

4 Wrong Concepts We Have Taught About Spiritual Gifts

One of the greatest blessings of the Holy Spirit is that He manifests Himself in every believer. He does not sit passively inside us. He is active. Jesus said in John 7:38 that the Spirit would become in us like a flowing river. He fills us so He can touch others with the reality of Christ.

The apostle Paul explained how this miracle happens. He taught that the Spirit gives gifts to each individual Christian, and these gifts manifest various aspects of Christ's power and nature. He taught in 1 Cor. 12:7: "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for the common good."

The word for spiritual gift in the Greek is *charismata*, from which we derive the term "charismatic." I have been a charismatic Christian for 40 years, but I'm still learning more about spiritual gifts today. And I'm concerned that those of us who use that term to describe ourselves have taught some misleading things about spiritual gifts. My prayer is that we will demonstrate greater maturity in the way we steward the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This list is certainly not complete, but here are four misconceptions we have promoted:

Misconception No. 1: Spiritual gifts require titles. I'm often asked how I prefer to be introduced when I go to a church to speak. "Are you a pastor, a prophet, an evangelist or an apostle?" they ask, as if I must pick one of those four answers. My standard reply: "You can just call me Lee."

I've never been comfortable with religious titles. I don't pastor a local church, so the term "pastor" doesn't fit me. I don't typically lead evangelistic campaigns, so I don't call myself an evangelist. And I've always felt it was pretentious

to pin the apostle or prophet label on myself.

The truth is that Paul never refers to his ministry colleagues using titles. He never talks about “Apostle Titus” or “Bishop Peter.” He simply referred to them by their first names: Timothy, Luke, Euodia, Priscilla or Sylvanus. I’m not saying it’s wrong for certain people to use titles. Many of my friends do. But you don’t need a title to function in your spiritual gift. Just serve and allow the Spirit to work through you.

Misconception No. 2: You can only experience one of the “power gifts.” In 1 Cor. 12:8-10, Paul lists nine different manifestations the Holy Spirit that can reach unbelievers and edify the church. These gifts are the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues.

Some people seem to excel in one of these gifts. But our heavenly Father is generous, and He does not dole out His gifts in a stingy way. I have met Christians who believed that because they manifested one of these power gifts in a particular situation, they could never experience the others. Don’t limit Him.

At various times in my life, I have experienced all nine of the power gifts. Depending on the needs you face, God can release healing, prophecy or a word of knowledge through you. It’s okay to desire these gifts. In fact, Paul exhorts us in 1 Cor. 14:1 to “earnestly desire” them. Then expect His power to flow through you.

Misconception No. 3: You are locked into one primary spiritual gift. In Rom. 12:6-8, Paul lists what we often call the motivational gifts. These are prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leadership and mercy. Christian ministries have devised various “spiritual gift tests” to help us determine which one of these gifts is strongest in our lives.

I have no issue with such tests. But sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking every Christian must fit into one of seven molds—almost like non-Christians who believe in horoscopes and try to fit under the characteristics of the zodiac signs. The truth is that every believer has a unique gift mix.

You probably have a combination of God's gifts. He loves variety, and He doesn't create people using just seven molds. Just as we each have individual fingerprints, we are unique in the way we express Jesus to others. You may have a gift of mercy, but your unique personality, your natural talents, and even your life experiences (both good and bad) make you a special vessel of the Holy Spirit.

One person may express his gift of prophecy through writing. Another may express it by playing the guitar or by using drama. One person may express her gift of mercy through prison ministry, while another uses it to counsel people who were sexually abused. The combinations are endless. Discover your unique blend of gifts and don't try to conform to someone else.

Misconception No. 4: Some spiritual gifts are only for men.

When Jesus' followers gathered on the day of Pentecost, the flame of the Spirit rested on each person's head. This holy fire touched both men and women. Since that moment, the Spirit has imparted spiritual gifts to both men and women. Gender has never been a barrier to spiritual gifting.

In Rom. 12, for example, leadership is mentioned as a spiritual gift—and no gender restrictions are listed. Yet some Christians have taught that only men can be leaders—even though Paul mentions that Priscilla, Phoebe, Chloe, Euodia and other women were leaders in the early church. Prophecy is also a vital spiritual gift, and women in the Book of Acts spoke under the anointing of the Spirit (see Acts 21:9). Yet some Christians have invented policies that forbid women from

prophesying and preaching. It is sad that so many of the Holy Spirit's gifts in women have been shut down.

This type of discrimination reveals a lack of faith as well as a carnal mindset. 1 Cor. 12:11 says: "But that one and very same Spirit works all these things, dividing to each one individually as He will." We are not in control of the Holy Spirit; we don't tell Him what to do or who to use. Let's get out of His way and let Him work through every surrendered believer. {eoa}

Castro Couldn't Kill Christianity in Cuba

After Fidel Castro's death on Nov. 25, journalists, Hollywood entertainers and heads of state described the Cuban leader as an "iconic figure," a "tireless advocate for equity" and "a champion of the poor."

