

The Spirit of Pentecost in an Upside-Down World

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Someone said living the Christian life is not difficult; it is impossible—that is, without the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is a power so great it can help you not only survive but also thrive in this crazy world. It's a power that comes from God Almighty through the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. It's the power that took the teachings of a young carpenter from Galilee, turned upside down the most ruthless empire of its era and overcame the paganism that went with it.

The World Is Upside Down

Two thousand years after the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out and the church was birthed, this power can still give you joy and peace, release miracles and make you victorious no matter what. Even though this power seemed all but dormant for almost two millennia and some Christians say it ceased after the days of the apostles, I believe it has been restored to the church and is currently at work in the earth, just as the Bible says. It's available today to help you understand the future, have faith to believe for miracles and experience unspeakable peace no matter your circumstances. Understanding some simple truths can unlock this power and help you navigate the chaos that I call an upside-down world.

I've come to realize through my study of Scripture and personal experience that the Holy Spirit's power is there for the asking—even if others misuse or ignore it. It's there to give you victory over the forces of evil, help you stand strong when the culture wants you to compromise and provide tools to help you prosper in spirit, soul and body.

This power is not found through logic, so I can't persuade you. It's something you must experience in the depths of your soul. This power is spiritual, which is why we need an awakening like those that have come throughout history at critical times like the ones in which we live.

I've heard church folk joke that when some people receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, their doctrine changes and they get so on fire they need to be locked in a closet until they settle down! Actually, the opposite is true. Those staid people should get some of this power.

But what about you? Are there things in your life with which you are not satisfied? Are you trying to live for God, but you continue to battle unhealthy behaviors or habitual sins that have dogged you for years? Maybe you are disappointed with your life, career, marriage or health. Maybe your walk with God is not all you dreamed it would be.

Many are discouraged, battling disease or in need of deliverance from addictions. You may be one who needs a financial miracle, restoration of your marriage or the spiritual return of a wayward child.

As Christians, we believe the Bible gives us power to change and that we should follow what it teaches. While struggles exist, there is a realm in the Spirit where we can live above the problems. There is a place in God where we can experience the power of the Holy Spirit, to help you move from where you are to where you can be in Christ. Of course, we never really arrive spiritually. But as we grow spiritually, we can begin to soar like eagles—not stay around the barnyard with all the turkeys, or, worse yet, wallow in the mire like a bunch of pigs.

There Is Hope

With God's help, you do have the power to change. No matter where you are in your Christian walk—whether you're a new

believer or someone who has followed Jesus for a long time—there is hope that you can experience the power of the Holy Spirit and attain your full destiny in Christ.

I'm neither a theologian nor a minister. I'm a journalist and businessman who has had more than my share of problems over the course of my life. But I can truthfully say that my life in the Spirit has been as the apostle Paul wrote: "exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine." And if I can experience that, you can too.

I remember the testimony of Fred Price, who gravitated to the Word of Faith movement because when he came into Pentecostalism, he heard talk of power but didn't see it in action. I heard him say that life in the Spirit doesn't remove us from the sinful environment around us any more than using an oxygen tank when we scuba dive keeps us from getting wet. But just as scuba gear allows us to exist in an underwater environment that ordinarily would kill us, so the Holy Spirit enables us to live in this sinful world without being ensnared by it.

That's what gives me hope for all of us living in this upside-down world right now. I sincerely hope you connect with God in new, fresh ways; be a powerful influence on your family, friends and community; and deepen your faith so you're able to move mountains. Plus, I hope you allow the Spirit to uncover your heart's deepest desires and empower you to overcome the challenges keeping you from fulfilling your dreams and purpose in life.

And there's more! One of my favorite verses says we are children of God if we're led by His Spirit. So get ready for the ride of your life. The Holy Spirit might lead you in the craziest ways, such as when He told Philip to go to the Gaza road, where he met the Ethiopian eunuch, a divine encounter that led to the gospel going to that part of the world. Life in the Spirit is a God adventure; if you let Him, He will help

you accomplish things you never thought possible.

Many people are bored with life, and others live in fear of COVID, mass shootings, civil unrest—the list goes on and on. But it doesn't need to be that way. Don't be discouraged. Instead, realize that getting to know the Holy Spirit will be the most fulfilling thing you'll ever do.

How to Be Baptized in the Holy Spirit By J. Lee Grady

When we meet Christ and put our trust in Him, we are “born again” (John 3:3) and we receive the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This is the most important decision we will ever make. This happened to the disciples of Jesus in John 20:22, which says: “[Jesus] breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

But before Jesus ascended to heaven He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the “promise of My Father” had come (Luke 24:49). He told them that if they would wait there they would be “clothed with power from on high.” In Acts 1:8 Jesus told His followers that they would receive “power” to be His witnesses.

