

THE SPIRIT

On Being Empowered To Reach Out

One of the most important things you need to learn as a new believer in Jesus, is about the privilege, power and principles of sharing Jesus with other people. Telling people about Him and his love is one of the things we are motivated to do when we find out how wonderful his love is. Tell as many people as you can, in hopes that they will also come to know Him as their personal Savior too.

Many new Christians are intimidated about 'witnessing' because they are afraid of being rejected or persecuted. Let me assure you that you *will* be put down from time to time, but the price you have to pay is small compared to the fact that Jesus paid the ultimate price - His blood - to redeem you, your friends, and your loved ones. It is a great privilege to share His love with others!

New believers often don't feel qualified to talk with others about the Lord. They will say a number of things like...

- *I don't know enough about God yet.* But if you have received Jesus, then you *do* know enough to share your personal experience. You don't need to know the whole Bible in order to start testifying about Him.
- *I'm not mature enough in the faith.* I hope that you will mature and learn more about Christianity, but oftentimes it is the new Christian who has the greatest ability to go and share Christ with unsaved people. Tell other people about Him and mature as you go along.
- *I'm not 'gifted' enough.* But you don't have to have the 'gift of evangelism' to evangelize. It is every Christian's privilege and responsibility to tell others about God.
- *I don't have an outgoing personality.* Even the meekest and shyest person can share Christ with someone that they love. You don't have to become a preacher or pound a pulpit in order to effectively share Christ with other people.

Evangelism is really just a process of one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread! Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." It is one of the natural consequences of giving your life over to Christ. If you are not *fishing*, you are not really *following* Jesus!

Proclaiming Christ to others is such an important part of the foundation of our faith that we need *power* from God to do it. We need the power that only God can provide so that we can obey Him in this important task of telling others about Him. In particular, I am referring to *the power of the Holy Spirit*.

"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Ephesians 5:18

Notice that *"be filled with the Spirit"* is a command, and not a suggestion. It is no less a command than the one to, *"... not get drunk on wine."* It is also a *continuous command* which could be more accurately translated as, *"Stay full of the Holy Spirit."* As you would have to continue to drink wine to stay drunk, so you must continually drink of the Holy Spirit to stay full of Him! This verse also presents a contrast between being filled with the Holy Spirit and its opposite of being drunk. Drunkenness robs you of abilities that you usually have, but being filled with the Spirit gives you abilities that you didn't used to have!

We'll pose and respond to three important questions about receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit:

- **What is the gift of the Holy Spirit for?**
- **Who is the gift for?**
- **How do we receive the gift?**

WHAT IS THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR?

- *Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."* Luke 24:49
- *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Acts 1:8

Jesus commissioned us to go and tell the good news to the world - we call this the 'Great Commission.' But these Scriptures tell us about the '*Great Condition*' to fulfill the *Great Commission*. The Holy Spirit gives us the resource we need in order to influence others toward Jesus. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is *our 'Unction to Function with Gumption!'*

Jesus promised us *power* when the Holy Spirit comes on us. This power is for three things:

- *Power for Morality ... Power to change your life. You will become more and*

more like Jesus when you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

- *Power for Miracles ...* Jesus said that signs and miracles will follow those who believe (Mark 16). When full of the Spirit, you will have access to Gifts that the Spirit distributes (1 Corinthians 12).
- *Power for Ministry...* When you are ministering to others (especially unbelievers), the Holy Spirit will tear down walls that Satan has built, and draw people to Christ. As a Spirit-Filled follower of Jesus, you will be a bolder witness and a more effective minister of Christ's love to all people.

In the gospels, the disciples had a great need for power. Before the Holy Spirit came upon them, the disciples were *hiding behind locked doors!* When the Holy Spirit came upon them and they began *tearing down those doors.*

'Unction to Function with Gumption!'

Even Jesus didn't begin His own ministry to the world until He Himself was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism. In Luke 4:18 He says, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...* " If Jesus *needed the power of the Holy Spirit* in order to fulfill His destiny, how much more do you and I?