Never was it so obvious that the world has gone crazy than this past weekend, when world leaders applauded a dictator who tortured his own people.

Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau, called Castro a "remarkable leader." Vladimir Putin of Russia called him "a strong and wise man." Ban Ki-moon, secretary general of the United Nations, described Castro as "a strong voice for social justice."

These eulogies remind me of a warning from the prophet Isaiah, who wrote: "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Is. 5:20a).

I appreciate Florida senator Marco Rubio's more honest assessment of Castro. A Cuban-American himself, Rubio said on the day after Castro's death: "One thing is clear: history will not absolve Fidel Castro; it will remember him as an evil, murderous dictator who inflicted misery and suffering on his own people."

I know it's tempting—in a politically correct sort of way—to say nice things about tyrants at their funerals. But it is a mockery of justice to applaud a man like Fidel Castro when his record of human rights abuses is so criminal. Regardless of where you stand politically, this man was evil personified. Consider his legacy of shame:

- He ordered mass executions of government officials when he took control of Cuba in 1959, and he was responsible for so many executions and "disappearances" of citizens that no one has been able to calculate the number;
- He imprisoned, tortured and murdered more of his own people than any other Latin American dictator;
- He forced more than 20 percent of Cuban citizens to flee the island, and some of them died in their boats while trying to escape;
- He created a police state in which citizens were subjected to 24-hour surveillance;
- He punished artists, writers and journalists for thinking freely, and he built concentration camps for dissidents—including thousands of gays and lesbians;
- He closed down all private enterprise, ended private ownership of all property and eventually destroyed Cuba's economy;
- He mentored Venezuela's dictator, Hugo Chavez, who then turned Venezuela into a sad copy of Cuba. Today, that nation is on the brink of total ruin while its people stand in line for hours to buy bread;
- He attacked churches, executed and tortured pastors and attempted to wipe out Christianity to create his

socialist utopia. His motto was "*Socialismo o muerte*," "Socialism or death."

What is worse, and even creepy, about Castro is that he was an avowed atheist who was reportedly involved in *santaria* and other forms of Afro-Caribbean witchcraft. Ever since a white dove landed on Castro's shoulder during a speech in 1959, *sanitaria* followers have believed he enjoyed supernatural protection from assassination attempts.

What was Castro's legacy? I would suggest the inscription on his tombstone should say: "He Couldn't Stop Christianity."

I visited Cuba in 1993, just after Castro began slightly softening his cruel restrictions on religion. I met many pastors who had been arrested and sentenced to years in prison camps because of their Christian faith. They knew what it means to face the spirit of antichrist. Yet after they were released, they found that Castro was unable to stop the spread of the gospel—even though he threatened churches with demolition and prevented the building of others.

I'll never forget the night a Pentecostal pastor told me we were going to visit what he called a "house church" on the western edge of Havana. I imagined I would be worshipping with a small group huddled in a basement. But when we arrived at the house, more than 200 people were joyfully singing praise choruses in the front yard.

When I asked the pastor if he was worried the police might arrest somebody, he smiled and calmly said: "Don't worry. Everybody in this neighborhood comes to this church."

In spite of Castro's hatred of God, his thirst for blood and his iron-fisted control, he could not stop the truth of Jesus from spreading in Cuba. A recent report by CBN News says 16,000 new churches have opened in Cuba in the past two decades. Missionary work on the island is at an all-time high.

Evangelist Luis Palau's organization sponsored the largest pastor training event in Cuban history this month, and those who were involved say Cuba is witnessing a miraculous awakening.

Carlos Barbieri, director of the Luis Palau Bible Institute, said: "The church in Cuba has grown in the shadows of culture for many years. Many of the churches and church leaders were born in the trenches and underground. They are bold and persistent. They are undoubtedly a living example for others, committed to the Scriptures and passionate about the Lord."

Fidel Castro worked for decades to snuff out faith on his island. But now he is dead—and the Cuban church has not just survived, it has thrived. Castro's sad life provides a warning to all leaders bent on evil. And Cuba's dark night has finally ended.{eoa}

Is the Holy Spirit Refining You?

When the Holy Spirit came upon the 120 disciples in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost, He manifested in primarily two ways: (1) the sound of a rushing wind and (2) flames of fire that miraculously appeared on each person's head. We do not know the exact nature of this fire; it obviously was not physical fire or it would have burned everyone's hair! It was most likely the visual manifestation of the Spirit's presence. But most assuredly this fire also represents to us the holiness of God.

