

As Seasons Change, Enjoy Where God Has You

I love the changing seasons. In central Florida, where I live, we don't experience seasonal weather changes as much as our friends in other parts of the country, but we do enjoy the change in focus and the cooler weather fall and winter bring. We may not have snow, but we can enjoy lighted snowmen on the porch during the holidays!

Years ago when I taught school, I would change the decor of my home as often as I changed the one in my classroom—out with one season and in with another. I'd get rid of the old so we could embrace the new. Being a creature of habit, I still like to change my surroundings about every three months.

The Bible says there is a season for everything in life (see Eccl. 3:1-8). If only we could embrace the seasons of our lives as willingly as we embrace the seasons of the year. It's been said that the only thing that is constant is change; but unfortunately that's what we tend to resist—especially if it means going outside our comfort zones.

God has planned the seasons of our lives with infinite wisdom. He has ordained each one, knowing exactly what fruit is to be harvested during each time frame. I believe that since His desire is to do us only good, He enjoys each season He plans for us (see Jer. 29:11). So why are we so prone to resist the season we're in?

It's as if we are never satisfied. When it's summer, we want fall. When it's winter, we want summer.

When we are single, we want to be married. When we are married, we want children, and when we have children, we want them to be grown and out of the house. When the nest is finally empty, we miss them and want them back—at least for a

little while.

Yet we tend to criticize the children of Israel, who sinned against God for their continued murmuring and complaining. Like spoiled children in the natural, they continually demanded more. God brought them out of 400 years of slavery, gave them rest from their enemies, and provided daily food, water and protection.

But no matter what He did, it wasn't enough. It seems that what they really wanted was control of their own destiny and circumstances, not total dependence on an invisible God whose plans were for their good (see Jer. 29:11). As a result, an entire generation perished before receiving their promised inheritance.

The wilderness journey was not a picnic. It was an adventure into the unknown, and it was a change of season for an entire nation. But the Lord knew the way through that wilderness, just as He knows the way through ours. He ushers in the seasons in our lives and walks us through them. All He desires is that we embrace what He is doing in our lives with faith and gratitude (see 1 Thess. 5:18).

God is always working, even in seasons when we don't see much activity. During the season of planting, when there is no harvest, God is watering, nurturing, fertilizing and containing us so that in due season we can bring forth the fruit of righteousness He desires.

After a season of harvest, He often initiates a time of pruning (see John 15:1-2). Painful though this may be, it is necessary for us to produce even more fruit. We can trust God to do whatever He needs to do in our lives today because of His proven faithfulness yesterday (see Lam. 3:22-23).

During this season of thanksgiving, let's determine to count our blessings and enjoy, as He does, the season He has us in. Every day is a gift, and we should savor all the sights,

sounds, smells, friendships, fellowship, family, food and fun of the season. Let's also be thankful that God, in His infinite wisdom, planned our lives and leads us through many fruitful seasons. Instead of wishing we were in a different one, let's embrace and enjoy the one we are in right now (see Gal. 6:9).

PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 11/11/2013

This week, as you enjoy this season, embrace an attitude of gratitude in every area of your life. When you pray for family, friends, and country, remember Israel and those persecuted for His Name's sake. Pray for those less fortunate who have been victimized by natural disasters, crime, terrorism, war and financial crises. Ask the Lord to show you what you can do to be a blessing and help those in need of comfort and provision. Continue to pray for wisdom and protection for our president and other government leaders. Ask God to ignite revival in our churches and send more laborers into His harvest fields here and abroad. Thes. 5:18; I Tim 2:1-8; Gal. 6:9.

The Snake in the Bedroom

On that day, my grandparents' two-story farmhouse was full of company. Grandma's closest friend in the world, Minnie*, and her husband, Fred*, were there. Even though I was 11, when I spent the night, I would either sleep on a pallet beside Grandma or on the living room couch. I was afraid of "Boo," the ghost from stories I told my cousins as we hid in the big closets. Grandma told me Minnie and Fred would be sleeping upstairs. I shouldn't be scared.

At **bedtime**, I reluctantly went up to the first room at the top

of the stairway. It made me feel closer to my **grandparents**. Their room was directly below.

The windows were open to the summer breeze. I could hear the rumbling of Papaw and Grandma's voices as they talked before going to sleep. I heard Papaw pray with her as he did every night. Then I heard their soft snores. It was a security I loved. I fell sound asleep.

The next morning, Minnie went downstairs early to help Grandma fix breakfast and get ready for the fish fry later that day.

