah understands this well. In the three prophecies in Isaiah that speak about the Spirit upon the Messiah, the purpose each time is the care of needy people:

Isaiah 11:2,4: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him...with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.”

Isaiah 42:1,3: “Here is my servant...I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations...A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.”

Isaiah 61:1,8: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...For I, the Lord, love justice...”

The emphasis in each passage is not what the Spirit does *in* the Servant Messiah but *through* Him. The focus is outward, not inward. To be sure, the inner work is related: “He will delight in the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:3). But the direction in all three texts is toward bringing change in people’s lives and situations. To be filled with the Spirit clearly is meant to take us outside of ourselves and into a world of need. If it was true for the Messiah, it is true for those who follow Him. If the work of spiritual renewal doesn’t get us outside the walls of the church, it is being short-circuited.

**THEREFORE...**

I was at a thriving church plant in Madison. They had been meeting in an office building, but now they were preparing to move into their new sanctuary. After our leadership meeting, Pastor Jon took me out the site. It was right in the middle of a new development. What a location! I shared my joy—as well as my concern the next morning as they gathered for worship: “Congratulations on your new church site. It is beautiful. I hope you’re not thinking, ‘Build and they will come. Now that we have a nice home, the neighbors are sure to visit us.’ They won’t. That is your turf, not theirs. You are not a group of comfortable,



## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

contended, cloistered saints. Better to say, ‘Build—and we will go.’ We will meet them on their turf.”

I crossed the bridge, taking me from San Pedro to Long Beach and the half-way house Mary supervised. She had come off the streets, was a part of our congregation, and invited me to meet “her girls.” They were coming out of addictions and prostitution. After talking with them, I carefully asked them if they would ever consider coming to our church. They laughed at me. They said the walls would fall down. Apparently, they thought they were too dirty. I was the holy one; they were the unclean ones. Kind of like the picture painted by the Pharisees. To them, holiness meant separation from sinners. To Jesus, the holiest of all, holiness meant separation from sin, but contact with sinners. What does it mean to you? The church has given the world the wrong idea of holiness. It means “get cleaned up so you can go to a clean church where you will find clean people.” We missed it. I drove away broken-hearted and cried out to God, “Please help us bring people like this to you.”

What happens on Sunday is preparation for Monday; it is equipping time. If Sunday doesn’t impact what we do on Monday, it isn’t worth it. We don’t gather together to hold out till the return of Christ, hoping the devil doesn’t cream us before we get whisked out of here. We gather to be equipped to invade the community, the culture. We are the salt of the earth, the virus of the system, the yeast of the bread, the aliens on the planet. We are here on assignment. Chalk it up to the wind that blows, the Spirit that drives us out from comfortable homes to places of challenge.

If you want to do this (minister to needy people out there), you need that (the power). **This is for that.** This is not a tongues movement, it is a Spirit mission. We are advancing the kingdom, not the charismatic renewal. To do this (bring good news to the poor, deliverance to the captives, healing to the broken, and release to the depressed), we need that—the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Tongues is not the issue—broken people are. This is why evangelicals are embracing the power of the Spirit in a new way, because they are seeing Spirit-empowered people advancing the kingdom, not only meeting for fellowship or praying for one another. It is a whole new mentality. The focus is on ministry, touching people with the love of a compassionate God.

So don’t leave home without it—that is, without the power of the Spirit. But for their sake, and for God’s sake, leave home!

**NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the main agenda of the Spirit? How did Pentecost demonstrate this?
2. How does the Church sometimes short-circuit this agenda?
3. How did the anointing of the Spirit make a difference in the life of Jesus?
4. How can the anointing (infilling) of the Spirit make a difference in your life? What might you expect to see?



**WOULD YOU LIKE TO OFFER THIS PRAYER?**

“Dear Father, I am sorry that the Church has too often confined the Spirit to the church site. We have expected that if something important is going to happen, it will happen in there—not out there. Forgive us for wanting the comfort of the Spirit without accepting the challenge of the Spirit. Thank you that the Spirit is concerned for them, not just for us. Fill me with your Spirit—for them! In the name of Jesus. Amen.”

## *It's Sunday...But Monday's Coming*

Suppose you were filled with the Spirit last night. Or perhaps you went up for ministry yesterday in church and God touched you deeply. Maybe you were on a retreat and felt the Lord's presence like never before and you made a fresh commitment to live in the power of the Spirit. Without a doubt, you were on the mountain top yesterday. But now it's the day after and the mountain has evaporated under your feet. You're standing dazed and bewildered—in the valley.

When God moves, what's the next move? How can the gains from yesterday be preserved today? These kinds of real life questions need answers.

Coming off the mountain can be painful. Ask Peter, James, and John, who had just seen their leader transfigured. Peter felt compelled, as we often do, to stretch the moment into a millennium. So he pressed Jesus. "If you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Matt. 17:4). Do you blame Peter? On the mountain the disciples probably felt they could invade hell. In the valley they failed at casting out a demon.

Postpartum blues hit more than just new mothers. I learned this when our congregation's worship leader and I helped lead music at a praise service for a conference. Scores of people came up afterward, some with tears, to tell us how they had appreciated the worship. When I returned to my hotel room, I found a note from my colleague, saying, "Praise God. Jesus was glorified this evening. Stand against discouragement—and have a good sleep." The next day I asked what he meant. He said, "I often battle discouragement after a spiritual high, and yesterday I was flying."

Anytime God has significantly touched us, there are some things we need to know, as well as some things to do, in order to walk out His work of grace in our lives.

***"So then,  
just as you  
received  
Christ Jesus  
as Lord,  
continue  
to live in  
him, rooted  
and built  
up in him,  
strengthened  
in the faith  
as you were  
taught,  
overflowing  
with  
thankfulness"***

(Col. 2:6-7 NIV).

## SOME THINGS TO KNOW

**Truth is always tested.** After Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and has filled with the Spirit, He was directed by the Spirit into the wilderness. Talk about a bleak and barren piece of real estate for a camp out! But the wilderness in the Scripture is more than a geographical location; it represents a place of testing, the arena where God tries to prove us and where Satan tempts us to defeat. Keep in mind that God's heart is tender toward His children. He purposes only to do us good, to build us up and prepare us to flourish in His kingdom. Satan, on the other hand, is committed to war against God's purpose for our lives, so he goes after us with his pack of lies and his arrows of discouragement. Count on it: after heaven has opened up, hell often breaks loose. How we act at this point is critical to our spiritual growth.

Expect Satan to challenge anything God does in your life. If he doesn't, perhaps he thinks it's not significant enough to disturb. He will tell you that what you experienced was unreal or your own doing or "just emotionalism." He will say that nothing has changed, that things will be as they have always been. Scripture gives us excellent counsel for times like these: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). Don't give in to the devil's lies. Refuse them. Continue to believe the truth and to speak it. As Jesus said, "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light" (Matt. 10:27). And finally, take confidence in this: if God is allowing you to be tested, it is so that what was true on the mountain can be just as real in the valley.

*"Resist the  
devil and he  
will flee from  
you"*

(Jas. 4:7).

Consider my friend Jerry's experience. He phoned me the day after meeting God in a fresh way at a retreat. His experience was an obvious—and glorious—answer to his prayers for the Holy Spirit's work to be evident in his life. Jerry felt significantly changed, like a new person, new, that is, until the next day when the doubts and questions rolled in. *Perhaps this was nothing more than a passing emotional high. Maybe I was imagining the whole thing.* I had good news for Jerry. "What you've experienced," I explained, "was Satan's challenging something God had just done in and for you. Tell him to back off." And Jerry did. He flexed his spiritual muscles and stood his ground.

**Growth is a process, not an event.** Following a spiritual encounter, we need to understand and value the process of growth, not look for another event. Birth is an event; growth is a process. Salvation is an event; sanctification is a process. Paul says, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord (event), so walk in Him" (process) (Col. 2:6).

We need the empowering of the Holy Spirit to bring us into the ministry

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

that the Lord calls us to. But very often, we also need events along the way to interrupt our walk, to jar us loose from encrusted habits that bind us. Sometimes we just need to be stirred up and set out in a new direction. To help get us moving, God uses events like altar calls, times of personal prayer, or a fresh commitment at a retreat. Still, these events, by their very nature, are not the whole picture. They are only part of the way God graciously deals with us, the exception, not the rule.

We cannot depend upon a continual series of events to bring us into maturity. A baby doesn't need multiple births to learn how to walk. He or she needs time, nourishment, and muscle development. In the same way, spiritual growth takes place in the process that follows the crisis and then is authenticated in our day-to-day struggles. It's tempting to hope for a "quick fix"—a spiritual high that could eradicate a twenty-year struggle with anxiety in fifteen minutes—but it rarely happens that way. Yet I don't blame anyone for that outlook. How well I remember battling acute insecurity in seminary. I lacked the simple confidence needed just to stand in class and speak. I was ill at ease and unsure of myself with fellow students. More than once I wished for a miraculous, instantaneous "lift" out of this uncomfortable pit, but God chose another way: He taught me truths that brought healing over the long haul.

As tempting as it may be to seek events, we cannot depend upon them alone to bring us into maturity. We cannot afford to wait around for a "Spirit fix"; we need to keep walking, keep putting one foot in front of the other. Walking isn't very dramatic, but it gets you there, little by little, one step at a time.

**Growth is cyclical.** Growth in faith is hardly a straight ascending line. Although sometimes it feels like a jagged ascending line interrupted by brief falls, most of the time it's more like an ascending series of loops. Before we make progress, we often have to go back over old territory. In doing so, it may seem as if we're going backwards, when we're actually going deeper.

A case in point was Barbara, whose mind was nearly gone when she came to us. Desperate, she said that something had to happen immediately, or she would go crazy. I assured her that the Lord could restore her mind but that it might take a while. And in fact, it did; it took longer than I expected. After months of being in a small group where people loved her and prayed for her, Barbara began reasoning well again, not to mention laughing and smiling. After five months of progress, however, she came into the office, obviously worried. "I'm not getting better," she insisted. "My mind's still a mess, and I'm still not free. I feel like I'm right back where I started."

I couldn't help but smile. "Barbara," I told her, "the change in you is so obvious. Everyone sees it." I explained the above illustration of the growth process, and she walked out with a light step. Barbara just needed to know that

God was at work, that she could trust the process, however slow it seemed.

If you experience dryness after a joyful encounter, don't fret. If God is true on the mountain, He is true down below. If He has been faithful on the higher ground, He can teach you to live in the valleys.

**Struggle and dying.** That's part of the process as we take new steps of faith and try to incorporate them into our daily life. Don't be surprised by the conflict, and don't be surprised that you are traveling through old territory. Something is being buried so that the fresh vision can come forth. God's new work has connections with the old.

**Fruit is developed.** Spiritual fruit is not given; it is grown. God's gifts, including the gift of the Holy Spirit, can be received in an instant. God's goal for us, however, is that we conform to the image of His Son and produce the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, and the like. And that takes time.

The gifts of the Spirit bring to us the ministry of Christ. All we do to possess a gift is receive it. Fruit, on the other hand, is the reproduction of the character of Christ, and it is developed, not simply received.

It takes three months to grow a squash; an oak tree takes twenty years. Give God the time He needs to make you into something strong that brings joy to Him and to others. He can do it.

**I have changed; life has not.** Years ago, as a youth, I went forward at a Billy Graham meeting in the Los Angeles Coliseum where I had a beautiful experience with the Lord. Man, was I riding high! I expected all of life to change, all of my relationships to improve, everyone to be nice from then on. Reality, however, soon rubbed away my emotional euphoria, and I was back to

the humdrum of life with all its ups and downs and all its discouragements. Nothing wrong with my experience. I'd just failed to realize that what had changed was me, not life. How I needed the Bible's wisdom that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The day after a wonderful retreat or a special encounter with God's Spirit often hits us with the dull thud of reality. Instead of having our devotions under a pine tree or singing worship choruses with people on a spiritual high, we wake to three screaming kids in the next room. We soaked up the love of God for a wonderful evening, and now we are expected to balance the check book, make four difficult phone calls, and service a faulty washing machine.

Let's face it, folks, the valley just doesn't look like the mountain—but Jesus is the same in both places. And He's changing us. Knowing this can keep us from unrealistic expectations of others.

You may be both thrilled and apprehensive about how God met you in a

*"if any one is  
in Christ,  
he (not  
everyone  
else) is a new  
creation"*

(2 Cor. 5:17).

## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

personal way. That's not uncommon. God is bigger than we are. He does make changes in our lives—major changes. After all, “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). Don't let your fears talk you out of what God has done or wants to keep doing. If God were a clay idol, we could put Him on our shelf and control Him, but then we would never stand in awe of Him as the King of the Universe.

**To summarize.** We need to realize that truth is always tested, that growth is a process (often cyclical rather than linear), that fruit is developed rather than given, and that when God touches and changes us, it doesn't mean He's changed everyone else in our life in the same way. Knowing these things can help us walk out the process.

### SOME THINGS TO DO

**Be patient. With God—and yourself.** Don't expect God to accomplish in a moment what He may be doing over a stretch of time. Remember with confidence our Lord's promise: “God who began the good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in his grace until his task within you is finally finished” (Phil. 1:6 TLB). Be thankful for the new step, but not presumptuous. We grow by steps, not by hops. God knows how much change we can handle at once. Count on it: there will be more changes ahead. God is making all things new—little by little.

**Hold on to your victory.** Satan would like to tell you that what you have experienced was all in your head. Actually, that's not a bad place for it. Peter wrote his letters to stir up the minds of his readers. (See 2 Peter 2:1.) Scripture instructs us to counter the enemy's lies in our minds: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23). Confess what the Lord did for you, and do not yield to the lies of Satan; you are moving on as a child of the King. One way to cement advances is by making confessions of faith and affirmations like:

*“it is a fearful  
thing to fall  
into the hands  
of the living  
God”*

(Heb. 10:31).

“I am a child of God. Therefore, I love myself.”

“I stand fast in the freedom that Christ gave me, and I allow others the same freedom.”

“There is now no condemnation. I don't condemn myself or others.”

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Another way to hold onto your victory is to do what you would do if you were convinced beyond any doubt by the testimony of your heart and the testimony of God's Word that the Lord had indeed touched you with His love and power. I like to use this reasoning with people I counsel. If someone is not

sure about love for a spouse, I ask, "What would you do if you knew you were in love?" They ponder for a minute, and then they know exactly what they would do. I say the obvious: "Do that very thing," or, "What would you do if you knew God had delivered you from fear...or forgiven your sins...or filled you with His Spirit?"

*"Give us this  
day our daily  
bread"*

(Matt. 6:11).

As a gifted marriage counselor once said, "It is easier to act your way into a different way of feeling than to feel your way into a different way of acting." The illustration he used involved a baby wetting her diapers. Mom doesn't feel like getting out of bed to change the baby. She could say, "I don't want to be a hypocrite about this, but the truth is I just don't feel like getting up right now." But, she gets up anyway and changes her baby's diaper. When she gets back into bed, she feels good about what she has done. Her action preceded her feeling.

Being disappointed over what was "supposed" to happen but didn't will keep you from enjoying the Lord. And, remember, He is always at work, drawing you closer, wanting you to know Him, not just having an experience. You can trust Him to give you what you need. Hold on to Him in faith.

**Expect God to meet you today.** Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). The psalmist says that God is "a very present help in time of trouble" (Ps. 46:1). He is the Lord of our todays, not just our yesterdays. Did He show His love to you in the recent past? Believe that He wants to demonstrate His compassion on this day. The Lord doesn't come the same way every day, but He does come. Greet Him. Resist the temptation to live in the nostalgia of yesterday's blessings and remember: "His mercies...are new every morning" (Lam. 3:22,23).

**Read the Scripture.** Experiences are subjective, while the Word of God is rock-solid. We weigh personal encounters by the timeless Word. The Bible keeps us connected to truth, whether we are in the clouds or in the wilderness. Stability comes not from a series of spiritual experiences, but from a consistent intake of the Word of God. Soaking in the scriptures, especially after a fresh touch from God, is invaluable for securing the gain God's given you. Experiences may pass away, but God's Word never does.

**Practice intimacy with God through prayer.** When the Father touches us with His love and power, we naturally feel closer to Him. Prayer keeps us in His abiding presence. He is not only available to us on a retreat: He is available each day, each moment; He is the very present God. Prayer is the language of love, a response to our Beloved.

**Give yourself away.** Expect God to use you to help others. Our spiritual



## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

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muscles grow each time we serve others. Trust God to lead you to people who need to know Him or who need the kind of encouragement that you can provide.

**Count the cost.** When prospective disciples offered their services to Jesus, He warned them to weigh carefully what they were getting into. Times of personal ministry are a gift from God. Through them He restores our soul and leads us in paths of righteousness. But sooner or later, the scenery can shift, and we can find ourselves not by green pastures or still waters, but in the valley of the shadow of death. Encounters with a loving Father prepare us for such geographical changes. Jesus does not promise us a smooth ride. A mountain-top experience can be a precious reminder of God's presence and power when we are going through the valley and the ride is rough.