Before John the Baptist was beheaded, he prophesied that God would endue His church with power. He announced that Jesus

Christ would give His church a double portion of His Spirit. John said: "He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit *and* fire" (Matt. 3:11, emphasis added). When the Day of Pentecost arrived, sure enough, both wind and fire were evident. True Pentecost has both.

We've known the wind during the last 50 years since the charismatic movement started bringing renewal to the church. We have felt "times of refreshing" in the Holy Spirit's renewing presence. We've enjoyed His healing, learned about the gifts of the Spirit, claimed His prosperity and received His supernatural power. Some of us have spent a lot of time on the floors of our churches, soaking in His miraculous anointing. We love to shake, bake, rattle and roll. We saturate and marinate in the anointing. We experience Holy Ghost goose bumps. And sometimes, because of our immaturity, we use the Holy Spirit's power to feed selfish desires to meet emotional needs.

But genuine Pentecost does not consist of wind alone. It's not just about noise or feelings. John said Jesus would baptize us in fire as well as power. What is the fire of the Spirit? It is a refining flame. John the Baptist said: "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12).

When it comes to Pentecost, holiness is not a side issue. It is the essence of the Holy Spirit's work. When He comes in power, He also comes to burn up the sin in our lives. He comes with conviction, searching our motives, uprooting our unforgiveness and shattering our pride.

Our problem is that we treat the whole scene in Acts 2 as if it were a party. We want hoopla and the noisy speaking in tongues, but we don't really want the fear of God or deep conviction of sin that comes when we are exposed to His

holiness. We spend all our time splashing in the shallow end of His river, when He has deeper things for us. We are afraid to embrace Jesus' winnowing fork, and we resist when the fire of His Spirit comes to burn up our selfishness.

Are you willing to allow God to purify you, even in hidden areas? Suppose you have lived in the same house for 24 years and you decide to move. The process of packing and cleaning that house is never easy. Imagine what you will see if you pull your refrigerator out from the wall to put it on the moving van. It has been in the same corner of the kitchen for a long time; no one has ever swept under it. The tile would be filthy. The floor might be caked with layers of grime, dust, stray nutshells, specks of rotted food, lost hair bands, dog hair, and unidentified stains that have been there for more than two decades. *Yuck!* This would require some special cleaning to get your house ready for a new owner.

It is a scary thought, but you may have areas such as this in your own life. Sometimes we hide our secret sins in private compartments. We know how to mask our ugliest attitudes. But when the Spirit comes in power, He comes to scour us of our grit and grime. He moves the furniture around in our lives in order to cleanse us of resentment, anger, shame, addictive behavior and so many other things that can create distance between God and us. I encourage you to open your heart to the Spirit's fire. {eoa}

Adapted from Set My Heart on Fire by J. Lee Grady, copyright 2016, published by Charisma House. Only when we fully surrender to the Holy Spirit can we know God intimately and share His love with others. The encouragement in this book will ignite His fire in your heart. To order your copy click on this link.

PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF Nov. 27, 2016

This week, invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and

uncover areas that need to be swept clean. Ask Him to burn out the dross and purify your heart and motives. Yield yourself completely to His power and purpose and tell Him that you want Him to have His way in your life. Pray a dangerous prayer of surrender and tell Him that you'll trust Him no matter what.

Continue to pray for those who rule over us and ask the Lord for a smooth transition of government leadership. Pray for the protection of our cities and newly elected officials. Declare the sovereign will of God over the nation and pray for a cessation of violence and anarchy.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Hebrews 12:29 and Matthew 3:11.

Read This and You'll Never Complain About America Again

The United States is richly blessed. We rank near the top of global charts when it comes to safety, natural resources, wealth, access to education, life expectancy, job opportunity, personal freedom and the right to pursue our dreams. We have so much to be grateful for on this Thanksgiving holiday.

Yes, we have our "First-world problems"—and we've griped a lot during the recent presidential campaign about the cost of health care, the sluggish economy and the lack of high-paying jobs. But as we sit down on Thursday to eat our stuffed turkeys in our comfortable homes or apartments, I suggest we adjust our perspective by taking a look at how the rest of the world struggles to survive.

Are you grateful for what you have? If you make \$34,000 a

year, you fall into the category of the wealthiest one percent of people on earth. That's right. Most people live far below that margin. In fact, in many parts of the world, the average person lives on \$ a day.

Are you thankful for your freedoms? Are you thankful for peace in your streets? In many countries today, lives have been shattered by war, political oppression, terrorism and famine. Consider these seven global hot spots:

1. North Korea: There are 34,000 statues of the late North Korean dictator Kim Il-sung scattered around the nation, and all citizens are required to have his portrait hanging in their house. It is the most isolated, secretive and oppressive country in the world—a place where you can be tortured in a prison camp for watching a DVD in your home.