The day before, when Fred asked me to sit on his lap and give him a kiss, his hands seemed to stray accidentally. I ignored it, got up quickly, and left thinking I must have been mistaken. Those kinds of imaginary acts happened often when Fred was around. I was keenly aware I was developing quicker than most of the girls in my class. I was the first of the girls I knew to reach **puberty**.

That morning, though, imagination played no part. As I lay asleep, Fred tiptoed into the room. I woke when I heard the door open. I saw him come in. I quickly shut my eyes and pretended to sleep. In my mind, I fervently prayed for God to intervene. But Fred was still there.

"Wake up, little darling," he said. "Come on, time to get up and give your old Fred a kiss."

He leaned his entire body over the bed and gave me a kiss I was sure would bruise my lips. I still pretended to sleep.

He jerked back the sheet. I could feel the morning breeze on my skin. I was well aware my short nightgown covered very little.

"Come on, now. I know you're awake," he said.

In my mind, I pictured Grandma's reaction when she encountered a Copperhead on the path to the creek. She froze. It was her

reaction to danger. Following suit, I became a statue. Inside I prayed, "Help me, Jesus. Help me, Jesus. Help me, Jesus."

Every second of the next few minutes is etched indelibly in my mind. His snake-like hands were all over me. I attempted to go elsewhere in my mind to think good thoughts, but it wasn't working. I prayed for God to send Grandma or Minnie up the stairs.

Instead Fred began touching me in places my mother had said boys should not touch me until I was married. The touching felt painful. I willed the tears away. Frozen in time and space my mind went numb, my body limp. I prayed as never before. Again, I begged God to intervene.

I was afraid what Fred might do. I couldn't move. I couldn't breathe. I was mortified by his actions, and I was sure it wouldn't be long before something very bad would happen. In sheer desperation, I sent up a final, silent prayer: "Help, God. Help."

When no lightning bolt appeared, a million thoughts crossed my mind about how I could stop what appeared to be the inevitable. I could claw his face. I could kick him. I could scream at the top of my lungs. I saw the actions in my mind but could not make my body move.

Then I heard the answer to my prayer.

"Fred, time for breakfast." It was Minnie's voice calling from the bottom of the stairway just outside the room.

"Be right down, Sugar," Fred called back.

He leaned close and said gruffly in my ear, "Open your eyes."

He smelled of cigar smoke. I disobeyed. My eyes stayed shut. I played dead.

I heard the door close. He had left without doing what I

feared. Several seconds passed. It felt like an eternity. The stairs creaked as he descended.

I told no one. I didn't know if the adults would believe me or not.

For years, I felt what he did to me must have been my fault, not his. My blossoming body must have caused him to be led astray.

As an adult, I began to learn more about adult men who molest young girls. Most pedophiles don't molest just one child but many. They choose those who are vulnerable.

Although I will not blame my extreme weight gain on Fred, I do know that from that time on, I was scared of Copperhead men. In many situations, young men tended to take after Fred more than the wonderful role models I had in my father and grandfathers. Those role models made me want to keep trying to find the right man—one of the good guys.

As a kid, all I knew was men like Fred stood their ground, like the Copperhead on the path to the creek. If I was going to be protected, I was going to have to come up with a plan. This plan had to be all-encompassing, something that would keep Copperheads away.

And so, whether consciously or unconsciously, I began to gain weight.

*Not their real names

*Excerpt adapted from Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God's Favor by **Teresa Shields Parker**. To read more, check out her book, available on Amazon. Teresa is a wife, mom, editor, publisher and business owner who loves to speak and minister to women. She blogs at .*

You Don't Have to Be Good at Everything

Yesterday I attended my first pep assembly at the Christian school where I teach. The state volleyball and soccer tournaments begin today, so we needed to make some noise.

I snuck up to the top of the bleachers, out of the fray.

I didn't know what to expect, as it had been, umm, a short 26 years since I attended my last high school pep assembly in Wyoming.

It was loud. Really loud.

All of the students circled around the gym, and the announcer called out the names of the varsity soccer and volleyball players. I clapped loud, as each player ran the circle, slapping each hand of the entire student body.

Then everyone took to the bleachers, and I watched the most fun thing ever.

The varsity volleyball girls played those varsity soccer guys in a volleyball match.

All those strapping lads out there, and they couldn't return a volleyball to save their lives. The ball hit the ceiling. A few times they tried kicking it back over. Serves hit the net.

The athletic director kept artificially boosting the guys' score over the PA, but I don't think even that helped.