**Stay close to someone.** The Pentecost converts stayed closely connected after their experience with the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers...and day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:42,46). We, too, need others to pray for us regularly, to be open with us, to help us walk out our experience with the Lord, and to be accountable to. None of us can make it alone, yet often we are afraid to ask for personal prayer from others because it could expose our weaknesses. However, if we will humble ourselves and resist the temptation of isolating ourselves, we can receive the help we need.

It is crucial to your growth to have a person or a small group to pray for you. If you don't, I suggest you talk with your pastor about it.

**Keep on keeping on.** After a fresh work of the Spirit, some expect consistent victory. The next time they fail, however, they are discouraged and want to give up. Would we expect a toddler never to fall when he's just learning to walk? Of course not. We'd cheer him on with every step, knowing that he'll keep trying until he eventually stays on his feet. The guilt of sin cripples many in their walk. God knows our weaknesses, and He's cheering us on. Our task is to avoid the extremes of self-pity on the one hand and self-condemnation on the other. Confess your sins—and keep walking!

*"they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... and day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts"*

(Acts 2:42,46).

**TO REVIEW:** The day after God has worked in our lives in a special way is so important. We cement yesterday's victory by believing the truth and acting in faith. We resist the doubts that sometimes assail us, and we walk in faith and obedience.

**NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. What are some important things for me to remember in order to walk out a fresh experience of God in my life?
2. And what are some things I should be doing?
3. Have I been tripped up recently in any of these areas because I wasn't able to incorporate an experience into my everyday life?
4. Are there important truths that God is allowing to be tested in my life right now? If so, what are they, and what should my response be?



**WILL YOU OFFER THIS PRAYER?**

*T*hank you, Father, that You make provision for me to live successfully in the valleys, not just the mountains. Give me grace to trust You when my experience seems to betray Your Word. Give me confidence so that I don't doubt You when You allow the truth I believe to be tested. I know it is for my own good. Amen."



## The Gifts—Toys, Trophies, or Tools

Know any jobs that need doing at your church? If so, you'll need to come prepared. You can't build shelves without a hammer and a saw. You can't hang stereo speakers without a drill and a screw driver. And you can't get the carpets clean without a vacuum. If you want to get the building spruced up and do the job right, you'll need some tools.

In the New Testament, Paul views the church as a living building, made up of believers in Christ, not bricks and mortar. Think of this definition in terms of your own church and then ask, "What jobs need doing here?" Does anyone need healing from asthma? Anyone need wisdom regarding a problem at work or faith for their finances? Anyone need deliverance from Satanic oppression or encouragement in the face of great obstacles or simply a spiritual breakthrough? If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, then you'll need tools, spiritual tools. This is what the gifts of the Spirit are, tools given by the Holy Spirit to do "the job" of ministering Christ's presence and power to His people, thus building up His Church.

Sadly, some have used the gifts of the Spirit for the wrong reasons. Instead of employing them as tools to serve others, they've used them in immature ways. This happened in the early church at Corinth where the believers' zeal outstripped their wisdom. They viewed the gifts more like toys and trophies than as tools. The result was disunity and confusion within the church. Indeed the Corinthians had all the gifts ( 1 Cor. 1:7); they just didn't know how to use them.

Wherever people misuse the gifts or place an exaggerated importance on them, weighing them above foundational doctrine, correction is needed. The Apostle Paul, through his letter to that fledgling congregation, brought the needed correction. In doing so, he has given us two solid chapters of teaching on how the gifts function in the body in general and in the worshiping community in specific. (See 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.)

Abuse of the gifts, I might add, has also come through neglect, indifference, or criticism. People who currently take the gifts seriously haven't come up with a new interpretation of the Scriptures. They are simply taking the Bible as it

*"As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace"*

(1 Pet. 4:10).

comes to them, without spiritualizing it. These people, including those in the charismatic renewal, do not claim to be speaking the whole counsel of God to the Church, but they do want to say, along with St. Luke and the Apostle Paul, that the gifts are for today, that they are not optional, and that they should not be ignored.

This chapter describes and explains the spiritual gifts enumerated in First Corinthians 12, how they are intended to be used, and how to enter into the experience of receiving them.

## GIFTS OF GRACE

A woman called a pastor to pray for a boy, who, according to his mother, needed deliverance from Satanic oppression. She didn't call her own minister but contacted one in her city who she thought might have the gift of discernment and knowledge of the ministry of exorcism. It wasn't that she wanted to bypass her pastor; it was just that she sensed strongly that this ministry was probably

outside his experience, which it was. But, it wouldn't have been outside the experience of St. Paul or Jesus or even Martin Luther for that matter. They would have employed a "gift of grace"—in this case, discernment—to know how to minister God's supernatural touch on this boy's life at his point of need.

The Greek word *charis* means "grace." A "charisma" is a gift of grace. Salvation is a *charisma*. (So is celibacy!) When Paul said that "there are varieties of gifts," he used the word *charismata* (1 Cor. 12:4). We normally think of the list of gifts in First Corinthians as the charismatic gifts, but all gifts are charisms, grace gifts.

There are three different listings of spiritual gifts in Paul's letters. The most common way to distinguish them in evangelical circles today is the following:

- **motivational gifts** (Rom. 12:6-8)  
These include prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, and showing mercy.
- **manifestational gifts** (1 Cor. 12:8-11)  
These include wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues.
- **ministry gifts** (Eph. 4:11)  
These include the gift of being an apostle or a prophet or an evangelist or a pastor or a teacher.

This grouping makes a tidy outline, and there are some good reasons for sorting out the gifts in this way, yet by doing so, we may also be in danger of boxing ourselves in and attempting to be more organized than the Spirit. When

*"But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift"*  
(Eph. 4:7).

## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

it comes to giving reasons or making up lists from Scripture, “we see through a glass darkly.” Or in other words, our lists are just that, *our* lists.

Are Paul’s lists exhaustive? Perhaps not. The lists, nevertheless, serve us well as a means to help us understand the range of gifts God offers His people. As mentioned previously, this chapter deals with only the gifts enumerated in First Corinthians 12.

### **A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF GIFTS**

Different teachers have divided the Corinthian list in different ways. I’ve found the following outline to be a helpful study tool:

- gifts of speaking (tongues, interpretation, prophecy),
- gifts of doing (healing, miracles, faith),
- gifts of knowing (knowledge, wisdom, discerning of spirits).

In defining the gifts listed below, I have given only brief explanations, concentrating on the overview at this point.

**Tongues** is a language—human or angelic—given to build up the recipient (1 Cor. 14:2,4). It is prayer and praise addressed to God, which bypasses the mind and which allows the worshiper, in the words of the late Paul Tournier, Christian psychiatrist and author, to “express the inexpressible” and to enter into a new dimension of prayer and personal ministry. When given in a public service, it needs to be interpreted as a message to the group present.

**Interpretation** is the gift needed when a person speaks out a message in tongues at a public service. A person with this gift gives the sense of the message, not a word-for-word translation, but an interpretation of what was said. A tongue interpreted sounds similar to a prophecy, except that tongues are often prayers. Some are of the opinion that all tongues are prayers.

**Prophecy** is speaking forth the “now” word, primarily to strengthen, encourage, and comfort the people of God (1 Cor. 14:3). It is a timely word, an application or illustration of the timeless Word of truth. It highlights God’s Word without superseding or contradicting it. Prophecy is not the same as inspired preaching. Prophets and teachers are distinguished in the New Testament as having separate functions. (See Acts 13:1 and 1 Corinthians 12:29.)

**Healing** is a gift to make sick people well—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. God is a healing God, and He uses gifted people to restore others to health. One fifth of the Gospels is a record of Jesus’ healing ministry, and He passed this ministry on to the apostles and to the Church as a continuation of His compassionate outreach to those in need.

*“On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation”*  
(1 Cor. 14:3).

**Miracles** are the confirmation of God's Word with God's works, the demonstration of God's power through altering the natural course of events, often causing people to believe God and give Him glory. Many mighty miracles in the Old Testament were worked through the lives of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha. The same is true of the apostles in New Testament times.

**Faith** is mountain-moving, present-tense trust in God to do kingdom work. The prophet Daniel, who entered the den of hungry lions without saying a word, must have experienced a surge of faith in order to trust God under such terrifying circumstances. In the nineteenth century, Hudson Taylor founded the expansive China Inland Mission, recruiting and supporting 1000 missionaries—by such faith. George Mueller, another nineteenth century man of God, was used to raise up orphanages and to care for children throughout England, totally relying on God for all his needs, again, through the gift of faith. Many believers today can testify to “impossible situations” where God gave them faith to trust Him when hedged in by circumstances that seemed humanly impossible.

**Knowledge** is the supernatural ability to know and apply the truth of God. “A word of knowledge” was given to Nathan regarding the affair between King David and Bathsheba. Jesus, too, used the gift of knowledge. When He laid aside His glory and became a human, He accepted the limitations of the human intellect. He was not all knowing, but He knew by the Spirit that the Samaritan woman had five husbands. She saw that He was a prophet and later opened her heart to believe He was the Messiah.

**Wisdom**, like the gift of knowledge, is not a human ability at all, but a sheer gift of God. It is divine answers to human problems, solutions not apparent to most; but when it is shared it allows God's will to be carried out. Daniel had wisdom and knowledge in the intellectual realm and was therefore chosen to teach in King Nebuchadnezzar's palace. But, even greater was the supernatural word of wisdom God gave him to know and interpret the king's dream. Two New Testament examples of receiving supernatural wisdom include Jesus' reply to the Pharisees' question on paying tribute to Caesar (Matt. 22:17) and Peter and John, “unschooled and ordinary men,” answering the rulers of the Jews after the healing of the lame man (Acts 4:13).

*“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John...they recognized that they had been with Jesus”*  
(Acts 4:13).

Discernment is the spiritual perception of what is from God and what is not, coming at the moment it is needed. The demonized girl who was following Paul gave the right information but from the wrong spirit, and Paul discerned that. Discernment helps the Church sort out truth from falsehood. It is especially needed when the other gifts are exercised in a meeting.

**PRINCIPLES REGARDING THE GIFTS**

The Corinthian Christians, as mentioned earlier, had their share of problems.

They wrote Paul, hoping for some answers. After addressing the issues in their church, he answered their questions. He wrote, “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote....” (7:1), and he started in on principles of marriage. Then he said, “Now concerning the unmarried....” (7:25). In 8:1, “Now concerning food offered to idols...”, and in Chapter 12, “Now concerning spiritual gifts....”

In Chapter 12 he laid out some principles regarding the gifts; in Chapter 13 he focused on love, the essential motivation behind the exercise of gifts; and in Chapter 14 he zeroed in on two gifts that needed particular clarification: prophecy and speaking in tongues.

Paul’s discussion of the gifts in Chapter 12 covers the following principles for their use: **Jesus is Lord over the gifts (12:1-3)**. To be filled with the Spirit is to be under the lordship of Christ. Spiritual gifts are not extras for people on the fringe or for those wanting more excitement than what they get in the normal Christian life. They are, in fact, basic to life in Christ and help demonstrate the reign of Christ in one’s life. Paul wanted to make sure the Corinthians had a clear picture of them, so he said, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed” (12:1). Apparently, not unlike many in our churches today, they were ignorant of the role of spiritual gifts. So Paul wrote that “no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, ‘Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (12:3). The Spirit’s message is not the Spirit - it is Jesus Christ. To be under the guidance of the Spirit is not to be on some “holy goose bump trip”—it is to be directed to the exalted Lord Jesus. The gifts of the Spirit are the works of Jesus. *If we want to be involved in the ministry of Christ, we will be open to the gifts of the Spirit.* We cannot say, “I want Jesus—just don’t give me that spiritual gifts stuff.” It’s a package deal. *Those committed to Jesus are committed to His ministry.* They want the gifts functioning in their lives and in their church’s life.

*“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed”*  
(1 Cor. 12:1).

**The gifts are tools to do a job.** Five times in Chapter 14 Paul uses the Greek word translated “edify” or “build up.” The gifts are tools to build up the Church; they edify others. So Paul writes, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (12:4). He could have said, “Now there are varieties of tools. A hammer can drive a nail, but it doesn’t set a screw. A screw driver does.” (And it works much better than a kitchen knife, right?) We’ve all tried using a tool for something other than what it was designed for. Recently I tried using a wrench

as a hammer. Finally in frustration I went to the work bench and fetched the hammer—and then I got the job done.

The more tools we have, the more proficient we'll be in doing what's necessary. The work can move along only so far with a hammer and nails. Add a saw, and we can do a bit more. Throw in some power tools, and the building begins to take shape. The more spiritual gifts in operation, the more proficient we will be in the ministry of Christ. Paul's vision of the Church is that "the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). This happens "when each part is working properly" (Eph. 4:16). And who has these gifts? Paul says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). And after listing the gifts, he again says, "All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" (12:11). If the tools God has given you are not being used on the construction site, either some job is not getting done or someone else is having to do it! I may have a personal preference for one gift over another, but the need determines the gift.

*"All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills"*

(1 Cor. 12:11).

One of our sons loved my hammer as a young boy. It was my tool but his toy. I didn't mind his banging around on a couple pieces of wood. It's when he attacked the furniture that I got nervous. Now he sees the hammer as a tool, and he can really help his dad. Like my kids, we sometimes treat God's gifts like toys. He may not mind too much when we are kids, but sooner or later *we must be converted in our thinking from using God's gifts for our pleasure to using them for His purpose.* When the prodigal son left home, he said, "Gimme my inheritance." When he returned, he said, "Let me serve you." Broken of selfishness, he began thinking more about his father's interests than his own wants.

**We need one another (12:12-31).** Paul deals with two potential problems in his letter to the Corinthian believers, problems that are still real in our day. The first is thinking that we, as individual members of a church body, are not important. He uses the analogy of the body to show that we are interdependent.

"If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body" (12:15). We might feel inferior to people we think have greater gifts. Paul could have countered such deprecating thinking by saying, "To one is given a hammer, to another a drill, to another a saw." What if the saw decided not to function, because it wanted to be more like a hammer?

The opposite problem is thinking too much of ourselves. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have



## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

no need of you” (12:21). Again, back to the building analogy, if the hammer dismisses the saw as useless, it may find itself out of a job shortly, because a hammer is limited in what it can do. You need the full toolbox; you need the whole body. **Unity requires diversity**; we need each other. We learn to appreciate our gifts, as well as how others complement us. Just as a toolbox is composed of diverse tools all functioning to do a simple job—to build the house, so the body is made up of different parts working together. Some churches major in hammers, some in saws or drills. The strongest church, however, majors in the full-orbed ministry of Jesus Christ and equips its people to do the jobs it can. Peter exhorts, “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pet. 4:10). Notice he said “employ,” not “enjoy.” *The gifts are tools to be used for the Body, not toys to be enjoyed for mere personal pleasure.*

There are no superstars in the Body of Christ, no one who carries the whole toolbox with him, no one who can say, “I don’t need anyone else.” We all need each other. I can thank God for how He has gifted me, but I can be just as thankful for how He has equipped you to help me.

### **LOVE HOLDS THE KEY**

If I possess a gift, it really belongs to others, because they are the ones who will benefit from it. It’s no wonder, then, that Paul sandwiched a discussion on the fruit of love (1 Cor. 13) between the two gift chapters (12, 14). It is love, after all, which enables the gifts to function with the right motive and the right goal.

After his profound chapter on love, Paul says, “Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy... so that the church may be edified” (14:1,5). The word for “earnestly desire” is *zelao*, from which we get the word “zeal.” We don’t take the love and forget the gifts. Because we love, we pray zealously, “God, build your Church, encourage your people, edify the body of your Son.” God’s answer is to give us the gifts of the Spirit, by which we build up one another.

In light of what the church misses out on when the gifts of the Spirit are ignored or neglected, some of us may need to confess, *“I have not earnestly desired the spiritual gifts. I have been more indifferent than zealous. I have hampered the building project by my coldness of heart. Fill me with fresh fire, with*

*“As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace”*

(1 Pet. 4:10).

holy zeal.”

## EXPERIENCING THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

God's people—that's us—desperately need to be equipped with the gifts of the Holy Spirit if we are to carry out God's purposes through the Church. But how do we enter into this experience? While the Bible doesn't give us a three-

step approach, there are some principles that can guide us:

*“All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills”*

(1 Cor. 12:11)

**The gifts are given by the sovereign Spirit according to His choosing.** They are a manifestation of the Spirit, who remains the Lord over the gifts. He “apportions to each one individually as he wills” (12:11).

