

Set Ablaze by the Spirit

These well-known Christians all have something in common. They encountered the power of the Holy Spirit-and were changed forever.

Christianity is more than following a set of intellectual beliefs about Jesus Christ. It's more than going to church or doing religious duties. The abundant life that Jesus promised us involves a personal experience with the Holy Spirit. The earliest Christians had this experience on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit poured out His fire on 120 disciples in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:1-4). But the miracle of Pentecost did not end there. Today, millions of people have discovered what it means to be filled, or "baptized," with the Holy Spirit. This heavenly blessing has energized their lives. We asked nine people-including four popular recording artists, a talk-show host, a 1960s Hollywood legend and a former Miss America-to share how they came to discover the power of the Spirit. We hope their testimonies will invite you to seek a deeper experience with God.

Jeff Deyo

MUSICIAN. NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

I grew up in a strong Christian family and was very involved in a mainline denominational church. My walk with God was strong, but I always imagined there was more.

After my wife, Martha, and I graduated from college we moved to Nashville, Tennessee, and started attending a charismatic church. We loved it and after a few months were asked to join the volunteer youth staff .

I began to feel as if my home church had taught me nothing about the Holy Spirit. I couldn't understand how it was possible for me to be a passionate Christian and a full-time minister and still not be "filled" with the Holy Spirit. Why did I need this infilling?

Later, our pastor used the analogy of a bottle of Coke and the infilling of the Holy Spirit: The Coke in the bottle doesn't become powerful until you shake it up. Then it gushes out!

Suddenly it clicked. Being filled with the Holy Spirit was more about getting the Spirit of God out of me than into me. The baptism of the Holy Spirit releases an explosion!

Debbye Turner

Formers Miss America New York, New York

I gave my heart to the Lord when I was 7 years old while sitting at my mother's kitchen table. I remember her telling me that I could not get to heaven on her apron said I would have to know God for myself and know how to pray and read the Bible on my own.

That day, she opened her Bible and showed me verses about what it means to be saved. When she asked me if I was ready, I said yes. Mom prayed the prayer of salvation with me, and I gave my heart to Jesus.

Many times I heard my mother, who was an evangelist, preach about the Holy Spirit. She often would quote Luke 11:13: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

She recited that verse to countless people. She told them it is great to have salvation but that it is absolutely essential to be filled with the Holy Spirit to come into the fullness of what God has for us. That made sense to me, even at age 7.

Mom sent me to a youth Bible study being held in the balcony of a local theater in Jonesboro, Arkansas, where I grew up. One night, the Bible-study leader invited those who wanted the evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit, which meant speaking in tongues, to come forward for prayer. I sensed it was time for me be filled with the Holy Spirit. I was ready. I wanted everything that God had for me, so I went forward.

All the young people gathered around me and stretched out their hands toward me. Some touched my head and shoulders. I was not afraid when they prayed. It didn't seem weird. I sincerely wanted the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As I began to pray, "God give me everything that You have for me," I felt as if God was standing right there with me. I submitted to Him. There was never a question in my mind about whether this was real. I felt like this was the final piece of the puzzle for me.

DARLENE ZSCHECH

Worship Leader

Sydney, Australia

I became a Christian at age 15. I was radically and beautifully saved, never to be the same, and eternally grateful that Jesus would give Himself for someone like me. A few months later I responded to an altar call for anyone who wanted to serve in full-time in ministry. My youth pastor at the time prayed for me, and I started to speak in this unusual language.

Rather than being freaked out by it, even though it felt initially strange, I was overwhelmed by how easy and voluntarily this language came. It was as if I was speaking a language I had always known yet never used.

I felt a great sense of the sovereign presence of God. I felt empowered, as if someone had plugged me into an electrical socket.

I started to study about this "baptism of the Holy Spirit." I knew that when I had received Christ by faith I had also received the Holy Spirit, but this was definitely an experience I could not deny.

Suddenly the Acts-church experience became real to me in a fresh new way. I began to understand the fire I had read about but never completely understood.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit has definitely changed my life forever. I use my gift of praying in the Spirit as a real weapon of warfare, especially because as a lead worshiper I face much spiritual opposition.

I encourage you to embrace the friendship of the Holy Spirit.

I have learned to praise, worship, and live for Christ regardless of my feelings.

