

Holy Spirit, Make Me Bold

God's Spirit is ready and willing to empower us. But be prepared: Those who are filled with His power often feel compelled to take unusual risks.

We have always loved Christmas and the birthdays of our children. Watching their eyes light up as they open a gift my wife and I purchased for them is a tremendous joy.

Jesus addressed the giving nature of God when He asked, "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).

Jesus was not referring here to our "born again" experience. At the moment he becomes born again, the new believer is automatically indwelt by the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 8:9-10, 14-16; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Jesus was speaking of another experience involving the Holy Spirit-the "gift" of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

God gave this powerful gift to the early church, and it is available to the church of this century as well. Through misunderstanding, misinterpretation of Scripture and naiveté, countless people have missed this wonderful gift. Others have not earnestly desired all God has for them.

But the baptism in the Holy Spirit is for every believer. It will help us be all God intends for us to be.

The Pattern of Pentecost

The baptism in the Holy Spirit was first experienced on the day of Pentecost. Luke describes this event in Acts 2:1-4:

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

When about 120 people in the early church received this experience after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they were mocked by observers who said they were drunk (see Acts 2:13). Others were surprised to hear so many people speaking in languages they had never learned.

In response to the crowd’s comments and questions, Peter preached the first known sermon after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a result, about 3,000 people became Christians.

In his sermon Peter explained that this experience was the fulfillment of what the prophet Joel had said would happen in the last days: “ ‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people’ ” (Acts 2:17).

Peter challenged the crowd to “ ‘repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off -for all whom the Lord our God will call’ ” ().

Peter said that this “promise” is “for all who are far off .” We are those people about whom Peter was speaking. God never intended for this experience to be for the early believers only. It is for us. All over the world today, millions of Christians are receiving the same gift Jesus’ early disciples received.

The infilling of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost became a pattern for Spirit baptism thereafter. When we become Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit (see John 3:3-6; 20:22) and become participants in the divine nature (see 2 Pet. 1:4).

However, when we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, we receive power to witness for Christ and work with greater effectiveness within the church and in the world. We receive the same divine anointing that descended upon Christ (see John 1:32-33) and upon the disciples, enabling us to proclaim God's Word and work miracles.

"Spirit baptism is 'distinct from conversion,'" Pentecostal theologian Robert Menzies says, in that it "unleashes a new dimension of the Spirit's power: It is an enduement of power for service." The giving of the Spirit is not for salvation but for greater service in God's kingdom.

This supernatural power explains how and why the early church was able to do the amazing work it did. Ordinary people spoke with power and saw tremendous results because the Holy Spirit was working in their lives.

The wonderful truth is that when we read about how the early church operated, we realize that we can be given the might to operate in similar ways. The manifestations of the early Christians can be our manifestations.

The miracles they saw can be a part of our experience. The boldness that came to these early Christians can be ours as well.

Compelled by God

Those who have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit often feel compelled by God to enter occupations they would not naturally seek. I did not want to go into the ministry, even though I had grown up in a minister's home. But my father insisted that I go to a Bible college.

Then one day I felt that the Spirit of God touched my life. My heart melted from its stubbornness, and I felt convicted about not wholeheartedly serving Christ. I decided to yield my entire life to the Lord. From that day until now, I have wanted to do only what the Holy Spirit has told me to do.

Missionary William Carey planned to go to the Great Polynesia in the South Seas. The Holy Spirit guided him to India instead, where he translated the Bible into nearly 40 different languages and dialects. David Livingstone's ambition was to work in China. But the Holy Spirit led him to Africa, where he became a missionary, statesman and explorer. Adoniram Judson's choice was India. The Holy Spirit urged him to go to Burma, where he did a great work for God, translating the Bible into Burmese.

It is important that we understand how critical our obedience is to the leading of the Holy Spirit. As we take our first step by faith, God will reveal the next. We can expect God to make clear what we should do.

When we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, we also receive a unique ability to be a witness. This does not mean that we are all expected to go into full-time ministry. Many have misunderstood the Lord's intentions in their lives and have entered ministry thinking they were obligated because they had received a wonderful experience from God.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is for everyone and will be a tremendous help to you no matter what your occupation, location or age. You will sense a new strength, authority and confidence to be a testifier and communicator of God's truth about His precious Son, Jesus Christ. The new millennium church of the 21st century, like the church in the book of Acts, needs the dynamic power of the Spirit to equip it to evangelize the world and build the body of Christ.

Characteristics of Spirit-Baptized Christians

Evangelistic zeal. Being full of the Holy Spirit and winning the lost go hand in hand. Pentecostals read the book of Acts and believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available for them today. They observe that the early church was focused on evangelism and believe they must behave and respond in the same way. Evangelism is their primary goal. Because of this focus, Pentecostal missions programs have dynamically entered unconverted areas of the world, often at great risk, believing God would enable them to reach these areas for Christ.

Reliance on the Holy Spirit. Those who have been baptized in the Spirit have a unique experience with the Holy Spirit and rely on the Spirit's power and person. When the early church depended on the Holy Spirit to lead them in all they did and to give them the charismatic gifts necessary for the job, they believed they would receive all the power they needed. When you have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, you will have a similar dependency. You will assume that the Holy Spirit will help you in the same way He did the early church.

A unique power given by the Holy Spirit. Those who have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit believe a unique (not natural) dynamic power will be available to them as they do the will of God. In his book *Azusa Street and Beyond*, Grant McClung Jr. writes: "For Pentecostals, every healing, miracle, spiritual manifestation, is a witness and testimony to the power of God."

Lay leadership. God greatly uses people who are not "professional clergy." The ability to be used by God is for everyone, not just for those who are professionals.

Worldwide, the Pentecostal-charismatic church is growing largely because laypeople realize the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to them. This realization enables them to take their personal experience with the Lord to their friends, family members and acquaintances. They pray for and witness to others and ask God to perform healings and deliverances just

as their pastors do. They depend on the Holy Spirit to lead them in their relationships, neighborhoods and workplaces.

Countless situations can be described in which “Spirit-baptized” congregation members have demonstrated gifts that many believe are available only to the clergy. Just as God used seven laymen in the early church, he will use laymen and laywomen today (see Acts 6:1-6).

A sense that Jesus Christ is actively involved in one's life.

Those who have been baptized in the Spirit quite literally believe that Jesus will go with them to the ends of the earth. They anticipate that this power and authority will be available to them as they remain in right relationship with Him, live the Christian life and witness to people who come across their paths. This understanding has greatly encouraged the typical Spirit-filled Christian to believe that Jesus will give him or her the gifts of the Holy Spirit just as He gave these gifts to the early church.

When we read about the experiences of those in the early church, we become hungry to be used by God in the same way. People came to Christ from all walks of life. God powerfully used this small group of believers to break through the powers of darkness with signs and wonders. People were healed, delivered and wonderfully transformed as the gospel spread throughout the land.

You can be used in the same way. All around you are desperate, hurting and confused people. Your Christian witness and life of faith demonstrated by the power of the Holy Spirit could be the very things that cause others to want what you have.

Plug In to the Power

Being filled with the Holy Spirit isn't complicated or spooky. Let these simple steps be your guide.

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 by following these guidelines:

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.

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

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