**We are to earnestly desire the gifts of the Spirit (14:1).**

One might conclude, as some have, that if the sovereign Spirit does the choosing, we remain passive in the process. Wrong! One can believe that God chooses our mate for us, but few would conclude that we should therefore sit at home until a spouse is dropped in our lap. The beauty of divine sovereignty is that it is not incompatible with human responsibility. So Paul exhorts us to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, and especially prophecy.

Included in that earnest desiring could be gaining an understanding of the gifts through study of the Scripture and books on the subject, praying for them to be released in your life, and asking others to pray for and with you.

**Manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit sometimes occurs when God fills us with the Spirit.** Prophecy often accompanied the Spirit's coming in Old Testament times, as speaking in tongues did in the New Testament community. Expect to demonstrate the gifts as you are filled with the Spirit.

**With growth in the fruit of the Spirit comes growth in the manifestation of gifts.** It's helpful, at this point, to note the similarities in the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit: they both come from the Spirit, they are both received by faith, and they both grow as we exercise faith. And note the differences: gifts are given—fruit is developed; gifts are not a sign of maturing—fruit is; gifts are the ministry of Christ; fruit, the character. Fruit and gifts must operate together. The more we desire the character of Christ visible in our lives, the more open we will be to employ the gifts as they were meant to be used. And the more these gifts are used, the stronger the witness of Christ's presence on the earth.

## CHOOSING TO UNWRAP THE GIFTS

We have a very generous Father with a very big plan for the world! He longs to impart wondrous gifts of grace to us, not only to build us up, but also to

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

equip us with the precise tools we need to minister His love, His mercy, and His healing power to those who need His touch. Will we eagerly receive what He offers us for the building of the kingdom? Will we unwrap these gifts of the Spirit and use them to serve others? A broken and hungry world awaits our answer.

**TO REVIEW:** The gifts of the Spirit are manifestations of the all-knowing, all-powerful Spirit, Who gives them to the people of God to enable them to do the work of God. They are to be desired, sought after, and used.

### **NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. How has God gifted me? Are my gifts being used as tools? If so, how?
2. Are some tools more evident in my church than others? Which ones need to be used more?
3. How are gifts like tools? Have I seen them used as toys or trophies? Why is that damaging?
4. Are there gifts I especially feel that God is calling me to exercise? Which ones? Are there gifts I feel especially drawn to? (This is sometimes an indication of God's will.)



### **WILL YOU OFFER THIS PRAYER**

“Father, I thank You for the gifts of the Spirit. Thank You that they are available today as they were in the early church. Forgive me where I have neglected them or been indifferent to them. I want to employ Your gifts as tools for the building up of the body of Christ. I open myself up for the gifts of the Spirit to be manifested in my life. I expect to be a channel of Your supernatural grace, and I will pursue the gifts as You encourage me to do so. Through Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, Amen.”



## God's in the Fruit-Growing Business

***“You did not choose me, but I chose you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide”***

(John 15:16).

**P**icture yourself walking through an apple orchard in late September, perhaps in eastern Washington or upstate New York. Harvest time's only a week away, and there you are, surrounded by rows and rows of trees bending under the weight of thousands of succulent red apples. Suddenly, you're hungry. Your appetite, whetted by the sight and aroma of fresh, ripening fruit, gives your saliva glands the message that it's lunch time. So when your orchardist friend says, “Hey, help yourself,” you don't hesitate. You grab the nearest apple, wipe it off on your jeans, sink your teeth in, and chomp away.

Fruit like this gets our attention.

Spiritual fruit also gets people's attention. Why? Because it looks just like Jesus. Even the best natural fruit has a limited life span; it's either eaten, or it shrivels up and dies. But when the Holy Spirit grows spiritual fruit in believers, people take notice. They see before them the very character traits of Christ reproduced

in ordinary people, in folks like you and me. Something supernatural has taken place within them, something powerfully winsome and engaging, something so totally reflective of our Father's heart that not only are others aware of it, they, too, become hungry for it.

This chapter describes the fruit of the Spirit, how it develops in our lives, and how we can participate in the growing process. As you read, watch for the hand of the Master Fruit Grower who nourishes and prunes His “plantings.” Weeds, pestilence, storms—nothing deters Him from His commitment to produce a “crop” of sons and daughters who act like their Daddy. This, according to Scripture, was God's plan from the beginning. As Paul said in his letter to the Romans, “He also has predestined (us) to be conformed to the image of his son” (Rom. 8:29). In other words, the Father's goal has always been to have kids who are like Him.

### **WHAT IS THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT?**

Paul gives us a clear definition of spiritual fruit in his letter to the Galatians: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (5: 22, 23). Rather an incredible nine-fold harvest, isn't it? Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, paints that same passage on an even larger canvas: “He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely” (Gal. 5). As you can see, the fruit of the Spirit goes way beyond a little cosmetic re-touch on our behavior or a minor reputation adjustment. Spiritual fruit represents a work that takes place at the core of our being, nothing less than the transforming of our character.

I once read a newspaper report about a well-known politician whose election campaign had run aground when news of an adulterous affair surfaced. He asked his advisors to help solve his “image problem.” A friend of mine, noting the report, had another “take” on the situation. “This isn't an image problem,” he observed. “This is a character problem.” Reputation is what people think you are, character is what you really are. It's what you are when no one is looking.

You can lose your reputation and still be doing all right. If you lose your character, you are in trouble. If you are more concerned for your reputation than for your character, you're dealing more with externals than with internals.

When I was a young minister in San Pedro, there were two pastors in town whose lives did not reflect the character of Christ, and yet they had remarkable spiritual gifts. One of them spoke eloquently at Trinity Lutheran on the ministry of deliverance. Hearing him, an elder with the gift of discernment spoke to me with great concern for this man's future. “If this man doesn't allow others to speak truth into his life, he's going to crash.” Sadly, that's exactly what happened to him—and to the other gifted pastor as well. Both these men's ministries and marriages self-destructed.

The gifts of the Spirit were so obviously present in their lives, but, unfortunately, these were not balanced with the fruit of the Spirit. These men hadn't let their character catch up with their charisma.

Jesus had strong words for those in His day who displayed charisma but lacked character. He insisted that prophesying, casting out demons, and performing miracles without coming under His lordship didn't earn automatic entrance into the kingdom of heaven. “Then, I will tell them plainly,” He said, ‘I never knew you; depart away from me, you evildoers’” (Matt. 7:23).

*“But the fruit  
of the Spirit is  
love, joy, peace,  
patience,  
kindness,  
goodness,  
faithfulness,  
gentleness,  
self-control”*

(Gal. 5: 22, 23).

I believe it's no accident that Paul, aware of our human propensity to seek the spotlight, wrote an entire chapter on a fruit of the Spirit—love, the more excellent way—and inserted it between the two chapters on the gifts of the Spirit. (See 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14.) Here we see the complete picture of God's equipping plan, the balance of gifts and fruit.

Think of the Master Fruit Grower's incredible investment in His crop. He paid for our salvation at the cross, but He didn't stop there. He wanted to do a deep "inside job" in us that would free us to be whole people. He wanted to change us from the inside out, or in theological terms, to begin the process of sanctification which restores us to the image of His Son. This process, begun at salvation, is just another term for the character building or fruit development that God yearns for us to receive. And the agent of change in this supernatural work? None other than the Holy Spirit. Deeply flawed by sin's impact on us, we're helpless to change without His power. Remember, too, that God is not put off by our weakness. As a Father who loves His kids, He is, in fact, drawn to us in our need.

Jesus lived on earth out of the Holy Spirit's power. Then, after His death and resurrection, He sent the Spirit with the specific mission of empowering God's people for Christ-like living. Think of it: the religious leaders thought they'd dealt with Jesus for good, but incredibly, when they encountered His disciples, it was as if they were confronting Him all over again. As John said, "From his fullness have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1:16). Jesus had somehow "rubbed off" on these simple, ordinary men He'd left behind. The Spirit who had made the difference in Jesus' life was likewise now filling His disciples. In a word, they had become "fruitful"—filled with the fruit of the Spirit, looking and acting like Jesus. Nothing's changed. We are also candidates for that same nine-fold fruit harvest, for looking and acting like Jesus.

## **HOW DOES FRUIT DEVELOP?**

The Christian life is the work of the Spirit from start to finish. Paul wrote, "If we live by the Spirit (salvation), let us walk by the Spirit (sanctification)" (Gal. 5:25). Birth (an event) leads to growth (a process). Two things are essential for the kind of growth that develops spiritual fruit. The first is a **relationship** with the Master Fruit Grower, and the second is time.

Jesus gave His followers—including us—a simple gardening metaphor to illustrate the necessity of having a relationship with Him. Listen to His words of promise and condition: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is who bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The promise? Fruit bearing. The condition? Remaining in Him. Without Him? We can do nothing. Pretty clear-cut direction for

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

maintaining a close relationship with the Lord, isn't it?

When we become Christians, we have a new status; we're believers with the opportunity for a love relationship with Jesus. We can talk to Him, listen to Him, praise Him, read His Word, spend time with Him. We can do all "the stuff" that builds an intimate relationship because we've received God's grace and forgiveness. Sin no longer separates us from a Holy God. No longer stuck living out of our self-centered nature, we can now live in a new, life-giving union with Christ. The Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Jesus, is alive in us and the potential for fruitful living is ours for the asking, with one limitation: "Neither can you (bear fruit) unless you abide in me" (John 15:4).

No alternatives for fruit-bearing are offered. Remaining in Jesus is the key. So, we ask, "How do we do it?" Our answer comes again from Jesus' words in John 15. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love" (v. 10). We're not left in the fog about what Jesus means here: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). We remain in Jesus when we choose to love each other with His sacrificial love.

Whether it's a branch on an apple tree or a follower of Christ, there will be no fruit without a "connection" to the life source. Relationship here is everything. We simply can't love others with God's love unless we stay vitally united with Jesus. Then—and only then—will we grow in His peace, His joy, His love.

*"This is my  
commandment,  
that you love  
one another as  
I have loved  
you"*  
(John 15:12).

## **FRUIT BEARING TAKES TIME**

Any orchardist knows that the little apple tree he planted so tenderly one day will not produce apples the next. Growing mature fruit takes time. It's a process, not only in an apple orchard, but in us as well.

A few years back, our daughter Erikka, then only three years old, scooted along at my side as I planted the spring bedding plants by the front walkway of our San Pedro home. I moved along fairly quickly with my trowel and box of multi-colored petunias, digging and patting the plants into the freshly-turned soil. "This border's looking good, honey," I commented as I dropped the last few plants into the ground. Instinctively, I turned to catch what I knew would be her wonderfully enthusiastic reaction, but instead I was the one with the reaction. There behind me lay all the petunias, pulled up by their roots and lying limp as noodles by the walk. "Erikka," I gasped, "What are you doing to the plants?"

Innocence radiated from her dancing eyes. "Daddy," she announced proudly, "I just wanted to see if they were growing."

As Christians, we sometimes want—and expect—what Erikka did: instant growth. Very often we, too, “pull up the plants” to inspect our spiritual progress. When we do this, it’s easy to become overly introspective or just plain discouraged when it appears that nothing’s changed at all. Paul calls us to “walk by the Spirit”.... (Gal. 5:16). Walking suggests a process, one step at a time. That’s one of the key elements in the growth of spiritual fruit: it’s a process that takes time.

I am often asked the question, “Is he or she Spirit-filled?” The questioner usually means, “Has this person had the experience of being filled with the Spirit, or does he/she exhibit certain gifts of the Spirit?” When the Scriptures speak of people as being full of the Spirit, they are not usually referring to an event, an experience or a gift, but to the evidence of fruit developed in their lives and the spiritual gifts manifested in a consistent way.

The apostles told the Hellenistic disciples to “pick out from among (you) seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom....” (Acts 6:3). Stephen was one of them. He was Spirit-filled all right. When he confronted the religious establishment, “they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke” (Acts 6:10). One of the evidences of being Spirit-filled, according to Paul, is control of the tongue. (See Ephesians 5:18-20.) Like wisdom, that, too, doesn’t just happen after a weekend retreat.

If I were interviewing a man for a job, I’d rather know if he could get along with people than if he had an experience in the Holy Spirit ten years ago. I would rather know if he has a good relationship with his wife than if he calls himself “Spirit-filled.” Loving his wife is the time-tested evidence that the Spirit has been at work producing fruit like love, patience, and kindness in a man’s life.

Change is rarely easy. Old habit patterns die hard. Let me share an illustration from my former parish. We had a garden at Trinity Lutheran, the church where I served for twenty-five years. Unfortunately, the kids usually took a shortcut through the garden to the playground. I was always putting up string, wire, stakes, and whatever I could find to keep them out. I posted signs, “Trespassers will be prosecuted!” It worked—for a couple of days. I dug up the garden and made announcements at our school. They stayed out—but not for long. It’s hard to learn to walk on a different path, to learn to “walk by the Spirit”—that’s a process. Again, I repeat: it will take time.

Have you ever been on a retreat where God moved in your life? You feel so wonderful that you know things are going to be different from now on. You come home and expect things to be changed. You soon discover, however, that people around you are still acting in the same old way. Your neighbor gets irritated with your dog’s barking. The kids have the flu, and their main method of communicating is whining. The garage man forgot to order your winter tires.



## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

Disillusionment sets in. Not only do you revert to some of your old familiar ways, but you also feel like throwing in the towel, figuring things will never change. But, remember, there are no “quick fixes” in God’s kingdom. We didn’t get where we are overnight—and more than likely, we will not change overnight either. It takes time to walk out forgiveness, repentance, and obedience and learn to receive the work of God’s Spirit in our hearts.

Any plant, however, when nourished by a healthy stalk, *will* grow. And so will we, nourished in our relationship with Christ. Listen to Paul’s words of hope: “And we all... beholding the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18). Notice the present passive tense “being changed.” We are being acted upon more than we are acting. The Father is conforming us to Jesus, and that’s not an overnight project. Don’t despair if progress is slow. As someone has said, “Yard by yard, it’s very hard. Inch by inch, it’s a cinch.”

### **WHAT IS OUR PART IN FRUIT GROWING?**

When it comes to growing spiritual fruit, we need to begin by knowing who does what. What’s God’s part? And what’s our part? Scripture, as it often does, challenges us to hold the truth in tension on this issue.

First, consider Paul’s word to the Philippians: “I thank God in all my remembrance of you... And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:4,6). Now, that’s good news: the Master Grower who rescued us in the first place and planted us in the soil of His love also commits to see us through to the end. Whatever it takes—watering, fertilizing, pruning, to use the gardening metaphor again—He’s committed to working for us and in us. That’s His part—and His promise.

Again in Philippians, Paul shows us the other side of the coin: “Therefore, my beloved as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...” (Phil. 2:12). *Work?* The word almost sets our teeth on edge. We know about God’s grace, that there’s absolutely nothing we can do to earn our salvation, or even add to it. Yet what Paul is saying here is that we, too, have a role to play by progressively *applying* our salvation to our life. How? By obeying the Lord, choosing to yield to the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives and responding to God’s Word in Scripture. Then we rest in the promise of the remainder of that verse: “...for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

When I was a college student, I heard Campus Crusade President Bill Bright talk about the Holy Spirit in a way I’d never heard before. In essence, he said that the Christian life wasn’t difficult, just *impossible*. Only the Spirit could do it

through us. It made sense. I repented of the folly of all my self-effort and began a journey of trusting more than trying.

Hoads of Christians remain discouraged, I believe, because they're doing exactly what I was attempting—trying to live the Christian life in their own strength. In many cases, they give up and just quit walking. Remember, the fruit of the Spirit is just that—the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of you or me. Let me give you two examples.

*"I thank God  
in all my  
remembrance  
of you.... And  
I am sure that  
he who began  
a good work  
in you will  
bring it to  
completion at  
the day Jesus  
Christ"*

(Phil. 1:4,6).

Paul wrote to the Colossians that Epaphras had told him about their "love in the Spirit" (Col. 1:8). He commended them for expressing this kind of love. It was much more than mere heartfelt feelings for other people. While "warm fuzzies" are legitimate human expressions of caring, they fall far short of God's agape love which is characterized by sacrificial giving and deep compassion, devoid of judgment. That kind of love is sourced in God, not in us. Yet, amazingly, we can be the human channels for it because, as Paul reminded the Romans, "God's love has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5). We cannot manufacture agape love, but the Spirit can—and does. And even more, He delivers it, on site, any hour of the day!

The same is true of joy. The Thessalonian saints "received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thes. 1:6). What? Doesn't suffering deplete joy? Some would call "afflictions with joy" an oxymoron. But, again, we're talking about something produced by the Holy Spirit. Joy here is a response totally unrelated to the surrounding circumstances. Look at Jesus.

As He faced the cross, He blessed His disciples with the joy that resided in Him. Joy when He had been denied, humiliated, and beaten? Joy when he was facing death? It's humanly impossible, we say. And that's just the point: the joy of the Spirit is no human joy. It's produced in heaven and developed in those yielding and trusting the Spirit of Christ.