**Note: In no way are we saying that the Gift of the Holy Spirit is a cure-all for every spiritual problem. In fact, receiving the Gift of the Spirit may even introduce you to some challenges you didn't have before. But you'll have more power to overcome.*

WHO IS THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR?

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."

Acts 2:17-18

Who are supposed to be the *recipients* of the Holy Spirit in this passage? "*Sons and daughters, young men, old men, servants, men and women.*" In other words, this gift is not exclusive to any particular group. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not just for select Christians. In verses 38-39 of the same chapter Peter says, "*The*

promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off --for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Every believer should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is not just for preachers or church leaders. Paul's command in Ephesians 5:18 (referred to above) is addressed to *all the saints* in Ephesus. This is not an *elective* course, it is a *core* course for every disciple of Jesus. It is not *optional equipment* like a GPS on your car, it is as *essential* as the engine or steering wheel. We are not talking about the *Deluxe Edition* of the Christian life; remember, we are talking about the *foundations* of our faith. We are all commanded by God's Word to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. John 7:37-39

'Who is this gift for?' Notice the "living water" that Jesus refers to is not so much something that flows to us, but rather it flows from us. In other words, the fullness of the Holy Spirit is not so much something you get to *keep*, it is something you get, so you can *give!* The Holy Spirit is not so much for *our* blessing, but so that we can *be* a blessing. This is water to *drink* and then to *disperse* to others.

As an example, if I am empowered by the Holy Spirit, my neighbors and unbelievers around me benefit because I will be a more effective witness to them. You cannot give out of an empty bucket. You have to *receive* before you can *give*. The fuller I am of the Holy Spirit, the more I have to give to those around me. Notice that Jesus called the gift, "*living water*," which indicates it is alive and moving, instead of stagnant and dead. A Christian is stagnant and dead who doesn't share Christ with others. God wants to fill us to overflowing so that we can refresh other people! Christians receive this gift, but the world receives the benefits. While the gift of the Holy Spirit is for every believer in Christ, the primary *benefits* of the gift are enjoyed by others around those Spirit-filled believers!

HOW DO YOU RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The Bible doesn't record, '*Ten easy steps to receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit.*' Nor is there one sure-fire way to be filled with the Spirit. God does what He wants, when He wants to. But there are some basic principles that the Bible gives us in

regard to receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit. There are some things that we can glean from the Scriptures about doing our part in receiving this precious gift.

There are three things that you must have in order to receive the gift:

- **You have to be born again.**

The Holy Spirit doesn't usually anoint pre-Christians to do the work of God. He empowers Christians, so that they, in turn, can reach non-Christians.

- **You have to have a desire to be used by God.**

Your motive for receiving the Spirit should not just be to *be blessed*, but to *be a blessing* to others. If you don't have a desire to serve God, then you are not really a candidate for Holy Spirit empowerment.

- **You have to know that you can only reach your potential as a witness for Christ as a Spirit-Filled follower.**

In other words, you have to be humble about your own inadequacies. You need Him to empower you to be all you can be as an influencer for Jesus.

There are also three things that you don't need to do to receive the gift:

- **You don't have to be a mature Christian to receive the Spirit.**

I'm not saying that maturity is not important. I do very much encourage you to mature in your faith every day. But you don't have to be a particularly mature Christian in order to receive the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8, a bunch of brand-new Christians were praying and received the Gift. Paul, himself, received the gift of the Holy Spirit only three days after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). In Acts 10, Cornelius and his whole household were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit almost simultaneously. Why should you wait years to get the power to do the job that you should start right now?!

Remember that all of God's gifts are given on the same basis as the gift of salvation. His gifts are all given on the basis of *grace*. In Galatians 3:2 Paul asks the rhetorical question, "*I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?*" Three verses later he asks again, "*Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?*" (Galatians 3:5) The obvious answer to both is, "*Because they believed what they heard.*"

Why should you wait years to get the power

to do the job that you should begin right now?