Most of North Korea's 25 million residents suffer from malnutrition because food is rationed. Children are forced to work. And no one is allowed to speak to anyone outside the country. Miles and miles of fences are built along the border to keep people inside the country. Defectors—if found—are executed or sent to prison camps.

2. Nigeria: A horrific humanitarian crisis has unfolded in Nigeria's northern region, where Boko Haram terrorists have killed 20,000 people. The United Nations has warned that 80,000 children may starve over the next year in Nigeria because violent Muslim militants have trapped families in areas where food is scarce. About 2.5 million people have been displaced by this violence. Boko Haram's campaign of terror includes burning churches, slaughtering the residents of entire villages and sexually assaulting children.

3. Syria: The numbers are staggering: 250,000 people have been killed in the civil war in Syria, and 11.6 million have been forced to flee their homes. Four million of these have been able to flee to other countries, but they face suspicion,

poverty and harsh winters. At least six million Syrians have been forced from their homes inside the country.

Recent bombings by the Syrian government and by outside forces have made it nearly impossible for aid groups to bring food, shelter or medical care to those who have watched their nation unravel. Many of the refugees living in camps in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon or Jordan live in tents, storage sheds or even chicken coops.

4. Yemen: Some observers call this country the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet, but few people know what is happening in Yemen because the government keeps journalists out and forces its starving people to stay in. Since the war started in 2015, more than 10,000 people have been killed.

Rival armies, backed by Saudi Arabia on one side and Iran on the other, have bombed cities and left three million people displaced. Recent reports show that up to 14 million people in Yemen are at risk of starvation.

5. Afghanistan. British and American troops began to pull out of Afghanistan during the Obama administration, and our attention shifted to other global problems. But as soon as Western soldiers left, Taliban warriors filled the void. Today, the number of civilian casualties in the Afghan war has exceeded the numbers from 2001, when the conflict began after 9/11.

Observers say today that the Taliban's campaign of terror continues. In many parts of the country, medical care is nonexistent, basic services are disrupted and Afghans are fleeing their country to find safety. Afghans now are the second largest group of refugees seeking safety in Europe.

6. Central African Republic: Most Americans probably couldn't identify the Central African Republic on a map. Yet this country of 4.9 million has been in crisis since 2013, when a Muslim group known as the Seleka toppled the government. Since

then, the nation has been in a civil war that has resulted in thousands of civilian deaths. More than a half-million people have been displaced by the violence. To make matters worse, soldiers on both sides of the conflict have used rape as a weapon to punish women who are accused of choosing the wrong sides of the war.

7. Venezuela: The Marxist government of Hugo Chavez was supposed to bring wealth to rich and poor alike. But Chavez died in 2013, and today Venezuelans stand in line for hours to buy rice, bread or aspirin with currency that is worth less than the paper it is printed on.

The locals joke about “the Maduro diet,” a reference to the hunger created by President Nicolás Maduro’s policies. But it’s not funny, because this once-prosperous nation now faces the threat of widespread starvation. Maduro had hoped Venezuela’s huge oil fields would guarantee prosperity, but the fall in the price of oil worsened the economic crisis. Now the country has the worst inflation rate, as well as the highest murder rate, in the world.

I’m not sharing these facts to make you feel guilty for being safe, well-fed or financially blessed. But before you complain about how bad things are in America, step back and look at your situation from a wider perspective. Be thankful. And let gratefulness adjust your attitude. {eoa}

Building and Repairing Bridges in a Divisive Season

The votes are counted and the 2016 election is over. Those who voted for Hillary Clinton are grieving or protesting. Those

who supported Donald Trump are cheering—secretly or publicly—over his surprise victory. Journalists are scratching their heads because they never imagined that Trump and the Republican Party would end up in charge of the White House and Congress.

But Mr. Trump is president now. And the church faces a huge challenge. Exit polls show the election was most definitely decided along racial lines, since 88 percent of African Americans and 79 percent of Hispanics voted for Clinton. How do followers of Jesus Christ—who is the ultimate reconciler—minister to people from all kinds of ethnic and political backgrounds when the election divided them?

During and after the election I decided to park myself in Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul's heavenly discourse on Christian unity. I urge you to read it several times over the next week. Paul's words fly in the face of our nasty political Facebook posts. He calls the church to declare a ceasefire from arguments and to embrace (are we ready for this?) gentleness, humility and reconciliation.

I've said this before, and some angry Christians have criticized me for it. They seem to suggest that following Paul's biblical guidelines doesn't apply during an election. They also think that being a peacemaker is a sign of weakness—even though Jesus promised special blessings to those who make peace (Matt. 5:9). Yet my concern is that if we don't dial down our harsh tone, the church is going to lose its influence as we congratulate ourselves for our voting power.