I have grown to accept the entire Word of God, even when it makes me feel quite uncomfortable. This is our journey of faith-and what a wonderful, wonderful journey it is.

Rebecca St. James

Recording Artist

Nashville, Tennessee

The strongest way in which I have experienced the Holy Spirit at work in my life is through His inspiration. His influence has been especially obvious to me during interviews or speaking engagements when I have been in special need of God's inspired words.

When I first started in music, I was only 16 years old. A lot of people wondered if I would have anything of real value to say. At times I wondered myself what I had to share that would be meaningful to other teenagers and adults!

In those days, we had an interview section in the middle of my concert during which the audience could ask me any questions they wanted. I remember praying while the questions were being asked, "Lord, give me the words to say." God would always fill my mouth with words that I knew came from the Holy Spirit.

Prayer was-and is-a big part of my ministry. Many times since those teenage years I've come to God, not knowing what I needed to share in certain situations but knowing that He would provide.

One recent time in particular I felt the Holy Spirit guiding me miraculously.

I had the opportunity to be on Hannity & Colmes during a Valentine's Day telecast.

The question up for debate that night was "Should people save sex for marriage?"

I was scheduled to be on the segment with a liberal sex therapist who took the opposite position on this subject. The producers were hoping our exchange would be an entertaining debate.

Immediately before the show I performed in a concert with the Newsboys.

One of the people hosting the concert asked the audience to pray for me-that

I would be inspired by the Holy Spirit during the upcoming program. On the spot thousands of people joined together to pray. Moments later I saw God answer their prayer!

Right before I went on the air, God gave me certain points to make

in relation to the issue of saving sex for marriage-points that had never occurred to me in 10 years of speaking on the subject. I wrote myself

notes hoping I
would have a chance to share them.

Miraculously, during the interview, I was able to use every
thought I had
written down! It was as if every question or challenge thrown
at me was a direct
request for the words God had given me! In a very high-
profile, mainstream
situation with people from all walks of life watching, God-
through His Holy
Spirit-answered the prayer to “fill my mouth.”

I saw God move through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He
is faithful to
provide all our needs when we trust Him.

Ben Kinchlow

FORMER HOST FOR THE 700 CLUB
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA.

I met Jesus Christ while I was hurtling toward hell in a
vehicle with no brakes. That
“vehicle” was my life.

I thought Christianity was dull and restrictive. It was for
old people. I thought you had to die before you could have any
fun. And I thought it was a white man’s religion.

The drama of my conversion drove me to find what would lead
people to give their lives for Christ. I read the Bible, then
other books.

I was determined to receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit. I went into my bathroom at 9 a.m. and waited for hours. Nothing happened.

Then I read how one writer had been filled with the Spirit while he sat near "a white brick fireplace in the white carpeted living room of a prominent attorney." I would find the same-and a white attorney who knew about the baptism in the Holy Spirit and would let me in his house!

God honors sincerity. I remember sitting in a straight-back chair in front of a white fireplace on a white carpet while being prayed for by rabid charismatics. After half an hour, it seemed, they all said, "Amen!" Again, nothing.

I went home, upset at God for not doing what He promised in His Word. The next day I gave Him the silent treatment. Suddenly, however, I was in a two-way conversation with Him, aloud and in my mind.

He questioned what proof I had that I had not received the baptism. I argued that I hadn't felt "warm and bubbly" like others had. He said He never promised anyone that feeling. His Word, He convincingly reminded me, promised power.

Then He challenged me-had I asked Him for the Holy Spirit? I answered that I had. He then simply said, "I did what I promised to do."

This understanding gave me a new surge of excitement. I looked up and said, "OK, I'm going to open my mouth and speak."

I opened my mouth and my tongue crimped-it was a definite physical sensation. The next second, a beautiful foreign-sounding language poured from my mouth.

I was afraid if I stopped, it would go away. Finally, I thought, I'd better write down the last word till I catch my breath so I'll know where to start! But in my mind I heard: "You don't have to do that. It's yours to keep."

The baptism in the Holy Spirit didn't make me a better Christian than anyone else. It made me a better me. It opened Scriptures to me in a new way. It made God's presence more real. It certified that my being born again was not an experience but an actual fact.