The disciples waited in Jerusalem, praying near the temple. On the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus died on the cross, something amazing happened. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the early church. This is described in Acts 2:1-4. The Bible says that when the Spirit came, the disciples were filled (another word is “baptized”) with the Spirit.

This shows us that there are two separate experiences we can have with God. One is salvation, in which we receive God's amazing forgiveness, a new nature. The Holy Spirit comes to live inside us, and He becomes our teacher, our comforter and our helper.

The second experience is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in which the Holy Spirit who is already in us overflows. "Baptized in the Spirit" means "completely immersed in the Spirit." Jesus never wanted us to rely on our own ability to do the work of ministry. He wants to do it through us. So He fills us with the Holy Spirit in order to empower us with His ability.

When we have this experience, the Holy Spirit's power fills us so full that He spills out. Also when we are baptized in the Spirit, unusual "gifts of the Holy Spirit"—which are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10)—begin to be manifested in our lives. We begin to experience His supernatural power. These gifts include prophecy, discernment, miracles, healing and speaking in unknown tongues.

When people were baptized in the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church, the Bible says they all spoke in tongues (see Acts 2:1-4, 4:31, 10:44-48, 19:1-7). A lot of people get hung up on speaking in tongues because it seems like a weird thing. It's actually not strange at all. It is a very special form of prayer that any Christian can experience.

When we pray in our heavenly prayer language, we are praising God and also strengthening ourselves spiritually. Speaking in tongues helps us become mighty in the Spirit. The apostle Paul, truly a giant in the New Testament church, told the Corinthian believers: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all."

Being baptized in the Holy Spirit is not something you have to qualify for. Any Christian can ask, and Jesus is ready to do it. You can pray by yourself or you can ask someone else to pray for you.

Here are the simple steps you can take to be filled with the Holy Spirit:

Prepare your heart. The Holy Spirit is holy. He is compared to

a fire (see Matt. 3:11), which means He purifies sin and burns up that which is not Christlike in our lives. Make sure you have confessed all known sin and made your heart ready for His infilling.

Ask Jesus to baptize you in the Spirit. You do not need to jump through hoops to get God's attention. He is eager to answer your request. Jesus is the one who baptizes us in the Spirit, so ask Him—and expect Him to answer.

Receive the infilling. Begin to thank Him for this miracle. The Holy Spirit's power is filling your life. If you feel your mind is clouded with doubts, just praise the Lord. Focus your mind on Him and not on yourself.

Release your prayer language. The moment you are filled with the Spirit, you will receive the ability to speak in your prayer language. You may feel the words bubbling up inside of you. You may begin to hear the words in your mind. Open your mouth and began to speak, trusting the Lord to give you this new, supernatural language.

Some people ask me, “Do I have to speak in tongues?” Certainly God will not force you to do it, but I believe He offers this gift to anyone. It could be considered the least of the gifts—but it serves as a doorway to the supernatural realm and helps usher you into the deeper things of God.

Step out in boldness. After you have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, one of the first things you will notice is a new boldness. The Holy Spirit does not like to hide. He wants you to speak about Jesus to those around you—and He will give you surprising courage.

Let me repeat: No matter how bad things seem to get in the world, there's a power to help believers overcome. It's the power of the Holy Spirit. This is something you won't read

about in the mainstream media or even hear preached in most Protestant churches. Even many whose theology includes believing the Holy Spirit is still at work in the world, just as He was in the first century, don't understand this power or how to appropriate it to help them navigate life. Yet this wonderful power helps us be victorious through life's difficulties and overcome evil.

As a journalist, I have covered the work of the Holy Spirit worldwide. But this is not just an occupation for me. Long before I ever wrote about any of this, God was doing a work in my life, teaching me and forming me into the man I am today. From a powerful church-camp experience where I received the baptism in the Holy Spirit to crying out to God as a college student running from the call of God on my life, I have come to know the Holy Spirit. He became real to me, and I saw the power He gave me to overcome sin in my life. That got me so excited that I was witnessing to people on my university campus and discipling other students.

All these years later I wonder if what happened is exciting enough for a book. I mean, my experience wasn't like David Wilkerson's in *The Cross and the Switchblade* or John Sherrill's in *They Speak With Other Tongues*. Or was it? Was my experience simply the path God chose for me, knowing it would cause me to trust Him in a way only the Holy Spirit could empower me to do? Thankfully, I've been able to rub elbows with, interview and know many notable Christian leaders from the 1970s to today. Wilkerson and Sherrill were two who had a powerful impact on my life. I've learned from them and been inspired.