Remember both sides of the coin in fruit growing. We put the emphasis on what God does in us, not what we do for God. Yet we are not uninvolved. Faith both receives and responds; it both trusts and obeys. And the Master Fruit Grower hovers over His plantings with infinite care, and He is able to bring beautiful, mature fruit into our lives.

## **WE CAN EXPECT A STRUGGLE**

God does His part, and we respond. Sounds pretty easy, doesn't it? Easy until we wake up naively one day on our Journey to Fruitfulness and find ourselves dodging exploding land mines on our path and ducking under the crossfire of

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

whizzing bullets. We're in a civil war, ambushed by unfriendly fire. We've been shot at by an opponent, one that incredibly rose up from within our own hearts. The Bible names this force *the flesh*.

Paul warns us about the power of the flesh to sabotage spiritual growth: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would" (Gal. 5:17). The flesh is hard-driving, independent of God, hostile to His law, selfish, ambitious, and voracious. It's that self-centered part of us that wants to stay in control and to do its own thing. Motivated by the law, the flesh wants to get in the act and put us back under the Old Covenant, where it is up to us to make things happen. Not surprisingly, flesh tries to produce fruit; it will even repent if it can draw attention to itself. But what the flesh produces shows how incapable it is of pleasing God. The list's not pretty: "The works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like" (Gal. 5:19-21). But surely it can't be that bad, we wail. Yet the truth is, outside of Christ, this is what you and I can produce on our own—the very antithesis of His character.

The flesh is like the law of gravity. The only thing that overcomes this pull of gravity is the law of aerodynamics, the law of the Spirit, the wind that carries us heavenward. Willpower cannot make it happen. External rules cannot do it. But the wind of the Spirit can. Yielding to the Spirit's control enables us to overcome the gravitational pull. If, however, we decide at any point that we can do it on our own and "step out of the plane," we will quickly discover that the law of gravity still applies. Billy Graham's flesh is just as hostile to God as anyone else's. God's answer to the flesh is not to Christianize it, but to crucify it.

Even here, God helps us. It's called "pruning"—what every good fruit grower does. "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful" (John 15:2 NIV). We don't see ourselves as God sees us, and we are no more capable of "pruning" ourselves than an apple tree can cut off its own branches. Still, our self-centered wills need trimming up at many points in our lives, and God loves us enough to want to "strengthen the tree" (that's us) and control unwanted growth in order to fit into the master plan for the entire orchard.

The best way to kill the flesh is to starve it to death. Without feeding, it won't survive. When we choose to watch compromising TV programs or read x-rated

*"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful"*

(John 15:2 NIV).

magazines, to indulge in a little gossip or entertain a critical spirit, we feed the flesh—and its appetite grows. The more we yield to it, the more it wants, so much so that Paul warns that “those who (live by the flesh) shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21).

One day when I was working under Pastor Larry Christenson in San Pedro, California, he asked me how I was doing with temptation. “Fine,” I told him, thinking I was doing pretty well. This seasoned, mature man of God responded quietly: “Not me,” he said. “I struggle.” I felt like a fool and wanted to retract my words. In spite of my embarrassment, however, I gained a valuable, on-the-spot understanding of Paul’s words to the Corinthians: “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

A struggle is not all bad; it can be a sign that God is at work. Jesus, in fact, after He was filled with the Spirit and before He set out on His ministry, was led into a tremendous battle. There in the bleak desert wilderness of Palestine, He battled the fleshly temptations Satan offered Him—and resisted. Struggles most often are clear signs that God is at work to strengthen us. Those aware of their struggle are, in fact, more likely to endure over the long haul than those who think following Jesus is a snap!

Take, for instance, my friend Doug, a young Christian, a running buddy, and a mail carrier. He was down on himself for swearing at a guy on the route. “Were you ever concerned about that before you came to Christ?” I asked him. “Not a bit,” he answered. “Well, welcome to the war,” I told him, remembering only too clearly my own struggles. Our surprise at personal failure shows that we really don’t know the capability of the flesh. The fact that we now feel the conflict is a good sign, not a bad one.

God needs a field to grow fruit in, and our hearts are the field. If we yield to the Spirit, that is, say, “Yes” to God, love, joy, and peace will grow in our hearts. If we yield to the flesh or say, “Yes” to our own selfish desires, we will grow another kind of fruit, a kind that isn’t worth much to anyone. The more we yield to the flesh, the harder it will be to control the weeds that spring up. Even if we want to live in the Spirit, we will find it difficult—and ultimately non-productive. Paul underscores this thought: “The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God!—harvests a crop of weeds. All he’ll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God’s Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life” (Gal. 6:5).

Satan tricks us by saying we can have everything we want right now. But he never makes good on his promises, and we reap only an unpalatable, weed-infested crop. Those who chose not to take time for acts of mercy or Bible reading will wish they had ten years later when the harvest comes. It is the law

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

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of the gardener—we reap what we sow. The gardener who plants skimpy seed should not expect a fruitful harvest. But the one who sows generously lives in hope of a rich harvest.

### **HARVEST TIME WILL COME**

Whether it's a fledgling plant or our own spiritual lives, growth can be slow and hard to measure. We live with the tension of "the now but not yet." We have the down payment, but the full inheritance waits for eternity. We groan inwardly, because we are not yet fully redeemed. "We see through a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). And yet the process is going on. God is changing us. *But we put the emphasis on what God does in us, not what we do for God.* Paul shows in the whole letter of Galatians that we are incapable of improving our status with God by our own works. Freedom to live the way God commands comes through the work of the Spirit, not through human effort. The emphasis in Galatians 5 is on the Spirit of grace, the Spirit that takes us beyond law to gospel, beyond service to sonship.

Two times in the passage on walking in the Spirit Paul mentions the crucifixion. (See Gal. 5:16-24.) The Spirit brings us to the cross, where we see what Christ did for us and what He is doing in us to make victory possible. God never said, "It is finished" at Mount Sinai, but He did at Calvary. So, friend, keep walking. Walking means putting one foot in front of the other. Don't expect too much with each step, but when you look back after a time, you'll see that you've made progress. The fruit is growing!

*"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren"*

(Romans 8:29).

**TO REVIEW:** God has predestined us "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). As we yield to God for the development of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (rather than attempting to produce it ourselves), we become more like Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ.

**NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. How would I describe the process of spiritual fruit growing?
2. What fruit is perhaps most developed in my life?
3. What fruit is least developed?
4. What could I be doing differently to encourage more fruit development?



**WILL YOU PRAY THIS PRAYER?**

“Dear Father, thank You that the Holy Spirit can produce good fruit in my life. Forgive me for trying to do it on my own. I yield to the Spirit’s power and invite You to continue Your good work in me. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.”



## What Do You Mean You Speak In Tongues?

When our oldest son was pre-school age, he asked me how many countries I'd been to.

"About fifteen," I told him, to which he quickly replied, "Then, Daddy, you speak in tongues." His facts were right—I do speak in tongues—but his reasoning was wrong. I have no ability to switch into the native language of every country I've been to, although, admittedly, that would be a pretty handy gift for a traveler. Instead, I have received a gift from the Holy Spirit, given to build me up and to help me in praising and worshiping God.

Little kids aren't the only ones curious about speaking in tongues. This particular gift raises questions for a lot of people. In this chapter I've listed some of the most frequently asked questions and then followed these with brief, straightforward explanations.

### KEY QUESTIONS ON SPEAKING IN TONGUES

As you read through this list, I encourage you to review the scripture passages included as well as the explanatory notes.

- ***What is the gift of tongues?*** It is the supernatural ability to speak in a language one has never learned.
- ***Is it a known language?*** Some tongues are known languages, such as those heard on Pentecost. On the other hand, Paul wrote, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels..." (1 Cor. 13:1), suggesting perhaps that some speaking in tongues might be human language and some might be angelic.
- ***When did people in the Bible speak in tongues?*** There is no mention of it in the Old Testament, and there is only one reference in the gospels—in Mark 16:15-20. This, however, is a disputed text, and few of the reliable ancient manuscripts include it. The first clear scriptural record of speaking in tongues is on Pentecost, as recorded in the book of Acts. This gift seems to have been reserved for the Age of the Spirit.
- ***What are the purposes of speaking in tongues?*** Paul writes that "he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself..." (1 Cor. 14:4). I'm sure you know

*"For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit"*

(1 Cor. 14:2).

people who could stand some building up spiritually. Other purposes include interceding, praying when you don't know how to pray, and praising God without the limitations of your known language. When used in a worship gathering, speaking in tongues requires an interpretation, unless it is done by the entire worshiping assembly for the purpose of praise, as, for example, in Acts 2 where they were "telling the mighty works of God" in their own tongues (v. 11).

- ***Is the gift available to anyone who asks?*** Yes, to any Christian. Paul said, "I want you all to speak in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:5), implying that there is a general availability of this gift. When people were filled with the Spirit in Acts, they spoke in tongues. It appears that God has made this gift available to all in the Church.
- ***How do I interpret First Corinthians 12, the question, "Do all...speak with tongues?" It suggests a negative answer.*** The context here (12:27-30) is referring not to gifts but to ministries. A ministry is a call to the regular exercise of a gift. One can prophesy without being a prophet. A prophet is one called to the ministry of prophecy. Many teach, but they are not all teachers. Some are called to exercise the gift of tongues in corporate worship, which, when interpreted, is like the gift of prophecy. Paul's question, then, suggests that not all have this particular ministry of speaking in tongues in a corporate or congregational setting.
- ***How does one receive the gift of tongues?*** James says, "You do not have, because you do not ask" (Jas. 4:2). But before you ask, you need to choose to make room for what God wants to give you by emptying yourself or, in other words by confessing your sins. You're now ready to ask the Father to fill you with His Holy Spirit, believing He is a Father who only gives good gifts. Remember, you can speak only one language at a time, so you will need to stop speaking English and simply open your mouth and begin to

*"You do not  
have,  
because you do  
not ask"*

(Jas. 4:2).

praise God as the Lord directs your tongue. It may seem foolish at the time—in fact, it probably will—but as you exercise simple childlike faith and speak out the syllables the Holy Spirit seems to give you, you will very likely soon be speaking fluently as the Spirit gives you the form of the words. We receive God's gifts by faith, and this means that we are not passive. Like Peter, before he walked on water, we must "step out of the boat" and choose to trust the Lord. God will honor your simple faith

***I've heard people say, "Just start making sounds after you have received prayer, and God will turn it into a language.*** Is that right? Let me answer this question with an illustration. A friend, Elsie Fuhrman, who has prayed for and has seen hundreds receive the gift the tongues, says this:



## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

“Some believers wait for God to do it all, not realizing they have a part in it, too. Acts 2:4 says, ‘they began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.’ To receive tongues, one needs to speak out, believing that God gives when we ask, and faith requires works (Jas. 2:22). Beginning to speak is the ‘works.’ Even if at first it may be myself doing it, the language begins to flow from my spirit when I continue in faith.” From my experience, I would say “Amen” to Elsie’s counsel.

**Can the devil counterfeit the gift of tongues?** Yes, he can, and he does, particularly in cults or other religions. That should not discourage us, however, for unless there’s something genuine, there won’t be a counterfeit. For instance, there are no counterfeit \$3 bills because there are no real ones. As a sincere believer, you need not fear receiving a “counterfeit” gift. Scripture reminds us of our safety in Christ (1 Cor. 12:3) and of the Father’s desire to give His children only good gifts. (See Luke 11:11-13.)

**Is the gift of tongues divisive?** No. The gift of tongues was given to unite. On the day of Pentecost, there were present in Jerusalem “devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). Tongues actually brought them together. The gift of tongues was also used to bring Jews and Gentiles together (Acts 10:47). In themselves, tongues are never divisive. Unfortunately, people acting out of pride, fear, or jealousy can be divisive.

**Isn’t the fruit of the Spirit more to be desired than the gifts?** Shouldn’t we prefer it? Actually, the gifts and fruit work in tandem. I’ve heard my friend Larry Christenson offer a good illustration of this by describing the plight of a thirsty man in the desert. Suppose you gave this man love only in the form of hugs and affirmation. Without giving him the gift of water, you wouldn’t meet his deepest, most desperate need. The same applies to the gifts of the Spirit. What’s important is what is most needed at the time.

**Is speaking in tongues a sign that a person has received the release of the Spirit?** We can certainly conclude this from reading the book of Acts. Repeatedly, those early believers received the Holy Spirit followed by speaking in tongues. Certainly, it is one evidence that the Spirit is present and working in a new way.

**But doesn’t Paul say that love is the more excellent way (1 Cor. 12:31)?** Yes, but he encourages us to choose both love (a fruit of the Spirit) and the gifts. He goes on to say, “Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts” (14:1).

**Can a person be filled with the Spirit and not speak with tongues?** Yes, speaking in tongues is only one evidence of the Spirit’s presence. Most people, however, having experienced the refreshing joy of God’s Spirit, will want to be open to all that God has for them.

*“Make love  
your aim, and  
earnestly desire  
the spiritual  
gifts”*

(1 Cor. 14:1).

**Who is in control of the gift, the recipient or the Holy Spirit?** The person with the gift decides when to speak in tongues and when not to. We are in control the same way as we are when we speak in our own language. The Spirit doesn't overcome us and cause us to blurt out in a tongue. The same vocal chords we regularly converse in are used, but when we speak in tongues, we are yielding to what the Spirit is saying. If we were not free to control this gift, Paul would not have given the exhortation, "If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at the most three, and each in turn" (1 Cor. 14:27). He also said that "the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (14:32). We are free, in charge, but yielded. In other words, we have the gift; the gift doesn't have us.

**Why has there been so much confusion with regard to this gift if it is a blessing for the Church?** Some of the reasons are fear of the unknown, fear of being out of control, pride from those who speak in tongues, pride from those who don't, lack of love (as evidenced in the Corinthian congregation), and concern for self rather than for others. When gifts are exercised with love, they

will bring unity. Baptism is the sacrament of incorporation, but it has also been used to divide Christians into camps. Again, it's people, not gifts or blessings, that divide.

**Can children speak in tongues?** Certainly. They often enter into this gift with ease. Paul says that the gift of tongues bypasses the mind. He says, "If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also" (1 Cor. 14:15). Children can often accept this more readily than adults.

**Paul seems to indicate that prophecy is a greater gift than tongues. Shouldn't we pursue that rather than tongues?** Speaking in tongues is a gift that opens us up to a new spiritual dimension and prepares us to receive other gifts of the Spirit. Paul says that

"he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church" (1 Cor. 14:4). If more people were speaking in tongues (and building themselves up), more would be prophesying and thus building up the church.

**Is speaking in tongues an ecstatic experience?** Not necessarily. Larry Christenson writes, "The gift itself has no particular emotional aspect; there can be as little or as much emotion as with any other speaking, depending on the emotional state of the person who is speaking. It is subject to the speaker's conscious control; he or she can start or stop it at will, speak louder or softer, slower or faster, and so forth, even though the actual procession of words or sounds is not consciously determined."

**When should one speak in tongues?** You can pray in tongues as a part of your personal prayer time, or you can pray quietly during prayer ministry

*"If any speak  
in a tongue,  
let there be  
only two or at  
the most three,  
and each in  
turn"  
(1 Cor.14:27).*

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

opportunities. You can exercise this gift whenever you are alone, perhaps while driving the car or while exercising. You can pray with others during times of praise in a corporate worship service or during times of intercessory prayer. You can pray claiming Christ's victory over Satan (spiritual warfare).

***What if I pray to receive the gift and don't receive it?*** Look to the Lord as a good Giver and believe that the gift is coming. Then step out in faith. Avoid getting too introspective, looking for reasons why you shouldn't get it, don't deserve it, or don't need it. Tell God you want Him and His gifts because you want to live a life of praise. And, in fact, many have received this gift for the first time in the midst of corporate or private worship. Rely on Paul's counsel: "Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts" (1Cor. 14:1). Some have received prayer for healing, and it happened, but not right away. Try to come as a child—open, needy, and trusting. Having said this, however, we also realize that some have come this way and still haven't received what they had hoped to. We must admit that we do see through a glass darkly. We are God's children, not His boss. If you have not received the gift of tongues after doing what you have felt you could, seek to rest in the love of a Father who only gives good gifts. He knows what He is doing, even if we don't.

***Why do some people believe this gift is not for today?*** Until the time that the Bible was codified, some believed that the gifts of the Spirit were only for the New Testament church. They understand the verse which says, "When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:10) to refer to the codifying of the Scriptures. Hence, they feel that since we now have the Bible (the perfect), there is no longer any need to speak in tongues (the imperfect). The context, however, suggests "when the perfect comes" refers to the coming of Christ.

***Does having the gift of tongues mean that I am a mature Christian?*** No. Gifts are given at a point in time. Developing the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) is a process rather than an event. Speaking in tongues is not to be forbidden (1 Cor. 14:39), but neither should its importance be exaggerated. The Corinthian Christians had all the gifts, yet they were immature and out of balance in their conduct and character. Developing the fruit of the Spirit gives us a humble spirit and helps us to stay in balance.