Right then, I was **encouraged** that people are only meant to **shine** in a few areas. It's totally fine that those guys can't play volleyball.

It's okay.

Their teams have won state titles for the last 10 years, and they don't need to add volleyball to the list of what they're good at.

So, about you.

You don't have to be **good at everything**, just **amazing** at a **few things**.

Like my friends who had us over for pizza in their super cozy house. That oven door kept opening with every kind of homemade pizza you could imagine. There was even one crust made out of cooked cauliflower and cheese for the gluten intolerant.

I can't play volleyball or impress anyone with my pizza skills, but I can wrangle words.

Do that **one thing** you're good at with all your heart. Just put all your **energy** into that thing you're good at, and do it for the **glory of God**. That's all your people need.

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord" (Col. 3:23, NIV).

Christy Fitzwater is the author of *A Study of Psalm 25: Seven Actions to Take When Life Gets Hard*. She is a blogger, pastor's wife and mom of two teenagers and resides in Montana.

A Prayer to See Behind the

Battle

Editor's Note: Bo Stern's husband is fighting a rare disease called ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease.

A couple of weeks ago, I was grabbing some groceries at Safeway when I noticed a man in a wheelchair who was in very bad shape. His pale face shook from tremors and from working to keep his head steady. At first I thought maybe it was ALS, but his healthy weight made me think otherwise.

Steve had just gotten his wheelchair, and I noticed this man's chair was red instead of blue, and I wondered what brand he had chosen and why, and just as I looked up, I caught the eye of the woman behind him. I don't know if she was his wife or not, but it was clear from her angry expression that I had been looking too long. She rolled her eyes at me in disdain, clearly sick of feeling gawked at by countless passersby and protective of the man she loved.

My stomach sank. I wanted to talk to her—to apologize and explain that I wasn't staring out of curiosity or even sympathy, but empathy. I've been in her shoes.

In fact, her shoes are my regular footwear. I know how it feels to want to scream that the man you love is so much more than his condition or his wheelchair. And I hate that I made her feel like an oddity instead of what she was: a **fellow-soldier**, living on the **battlefield of sickness and disability** and trying to function in a world that doesn't always understand.

Later, I thought about how easy it is to look at someone and imagine we know their motives. I have done it a million times. I've settled for a surface-level understanding, which is often more dangerous than no understanding at all.

I need to remember that behind every face is a backstory, a history, **a struggle**. And those stories make some more beautiful and some more broken (and maybe, for some, a little of each). And so I wrote this prayer, and I'm committing to

pray it often so I can learn to see people more clearly:

Father of all who are breaking beneath the weight of war,
straighten and strengthen my vision
to see past skin and shell,
beneath bravado and bluster,
and into the long-buried story.

Focus my heartsight on what eyes can't see
to love without reason,
hope without limits,
and truly believe
that everything possible with You
is dwelling in me.

Christ,
the Hope of Glory,
let me see.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of the newly-released Beautiful Battlegrounds (NavPress). She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her Goliath came in the form of her husband's terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Ore.

Find Time to Pursue God Despite the Daily Drama

You would not be reading these words if you did not have a genuine desire to **pursue God**. But at the same time, you're probably feeling a degree of **frustration** about how to pursue Him while busily facing life's challenges.

In our culture we are surrounded by **distractions**. And just as

there will never be a time of “enough time,” there will never be a time without distractions; that is the **impossible dream**. The reality is that the urgent can often crowd out the important.

We have all had a good case of the “if onlys” at some point in our lives. Your spirit keenly feels that pursuing God is your greatest desire and delight, yet your life abounds with things that compete for your attention. You’ve probably said: “I would love to **pursue God** more fervently, if only I had more time ... if only I had more help ... if only others were more thoughtful ... if only my family didn’t take so much of my time.”

The “if only” list is virtually endless. Almost always it includes “if onlys” related to jobs, spouses, children and the church.

Decision to Pursue God

I can still remember a rainy day in late autumn many years ago. Our son, Tommy, would soon be 3 years old, and now we had our new baby girl, Teri. They were exactly what my husband and I had hoped for.

The carefree days of “just the two of us” had been replaced with the responsibility of the four of us. I stared out a window, blinking away tears as I watched my husband, Tom, drive away to his ministry appointment. I was happy with the children and had vowed to be the best mother I could possibly be. Yet I had the inward stirrings of spiritual giftings and a deep yearning to be used of God.