It's your choice. You can dig in your heels and be a cantankerous and offensive Christian, or you can become a peacemaker. Here are some steps you can take:

1. See the world through other people's eyes. I have immigrant friends who were scared of Donald Trump because of his comments about Mexicans. I've learned to say,

"Hablemos" ("Let's talk"). Speaking to my Hispanic *amigos* in my broken Spanish tells them I care, even though I don't say my verbs correctly. Immigrants are not our enemies. Be a friend and try to understand how they feel.

2. Repent of your outrage. The apostle Paul told the Ephesians: "Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph. 4:26). It's one thing to be passionate about your political position; it's another to be so angry about an issue that you seethe with bitterness toward anyone who slightly disagrees with you. That is sin. And when the world sees angry, judgmental Christians, they drive past our cold churches and vow never to visit. If you allow hate to dwell in your heart, there is no room for the love of God.

3. Bite your lip in conversations. Paul said, "Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, that it may give grace to the listeners" (Eph. 4:29). The apostle did not put an asterisk at the end of this sentence to say, "except during elections." This rule applies 365 days a year. We don't have permission to spew our verbal venom just because a liberal Democrat is running for office. Ask the Holy Spirit to filter what you say. And if it's unkind, condemning, insulting, racist or crude, just be quiet.

(P.S. I am not sure when it became acceptable for Christians to swear at each other, but you are grieving the Holy Spirit when you use a derogatory term to describe a brother or sister in Christ. And remember: Jesus said in Matthew 5:22 that if you call someone a "fool," you are "shall be in danger of hell fire.")

4. Preserve and nurture relationships with those you disagree with. This election was intense, and the conversations between friends and family often got heated. Your candidate may have won, but if you burned bridges because of your campaigning, you lost. Now is the time to mend broken relationships. Paul

told us to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). That means you have to work hard at staying connected to people. If you cut Christians out of your life because of how they voted, you are dismembering the body of Christ.

5. Gently challenge any form of prejudice. We can't achieve Christian unity just by sitting in a circle and smiling at each other. True peacemakers are not wimps. Building bridges requires the courage to confront. Paul said true unity requires “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Pastors, especially, have the responsibility to speak from the pulpit about racism. It is shameful for us to run from this issue when it is staring us in the face.

I challenge every church leader in America to carefully assess whether you burned any bridges during this election. Did people walk out because of political statements? How are you going to win those people back? And how are you planning to reach people who are from a different racial group? Let's set aside all animosity and build a bridge with Christ's love.
{eoa}

Staying on Fire During Your Dry Season

You cannot begin a journey until you take the first step, yet many Christians are afraid to begin living the Spirit-filled life. But after you do start, how do you actually live this out, especially when the initial excitement has passed, the goose bumps have gone, and you have to face the reality that life is not always easy?

Many Christians make the mistake of basing their walk with God on feelings. I am not against feelings—I have wept in God’s presence, felt His overflowing joy, and danced in the aisles of the church when I was excited. But no matter how high I jump, how loud I shout or how much rapture I experience in my soul during a worship service, those feelings will not carry me through the rough seasons of life. At some point we all have to wash dishes, do laundry, take care of sick children and work long hours to feed our families. And at some time we have to battle sickness, resolve family conflicts, struggle through personal disappointments and face the death of friends and loved ones. Life is not always fun. And feelings never last as long as we’d like them to.

Thankfully the Holy Spirit is with us on the not-so-exciting days too. He walks with us through the mundane times; He is there on the bad days; He’s with us even on the days we’d rather forget. He is with us always. And the Holy Spirit does not abide with you figuratively, symbolically or remotely. He is not with you in an ethereal or intangible sense. His “presence” is not in quotation marks like it is in this sentence!

He is actually with you, just as your closest friend would be if he were sitting beside you, talking to you and hugging you. *He is there*—and He is more real than any human being in your life because He is God. And you can know His presence—not just in the sense of feeling something, but in resting in faith and trust. This is one of the great blessings of the indwelling Spirit. He is the giver of true peace that cannot be explained yet is more real than the warm blanket you snuggle in on cold nights.

Jesus often used the word “abide” to describe the unique reality of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence. In Greek *menó* means to remain continually; to endure and never perish; to continue to be present. Jesus was making it clear: The Holy Spirit is coming to live in you, and He is going to be with

you 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He is moving in with you, and He is never leaving!

This should be one of the most comforting truths to us; but many times we doubt God's promise. I know many Christians who struggle to believe God is really there. Because they have experienced abandonment by parents, spouses or friends, they expect the Holy Spirit to desert them as well. But the Word of God tells us He will never leave us. And He does not just lie dormant. He does not sleep. He is not preoccupied with more important matters. The Spirit lives in us and actively works in us, even in the dry and difficult times when we don't sense He is doing anything.