## **SOME WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

The gift of tongues is available for God's people today to enable them to "express the inexpressible" and to pray and worship God in a way that bypasses their minds. It is a gift that builds up the person using it in contrast to all other gifts of the Spirit, which are given to help others. Sadly, I have heard some

people, perhaps out of ignorance or fear, devalue the gift of tongues. Yet the Scripture clearly says: "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights..." (Jas. 1:17). God only gives good gifts, including the gift of speaking in tongues. Those who exercise it need to value it, and those who do not exercise it need also to value it as from God. Any other stance foolishly discredits God, which is really to discredit ourselves. One way to honor the Giver is to value His gifts.

In our highly rational, high-tech age, we need to recall Isaiah's perspective:

God's ways are not our ways. They are far higher. (See Isaiah 55: 8,9.) Let's face it—speaking in tongues doesn't make much sense to our intellect. If you analyze it, you'll come up with "foolish" every time. But Paul reminds us that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1 Cor. 1: 25). Those who fail to hear the Father's incredible heartbeat of love for His Church may well dismiss this gift as foolish and without value. Yet just the opposite is true! God's special, edifying gift, freely and graciously offered to His sons and daughters, is nothing short of good, wonderful, and fulfilling when received and faithfully used.

Perhaps your heart is even now responding to God's offer of this gift of tongues. If that's the case, count on this: the Father is joyfully waiting to give you a releasing, empowering gift to strengthen you for a life of praise and service to Him.

### **SOME SUGGESTIONS AS YOU PRAY FOR THE GIFT**

If you are now ready to pray for the gift of speaking in tongues, the following suggestions will help you as you seek the Lord for it:

**You do the speaking; the Holy Spirit does not.** The same vocal chords are used to speak in tongues as are used for the language you usually speak.

You can't speak two languages at the same time. After receiving prayer, try not to analyze intellectually what you've done. Be still. Stop speaking in your learned language.

**Singing praise songs sometimes helps you enter into the gift of tongues.** It did for my wife, Karen. She had read a book about the work of the Spirit. She was in a service where God seemed especially present to her and where people were worshipping, some by singing in the Spirit. She decided to join them!

**Expect to receive.** Some are too afraid to expect anything. Faith pleases God.

**Be willing to speak out.** Don't wait to be hit in the head. Take some initiative.

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts'"*

(Isaiah 55:8,9).

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

Remember Peter; he didn't say, "If you want me to walk on water, throw me out of the boat." He got out and started walking. Miracles have a divine and a human side to them. Guess which side is ours?

*It may start small.* Babies don't break out with mammoth vocabularies. If you receive one word, go with it until you receive more.

*Don't be afraid to come as a child.* We can't enter the kingdom of God without a childlike attitude. Have that mentality when seeking and exercising spiritual gifts. In faith, start making sounds, believing that God will take these and turn them into a language of praise.

**TO REVIEW:** The gift of tongues is just that, a gift. Given by the Holy Spirit to those who ask, it is for personal edification, for prayer, and for praising God without the limitations of one's own language. This gift blesses both the recipient and the Body of Christ when used with love and wisdom. Scripture offers clear guidelines for employing this gift and for understanding its purpose.

### **NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. How do I understand the purpose of speaking in tongues?
2. With that understanding in mind, do I desire the gift?
3. If I receive the gift, how could I see myself using it?



**WILL YOU NOW OFFER EITHER ONE OF THE FOLLOWING PRAYERS?**

**Prayer to receive the gift of tongues:**

“Thank You, Father, that You are a giver of every good and perfect gift. Thank You that, according to the words of Jesus, You give good gifts to those who ask. I am asking You to give me the gift of tongues. I desire to use it to strengthen my life of prayer and praise. I believe that You have made it available to me, and I now receive it as we receive all of Your gifts—by faith. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

**Prayer if you already have received this gift:**

“Father, I thank You that by Your grace You have given me the gift of speaking in tongues. Forgive me for the times I have not been a good steward of this gift. I desire to be faithful in praying with my mind and praying with the Spirit. I wish to be built up by the regular use of this gift so that I am ready to build others up as You strengthen me. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

If you have prayed either of these prayers, take some time to offer praise and thanksgiving to a generous Father, One who loves you as much as He loves Jesus and who freely gives His gifts. As you do, let your known language cease, and let the expression of the Spirit come from within you. Be willing to come humbly and boldly like a child, confident rather than analytical and free rather than inhibited. May the Lord abundantly bless you.



## Is the Church a “Non-prophet” Organization?

If you want high drama, turn to the book of Exodus and reread the story of God’s meeting with Moses on Mount Sinai. Cecil B. DeMille, the Hollywood film mogul, was so captivated by this story that in 1932 he produced *The Ten Commandments*, the spectacular movie version of this event. He did a remake in 1957, and to this day audiences still watch the re-runs. Mind you, De Mille only *read* the story while Moses was there, in person. He was on site when the earth beneath him trembled and the mountain before him convulsed. He *saw* the fire and smoke belching forth into the sky. He *heard* the booming thunder, the crackling lightning, and the blaring trumpets. And what is even more, Moses *heard* God’s voice booming forth from the mountain.

This was more than a little Fourth of July fireworks show. This was a cataclysmic phenomenon. It was as if the earth itself had pulled back on its orbit, throttled some kind of cosmic accelerator, and gunned it—all as a prelude to hear the Creator speak audibly to man. Let that picture sink in, and you get an inkling of why Moses stood among the rocks of the Judean wilderness probably shaking in his sandals. But Moses wasn’t the only one that day. Think of the Israelites, those Moses was attempting to lead. They covered behind him, too frightened to do anything but beg their leader to ask God to back off. “Moses,” they must have pleaded, “please just ask God not to do this anymore.”

Essentially, God did gear down His communication style after that. Although, on occasion, His voice has come booming down out of heaven, most commonly when God speaks, He does it through people, through humans like you and me. This kind of divine communication is what the Bible calls prophecy. This chapter defines this spiritual gift and attempts to clarify its role in the Church by addressing the following key questions: What is prophecy? What is its purpose? Is it for today? How can I develop this gift? How can I learn to receive prophetic words? Other issues about prophecy are listed in the question and answer format at the end of this chapter.

*“I will pour  
out my  
Spirit, upon  
all flesh, and  
your sons  
and your  
daughters  
shall  
prophesy”*

(Acts 2:17)

### **A LOOK AT THE PROPHET**

We begin with the prophet. Simply defined, a prophet is a mouth for God’s

words. Under the Old Covenant, those with a prophetic ministry constituted a small fraction of the religious community, and no wonder—the Israelites had a propensity toward “prophicide.” The mortality rate among this select group was unusually high. Prophets were jeered and ridiculed, even stoned for words unpopular with the people. Insurance for seers was not cheap. When a prophetic call was issued, the frequent response was, “Here am I; send Harry.”

Even so, Moses, the mighty prophet of God, looked forward to the day when the gift of prophecy would be shared by more of God’s people. (See Deuteronomy 34:10.) In fact, after this overburdened leader complained once about his heavy ministry load, God answered by pouring out His Spirit on seventy elders, who then all prophesied. When Joshua became alarmed that two men hadn’t received the gift in what he thought was the “right” way, Moses’ reply showed his heart’s desire: “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets!” (Num. 11:29).

That longing of Moses was answered on Pentecost when the Church was born, and Joel’s prophecy began its fulfillment: “And your sons and daughters shall prophesy...Even upon the manservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my Spirit” (Joel 2:28,29). This expansion of the prophetic gift was to be a distinctive feature of the New Covenant and the Age of the Spirit. Because God has thrown back the curtain of the Holy of Holies through the death of Jesus, we can now hear personally from Him. For that reason, rather than having fewer prophets this side of the cross, we can actually expect far more.

## **WHAT IS PROPHECY?**

Prophecy, or the prophetic word, is the “now” word of God, spoken into the needs of the immediate situation. Jesus referred to this kind of continuing guidance when He said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). The Bible is God’s universal Word of truth. The “now” word neither adds to nor supersedes the Word but rather highlights it. St. Paul said that “he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation...He who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Cor. 14:3,4). Six times in this chapter Paul uses this word “edify,” which means literally “to build a house.”

*“Would that  
all the Lord’s  
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(Num. 11:29).

Countless people today suffer with hidden hurts, silent resentments, gnawing guilt. Many of them are looking for someone to help guide them. Many in this search look to palm reading, fortune telling, or horoscopes for some kind of guidance. Others simply despair. If they only knew the truth: that the Lord is a compassionate God and He desires to rescue them from their hopelessness. He wants to speak



## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

words of love and truth to them. Believers need to be reminded that God has opinions about the church's building program, the neighbor's bout with cancer, their teenager's struggles. Though God has given us His written message—His timeless Word—He also wants to give us guidance through timely messages and words of exhortation and encouragement that speak life in our own circumstances.

All of us need to be built up and encouraged. The prophetic gift is necessary to build up the house of God, to nourish us in the faith, and to strengthen us in our human weakness. Certainly this gift is for today, not just for the apostolic period. True, "when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:10). In heaven there will be no lack of knowledge, no need to be encouraged, no mysteries to unravel, no business to finish. But in the imperfect meantime, God gives His gifts, including prophecy, to continue building upon the foundation laid by the apostles.

### **SOME PURPOSES OF PROPHECY**

The gift of prophecy works in unique ways to enhance the life of the Church and of the believer. I have found that the following five ways help clarify the purposes of prophecy:

**To identify the issue.** Jesus handled Zaccheus differently from the way He dealt with the woman taken in adultery or with the rich young ruler. The Spirit helped Him sense the critical issue in each person's life and then target His ministry accordingly. When He told the woman at the well, "You have had five husbands," she rightly replied, "I perceive that you are a prophet" (John 4:19). How did He know the heart of the matter? God had revealed it to Him. No wonder the Pharisees had so much trouble with Jesus. While they were predictable men of technique, Jesus yielded to the Spirit to discern how to handle each situation. Consequently, they never knew what He would say or do next.

Jesus taught His disciples to be men of the Spirit as well, and it should be the same for us. As we trust the Spirit while we seek to give help to people, we can be confident that He will guide us in the words we use and in the prayers we offer. The same Spirit that directed Jesus promises to guide us into all truth. For example, if a person has a problem with money like the rich young ruler had, we need not waste our energy discussing the second coming or some moral issue that's less relevant. We can ask God to lead us to the word of truth that pertains to the specific problem as we listen.

**To reveal the heart.** The human heart, in many ways, is like the rudder of a ship. Just as the turn of the ship's rudder sets the ship's course, so the bent of

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our hearts sets the direction our lives go. Jesus knew people's hearts like no one else who has ever walked this earth, and He also knew that until the heart is opened to the Father's love, human actions will not change. Opening hearts to the healing light of love and truth invariably means exposing the wounds, the hiddenness, and the lies within.

Jesus so often targeted the Pharisees at the heart level. Why? Not to embarrass them or to set them up for an example, but to press them into reality, to expose their hearts so that they could see beyond tradition and law to their utter need for a relationship with Him. At one point He told them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me'" (Matt. 15:7,8). Prophetic preaching, teaching, and exhortation (and counseling, witnessing, and praying, for that matter) can target the heart in the same way Jesus did.

Peter demonstrated this prophetic quality in his reply to Simon, the sorcerer, who wanted to buy the power to lay hands on people and have them receive the Spirit. The apostle rebuked him severely: "Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!... For I see [a revelation of the heart] that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:20,23). As a result of Peter's prophetic insight, the fear of God was planted in Simon's heart, and he asked for prayer to escape His judgment (v. 24).

Paul told the Corinthians that the gift of prophecy has a place in worship because of this very quality to target hearts and to bring conviction. He said, "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called into account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" (1 Cor. 14:24,25).

**To pray on target.** I used to think that prayer was primarily telling God what I needed.

I thought that the more urgent I sounded, the better chance I had of getting what I had asked for, because my urgency demonstrated faith. I have since come to realize that prayer is not twisting the arm of a reluctant God. It is more a matter of finding out what God wants to do and agreeing with Him.

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus could see Peter faltering. He said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31,32). Jesus did not pray haphazardly. He had seen prophetically what Satan was trying to do and what God was planning to do, thus His prayer was confident and focused because He knew He was agreeing with the Father in prayer. How that word must have

## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

encouraged Peter as he battled the condemning thoughts of his adversary!

Jesus said, “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). We cannot pray effectively unless the Lord helps us know what to pray about. “The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought...” (Rom. 8:26). We are utterly dependent on God for everything—including our prayer life.

We may pray for His will to “be done on earth as it is in heaven,” but what is His will? What has He revealed to us about our family’s needs, our neighbor’s struggles, our church’s future? Prophetic insight not only helps us minister on target, but it enables us to pray on target as well.

**To Declare God’s Will.** When an official asked Jesus to heal his dying son, the Lord declared: “You may go. Your son will live” (John 4:50). How could Jesus speak so boldly about the outcome of the situation? The answer lies in His words to those who had challenged His authority: “The Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing” (John 5:19). Jesus was given prophetic insight into the Father’s will for that situation, and so He could declare it with authority and confidence.

I believe this has been a key to the effectiveness in the ministry of the late John Wimber. He invited those who attended his seminars to step back and prophetically see what the Father was doing. “Try to sense what He is up to as you are preparing to minister,” he counseled. “When you get a conviction, go with it.”

I remember one pastor who was praying at the altar for a young man. Although he did not know this young man, a word came to him that this young man had struggled his whole life under the demands of an overbearing father. When the message was confirmed by tears, the pastor declared the will of the Lord that he be healed of the feelings of inferiority.

In circumstances like these, God can put His Word in our hearts and allow the impression to grow stronger until we are confident of its source. Then we can become His mouthpiece to declare His desires—and that builds up the Church.

*“The Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing”*  
(John 5:19).

**To Predict the Future.** Another purpose of the prophetic gift is prediction. Although prophecy is more often the “telling forth” of a word from the Lord rather than foretelling, the Bible includes examples where prophets did reveal what was to come. Most of the prophetic books in the Old Testament predicted events in the distant future, as did Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and the vision of John in Revelation.

The prophet Agabus in the New Testament church provides an illustration of how this kind of prophecy may be concerned with more immediate events

and thus help guide a church's or an individual's decisions. Agabus accurately prophesied a coming worldwide famine and so alerted the local church to prepare for relief efforts. He also foretold Paul's arrest in Jerusalem. This kind of prophecy is rare today, and most experiences we are familiar with are, sad to say, from false prophets who have misguided people.

## **SOME HINDRANCES TO PROPHECY**

If prophecy is so vital in the life of the Church, why isn't it more frequently practiced? I believe that several common attitudes hinder the expression of this gift:

**First, our failure to expect prophetic ministry to occur is definitely a hindrance.**

Three times in Scripture we are exhorted to earnestly desire to prophesy (1 Cor. 12:31, 14:1, 14:39). Yet our expectation of experiencing this ministry is often low. The Greek word for desire here, "zelao," suggests a zealous pursuit. We need to ask ourselves: "How zealously do we seek prophecy?"

To say that the fruit is more important than the gifts misses Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 13. He sees the two, not in contrast, but as complementary. The gifts function through love. Love motivates; the gifts manifest. Love without the gifts is the character of Christ without His ministry, the attitude without the ability.

Timothy received a spiritual gift through the laying on of hands, but he needed prodding from the veteran apostle to use it. Paul's exhortation to him to "stir up the gift" (2 Tim. 1:6,7) should help those of us today who are passive or fearful of using the gifts.

The second attitude that hinders prophecy is **our tendency to make excuses for letting the "spiritually elite" monopolize the gifts.** Moses said, "I can't talk," Jeremiah said, "I'm too young," Elijah said, "There are too few of us and too many of them." But God's reply to us, in essence, is the same as it was to them: "I want to use you anyway."

One of the women in our church in San Pedro conducted a confirmation workshop for another church. At the close of the seminar, the pastor, who knew we practiced laying on of hands with a prophetic ministry, asked her to pray personally for each one attending. She had never done that before and was surprised by the request, but she agreed to do it. To her great joy (and relief) she discovered that God was no respecter of persons. He used her prophetically in the situation in the same way He can use anyone prepared to rely on Him and to be sensitive to His will.

God is not limited by our age, gender or position. In the church where I was a pastor, we were teaching even our young children to listen to God, and we

## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

were delighted to see how accurately they could hear His voice. We were seeing the fulfillment of what the prophet Joel said—that our sons and daughters would prophesy.

Most importantly, we can relax. God doesn't ask us to be super-spiritual or supernatural in order to exercise the gift. The more fully human we are, the more ready we are to be used. Christ's coming in the flesh affirmed our humanity, so we can relax and let God be the supernatural one.