I struggled with these two callings: chasing God and chasing kids; heavenly passion and earthly parenting. Both of these required time and energy. Neither of them could ever really be completed in the space of time allowed.

I made a decision on that day that has helped me balance

spiritual pursuit and earthly responsibility. It helped keep me on track in my chase after God while chasing my lively children.

Perhaps it was more of a desperate decision than a deliberate one. I know my frustration came from a heart desperately hungry for God. With two babies at home and a husband in a traveling ministry, I could either seethe in frustration or find a way to feed my spiritual hunger.

I couldn't do too much at the time. It was all I could do just to be what I was, but I could prepare myself for the time when I would be able to do more.

I made my decision: I would read, study, pray and meditate in the precious few moments of a young mother's "down time." At first, it was usually while the kids were down for their naps; then later, when they were at school.

For a special seven-year period, I carefully planned my time so that most evenings and every early morning would take me a little further in my pursuit of God. I am by nature an early riser, and this was a time that suited my God-chasing efforts.

My Bible and my books fed my hunger for learning about Him. My prayers brought Him intimately near so that in meditation, I learned from Him. The deliberate pursuit provided time to get to know Him.

Commitment to the Chase

What seems like an unreachable, impossible dream—**time to pursue God** with all our hearts, free from distractions and hindrances—will become a possibility only with commitment.

True commitment is the driving force of life. Commitment evolves into passion, and passion is contagious.

Often, we sabotage our own good intentions of pursuing God because of a preconceived idea of how it should be done. Then

if we fail to conform to this idea, we abandon our pursuit.

Perfectionism produces procrastination. And procrastination robs us of commitment. Perfectionism also produces pharisaical self-condemnation, which takes the joy out of the relationship. Joyless duty undermines commitment.

I wonder if there have ever been any God-chasers who did not have the opportunity to succumb to the “I would-if only” dilemma. Surely Abraham was tempted, considering his life circumstances:

- He had a mandate from God that no one, not even he, understood.
- He had an aging promise and an aged wife with seemingly little faith.
- He was stressed with the responsibility of caring for his nephew Lot and his family, whose values and goals differed from his own.
- After the birth of his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, the tension in his family over sibling rivalry erupted into major conflict.

Many times in his life, Abraham could have succumbed to the “if onlys.” He was a traveling man with a large household, much wealth and much stress, but he had his priorities right—he pitched his tent and built an altar in all the moves of his life (Gen. 12:7-8; 13:2-4,18; 22:9).

Through it all, he was committed to the course in his pursuit of God. He isn’t known as the “father of the faithful” without reason.

If you are committed to the chase, somewhere along the way your “if onlys” will become “in spite of.”

Had we known Jacob, his 12 boys, Dinah, his daughter, and his extended household, we would have labeled them a dysfunctional

family. Few parents have suffered a rougher ride with their kids than he.

You could name almost any perplexing issue, and Jacob could tell you about it from firsthand experience. He faced family problems, work problems, devastating disappointment and tragic events. But his commitment to pursue God at any cost kept him in the chase, even though he had to run with a limp.

A limp is not necessarily an indication of failure; it can be a badge of success. For Jacob it was a reminder that he refused to give up his hold on God during an all-night wrestling match (Gen. 32:22-32).

Jacob's passion pushed him to gain the birthright, even though, at the time, he was probably motivated for material rather than spiritual reasons. In a time of extreme family stress, his pursuit of God intersected with the very door of heaven (Gen. 27-32).

Pursuit Under Pressure

It is surprising how often God is found in the rock-hard places of life. Surely Jacob would not have chosen this process, but there is no doubt that his pursuit of God, along with the pressures from his mother, father, brother, uncle, wives and children transformed him from a fast-talking, manipulative man into a prince with God.

At Bethel, which means the "house of God," Jacob envisioned a ladder extended toward heaven with ascending and descending angels (Gen. 28:10-19). Peniel, the site of his wrestling with an angel, means the "face of God." Both locations became for him points of course correction.

Esau, his brother, had no limp; neither did he have direction. Scripture calls him "profane" (Heb. 12:16, NKJV).

Jacob's passionate pursuit of God gave limited access to much

in his life and served as a course corrector to keep him on track. His struggle was worth it. He—not Esau—gave his children the legacy of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Even the apostle Paul was a survivor of multiple crises and stresses (2 Cor. 11:23-28). Yet he stayed on course by the strength of his commitment. He “resolved to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2, NIV).

Wistful longing for freedom from the common disturbances of life will never take you to the finish line in your pursuit of God. This was not the experience of the saints before us nor will it be ours.