Pat Boone

Entertainer, Los Angeles, California

I gave my life to Christ when I was 13, but it wasn't until I was much older that I came to see my need for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. At the time, I was a successful performer facing an immense financial problem, which I brought in lawyers and financial experts to help me resolve. But ultimately I came to the conclusion that only God was going to solve the problem. And I knew I couldn't expect Him to solve it unless I belonged totally to Him.

So I found myself searching for a closeness to my Father-with a willingness to surrender completely. In January of 1969, I decided that the gift of the Holy Spirit could be for me-if I was willing to claim it. That evening I went over to the home of George Otis, a businessman and friend. I had determined that above everything else, I

wanted the Lord in control of my life.

George read to me what the Bible has to say about God, the Holy Spirit, and how a man can meet Him through faith. We talked about Peter and how he responded when he saw Jesus walking to him on the water in Matthew 14. Peter wanted to go to Jesus; but to get there he needed the "gift" of being able to walk on the water, and Peter asked Jesus for it.

Peter didn't wait for some overwhelming power to pick him up and take him to Jesus' side. He knew he had to throw his legs over the side of the boat and step out on the waves. I believed this thrilling story; and right then I wanted, just like Peter, to go to Jesus. I knew I had the promise-but faith had to take over.

The moment had come. George and I raised our arms to God, and I prayed. "O Father, this is it-I give up. I yield my life to You. Please take it, Lord, and make of it whatever You want to. Forgive me of every sin, wash me clean; and Jesus, oh, precious Jesus, be my Baptizer. Baptize me right now in Your Spirit, the Spirit of the living God."

When I prayed I sensed the Lord's presence in a remarkable way. I began by simply offering my voice to Jesus and supporting a tone. As I did, a beautiful melody came out, and words began to float in on the melody! It was such a graceful and beautiful thing that I hardly recognized the voice as mine.

I had a deep sense of knowing that I was singing a new song to

God. Since then I have praised the Lord in a prayer language as well.

The result of my baptism in the Holy Spirit-and my wife's-was complete transformation in our family. Shirley and I fell in love all over again: with each other and with our four children. Soon, our four daughters had received the gift of the Holy Spirit as well.

God also resolved the huge financial issue we were facing and opened many doors of opportunity for me, both to further my career and to share the gospel. He is truly an awesome God!

Cece Winans

Gospel Recording Artist, Brentwood, Tennessee

I was about 9 years old when I received the Holy Spirit-and at 40 I am still on fire and in love with the Lord! Though I am a Grammy-winning vocalist today, my walk in life has not been easy. I grew up with nine siblings, and the good things of my life haven't been served to me on a silver platter.

But early on, God became a cornerstone from which I would build my life. His Word clearly marked my steps. I was captured by the Holy Spirit at the altar of my grandfather's small Detroit Church of God in Christ. I was kneeling, surrounded by other children and older saints.

I was always at the altar doing what was called at that time "tarrying for the Holy Spirit." At that moment, I remember a wonderful feeling coming over me, the eminent covering of God's presence. It was awesome to me then and still is. I

recall being overcome with an overwhelming sense of peace and safety that permeated my spirit.

No particular physical or supernatural manifestation marked the moment. Speaking in tongues came later.

After that experience I really, really loved God and knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life pleasing Him. I believe my parents had a tremendous amount to do with that moment-and all the other moments when God really touched my life-because they kept me in the right spiritual atmosphere.

I believe that I was called to be who I am in God from my mother's womb. I am intensely aware of how God has used me and continues to use me to bring others closer to Him. God has allowed my light to shine in so many places to so many people, and they are able to see Him in my personal and professional life.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit has helped me to be more consistent in my relationship with God, and I know it is because I allow the Holy Spirit to do His job. It really is simple for me, in that I realize without God and the Holy Spirit, I can do nothing, but with Him all things are possible. I know that the intimacy I experience with Jesus would not be what it is if the Holy Spirit had not come into my life.

I want you to know the Holy Spirit will keep you close to God if you allow Him to. The Holy Spirit is indeed a Comforter and all the things the Word of God says He is. With the Holy Spirit in your heart, you will never be alone or without hope or strength.

The older saints in church used to say: "He's a keeper! And He will keep you!" If you want the Holy Spirit you can have Him- if you believe!