**Our failure to wait on the Lord** is the third attitude that hinders prophecy. God's lament is spoken through Jeremiah: "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people..." (Jer. 23:21-22).

The words Elijah used to introduce prophecy should give us a clue about the source of his authority with people: "As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand..." (1 Kings 17:1). If we want to hear a timely word for God's people, we need to stand in His council and listen. There, prophecy goes forth from the mouth of the Lord to the ears of the prophet. As Amos said, "The Lord God does nothing, without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Those who are standing in His presence will be privileged to know what He is doing.

When I was a pastor in San Pedro, I received a call from an elder in our church who said that his wife had a word from the Lord that she believed was for our church family. I acknowledged the call and hung up. He phoned back and said, "I'm not sure you understand. My wife has a word she thinks should be shared tonight at the Lenten service." He was right. I had not understood him in this way, but I said I would call on her sometime in the service, and I did. After she shared the word, I invited anyone to come to the altar who wanted to pray in response to the word. I turned toward the altar and began to kneel. A holy stampede followed. People poured out of their pews and up to the altar, conscious that God, not just Jean, had spoken to us and that we needed to respond. This simple example shows the power the prophetic word can have when people are willing to listen.

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(Amos 3:7).

## **DEVELOPING THE GIFT OF PROPHECY**

As we move past the hindrances to prophecy, we need to take positive steps to cultivate this gift. Once again the key lies in our attitude toward the Lord and toward ministry. I've found the following six attitudes helpful in moving out in the gift of prophecy:

**Be filled with the Spirit.** Prophecy operates through the dependent, not through the clever. Peter reminds us that “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation...but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:20,21). Spiritual gifts are manifestations of the Spirit, not of the speaker.

**Learn to listen.** As we wait upon God, He will give us His concerns for situations and equip us with the right words for those people in need. While in conversation, counseling, witnessing, praying, or working, we should also be listening as the psalmist did: “My soul, wait thou only upon God” (Ps. 62:5).

**Be motivated by love.** Dick Mills, a man with a seasoned prophetic gift, was once asked in a television interview why he thought he had been given the gift of prophecy. Without hesitating, he replied: “I have always loved people. As

a boy I used to go up on the trails of the High Sierras near our home and pass out water to tired hikers. I have always wanted to help people.” Like those cool drinks on the trail, a word in season is a wonderful way to show love by giving refreshment to the weary.

We should remember that Paul gave the enthusiastic Corinthians, strong on gifts but short on love, this equation: *Prophecy minus love equals zero*. The gift of prophecy is not the gift of criticism. Harsh, judgmental words not based in love are not expressions of the prophetic gift. In fact, the pessimistic sourpuss who is down on people is a misleading caricature of the Old Testament prophet, for in reality, his insight into the character and purpose of God grew out of a rare love for others.

Paul made it clear that to prophesy is to build up other people rather than one’s self. Those eager to grow in prophetic discernment must move past the “bless me” syndrome and seek instead to be a blessing, first to God and then to His people.

**Be confident that God can use you.** We prophesy in accordance with our faith. (See Romans 12:6.) The person who says, “I never get a word from God,” is probably right. On the other hand, the one who says, “Your sheep hear your voice, and I am one of your sheep,” will certainly hear. As we learn to trust

our inner impressions, our faith grows because we realize that God is able to speak through us and to us.

**Realize that we are not infallible.** We are called to be people of integrity, not infallibility, for “we prophesy in part” (1 Cor. 13:9). We don’t see the whole picture; we see “through a glass darkly.” But as a friend of mine once said, “That’s a whole lot better than being blind.” We should be encouraged by the

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(1 Cor. 29, 32, 33).

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

system of checks and balances for New Testament prophecy which Paul spells out in 1 Corinthians 14: “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said... The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God disorder, but of peace” (v. 29, 32,33).

**Stay human.** When some people start talking about a gift like prophecy, they can get a little weird or spooky. Divest yourself of such notions. The more down-to-earth we are, the more God’s supernatural life can flow through us. Put-on emotions or affected voice qualities have no place in the manifestation of this gift. The more we demystify the gifts of the Spirit, the more we will see them operating among God’s people in a natural, winsome way.

### **RECEIVING THE PROPHETIC WORD**

What form can we expect a prophetic message to take? How will we know when it comes? Scripture suggests several ways we can receive prophecy:

**Through a word.** Jeremiah wrote, “The word of the Lord came to me saying...” That phrase was common among the prophets. Was it an audible word? Probably not. God seldom, if ever, speaks words into our mind. Most often, He impresses our thought processes with ideas or words. One prophet said, “He laid a word in my mouth.” It comes spontaneously and unpremeditated. It may be a single word or a phrase. Jeremiah didn’t want to prophesy but was constrained to do so because the words burned within him (Jer. 5:14).

**Through a picture.** Jesus said He did what He saw the Father doing. “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all that He Himself is doing” (John 5:19-20). Jesus saw the Father at work. Jeremiah saw an almond rod; Joseph, a cow; Daniel, a statue; Amos, a basket; Peter, a sheet. Much of the book of Revelation is a series of pictures and symbols which convey God’s message.

God has often spoken to His people through pictures or visions. We can expect Him to continue this form of communication in the dispensation of the Spirit, for which it was prophesied that “young men will see visions and old men dream dreams” (Acts 2:17).

Prophetic pictures may be symbolic like a political cartoon, suggesting a truth or a lesson. In fact, the left half of our brain favors such symbolic language; it is the language of the subconscious. So we should not be surprised to find that God uses images to communicate directly with our minds.

Normally, when we receive a prophetic image, the meaning it suggests will become clear if we keep it before us for a moment. If we are given a picture for someone else, what the picture means to us may be different from what it means to the other person. It’s usually good to share our interpretation rather than the

picture. If, however, we cannot decipher the meaning ourselves, we should ask the other person if the picture has a special meaning to him.

An example of this occurred in the church that I once served when one of our elders prayed for a visitor and saw a picture of darkness over the man's lung area. The man being prayed for attached no significance to the image until two weeks later when he was diagnosed as having inoperable lung cancer. Learning the diagnosis, he was encouraged to call the elder for prayers, believing that if God had shown him the problem, he could also pray for the solution. The prophetic word had given him faith that the Lord knew his situation and was a healing God.

**Through a sensation or an impression.** At times the Old Testament prophets speak of how "the burden of the Lord" came to them to prophesy. (See Habakkuk. 1:1.) The phrase suggests that a weight, like an impression, or a sensation, may accompany revelation. Often those who receive a prophetic word can almost feel it striking against their spirits. Others testify to pains or physical responses in their body to different needs. If the spirit within us is searching out the spirit in another person, it should not surprise us that physical sensations may be involved.

*"Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you"*  
(1 Tim. 4:14).

## **STEPPING OUT IN FAITH**

In all of these prophetic forms, the key is to act obediently as the Lord speaks. Often the message will slowly unfold as we move in faith. The words may begin to form in our spirit almost imperceptibly. As this is happening, quiet yourself and concentrate on the Lord. As the word takes shape, believe that God is speaking to you and wants to speak through you. Take courage! It is better to miss the target honestly than to hold back for fear of error. The more you experience confirming responses from others, the stronger your confidence will grow.

When you are praying for an individual, it may be necessary to ask a few questions to see if you are praying accurately or if the ministry is being received. Be as natural as possible. Words you receive can often be less threatening if shared as a question rather than as a pronouncement. The person you are praying for may find it easier to respond if you ask, "Did you have a terrible fear of your father as a young child?" rather than your declaring, "The Lord told me..."

Keep in mind as well that the laying on of hands is often the divine connection for receiving a prophetic word. (See 1 Timothy 4:14.) It can also be the occasion for the impartation of gifts or the calling forth of what God has already given.



## **THE FRUIT OF PROPHECY**

The exercise of the prophetic gift increases our awareness of God in worship and thus deepens our experience of Him. It strengthens our fellowship because love flows through the operation of the gifts. It helps believers discover and enter into their callings. Saul and Barnabas, for instance, teamed up on a missionary venture because of a prophetic word. (See Acts 13:2,3.) Finally, prophecy improves evangelistic efforts because it helps people identify the root needs in those who are being challenged with the gospel.

In all these ways, the love of God is expressed through His people in the ministry of prophecy. The Church cannot afford to be a “non-prophet” organization. Authors Ray Beeston and Ranelda Hunsicker say it well: “If we rule out everything other than the Bible as a means of hearing from God, we create a long-distance relationship. That’s not what God has in mind. He put His promises in writing to anchor our lives. They keep us from sailing off on a false course under the wind of our own thoughts and feelings. But He also longs to talk with us, to surround us with His presence and power. We are sternly warned not to put out the Spirit’s fire or treat prophecies with contempt. Instead, we must test them carefully and hold on to what is good.”

We need more than a well-crafted sermon; we need a timely message from God. Those who hurt need more than a pat on the back: they need a God-sized solution to their dilemmas. The gift of prophecy can help make that happen. Let us “earnestly desire” it, then, for the building up of the Church and for the sharing God’s love with a broken world.

## **COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT PROPHECY**

*Q: Is the gift of prophecy different from the word of knowledge?*

A: Yes and no. Paul’s enumeration of the gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-10) lists them separately. But prophecy is a broader term than the word of knowledge. Prophecy includes all forms of charismatic revelation, one of which is the word of knowledge.

*Q: Is the gift of prophecy available to all Christians?*

A: Just as Paul invites all to speak in tongues, he urges them all to enter into prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1,5,12,19,20,31). The New Covenant calls believers into the holy priesthood, and it likewise ushers them into the Holy of Holies to hear from God and to be His voice in the earth. Not all, however, are called into the office of prophet. The response Paul expected from his question, “Are all prophets?” was clearly, “No.”

*Q: Does one who prophesies have control over what is said?*

A: Yes. Paul’s guidelines for proper worship (1 Cor. 14:26-33) could not be

followed unless the speaker has full control of when and what he speaks. The Spirit fills us and influences us, but it does not seize our personalities and overtake us.

*Q: Did prophecy come to an end at the conclusion of the Apostolic Age, as some have said?*

A: No, but with the coming of Jesus, God's ultimate Word to the human race, and with the giving of the Scriptures, the sphere of prophecy became much more restricted. It was less needed for general teaching, but it is just as needful for the encouragement of the saints.

*Q: Are you saying that we should be having prophecies in our church?*

A: Listen to the balanced apostolic admonition from St. Paul: "Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thes. 5:19-21). We are clearly not saying that you should have a committee meeting next week and appoint some prophets for your church. Paul is concerned for balance. But it isn't balance where our people hardly know that the gift exists, let alone see it exercised in the context of a worship service. We have been guilty in the Church of quenching the Spirit and of despising prophetic utterances.

*Q: What happens if I prophesy wrongly?*

A: It will be a growing experience! Leaders are to weigh prophecies (1 Cor. 14:29), more as an encouragement to boldness rather than as evidence in an inquisition. If we were prophesying words to be written down as Scripture, it would be a different matter, but the Bible has been written, so relax. Practice your gift. Like preaching, teaching and counseling, prophesying is strengthened with use.

*Q: And how is prophecy weighed?*

A: Those with pastoral responsibilities weigh both the prophet and the prophecy. Is the one prophesying under authority? Does the prophet exhibit the fruit of the Spirit? The prophecy is weighed for its agreement with Scripture, its tone (does it build up or tear down?), and its timing (is it the right word and the wrong time?). The standard of prophecy is Jesus, the living Word (Rev. 19:10) and the Bible, the written Word (2 Pet. 1:19-21). It is important that prophecy be weighed for several reasons:

1. Jesus said many false prophets will arise in the last days.
2. Paul said that we prophesy in part.
3. Paul exhorted us not to deny prophecy but to test it (1 Thes. 5:20, 21).
4. It is possible to prophesy (or at least claim the gift) and not be related to Jesus (Matt. 7:21-23).

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

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**TO REVIEW:** Prophecy is a “now” word spoken to bring strength to the body of Christ. The gift of prophecy is a gift of the Spirit given for building up and for encouragement and consolation, to the body of Christ. We are to eagerly seek after its manifestation.

### **NOW STOP AND ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS**

1. How would I define or describe the gift of prophecy?
2. What are some uses of the gift of prophecy?
3. How would I compare and contrast a New Testament and an Old Testament prophet?
4. Am I open to hearing from God? Would I be willing to share a message if I felt God gave me something for others?



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### **WILL YOU OFFER THIS PRAYER?**

“Father, I thank You that You have always spoken to Your children and that You are still speaking. Please quiet my heart, so that I learn how to hear Your voice. I want to open my ears so that I can hear from You and be part of giving strength to the family of God through the gift of prophecy. Through Jesus Christ, the Living Word, Amen.



## How Do You Get There From Here?

***“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God”***

(Rom. 8:14).

I used to think that prayer was one-way communication—I talked, and God listened. Then one day I discovered that God can talk, too. I shouldn’t have been surprised. After all, the whole of Scripture discloses a God who wants to communicate with His people. From Genesis to Revelation we see Him pursuing a relationship with His children that is personal and intimate. Picture, if you will, the best human father you know—one who is deeply committed to talk with his kids, to listen to them, and to be there for them. Then magnify that image a thousand-fold. As good as this might be, it would still pale against the heavenly Father’s love and commitment to guide us through this life.

As a youth director, I was asked one question more than any other: “How can I receive guidance from the Lord?” I love the way kids ask straightforward questions. And, I’ve found that adults, who sometimes don’t ask, really want to know the same thing: “How can I learn to hear from God?” That must have been the same question the disciples had as they sat in the Upper Room, seemingly immobilized after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. Their guidance—in the personal presence of Jesus—had been brutally snatched from them. They were now on their own, without a leader or a map or a guide book. Hardly their dream idea of the way to launch a mission. But, tune in fifty days later: these same men are out preaching and ministering with a boldness and pinpoint accuracy that shook up all Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside. What on earth made such a remarkable difference? Well, actually, nothing from earth at all, but rather something from heaven: the coming of the Holy Spirit—the very gift Jesus had promised them earlier.

Jesus had told the disciples that the Spirit would make the difference in their ministry. He would be leaving, but the Spirit would be coming—to live in them (John 14:17), counsel them (14:16), teach them all things and help them remember what Christ had taught them (14:26), guide them into all truth, and tell them what was to come (16:13). They would not be left to forge ahead alone.

It is the birthright of every Christian to experience the Spirit’s guidance. In fact, St. Paul insists that the true believers are those who depend on the Spirit’s

## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

leading: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). But how do we do it? How do we learn to hear the Spirit? How do we know it is God speaking? How does He guide us to make the right decisions? This chapter deals with these questions as they relate to God’s provision to be our personal guide and to lead us into all truth through the Spirit.

### **GOD HAS SPOKEN—AND STILL SPEAKS**

The gods of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Egyptians were fully visible to the people via their stony statues everywhere, but like the deities they represented, they never spoke a word. Not so the Lord God of all creation, the God of Israel, the God of the New Covenant. His very nature is to communicate. He has made known His will in a variety of ways: through prophets ( Heb. 1:1), in His creation (Ps. 19:1), in His Word, through His Son (John 1:18), and through the indwelling Spirit.

Abraham was called a friend of God. Friends talk together about personal things. Moses also spoke with God in a personal way: “The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11). David learned to inquire of the Lord before taking important steps of actions (2 Sam. 5:17-23). Jesus Himself said that He only did what He saw the Father doing. He also called us His friends because He shared His Father’s intimate words with us. (See John 15:15.) Paul was sent out through the Spirit’s guidance (Acts 13:2) and led by the Spirit to cities that God had prepared to receive the gospel (16:6,9). Indeed, God has spoken to our forefathers, and He hasn’t changed. He is still speaking through His Spirit.

A woman in our church who had learned to respond to God’s voice had a sudden urge to leave a party and return home immediately. She arrived at her house, went in, and within minutes her car burst into flames. Had she delayed, she might have been in the car when the fire erupted. Obviously, she was very thankful for the Spirit’s prompting and for choosing to obey Him.

Friends of ours from Seattle, Ruth and Tom, were spending several nights in a hotel in Vancouver, British Columbia. The second night there Ruth awakened from a sound sleep with a startling dream about turmoil in their neighbor’s home. At first she dismissed the dream as too much late night dessert, but she couldn’t get back to sleep because the scenario seemed so real, yet so unlikely for this “put together” family. Finally, at 2 a.m., she awakened Tom, and they prayed for their neighbor’s family.

Returning to Seattle, Ruth went next door to retrieve the mail. As she paused on the neighbor’s front step to visit with the woman for a few minutes, the

*“The heavens  
are telling  
the glory of  
God; and the  
firmament  
proclaims his  
handiwork”*

(Ps. 19:1)

intense feelings of the dream returned. Was God trying to tell her something? Sensitive to this possibility, she casually asked if everything was okay at their house. The woman snapped back, "Everything's fine!" They chatted a few more minutes, and then as Ruth turned to leave, the woman said, "Wait a minute. Everything's not fine. We're in a terrible mess here!" She proceeded to flesh out the details. "We had to phone the police to come and get our son, our marriage is rocky, and I'm not sure I can handle things anymore." The confession of trouble introduced a new level of caring for the neighbors, for prayer, and to ultimately help and healing over a period of time. To my friends, it was a clear case of the Spirit's leading.