However, commitment to the priority of your relationship with God will become the stabilizer in your pursuit. It does not come preset or prepackaged. Constant course corrections will be needed

Staying On Course

The *Apollo* space mission to the moon was on course only 1 percent of the time. It was constant course correction that made the mission a success.

A statement Jesus made has kept me going at times when I felt more like a plodder than a racer. With many distractions around Him and people trying to deter Him from His purpose, He said, “In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day” (Luke 13:33).

Jesus was steadily moving toward the fulfillment of His purpose, one day at a time. Direction is more important than speed.

We’ve all come to understand that the only constant in life is change. Therefore, to a God-chaser, course corrections in the chase are essential.

Your children’s requirements will change. Your babies need

you; your toddlers demand you. Your teens practically ignore you, and your grown children move on beyond you.

Doesn't it make sense to give priority to the one thing that never changes? No matter the distractions, "Come near to God and He will come near to you" (James 4:8).

Read a companion devotional.

Thetus Tenney has been in active ministry for decades. She served as international coordinator of the World Network of Prayer for the United Pentecostal Church. Thetus and her husband, T. F. Tenney, live in Louisiana.

Joy Really Is a Choice

I just wrote a check for my son to take voice lessons. He plays electric, acoustic and bass guitar, and he is working toward being a music leader at church in the future. He's well on his way, and I can hardly wait to see the progress he makes with his voice coach this year.

Paul lets the Corinthian believers know he is their coach: "We work with you for your joy" (2 Cor. 1:24, NIV). Paul's the one who sang worship songs from prison, so he's an expert in the field of practicing joy in the most painful, dark, hopeless places.

Paul coached me.

Four years ago this month, my husband, Matt, came home from Uganda and had a severe reaction to his malaria medication. I cried myself to sleep for the first eight months of his horrible illness. Now Matt is much better, although symptoms still come in and out like the tide.

Paul instructed me to rejoice in the Lord: "I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4).

I was a good student, and I did rejoice. It was hard.

Joy is something we choose to sign up for and practice. Rejoicing in the Lord is something we can be coached in and get better at.

My son, who has been singing baritone in choir for two years, came home and told us his voice coach thinks he is really a tenor. "My song goes all the way up to an E," he said. Matt said, "You can do it, son. She'll work with you until you can sing that high."

"Work," Paul says to the Corinthians. "I will work with you for your joy." Work it is. Complaining and depression and hopelessness are much, much easier to reach. They're the low, comfortable notes of the song.

Rejoicing will stretch you higher than you think you can reach.

Consider what an incredible relationship we have entered into with the Lord that one of his greatest concerns is teaching us to enjoy Him. What kindness. We are made for a magnificent joy, and to hope for this is the first lesson.

Christy Fitzwater is the author of A Study of Psalm 25: Seven Actions to Take When Life Gets Hard. She is a blogger, pastor's wife and mom of two teenagers and resides in Montana. Visit for more information about her ministry.

Ambition, Motivation and True

Success

R. T. Kendall (Chosen Books)

What drives us to do what we're called to do? Ambition.

R.T. Kendall's latest release, *Finding Your Heart's Desire*, explains this human propensity propelling our hidden agendas. Though ambition is neither good nor evil, God uses it to encourage us to please Him—to make pleasing Him the driving desire of our hearts. As we fulfill God's will and plan for our lives, Kendall says, it yields a heavenly reward to be given when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Kendall motivates us to bypass the applause of man and seek the praise of God as we become aware of our hidden motives and develop into godly thinkers. The former pastor also challenges us to understand ourselves better, learn to be patient and non-judgmental with each other, and to use our ambition to glorify God.

Ultimately, true satisfaction will not be found in egocentric endeavors but in lives that position themselves to serve God's interests. Self-seeking profit only forfeits the greatest reward of all—God's approval. This book reminds us that more of God should be our highest aim. —*Ibelisse Sanchez*

The Glorious Unfolding

Steven Curtis Chapman (Reunion Records)

More than 25 years after his debut project released, singer-songwriter Steven Curtis Chapman continues to inspire and entertain listeners with his trademark acoustic pop songs.

The Glorious Unfolding, Chapman's latest release, places the artist back in familiar territory as he alternates between up-tempo pop rock and heartfelt ballads interlaced with messages of hope and encouragement.

The project opens with the rousing title track, followed by the album's bouncy first single, "Love Take Me Over," but mellows with the affirming "Finish What He Started" and "One and Only You," a companion piece to Chapman's classic "Fingerprint of God." "Something Beautiful" ventures into modern pop with a message of grace and redemption.