As wonderful as that has been, it also let me see their weaknesses and shortcomings—something that could have discouraged me many times. My longtime mentor Jamie Buckingham was open about the struggles in his life and ministry that resulted in heartbreak and scandal. Yet it was that crushing that led to him being open to the Holy Spirit, and his

relationship with the Holy Spirit totally changed him, to the point that for over 25 years, until his untimely death, some considered him the conscience of the charismatic movement.

So what are believers supposed to do? Those who follow Jesus and are led by God's Spirit must find a way to live amid this madness.

Experiencing True Power

I have been a Christian for most of my life and was taught to believe in miracles and the literal truth of the Word of God. Yet growing up, I saw sincere, godly Pentecostals talk about power but never experience it. They believed the Bible says physical healing is for today, yet they rarely experienced healing or saw miracles.

In the 1960s, as political figures were assassinated and riots broke out in the streets, a vast outpouring of the Holy Spirit was under way in mainline churches and among Roman Catholics. This is also when thousands of hippies and drug addicts were turned on to Jesus in a revival that became known as the Jesus movement.

This all happened as I was coming of age. I remember how high-energy the new charismatic movement was as people began to understand God's power and leave dead churches. These believers were so passionate all they talked about was Jesus and how He wanted everyone to have this wonderful experience.

These new charismatics were, as I remember, just learning about healing, deliverance, and how to walk in faith, believe God and get a vision for what He wanted them to do. Around that time, I started *Charisma* magazine.

33 Things the Holy Spirit Does

Though many Christians overlook the importance of the Holy

Spirit, Scripture is clear about not only His vital role, but also His divine actions. Here are 33 of the countless things the Spirit of God continues to do today.

He helps us (Rom. 8:26).

He guides us (John 16:13).

He teaches us (John 14:26).

He speaks (Rev. 2:7).

He reveals (1 Cor. 2:10).

He instructs (Acts 8:29).

He testifies of Jesus (John 15:26).

He comforts us (Acts 9:31).

He calls us (Acts 13:2).

He fills us (Acts 4:31).

He strengthens us (Eph. 3:16).

He prays for us (Rom. 8:26).

He prophesies through us
(2 Pet. 1:21).

He bears witness to the truth (Rom. 9:1).

He brings joy (1 Thess. 1:6).

He brings freedom (2 Cor. 3:17).

He helps us to obey (1 Pet. 1:22).

He calls for Jesus' return (Rev. 22:17).

He transforms us (2 Cor. 3:18).

He lives in us (1 Cor. 3:16.)

He frees us (Rom. 8:2).

He renews us (Titus 3:5).

He produces fruit in us (Gal. 5:22-23).

He gives gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-10).

He leads us (Rom. 8:14).

He convicts (John 16:8).

He sanctifies us (2 Thess. 2:13).

He empowers us (Acts 1:8).

He unites us (Eph. 4:3-4).

He seals us (Eph. 1:13).

He gives us access to the Father (Eph. 2:18).

He enables us to wait (Gal. 5:5).

He casts out demons (Matt. 12:28).

At the time, I was disillusioned with the legalism and small-mindedness I saw among Pentecostals. Yet as my faith grew, I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and developed a vision for my life to encourage the Christian community to experience the power of the Holy Spirit to radically change their world.

Every believer lives with this tension. We can experience wonderful victory and yet also have terrible things happen. In good times and bad we must have the power of the Holy Spirit. We don't know what life will hand us. We must be ready for anything.

We know that everyone, no matter how blessed they seem, faces major problems in life. I hope you also know that those whose lives may not seem to be blessed can have an abiding joy and peace that come only from the Lord. Each of us must follow the Lord as He is revealed in His Word through all the seasons of life. Yet we need pastors, mentors, coaches and brothers and sisters in Christ to help us navigate life's ups and downs and grow in the Spirit.

I'm concerned about the condition of the world, and I see Christians becoming discouraged. I have sometimes been discouraged too, which has forced me to seek God for more power to navigate all the changes in the culture. I'm not writing theories. I've lived this. And I've learned it's possible to experience God's power to have a more fulfilled life and overcome spiritual attacks. I have a burning desire to let the world know that the Holy Spirit can help people survive and thrive spiritually, even when the world is upside down.

Stephen Strang *is the founding editor of Charisma. His latest book, Spirit-Led Living in an Upside-Down World, releases this month.*