More often than not, however, the Spirit's promptings are not dramatic events, but are rather, like the "still, small voice" that Elijah heard. His answer did not come via "wind, earthquake or fire" but quietly, from within. (See 1 Kings 19:12.) That's probably the norm for most of us as we go about our daily routines. The Spirit, our Helper, comes alongside in very ordinary ways to guide us: a sudden thought to phone a friend, a decision to take a different route, a strong impression to pray for a child at school, a thought to read a specific scripture passage. The Apostle John compared the Spirit to the wind. We neither see nor hear it, but when it blows off our hat in a sudden gust or gently fans our forehead after a game of tennis, we experience the reality of it.

When God speaks, the important thing is not so much what volume or venue He chooses, but how keenly we can recognize His voice as the guidance we so desperately need.

*"... and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice"*

(1 Kings 19:12)

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING**

The whole life of a Christian is characterized as a life of listening. A believer is one who hears God's Word and believes (John 5:24). To fellowship with Christ, we must hear His voice and open the door (Rev. 3:20). Jesus said to Pilate, "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (John 18:37). Animals learn to detect the voice of their owner. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). No amount of activity we engage in will overcome our need to hear God's voice.

I was driving downtown one day when I wondered if I should have taken my older car, because this car had been giving me problems. But, exchanging cars meant driving all the way back to the house. I prayed and felt the Lord directed me to change cars. I prayed again and felt the same guidance. Unfortunately, I ignored it and went ahead, only to have car trouble both ways. My stubbornness cost me much time and effort, and I wished I'd obeyed the Spirit's promptings.

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

One cannot miss the importance that listening to the Spirit was for the believers in the book of Acts. Listen to the phrases Luke records: “the Spirit led us,” “the Spirit sent us out,” “the Spirit opened a door for us,” or “warned by the Spirit.” It’s pretty obvious that they lived in a vital dimension of the Spirit, putting their full weight down on trust and total dependency on His guidance.

Listening for the Spirit’s specific guidance is especially important when we read the Bible. For instance, the Word of God tells us about marriage, but it doesn’t tell us who we will marry. For that we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And, while the Bible lays out principles of work, it doesn’t tell us what we should do or where we should work. But, the Spirit will guide us if we learn to listen closely. Listening to the Spirit as we read helps us know whether or not we are reading the Scripture through the filter of grace and accurately discerning the Father’s heart.

### **HOW CAN WE HEAR FROM THE SPIRIT?**

Guidance for a believer comes through Scripture, through circumstances (the opening and closing of doors), through the inner prompting of the Spirit, and through other people. A key with guidance, however, is to bear one important thing in mind: guidance has more to do with building a relationship with the Father than with learning a technique. Note the following six guidelines. They are not meant to teach us a process but rather to strengthen our commitment to a loving Father.

**Give yourself to God.** Guidance is so much bigger than knowing which meeting to go to or even which house to buy. It is a matter of coming under the lordship of Christ. Once you’ve settled the big one—who is your Master—other questions are not as hard. If you want your way more than God’s, don’t expect to hear God’s voice. Allow God to renew your mind so that your thoughts run in parallel lines with His. Then you will be doing what Paul says: “proving the will of God in your life.” (See Romans 12:1,2.)

It is difficult to find God’s will when we are actually looking for our own way or when we don’t believe He has the best for us. Doubt His goodness, and we will flounder with His will. Trust His faithfulness, and we will see it lived out in our life. See His sobering control expressed in our life, even as the Scripture relates: “The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord” (Prov. 16:33).

I encourage young people to join the 3M Club: Master, Mission, and Mate. The three biggest decisions in our life include the following: Who will be our master? What will be our mission? Who will be our mate (or should we even marry)? Once we have identified the first, then we are more prepared to handle numbers two and three. When Saul (who later became Paul) was confronted by

Jesus on the way to Damascus, he asked two important questions. The first was, "Who are you, Lord?" The second followed naturally after the first was in place, "What will you have me to do?"

This means that we must come to the place where we can say with Jesus, "Not my will, but Yours be done." When we have determined that we really want the Lord's will and not ours, He will see that we find it.

*"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect"*

(Rom. 12:2).

**Express your confidence in His guidance.** A little girl was on her first train ride, heading for St. Louis to see her grandparents. After an hour she went up to the conductor and said, "I'm afraid I might end up in Chicago. My grandpa is picking me up at the train station in St. Louis." The conductor assured her that she would meet him in St. Louis, and she sat down comforted—for a little while. But then she got worried all over again; what if the train pulled into Kansas City instead of St. Louis? Afraid she'd miss her grandparents, she went back again to the conductor and expressed her anxiety.

"Honey," the conductor responded, "Your ticket says St. Louis. You're on the train that goes straight to St. Louis. You don't have to worry for a moment."

We are children of our heavenly Father. He knows our destiny and is able to get us there safely. Our focus needs to be on His ability to do what He promises to do; we need to put our emphasis on the God who guides rather than on our need for direction. Our job is minor compared to His. Let Him lead. Tell God what is true of Him: "You are a good Father. You give good gifts. You lead me

in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. I am Your child, and I know you won't lead me astray."

A friend once said, "The one who is nervously pressing in on God for His will can be confident that he doesn't know it." I am told that Corrie ten Boom once said, "The will of God is not so much the burden that we carry but the power of God that carries us." Letting the Spirit guide us is like river rafting. Our assignment is to get on the raft and stay on, and the river will carry us. We don't need to ask every thirty minutes, "Are we going the right way?" The river takes care of that. But, occasionally, we come to forks in the river where we must slow down and make a decision which way to go. If we make the wrong choice, we'll know it soon. The issue here is trust—trusting the Creator of the river who knows where we are and where we're headed. If our hearts are soft and pliable, we can be redirected more easily than if we're stubborn and self-willed, presuming that we know the way to go. If we get into dangerous white-water situations we ask God, "Did I take the wrong turn?" At other times the water is



## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

quiet, and the river carries us calmly along.

**Let Him speak out of His Word.** He'll never contradict it. Meditate on it, mull it over, memorize it, and let your mind be shaped by it. Let it bring faith, cleansing, and correction. Take His Word seriously, and make it your absolute final authority on all matters. Don't be tempted to contradict it, saying that your situation is an exception or that something really doesn't apply to you. That's a fatal flaw. Let the Spirit who guided the original writers now guide and inspire you to understand the scriptures, and more importantly—to do the scriptures.

**Practice the habit of listening.** The flesh is noisy, active, demanding. To hear the Spirit requires quieting down and listening. What is He saying to you? What impression is He giving to the mind of your spirit? What pictures? What words? Careful now—don't get “religious.” Stay relaxed and remember that you're a human being. Let God do the divine part—your part is simply to listen with an open heart. When you pray with others, listen first. See how God guides you; don't just dive in. If someone asks for your counsel, listen to the Spirit. If you're given an assignment at church, at work, or at school, listen and see if the Spirit shows you how it should be done. As you go to bed at night, ask God, “Anything you want to say to me before I go to sleep?” As you get up in the morning and have a time of prayer, don't do all the talking. Remember to practice listening. Learn to listen before making a decision. God has a will about your life, your direction, your job, and your future, and He wants to guide you.

David did not assume that, because he was a fighter, he knew how he should fight against the Philistines. Nor did he assume, when he prepared to attack a second time, that he was to battle the same way that he did the first time. He consulted with the God of battle, who knew much more than the warrior king, and David was successful on both counts. Listening is much safer than presuming to know. This means that when a group such as a church council, for instance, comes together to decide on something, the members are discerning more than deciding. All they need to know is the Lord's will. Ultimately, in a Divine Monarchy, only one person has a vote—the Monarch. Our job is to determine how He's voting!

**Look for guidance in the routine of life.** Most guidance occurs, not in the spectacular, but in the everyday quiet occurrences of life—often without our realizing it's taking place. Ruth walked in the will of God one step at a time, and God led her to Bethlehem and to Boaz. Her guidance grew out of her commitment to the God of Naomi. She didn't need to ask God who to marry. She simply walked in God's ways.

God's guidance may come through dreams, visions, prophecies, revelations, or the still small voice such as the prophet Elijah experienced. We let God determine how and when it comes.

**Ask for the immediate before the ultimate.** Obey God one step at a time. Scripture says that “a man’s steps are ordered by the Lord” (Prov. 20:24). A friend who’d been a marine major in Viet Nam once told me that visibility in the jungle was sometimes just the next step that he was taking. Occasionally, he would be pulled out of the rugged terrain by a helicopter to view the whole landscape. Then he would be dropped back into the jungle. The only way he could make his way through was to establish reference points along the way. Point A might be a river bed, Point B a hillside, and Point C was the camp,

*“a man’s steps  
are ordered by  
the Lord”*

(Prov. 20:24).

but he had to go one step at a time, point by point. Sometimes we want God to reveal point C from point A. Better to ask Him for the next step, and you’ll sense you’re getting closer to your goal. For instance, a young person asking God about a future vocation might do well first to confer with people about gifts and interests and then to pray about the place where those gifts can be developed. That might be point A. But keep moving. It’s much easier to steer a moving bicycle than a stationary one. God leads us in the process. “A man’s mind plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps” (Prov. 16:9). God guided Israel by a pillar of fire and a

cloud—as they moved. Guidance is not a passive experience; it occurs when we keep moving toward God and His purposes.

**TO REVIEW:** Guidance on a daily basis is possible because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide us into all truth. Our main task is to give ourselves to God and to learn how to listen to the Holy Spirit. Hearing from God is not following a formula or rules from “the boss,” but is rather building a trusting relationship with a loving Father.

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

### **NOW STOP AND ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. Am I convinced that the Spirit speaks and that I can hear Him? Have I experienced it? Could I share an experience of hearing the Spirit speak to me?
2. What encouragement from the scriptures can help me grow in receiving the kind of guidance the Spirit wants to give?
3. Have I developed a trust in the Father's ability to guide me? How can I learn to trust Him more?
4. How can I develop a listening ear to the Spirit?



### **WILL YOU OFFER THIS PRAYER?**

“Father, I thank You that Your sheep hear Your voice and follow You. I am one of Your sheep. I trust You to speak, and I commit myself to listening. I would rather be guided by Your Word and Your Spirit than by my own flesh. Forgive me for the many times I have not been willing to wait for Your guidance. Thank You for giving me a new desire to be counseled and led by Your Spirit. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.”



## Jesus, the Spirit-Filled Man

***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed...”***

(Luke 4:18 NIV).

Jesus had come home to Nazareth, the city of His upbringing. He had been baptized in the Jordan River and tempted by the devil for forty days in the wilderness, and now He had returned to His familiar surroundings, where He worked alongside His father at the carpenter’s bench. On the Sabbath day, He visited the local synagogue He knew so well. While He was well known among His neighbors and certainly to the local rabbi who undoubtedly observed Him earlier as a boy of unusual gifting, probably no one thought His presence with them to be unusual. Certainly, no one sensed His returning “in the power of the Spirit” as Luke described His reentry into this region. (See Luke 4:1-14.)

To them Jesus was simply Joseph’s son, nothing more, or so it seemed until He stood up in their midst and read from the scroll the attendant handed Him. He spoke out the opening words of Isaiah’s prophecy: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.” Every eye fastened on Him as He continued reading: “He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, release to the oppressed...” (Luke 4: 18, 19). When He had finished, He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, sat down, and announced to His Jewish friends and neighbors that Isaiah’s prophecy was that very day fulfilled—in Him (v. 21). A holy hush must have fallen on that place. Jesus, the carpenter’s son, had just presented *Himself* as the Messiah they’d been waiting for.

Picture the crowd in the synagogue: friendly, yet oblivious to what Jesus was actually telling them. In fact, at first they exclaimed over His gracious words. They were proud of Him. A short-lived response, however. As Jesus pursued them verbally, exposing their attitudes toward the Gentiles, it dawned on them what He was saying, and they became angry. Not only had this Man alluded to a much wider plan of God than they could accept—a plan to include the Gentiles as well as the Jewish people—but He had also committed blasphemy. He was nothing more than an itinerant preacher, and they wanted none of it, and none

## the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

of Him. The hostile crowd would have killed Him on the spot if He hadn't given them the slip and headed for Capernaum, His new base of operations. Here He amazed the people by casting out demons, healing the sick, and teaching the spiritually hungry.

Jesus was a Man on a mission. Yet, He was not Clark Kent turned Superman, He was made out of the same stuff we are—flesh and blood—with all its human frailties and limitations. Paul tells us that He emptied Himself of His divine nature and took on the form of a human servant. (See Philippians 2:5.) Still, Jesus healed the sick, restored the brokenhearted, delivered the oppressed, and taught with God's authority and wisdom. How did He do it? Our answer lies in the very words Jesus spoke that day in the synagogue: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me..." (Luke 4:18). Yes, this announced His messiahship, but it carried an added punch—it also described His *modus operandi*. Jesus moved and ministered *in the power of the Holy Spirit*. What did this mean for His followers, then and now? And how does this challenge us—the Church—to carry on His ministry in the world of the twenty-first century? In this final chapter, we address these questions as we look at Jesus, who is clearly our model for the Spirit-empowered life.

## THE BIRTH OF JESUS

The Holy Spirit could well be called "the midwife of history." When life is coming forth, the Spirit is on the scene, and not as a passive observer. At creation, He "hovered over the waters," present and active in that awesome process when time, as we know it, began. (See Genesis 1:2.) When the Word took on flesh, the Spirit was vitally active in those lives adorning the Christmas story.

After centuries of silence, the Spirit "came out of hiding." The spiritual desert was about to bloom again, this time with unprecedented glory. The light promised to Israel was soon to dawn; the Spirit was blowing, and the prophetic urge was stirring. The angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his promised son would be filled with the Spirit from the womb (Luke 1:15). The same angel told young Mary that she would conceive supernaturally. "How will this be?" she asked. The answer came back: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you... For with God nothing is impossible" (Luke 1:34, 35, 37). The midwife of history was on duty. When the Spirit is present, life comes forth.

The child of Elizabeth and Zachariah was born, and they named him John. Immediately, after nine months of enforced silence, Zachariah's tongue was loosed, and, filled with the Holy Spirit, he prophesied over his new son (1:67).

*"The Spirit  
of the Lord  
is upon me,  
because He  
has anointed  
me..."*

(Luke 4:18).

Mary, the virgin girl, gave birth to Jesus, and the heavenly hosts notified the astonished shepherds on the hillside in stereophonic choruses of praises to God (Luke 2:7-14). Simeon, led by the Holy Spirit, met the holy family in the temple, blessed them, and prophesied over the Child (Luke 2:25, 33). Anna, the faithful 84-year-old prophetess, who had prayed and fasted in the temple until Jesus' birth, now spread the word to everyone she met (2:38).

Indeed, the desert was blooming, and the wind of the Spirit was blowing. New life and new hope had moved to center stage at the birth of Jesus. The One who Isaiah prophesied would have the Spirit of the Lord upon Him had arrived. (See Isaiah 11, 42, 61.)

*"The heavens  
were opened  
and he saw the  
Spirit of God  
descending like  
a dove and  
alighting on  
him."*

*"...this is my  
beloved Son in  
whom I'm well  
pleased"*

(Matt. 3:16,17).

## **THE MINISTRY OF JESUS**

The Spirit that came upon various Old Testament saints for special "God-sized assignments" now focused singularly on the Son of God. Jesus was endowed by the Spirit with a fullness not seen before. Although He was the Son of God, He functioned in ministry by virtue of the Spirit's indwelling and not by virtue of His divine Sonship. As Michael Green writes, "No longer is the Holy Spirit encountered as naked power; he is clothed with the personality and character of Jesus. If you like, Jesus is the funnel through whom the Spirit becomes available to men."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' ministry was launched in the waters of the Jordan River where He was baptized by John the Baptist and "ordained" by His Father's affirmation. Matthew records the event: "The heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him." Jesus then heard His Father's voice saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased" (Matt. 3:16,17).

Now thirty years old, Jesus stands at the threshold of His ministry—and He heads out, led by the Spirit. Mark describes this sequence: "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil" (Luke 4:1,2). At His baptism Jesus heard the voice of His Father. But not so in the desert. God was not speaking there—Satan was. What the Father affirmed, the adversary challenged. The first Adam, tempted by the enemy in paradise, lost big when he and his wife succumbed to the offer of the snake. Jesus, the second Adam, tempted in the wilderness, the lost paradise, defeated the powers of darkness and inaugurated His ministry as a victor, not as a victim. Satan was down, but not out. He would come back to try again.