Never doubt the Spirit's presence in your life; rather, seek to grow close in intimacy with Him. And when life's challenges upset you, or when you are led into a valley of discouragement, monotony, or grief, press into the Holy Spirit's presence so you know His nearness. Even in the driest wilderness the Spirit will open up a gushing well of peace, joy, hope, and assurance. {eoa}

*The preceding is an excerpt from **J. Lee Grady's** book, Set My Heart on Fire (Charisma House, 2016). Copyright © 2016 by J. Lee Grady. All rights reserved.*

***J. Lee Grady** was editor of Charisma for 11 years before he launched into full-time ministry in 2010. Today he directs The Mordecai Project, a Christian charitable organization that is taking the healing of Jesus to women and girls who suffer abuse and cultural oppression. Author of several books including 10 Lies the Church Tells Women, he has just released his newest book, Set My Heart on Fire, from Charisma House. You can follow him on Twitter at @leegrady or go to his website, .*

Are You Blocking the Flow of the Holy Spirit?

A few years ago the Lord challenged me about my level of spiritual hunger. He showed me that even though I had stood in many prayer lines and repeatedly sung the words, "Lord, I want more of You," I wasn't as passionate for Him as I thought I was.

My church sponsored a conference on the Holy Spirit. At the close of one service, I was lying on the floor near the altar, asking God for another touch of His power. Several other people were kneeling at the communion rail and praying quietly for each other.

Suddenly I began to have a vision. In my mind I could see a large pipeline, at least eight feet in diameter. I was looking at it from the inside, and I could see a shallow stream of golden liquid flowing at the bottom. The oil in the giant pipe was only a few inches deep.

I began a conversation with the Lord.

"What are You showing me?" I asked.

"This is the flow of the Holy Spirit in your life," He answered.

It was not an encouraging picture; it was pitiful! The capacity of the pipeline was huge—enough to convey tons of oil. Yet only a trickle was evident.

Then I noticed something else: Several large valves were lined up along the sides of the pipeline, and each of them was shut.

I wanted to ask the Lord why there was so little oil in my life. Instead I asked: "What are those valves, and why are they closed?"

His answer stunned me. "Those represent the times when you said no. Why should I increase the level of anointing if you aren't available to use it?"

The words stung. When had I said no to God? I was overcome with emotion and began to repent. I recalled different excuses I had made and limitations I had placed on how He could use me.

I had told Him that I didn't want to be in front of crowds because I wasn't a good speaker. I had told Him that if I couldn't preach like T.D. Jakes does, then I didn't want to speak at all. I had told Him that I didn't want to address certain issues or go certain places. I had placed so many cumbersome conditions on my obedience.

After a while I began to see something else in my spirit. It was a huge crowd of African men, assembled as if they were in a large arena. And I saw myself preaching to them.

Nobody had ever asked me to minister in Africa, but I knew at that moment I needed to surrender my will. All I could think to say was the prayer of Isaiah: "Here am I. Send me." (Is. 6:8). I told God I would go anywhere and say anything He asked. I laid my insecurities, fears and inhibitions on the altar.

Three years later I stood at a pulpit inside a sports arena in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. As I addressed a crowd of 8,000 pastors who had assembled there for a training conference, I remembered seeing their faces in that vision. And I realized that God had opened a new valve in my life that day when I was on the floor of my church. Because I had said yes, He had increased the flow of His oil so that it could reach thousands.

Many of us have a habit of asking for more of God's power and anointing. But what do we use it for? He doesn't send it just to make us feel good.

We love to go to the altar for a touch from God. We love the goose bumps, the shaking, the emotion of the moment. We love to fall on the floor and experience one filling after another. But I am afraid some of us are soaking up the anointing but not giving it away. Our charismatic experience has become inward and selfish. We get up off the floor and live like we want to.

Pentecost is not a party. If we truly want to be empowered, we must offer God an unqualified yes. We must crucify every no. We must become a conduit to reach others, not a reservoir with no outlet.

Search your own heart today and see if there are any closed valves in your pipeline. As you surrender them, the locked channels will open, and His oil will flow out to a world that craves to know He is real. {eoa}

Special announcement: *If you live in the Orlando area, Lee Grady will be speaking at a special event at the Charisma offices on Thursday, Nov. 10 at 7 pm. He will be launching his new book, Set My Heart on Fire from Charisma House. To reserve a free seat, get your ticket here.*

Why We Must Minister in the Spirit With Integrity

In our performance-driven culture we are pressured to get results. We don't believe the Holy Spirit shows up in a

meeting unless someone falls on the floor or claims a healing.

We want action—and if we don't get any, we will make stuff up! Paul the apostle, on the other hand, preached that the Holy Spirit manifests Himself not only through the nine power gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, but also through His fruits listed in Galatians 5:22-23. A true representation of the Spirit isn't just about what He *does*; it is also about who He *is*. We invite problems when we showcase the spectacular and ignore the essential.