- **You don't have to speak in tongues to receive the Spirit.**

If you are a new believer and have never heard people pray or worship God in a spiritual language, let me summarize what it is. “Tongues” is a language, which you did not learn, that comes along with Holy Spirit fullness. This language enables you to worship and pray to God in a sort of *'overdrive'*. It is referred to throughout the book of Acts, and in each case, when people were receiving the Holy Spirit, it is stated (or at least implied) that they spoke in this spiritual language. This language is available to you when you receive the Spirit.

People have asked me, “I want to be filled with the Spirit, but do I have to speak in tongues?” My answer is this: “No, you don’t have to. But you do get to!” Spiritual language is a huge blessing from God. It’s for your own edification, for the stirring up of the power of God in your life, so you can be a more powerful witness to other people.

I believe that every Spirit-filled Christian has the *potential* to speak in tongues. But that does not mean that everyone does (at least at first). Some hesitate because of unnecessary fear or misconstrued notions about what tongues is all about. It's really nothing to be afraid of, and is something which would undeniably benefit your Christian life.

Keep in mind that it’s not the spiritual language which fills you with the Holy Spirit. Getting filled is what enables you to have and use this language.

- **You don't have to be afraid to receive the Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit came on Jesus like a *dove*, not like an eagle! He is not going to sneak up on your blind side, grab you, and do you harm! For some, receiving the Holy Spirit is emotional, for some it is not. The same would be true if you were to compare salvation experiences among believers. Each person’s experience is different, and each of us will have a different story to tell about receiving the Holy Spirit. Some will weep or laugh or shake; while others will not. None of these manifestations either validate or invalidate the experience.

The spiritual language is not the thing which fills you with the Spirit. Getting filled is what enables

you to have and use this language.

You don't need to be afraid of the Holy Spirit any more than you should be afraid of Jesus or the Father. The Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. He is no less God and no less gentle than the other members of the Godhead.

There are also three things that you do need to do in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit:

- **You have to ask.**

Jesus said, *"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* (Luke 11:13) This is how to receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit - just ask. James 4:2 says, *"You have not because you ask not."* This means we need to ask the Lord, and He will give us what we need, especially when we're asking Him for something that He wants to give us, like the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

You don't have to speak in tongues, you get to!

- **You have to believe.**

Let's look at those verses from Galatians 3 again. Verse 2 says, *"I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?"* Verse 5 says, *"Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?"* This gift, as are all of God's gifts, has already been paid for by Jesus at the cross, and is appropriated by believing.

- **You have to receive.**

In John 20:22 it says, *"He (Jesus) breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"* Jesus told his disciples to *receive* this gift from God. As you had to reach out to God and take your salvation, the same is true with the gift of the Spirit. The gift is offered, but you have to *receive* it.

(Suggestion: Ask someone to pray with you!)

In the book of Acts we see several incidents where people received the gift of the Spirit, and it was usually while other believers were praying with or for them. You can certainly simply ask for, and receive the Spirit on your own. But I suggest that you ask another follower of Jesus to pray along with you. Either way, I guarantee that this gift will launch you into a new vista of a bold and effective Christian life.

Father, I thank you for the Holy Spirit, Whom you sent to empower us so that we can be bold and effective ministers for Jesus Christ. You said that "We will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on us." I pray that each of my brothers and sisters reading this would believe and receive this power from on high to become dynamic, vibrant disciples. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Get started...

- Put in your own words what you've learned are the main reasons to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Look up Luke 11:13 in your own Bible and underline the key term about what you have to do to receive the Spirit.

A verse to memorize...

- Acts 1:8

(I recommend that you look up the verse, write it on a card or something, and repeat it over and over throughout the day until you can quote it verbatim.)

Read it and write it...

- Take some time everyday to read the Bible. (I recommend that you begin with the Gospel of John and then move to the book of Acts. When you finish those books, go on to the Gospel of Matthew. If you've finished Matthew, then go on to the Gospel of Mark and read some more about Jesus.)
- And then journal your thoughts, feelings, and questions. In addition to talking to God everyday out loud, write some of your praises and prayers on paper (or on your computer). Be honest and intimate in your conversations with Him. Expect Him to communicate with you with honesty and intimacy as well.