*All that Jesus did was in the power of the Spirit.* He cast out demons by the

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

Spirit (Matt. 12:28) and healed by the same Spirit (Acts 10:38). He offered Himself up as the Lamb of God by the inspiration of the Spirit (Heb. 9:14). His teaching was authoritative and life giving, unlike that of the scribes who only repeated what they'd learned from other sources. He lived and died as the Spirit-anointed Man, yet He claimed no exclusive rights to the Spirit. In fact, He told potential disciples that the Father would give the Spirit to those who asked, and He encouraged them to ask.

Like the Old Testament saints, Jesus was empowered for ministry by the Spirit. But there were some major differences: the Spirit came to Him without measure (John 3:34), and the Spirit *remained* on Him. John the Baptist had said, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33). The new age was dawning. The New Man was on the scene. Demons knew it and were running scared. The strong man had been tied up and thrown in the corner. The Stronger One had plundered his goods and was ushering in a new reign—the kingdom of God. And the mark of that new kingdom? Clearly, it was Jesus' overcoming the works of darkness in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28).

It had been over four hundred years since a prophetic voice had been heard. Now the sound barrier was broken. The Spirit was on the scene again, ushering in the Messianic era. For three years, Jesus, fully dependent on the Spirit's power, walked the dusty roads of Palestine, and through His teaching and working miracles among the people, He modeled His Father's heart of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and justice for the world. At the end of three years, things would change.

*"He on whom  
you see the  
Spirit descend  
and remain,  
this is he  
who baptizes  
with the Holy  
Spirit"*

(John 1:33).

## **TRANSITION TIME**

Change can be slippery business. UCLA basketball has never been the same since the legendary coach John Wooden retired. What can you do for an encore after winning a record number of national basketball titles?

I've watched churches slowly disintegrate after a flowering ministry was followed by the coming of the wrong person. The same has happened to many businesses and even governments.

Change is inevitable, but it is a difficult channel to negotiate. We are protectors of the status quo, which, according to one pastor, is Latin for "the mess we're in." If we're not careful, we'll end up with disasters. That's exactly what the disciples were feeling when Jesus broached the subject of His leaving them. He had radically changed their lives. They'd surrendered their vocations to follow Him, and now here was their Master talking about going away—and they couldn't go

with Him. It was a transition time for them, the changing of the guard.

How does Jesus accomplish it? When you read the book of Acts, you'd have to say that the transition was highly successful, but you wouldn't have guessed that by the scene that took place in the upper room.

Jesus was giving the disciples His final instructions. It looked more like the last five minutes before the start of the Sunday School Christmas program than strategy planning to take on the world! Jesus was trying to tell these men what they should already have known by then. Thomas interrupted Him and said, in effect, "Wait a minute. You just said we know where you are going. No, we don't" (John 14:5). So Jesus told them He was going to the Father. Then Philip butted in, "Time out. Who's the Father?" (v. 8). It sounded as if these hard heads were getting to the Son of Man when He answered, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (v. 9). In other words, "Come on. Let's get with it."

Jesus had not talked much about the Spirit until now, yet He lived consistently under the Spirit's anointing. He was the Messiah, the anointed One. Now He was ready to leave, and He needed to prepare His disciples for the transition. So He said, "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:4-7).

## **THE BIG ADVANTAGE**

Have you ever been praying for someone and thought, "I wish Jesus were here right now"? Have you ever puzzled over a problem that had you stumped and thought, "I wish I could sit down and talk with Jesus on this one"? The disciples lived, slept, worked, preached, healed, and evangelized—with Jesus right with them. When they blew it, He corrected them; when they responded rightly to questions, He praised them. When they lacked information, He instructed them; when they didn't know the way, He guided them. Could anything be better than that? In fact, yes. Having Him get inside them and be with them for every moment day and night—whenever, wherever, however. And that is just why the Spirit came: to do in us what Jesus would do for us if He were physically present.

Jesus said He was sending "another Counselor," meaning another of the same kind. *He would be as Jesus was, do as Jesus did, only with infinitely greater possibilities, because as the Spirit He would have no time and space limitations. Jesus*



## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

*could be at only one place at a time while on earth.* But from heaven He could direct the activities of the new Church without restrictions. So He said, “It is to your advantage...” That was more than they could handle—at the moment. The disciples weren’t tracking. “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now” (John 16:12). But they would hear when the Spirit came. He would come to guide them into the truth they needed.

### **THE PROMISE OF GUIDANCE**

Jesus said a great deal to the disciples in the three years they walked and worked together. They didn’t take notes. They didn’t have laptops to record His words. How were they going to remember? Jesus said that the Spirit would help them. “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (v. 13). He’d already told them: “He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:26). What a gift for them! They would have what they needed, when they needed it. Think of the time you’ve spent reading the scriptures, listening to tapes, hearing messages. The Spirit, Who is called by Jesus the Spirit of truth, has access to all that truth. He can speak it to your mind whenever you need it—if you’ll let Him.

A friend of mine on the West Coast tells about a time when she questioned the Lord as to why she seemed so interested in reading the Bible, why her heart seemed so bent on pursuing His love and His ways when others around her appeared content to “just have religion.” She actually drifted off to sleep one night with the thought that maybe she was “weird” or had “gone off the deep end.” A few hours later, as dawn was breaking, she awakened with the clear and comforting words of Jesus: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). The Holy Spirit delivered the truth she needed when she needed it. And what is more, His truth settled an issue in her heart.

When something has popped into my head that I needed during a counseling session, I’ve silently given credit where credit was due. But it has occurred many times over the years when I wasn’t even aware of it. This is what Jesus promised would happen when the Spirit was sent; He would guide us into truth as well as help us remember truth when we need it.

*“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come”*  
(John 16:13).

## THE PROMISE OF POWER

Say the word *power*, and all sorts of strong images flood our minds: missiles blasting off a launching pad, Tokyo's bullet trains racing down the rails, even a fully loaded Mac truck lumbering down the freeway. *Power*—energy harnessed to accomplish the humanly impossible. In human affairs power speaks of the authority vested in heads of state, parliaments, and other governing bodies to

command armies and govern vast numbers of people.

In the upper room, Jesus talked to His disciples about power:

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). At first glance Jesus' words seem to pale in comparison with the more dramatic images of power we've just mentioned. But take another look.

*Power* in this context is from the Greek word *dunamis* which means “miraculous power, ability, abundance.” Jesus promised the disciples this kind of power to enable them to represent Him and to continue His ministry. They would receive it after He had left and when the Spirit would come. The book of Acts, as we've already seen, confirms His promise; their healing, preaching, deliverance ministry took off at Pentecost when God's own power came through them in a supernatural dimension.

But Pentecost brought more than just the Spirit's power for miracles and signs and wonders. The Spirit came also as the empowerment to live a faithful life as a follower of Christ under the New Covenant. When Israel accepted the covenant made by God at Mount Sinai (the Old Covenant), the people said, “All the

words which the Lord has spoken we will do” (Ex. 24:3). The Old Covenant depended upon their obedience, and that's why it failed. It was dealing with human inability to keep the law perfectly. The New Covenant was based on better promises. God says: “I will!” Yes! “I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts...I will be merciful toward their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more” (Heb. 8:8-13). And if God says He will do something—*He will!*

Notice in John's Gospel the recurring phrase, “He will” that Jesus uses to assure the disciples of what the Spirit will do. “He will convince of sin... He will guide you into truth...He will glorify me...He will take what is mine and declare it to you...” (John 16:8,13, 14, 15). Let me give you an example of how this works. When a young Finnish boy from the worship band came forward for ministry, I could see failure written all over his face. He had a desire to

*“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth”*

(Acts 1:8).

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

follow the Lord, but he didn't have any confidence that he could pull it off. He wanted things to be different so badly, but he'd had such a string of failures he couldn't see how things could change. So I summarized the two covenants for him. "Under the Old it is dependent upon you. That is why the law feels so burdensome when you're trying on your own to fulfill it. Under the New Covenant, the Spirit within you takes responsibility to make it happen in our lives. You can see why trusting is more important than trying." The young man's eyes brightened, and a smile eased across his face. Hope moved in and routed despair. The Spirit was freeing Him with the truth. I left him with the strong promise Paul gave to the early church: "He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thes. 5:24).

The key to the success of the New Covenant, for the disciples and for us, is the Spirit. Paul shared his struggle to be obedient to God in his letter to the Romans. In Chapter 7 he used the word, "I, me, or my" 47 times from verse 7 to verse 25. He doesn't use the word Spirit once, but the word law is used 22 times. He was trying the best he could to please God, to satisfy the holy standard of the law, but Paul was a failure. In Chapter 8, the word *Spirit* occurs 17 times. The answer to the "I" problem is the Spirit. I can't—He can!

This was essentially St. Paul's great proclamation as a missionary: "Christ in you—the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Christ *lives in us* through the indwelling Holy Spirit. More power than any missile or Mac truck ever dreamed of, this is the kind of power that changes lives, overturns the forces of evil, and ushers in the kingdom of God. This is what Jesus promised us through the Spirit.

*"He who calls  
you is faithful,  
and he will  
do it"*  
(1 Thes. 5:24).

## **THE CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH**

In a sermon in Seattle, Dr. Tom Gillespie, president of Princeton Seminary, gave disturbing statistics of the decline in what is generally referred to as the mainline churches. Speaking of his own denomination (Presbyterian), he said, "If the current trend does not change, our church may be non-existent by the year 2020."<sup>2</sup> Concerned leaders from other denominations have echoed similar assessments of the malaise in their churches over the past twenty years. Lyle Schaller, church growth consultant, reports that 65 to 85 percent of all churches over ten years old are shrinking in membership or have plateaued.<sup>3</sup> According to Kent Hunter, from the Church Growth Center, "Thousands of pastors and lay leaders are frustrated and discouraged as they face each day in weakening churches filled with apathetic masses. Enthusiastic members serve week after week on the edge of burnout."<sup>4</sup>

While church decline is an established fact at the beginning of this new millennium, there are, as both Gillespie and Schaller have noted, clear—and

wonderful—exceptions to this trend. Turnaround is happening in many situations. Renewal and revival are taking place in many locations throughout the world. Lives and churches are being turned around. We in Lutheran Renewal have seen strong growth and change in many individuals and churches in the past few years. And what creates these turnarounds? Not new task forces or innovative programs; it is nothing more than a “re-turn” to the Lord, to His Word, to prayer, and to the empowering of His Spirit.

The reality of decline and the necessity of “re-turning” to God is as old as the human story. The Old Testament prophets were always calling God’s people to “return” to their identity and covenant as the children of God. John Wesley noted that the spiritual fires of the Reformation had grown cold even within the lifetime of Martin Luther. Shortly before Wesley died, he wrote urging the Methodists to hold fast to the doctrine and to the Spirit with which they had first set out.<sup>5</sup> How does the Church recapture the abundant life that Jesus talked about? When the Father promised us the gift of the Spirit, it was a promise that we could live in abundance, not in scarcity. So many of Jesus’ teachings pick up this theme. Take the two brothers in the parable of the prodigal son. Neither believed there was abundance with their father. One went off looking elsewhere, and the other simply hung around home, living in scarcity. Look at the day Jesus visited at the home of Mary and Martha. Martha couldn’t get past her cultural traditions of hospitality to grasp the abundance that was offered her in sitting at the feet of Jesus, in the presence of the Master. She must have hated the feelings of lack and scarcity that rose up in her when she was annoyed over Mary’s choice for abundance. Jesus had more for Martha.

Jesus had more for those two discouraged guys on the Emmaus Road. They were so into their own despair and deflated expectations that they missed the impact of the cross and what Jesus had come to do, and so they moped along the road until Jesus intercepted them, explained things to them, ate broiled fish with them and the other disciples, and then commissioned them with “the promise of my Father” (Luke 24:48). “Stay in the city,” He told them, “until you are clothed from power from on high” (v. 49). In other words, “Don’t head out without Me!”

Oh, Church! The Father has so much more for us than endless burnout and discouragement. In a world hungry for the Good News, desperate for physical and emotional healing and for true peace and reconciliation, God’s people must be mobilized with renewed passion and power. We can’t head out without Him! I believe He is calling us in this hour to “re-turn” to Him so that He might fill us with His love and empower us with His gift of the Holy Spirit to serve the world He sent His Son to die for, the world He loves. He wants to move us out of scarcity into abundance. The Father wants a Church who will say “Yes” to all He has to give.

## **the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit**

**TO REVIEW:** The Spirit was active in the ministry of Jesus, from His birth to His baptism to His death. Jesus didn't often speak of the Spirit, but He lived by the Spirit's anointing. Before leaving, He told His disciples about the Helper He would send to continue where He left off. The changing of the guard was thoroughly effective, as we can see in the book of Acts. If it is to move in the power and authority that Jesus promised, the contemporary Church must be renewed by the Holy Spirit.

### **NOW ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you know of any ministries or businesses that failed after the changing of the guard? Do you know of any that really flourished?
2. What was the relationship of Jesus to the Spirit during His earthly ministry?
3. Do you remember any "final instructions" you have given to people before a departure? What final instructions did Jesus give His disciples concerning the Spirit? How would you say they received those instructions?
4. Have you ever experienced the truth of the Spirit of the New Covenant, who promises to do in us all that God commands?
5. In what ways can you pray for renewal to come to the Church?



### **WILL YOU OFFER THIS PRAYER?**

“Father, I thank You for the Spirit of grace, the Spirit that works within me to will and to work for Your good pleasure. Teach me that trusting is more effective than trying. I can't—but You can. Amen.”



## *And In Conclusion...*

### **THE MAN, THE MENU, AND THE MEAL**

Behold, a certain man went forth to a restaurant. He was received at the door, handed a menu, and invited to his seat. The man studied the menu carefully. He rejoiced in the wide options available and found it difficult to settle on one. But he was given much time to read the menu. Others were reading the same menu and considering the same list of potential entrees. After some time of personal meditation, the maitre d' reflected on the menu for him and others. It answered some of the questions he had about the menu, for which he gave thanks. He felt much peace at the restaurant. A group of waiters then sang a song about one of the favorite recipes of the cook. Then the maitre d' dismissed the people in a most appropriate way, and lo, the man left the restaurant. But he didn't eat.

The wide selection of the menu so impressed him that he thought about it throughout the week after his visit. Eventually, he gathered with a group of friends to discuss its contents. They compared it with other menus, examining the ingredients used by the cook. They decided to meet regularly to better understand the nature of the menu. Every meeting helped them grow in their appreciation for the menu. Then they held a conference for people who valued menus as they did. They felt a sense of fellowship with others of kindred heart. They sang glorious songs at their conference about the richness of the menus they had studied. They even opened up new restaurants, so that others could experience the joy of reading the menus that they had. But they didn't eat.

## LESSONS FROM THE STORY:

- The menu helps us to see all that is available. It points us to the reality. It gives us a desire to taste the meal, but the menu is not the meal. Reading more menus does not satisfy our hunger for a meal. Are you reading the menu without tasting the meal?
- It is one thing to talk about the Spirit's presence, another thing to experience it. Religion that does not include encounter is heady and unreal. It is good to have a theology of the Spirit, but even better to have an experience of the Spirit. When the explanation follows the experience, it will be more accurate and winsome. The Church does not need more menus; it needs people who have tasted the meal. Eating the meal is the best way to appreciate the menu. "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

I hope you've enjoyed reading this book, but beyond that, I hope you are experiencing the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. No amount of reading or study or reflection or dialog can replace the satisfaction of encountering the third person of trinity, God the Holy Spirit!





# End Notes

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

After graduating from UCLA and Luther Seminary, Paul Anderson pastored a church in Southern California. He then moved to Minnesota to direct the work of Lutheran Renewal. He lives in St. Paul with his wife, Karen, and their six children. He is president of The Master's Institute, a seminary in the Twin Cities. He also directs the Alliance of Renewal Churches, a network of churches committed to kingdom advance. When Paul is not hanging out with his kids or overseeing one of these ministries, he may be found on the basketball court or on a date with his wife.

## ALSO AVAILABLE FROM PAUL ANDERSON

*Breaking Strongholds in My Life* (booklet)

*Building Christian Character*  
a workbook study of 34 character qualities

*Building Christian Character, Teacher's Guide*  
good for youth or Sunday School classes

*Dare to Dream*  
a book to help people pursue their destiny in Christ

*Dare to Dream Workbook*  
a personal integrative journal to help you in your  
pursuit

*Healing from A Father Wound* (booklet)

*"What About...?"*  
series of 11 booklets on repentance, healing, heaven,  
hell, prayer, etc.

*Kyrie*  
instrumental music of hymns and older contemporary  
music. A new CD of hymns with a contemporary  
flavor will be available soon.

For questions or comments on *The Father's Gift* or to contact Paul Anderson about doing a Holy Spirit seminar or a "Dream Day" at your church, contact:

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