Truth is more vital than tongues. The gift of speaking in tongues has been a priceless blessing in my own life. But the apostle Paul, who prayed in tongues more than anyone in Corinth, said he'd rather hear a five-word sermon in a language he could understand than hear someone else babble in tongues for hours (1 Cor. 14:18-19). Paul knew that spiritual gifts can be abused and misused. And he admitted that someone who speaks in tongues but doesn't show the love of God is like a "noisy gong" (1 Cor. 13:1). That is a nice way of saying, "Annoying!"

Love is more crucial than charismatic manifestations. Many of us emphasize the wind and fire that came from heaven at Pentecost. But let's remember that the Spirit manifested Himself in another way in the same chapter. The first Christians were united by a bond of love. The Spirit brought about a holy connection—and this holy love held them together.

Unselfish love, generosity, brotherly and sisterly affection, and sincere kindness is just as much a manifestation of the Spirit as healing or miracles. In fact, powerful signs and wonders are more likely to happen in an atmosphere that is bathed in Holy Ghost love.

William Seymour, the father of modern Pentecostalism and founder of the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, said it this way: "Pentecostal power, when you sum it all up, is just

more of God's love. If it does not bring more love, it is simply a counterfeit."

Could this be the reason we don't see as many supernatural manifestations today? When we are smug, hypocritical, bitter, harsh, judgmental and hateful, we totally short-circuit God's power. I pray we will embrace not just the sound and the fury of God's power but also the genuine love that flows from His heart.

Don't Allow Things to Get Weird

When the Holy Spirit comes in His fullness, people receive miraculous anointing, remarkable boldness, overflowing joy, and irresistible enthusiasm. Yet because we all are bent toward sin and selfishness, many people who experience the Holy Spirit's raw power sometimes also act weird. Their flesh gets in the way, and they misuse the gifts of the Spirit.

I've seen this happen often during prayer ministry at church altars. Because of poor training and a lack of mature leadership, things can get wacky when people come to the front of the auditorium for ministry. If this flakiness isn't immediately corrected, visitors will stop coming, and your church will get a bad reputation. {eoa}

*The preceding is an excerpt from **J. Lee Grady's** book, Set My Heart on Fire (Charisma House, 2016). Copyright © 2016 by J. Lee Grady. All rights reserved.*

J. Lee Grady was editor of Charisma for 11 years before he launched into full-time ministry in 2010. Today he directs The Mordecai Project, a Christian charitable organization that is taking the healing of Jesus to women and girls who suffer abuse and cultural oppression. Author of several books including 10 Lies the Church Tells Women, he has just released his newest book, Set My Heart on Fire, from Charisma House. You can follow him on Twitter at @leeegrady or go to his website, .

Preparing Your Heart for a Personal Revival

I lived in central Florida for more than 24 years. It is a land of flip-flops, swimsuits and water parks that stay open 365 days a year. The average temperature in Orlando in January is 71. In the summer a humid 95 degrees is fine with me.

But I have friends in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Rochester, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who endured the record-breaking polar vortex of 2014. Cold temperatures such as it produced had not been seen in more than two decades. It was -40 degrees in Minnesota in early January. The mercury hit -13 in Milwaukee. It was so cold in Chicago (-16) that the polar bear at the Lincoln Park Zoo was moved indoors!

When this deep freeze hit, I was reading the book of Romans, and verse 11 of chapter 12 jumped off the page. The apostle Paul told his followers that in order to please God they needed to be "fervent in spirit." The Greek word for *fervent* (zeó) means "to boil with heat." The message is clear. As Christians we have a responsibility to stay hot for God no matter how cold our spiritual environment is.

But how do you stay on fire for the Lord? How can you raise your spiritual temperature at a time when many people's faith today has gone from lukewarm to freezing? Do you want God to set your heart on fire? Would you like to have a life-changing encounter with the Holy Spirit?

It is possible to have that kind of spiritual revival. But it doesn't just happen. There are some steps you must take to warm your heart, prepare it for a holy visitation and increase

your spiritual hunger.

Get Back in the Word

Spiritual zeal is kindled in your heart when you hear God speak through the pages of the Bible. I'm not talking about casually reading daily devotionals with your eyes halfway open or halfheartedly skimming Bible verses on your phone. When you desperately dig into the Scriptures to find truth, you will say, as did the disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus: "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was ... explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

The Word will set your heart ablaze. In fact, you cannot expect a life-changing encounter with God unless you open your Bible and seek Him in its pages. God invested a lot time and energy to give us His Word, and many people gave their lives so that you could have a copy of the Bible today. God has watched over His Word for centuries to preserve its message. It is His love letter to you. Please do not ignore it!