Marilyn Hickey

International Bible Teacher, Denver Colorado

I have been a Spirit-filled believer for 50 years. I was raised a Methodist-in fact, quite a liberal Methodist. When my father was committed to a mental institution, my mother really pressed into Christ and became a Spirit-filled believer. She began praying for my brother and me, as we both were turned off by the Spirit-filled church.

During this time I met Wally, my husband to be. Wally had just been Spirit-filled. We dated, but he wouldn't take me anywhere except to church or out for dinner. He wouldn't take me dancing or to movies. He had such a hunger for God-he always wanted to be in church.

I did not care for his Spirit-filled church. The people clapped their hands, cried and spoke in tongues. I was very offended by it all.

One night, Wally told me he was fasting for me. He said he had served the devil with all his heart and that now he was going to serve God with all his heart. He felt I was not a committed believer. He knew I was born again but that I wasn't interested in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. God had told Wally he had to put Jesus first in his life and I would have to be second.

I was quite offended by this, but that night God started to

deal with me. I couldn't sleep, but I continued to resist God. For three nights I didn't sleep while God dealt with my heart.

Finally the Lord said to me: "I have dealt with you for four years for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If you do not yield to Me now, I will never deal with you about this matter again. You are born again and you belong to Me, and I'm going to show you what your decision will do if you turn down the baptism in the Holy Spirit this time.

"You will never marry Wallace Hickey. You will move to California, get your master's degree, be a good schoolteacher, marry, have a good life, and when you die you'll go to heaven. But if you choose to be Spiritfilled, then I have something so wonderful for you it is beyond your imagination."

When God spoke to me like that, it broke me into a thousand pieces. I simply said: "Lord, if I never marry Wallace Hickey, I want more of You. I commit myself to be baptized in the Holy Spirit."

The next night the Spirit-filled church in our city was having an all-night prayer meeting. I called Wally and said I wanted to go. I prayed that night to be Spirit-filled, but I wasn't until three days later.

My life dramatically changed. I was a very shy believer, but I became very bold. It wasn't long before Wally and I were engaged. Today, I cannot tell you all the ways the Holy Spirit has brought His power into my life. How could I ever get enough of Him?

Ted Haggard

President, National Association of Evangelicals,

Colorado Springs, Colorado

I became a Christian in high school, and for several years—even well after I started attending Oral Roberts University (ORU)—I thought some of the charismatic theology on the Holy Spirit was half-baked at best. I wanted little to do with it.

I was perfectly happy with my Christian walk. I had a fantastic prayer life. I read my Bible every day. I was part of a great Christian community and had plenty of opportunities to do ministry.

I was a dispensationalist with a strong understanding of cessationist theology. I won debates on the subject of spiritual gifts, and I knew character, obedience and integrity were more important than edgy, charismatic experiences.

Then, during my private Bible study, I found a hole in my theology. It began in John 20:22, when Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

I realized that at that point in their walk with the Lord the disciples were just like me. They knew Christ and saw manifestations of God’s power in their lives.

I also saw, in the next book of the Bible, Jesus telling this very same group He had breathed on to wait in Jerusalem for the gift their Father had for them (see Acts 1:4-5). Then Jesus labeled the gift. He said, “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy

Spirit'" (NIV).

I realized there are two separate, distinct experiences with the Holy Spirit.

Then one night at ORU, a friend named Tom came to my room determined to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. I had a tape on the subject, so I offered to listen to it with him.

We went out to my car and popped in the tape. For the next hour, I prayed silently for Tom. I was afraid of what would happen if he started taking this stuff seriously.

While Tom sat listening intently and preparing himself to receive the Holy Spirit, I prayed God would protect him from spiritual chicanery.

After their sermon, the speakers prayed for everyone listening to receive. Tom opened his hands to God and prayed along.

While he said: "Please, God, I want it. I want more of You," I silently prayed: "Please, God, protect Tom! Don't let him think he can pray in tongues!"

Nothing happened to Tom, but suddenly I started praying in tongues! I was being baptized in the Holy Spirit!

It was the most surprising, exhilarating experience, but I embraced it. Tom did, too. A few hours later he was baptized,

and together we prayed in the Spirit
all night.

Now, more than 20 years later, I still love praying as we did
that night.