

Please Don't Be Afraid of the Holy Spirit

When I was filled with the Holy Spirit many years ago, I knew my Southern Baptist mother probably wouldn't be happy about my Pentecostal experience. She and I shared the same core beliefs in Jesus and salvation, of course. But I knew that some Christian denominations don't encourage believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit or to practice the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament.

So I didn't share my testimony with her for a few years. I'll never forget the day my mother learned of my experience. After she told me a story from her childhood, in which she witnessed some Christians "rolling in the sawdust" at a backwoods Pentecostal meeting, she widened her eyes and asked: "You don't speak in tongues, do you, Lee?"

"Yes, Mama, I do," I said. She was visibly horrified, but I reminded her that I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit at our Southern Baptist church in suburban Atlanta.

Since then I've shared my story with countless people, written books about my testimony and prayed for hundreds of people to be filled with the Spirit. But I've also been shunned, ridiculed and misjudged by brothers and sisters in Christ because I embraced an experience that brought me closer to God.

I've learned not to take these reactions personally. I don't just love Christians who agree with me. I even love those who think I'm deceived. Since love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, it would be counterproductive if I lashed out in anger at a brother in Christ.

But why are so many Christians afraid of the Holy Spirit? From my observations, there are five main reasons:

Religious tradition. Many hardline Jews in Jesus' day couldn't handle it when He touched lepers, healed a bleeding woman or talked to Samaritans. Tradition prevents us from being open to anything new, even when God is providing the new path. Many Christians are skeptical because they've been taught that the spiritual gifts in the New Testament don't happen anymore.

Fear of the supernatural. The book of Acts describes healings, angelic visitations, doors opening by themselves and demons coming out—accompanied by screams. I'm not sure why a Christian wouldn't want to see such miracles today. Maybe they watched too many horror movies about demons? Fear can cause someone to live in a box of limitation. I wish more believers today would ask the Holy Spirit to work supernaturally through them.

Dependence on logic and reason. Many Christians build their faith completely on an intellectual foundation. They love apologetics, and eloquent sermons, but they forgot that the apostle Paul—who was a masterful scholar—actually put more emphasis on the subjective realm of the Spirit than on scholarship. Paul wrote: “...my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4). God gave you a mind, but if you continually lean on your own understanding you will limit Him!

Fear of talking to others about God. When people are baptized in the Holy Spirit, they are filled with boldness and begin to share their faith openly. This can be terrifying to someone who is timid or introverted, so they naturally pull back when there is an opportunity to receive more of God's power. Don't live in timidity's control!

Fear of full surrender. The Spirit-filled life requires a total surrender to God's will. We must be empty if we want to be filled with Him. We must be able to say, “Not my will, but Yours be done,” or else He cannot work in us. We must give God

an unqualified Yes.

People have admitted to me that they could not fully surrender to God because (1) they feared He would require a job change; (2) they wanted financial security; (3) they didn't want to give up a romantic relationship that was wrong; (4) they were afraid God would call them to be a missionary; or (5) they didn't want friends and coworkers to know they were Christians.

If you want to be saturated with the Holy Spirit, lift your hands in surrender and pray: *"Father, I renounce all fear in Jesus' name. Forgive me for keeping You at an arm's distance. I want everything You have for me, even the things I don't understand. Fill me with Your Spirit, and give me boldness so I can be Your witness. And let Your signs, wonders and miracles follow me as I share the message of Your love. Amen."*

J. Lee Grady was editor of Charisma for 11 years and now serves as senior contributing editor. He directs the Mordecai Project (), an international ministry that protects women and girls from gender-based violence. His latest books are Follow Me and Let's Go Deeper (Charisma House).