Stoke the Furnace of Private Prayer

Fires don't last long if you don't regularly pile wood on the flames. You should guard your quiet time with God as if your life depended on it. You cannot survive spiritually without regular communion with the Lord. Oswald Chambers put it bluntly: "Prayer is the vital breath of the Christian; not the thing that makes him alive, but the evidence that he is alive."

Maybe you have been away from God for some time. Maybe you have been in a spiritual desert because of failure or pain. Maybe you have not had personal communion with God for a while. Wherever you are in your walk with God, you can begin afresh right now by approaching Him and starting over. Just make an appointment with Him and keep it.

Praise God With Abandon

Sometimes the chill of discouragement, fear and anxiety can form icicles in our souls. The only way to melt the ice is to rejoice in the Lord. Are you going through an extended period of heaviness or disappointment? Psalm 47:1 says: "Clap your hands, all you people! Shout to God with a joyful voice."

When you praise God with exuberance, new strength will arise. Make a decision that this year you will praise God in a more vocal, uninhibited way than ever before. Read through the book of Psalms and note how often this ancient hymnbook commands us to praise God with all our hearts. If you need help praising God, play a recording by one of your favorite Christian artists and sing along. {eoa}

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How We Grieved the Holy Spirit in This Election

We have just endured the most bitter and divisive presidential contest in a lifetime. The whole nation is shell-shocked. Our

ears are ringing and our heads are pounding after being bombarded for more than a year and a half with noisy rhetoric.

Imagine if an alien spaceship tried to decipher the jumbled message that has been transmitted from the United States for the past 19 months. "Trump is a racist! Hillary is a nasty woman! Trump gropes women! Send Hillary to prison! The election is rigged! Remember Benghazi! Trump hates Megyn Kelly! Megyn Kelly hates Newt Gingrich! Blah blah blah blah blah!"

I have loathed every minute of it. I'm looking for a T-shirt that says: "Thank God it's over."

My struggle wasn't caused by the bickering about Obamacare, Hillary's email server, Donald Trump's insults or Bernie Sander's liberal lectures. I don't mind the arguments and put-downs on the news, because I can turn off the television when I want to. And I believe there is a place for legitimate political debate. What grieved me most was seeing the hatefulness Christians threw at each other during this election cycle.

I've heard Christians swear at each other, verbally assault each other, and dissect each other in self-righteous Facebook posts. I've watched one Christian demonize another Christian simply because they have different views on a public policy issue. And I've seen how the racial divisions in the church grew deeper when a pastor decided to politicize a sermon or tell people they had to vote a certain way to please God.

About half of our population will be celebrating the winner of this election next Tuesday, while the other half will be licking their wounds. I don't believe the Holy Spirit will be taking sides. I believe He is grieved by the way the church behaved.

What exactly does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? The clue is found in Ephesians 4:30, which says: "Do not grieve the

Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Then the apostle Paul goes on to explain how to avoid grieving the Spirit.

He writes: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has forgiven you” (v. 31-32).

The point here is that the Holy Spirit is quenched when we mistreat each other. Our relationship with God is not just about how we act individually. Christianity is not a Lone Ranger religion. If we don't treat each other with love and respect, the Spirit is not happy. He withdraws His blessing and waits for us to repent. He calls us to community.

It's interesting that one of the behaviors mentioned in this verse is “clamor.” This is the Greek word *kraugē*, which means “to shout or cry loud or insistently.” It refers to the volume level of an argument. Yes, you can grieve the Holy Spirit with your tone of voice.

There is nothing wrong with disagreeing. But when our disagreements become shouting matches, and our tone becomes harsh or vindictive, the Holy Spirit tunes out. He does not like it when we shout, scream, rant and spew venom at each other.

Yet many Christians today defend this behavior. We have been trained well by the sharp-witted commentators on Fox News and CNN. We have the idea that standing for truth requires us to blast our opponents out of the water. We wield our verbal swords and skewer our enemies like Roman gladiators in the coliseum. And the crowds cheer when we slay our political opponents with snappy one-liners. *Touché!*

God, forgive us. We have called what is evil good. We thought we were exhibiting moral courage when we brashly attacked a brother who had a different opinion about immigrants or health

care policy. We thought God was pleased when we shouted down the woman who disagreed with us about transgender bathrooms. We thought God was on our side when we angrily quoted the Bible and waved our fists in the air.

We didn't have a clue that the Holy Spirit had withdrawn from us. He was grieved. We didn't realize that just because a person is right about something does not mean they have God's blessing. Moses was a great man of God, but when he struck the rock in anger he forfeited his chance to enter the Promised Land.

If you have allowed anger to take control of your life during this crazy political season, pull away from the ruckus and let the Holy Spirit adjust your attitude. Go on a fast from ranting and raving. Stop being outraged and encourage somebody. Forgive those who disagree with you. Love those who voted differently from you. Set politics aside and act like a Christian. {eoa}