Years after the tragic passing of his daughter, Maria Sue, the promise of heaven and seeing her again is still felt in "See You in a Little While," "A Little More Time" and "Michael and Maria." As is his tradition, Chapman includes a love song to his wife, Mary Beth, with the piano ballad "Together."

Chapman's music is consistent if nothing else, even as the landscape of the music industry has changed and his ministry has evolved. *The Glorious Unfolding* is decidedly not a reinvention but a new collection of songs that fits well in Chapman's impressive catalog of hits. —DeWayne Hamby

Hurricane

Natalie Grant (Curb Records)

Five-time Dove Award-winning Female Vocalist of the Year Natalie Grant has been through a personal storm and now brings her experience to what she calls her "most personal record to date." Curb Records releases *Hurricane*, Grant's first project in three years, on Oct. 15.

As a mother of three, Grant suffered with postpartum depression following the birth of her youngest daughter. She struggled in that darkness while still touring for nearly two years until she began the creative process for the new release. And though her initial plan was to record 10 songs selected by her record company, she found herself inspired again.

“It completely switched around and I ended up writing more,” she says. “It’s just like the Lord when I planned it one way and it went the opposite, like a creative dam broke. This record was like therapy for me.”

Title track “Hurricane” was inspired by Grant’s personal life, as well as the story of Jesus walking on the water in the storm. The single was released in May and has become the fastest-rising single of Grant’s career, striking a chord with listeners looking for hope while facing their own storms.

Since her debut release in 1999, Grant has been consistent in her music projects and touring. Fourteen years later, she is still focused on making an impact on the culture in which her three young girls will be raised.

“This is a time when it could be easy for anyone to [stop and] say, ‘It’s been a great career,’ ” she says. “As a mom to three young girls, one of the reasons I want fresh music and relevant messages is because of them. They’re going to be looking to the girls I’m impacting right now.”

Though many of the songs are weighty, *Hurricane* is still upbeat in outlook and tempo. As a self-described “pop-music junkie,” Grant wanted to make “fresh, relevant” songs for today’s listeners.

“I wasn’t trying to reinvent myself, but right now I’m more sure of who I am than ever before,” she says. “Mostly, I was overwhelmed and in a dark space, [but] this record is a result of hope. I wanted that to be reflected in this record.”

7 Steps to Being Spirit-Filled

Some people have suggested that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was only for the early disciples who needed an extra “charge” or a unique gift to get Christianity started. Well, we need it too! God’s power is for today. You can have your own personal experience with the Spirit

1. Remember that the Holy Spirit is holy. He will not enter an unclean vessel. Only Christians receive this experience. It belongs to no other religion and cannot occur unless a person accepts Jesus as his or her personal Lord and Savior.

2. Understand that this gift is for you. Some are afraid of the experience because they grew up in a denomination that was critical of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. But you have nothing to fear from any of the gifts He has for you. Jesus said, “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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 11:11-13, NIV). The promise is for anyone who asks!

3. Hunger for all God has for you. There must be a holy ambition, a desire for more of Jesus, and a pure devotion in our hearts when we seek anything from God. There can be no impure motivations or any desire to have the gift so that we can use it for our own benefit.

4. Ask God to baptize you in the Holy Spirit. Some people receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit at the time of their salvation. Others come into this experience decades after

their conversions. For whatever reason, they did not ask for it. If you want to receive it, schedule a time to be alone with God or to attend a Bible study or church where this experience is common. Then ask Him to baptize you in the Spirit.

5. Believe that God will give you the promise by faith. When my wife and I give birthday gifts to our grandchildren, they reach out their hands and take the gifts. We are eager to give and they are happy to receive. They do not need to beg us. So it is with the infilling of the Spirit. It brings God great pleasure to give you this gift.

6. By faith, worship God in the new language He gives you. When you begin praying in tongues, remember that your spirit is praying. The devil has no idea what you are saying, but God understands the language of your spirit. You may not know what you are saying to God (see I Cor. 14:2), but you can sense that you are communicating with Him from your heart.

7. Live by the Spirit. Every day you can choose to live a holy life, be sensitive to God's will and serve God with all your heart. When people live by the Spirit they have a tender heart toward the things of God and are sensitive to the needs of others. Their lifestyle will include repentance, forgiveness, holiness, boldness, courage and power. As you walk in the Spirit you will discover a spiritual power that is greater than human strength. Now is the time to plug in!