

We Were Born to Burn in a Baptism of Fire, So Let's Tend to the Flame

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 a picture of the flow of the Holy Spirit in your life," He answered.

It was not an encouraging visual. 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 valve 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 to Me. 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 the limitations I had placed on how He could use me.

I had told Him I didn't want to be in front of crowds because I wasn't a good speaker. I had told Him I didn't want to address certain issues or go certain places. I had placed so many conditions on my obedience.

After a while I began to see something else in my spirit. It was a huge crowd of Africans, 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" (Isa. 6:8b). 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 it could reach thousands.

We Need More Oil

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, gasoline fell to record low prices. I paid \$ a gallon in my home state of

Georgia. Some states reported prices below a dollar a gallon.

There were two reasons for the dramatic price drop: Not as many people were buying gasoline because of the pandemic, and Russia and Saudi Arabia were engaged in a price war, causing the oil supply to swing up. Market analysts said they'd never seen such a glut of oil on the market.

As I pondered this situation, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and said: "Now is the time to fill up." I knew He wasn't talking about my car's gas tank. Sometimes there are things in the natural world that send spiritual messages.

Jesus talked about the importance of having enough oil. The five wise virgins in His parable in Matthew 25 made sure they had enough oil for their lamps, while the five foolish ones weren't prepared. They were locked out of the wedding feast because they didn't consider oil an essential commodity.

This same is true today during this strange international crisis. God wants us to be ready for what's coming. We need more of the Holy Spirit's oil.

We've been much like the foolish virgins. The oil of the Holy Spirit hasn't been important to us. We can take it or leave it. We don't think we need God's supernatural power because we have technology, comfortable church buildings, economic prosperity, eloquent preachers and slick contemporary worship.

We figured out a way to do church without God's help. We even have books and church growth gurus to teach us how to manufacture a cool vibe, entertain people for 60 minutes and get them out quickly. Revivalist A.W. Tozer said it this way: "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference."

Many churches today are devoid of the Holy Spirit's raw power. Conversions are rare. Baptismal tanks are dry. Altars are

empty. We don't hear many testimonies of healings. And how long has it been since someone was freed from a demon? Our processed version of Christianity doesn't resemble the book of Acts.

This must change. What if God wants to send a global awakening of the Holy Spirit after this coronavirus pandemic ends? Do we have enough oil in our lamps to handle the next revival?

Dependence on the Holy Spirit was the early church's secret. The Spirit anointed the first disciples to heal the sick, discern evil spirits and carry the gospel boldly to difficult places. How did we ever think we could do ministry without that power?

When Paul went to Ephesus, he met some men who believed in Jesus in an intellectual way, yet they had never been born again. In fact they didn't know there was a Holy Spirit (see Acts. 19:1-7). This reminds me of many American churches. We go through the motions of church, but we are clueless about Pentecost.

Many of us have a habit of asking for more of God's power and anointing. We love to go to the altar for a touch from God. We love the goosebumps, the shaking and 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 and not giving it away. Our charismatic experience has become inward and selfish. We fall on the floor and vibrate; then we get up and live like we want to.

But Pentecost is not a party. It's not about us. 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.

Lord, Send a Fresh Pentecost

On Feb. 17, 1967, more than 54 years ago, a miracle happened near Pittsburgh that the world has largely ignored. It happened at a small Catholic retreat center called The Ark and the Dove, where a group of students from Duquesne University had gathered for a weekend of prayer. Suddenly and without any warning, those students were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Patti Gallagher Mansfield, one of the first students to experience this outpouring of the Spirit, says she knew something remarkable and otherworldly had happened.

“Within the next hour, God sovereignly drew many of the students into the chapel,” she writes. “Some were laughing, others crying. Some prayed in tongues, others like me felt a burning sensation coursing through their hands.”

Gallagher had prayed a simple prayer prior to experiencing her personal Pentecost. She prayed, “Father, I give my life to You. Whatever You ask of me, I accept. And if it means suffering, I accept that too. Just teach me to follow Jesus and to love as He loves.”

The world was in turmoil in February 1967. Israel was on the verge of war with Palestinians. Racial tensions in the United States were triggering violence. Young protesters were demanding an end to the Vietnam War.

Few people noticed what happened to those students at Duquesne, but the fire that fell on them spread quickly to other campuses. Within a year, the Catholic charismatic movement spread to millions—and it jumped the theological firewall to touch Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and believers from all denominations.

It became the largest Christian movement since the Protestant reformation. Today, 70% of all Christians in Latin America are part of the neo-Pentecostal movement. Similar growth has occurred in Africa and parts of Asia.

The wave of supernatural renewal that swept across the United States in 1967 continues today. The Holy Spirit has not withdrawn from us. He longs to fill us, refresh us and empower us in this new season. But if you want to experience your own Pentecost, you must surrender as Gallagher did. You must want more of God.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His disciples to stay in spiritual lockdown. He said in Luke 24:49 (NASB): "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

The disciples didn't know what they were waiting for. They had no idea what "clothed with power" meant. Jesus didn't give them a church bulletin with specific times, and He didn't warn them that they might experience wind, fire or strange languages. All He told them was "Stay put."

I imagine some of the more impetuous disciples were eager to venture out and tell others about Jesus, since they had seen Him after His Resurrection. But they obeyed the Lord. They went to the upper room in Jerusalem, and there they were "continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14a, NASB 1995).

And the waiting paid off. Several days later, the promised power arrived. Suddenly, the heavens opened. Just as Elijah left his mantle for Elisha, the glorious mantle of Jesus came upon His followers. Every person in the upper room was filled with the Holy Spirit, and they were transformed into blazing spiritual torches. Before the day ended, 3,000 people believed in Jesus and were baptized.

This is the message of Pentecost. Prayer comes first, then power.

Our tendency is to run ahead of God. We like shortcuts. Or we arrogantly assume we can do a better job with our money, education and technological savvy. Yet the truth is that many American churches are just spinning their expensive religious wheels. We are very busy, but we are ineffective.

British missionary C.T. Studd, who lived from 1860-1931, saw this tendency years ago. He wrote: "How little chance the Holy Ghost has nowadays. The churches and missionary societies have so bound Him in red tape that they practically ask Him to sit in a corner while they do the work themselves."

I intend to pursue a personal Pentecost during the month of May, and I invite you to join me. I will soak in the book of Acts during those days, and I will squeeze every drop of revelation possible out of those 28 chapters. I'll read the first chapter on May 1, the second chapter on May 2, and so on.

(If you'd like, you can also follow along in my 28-day study of the book of Acts on the YouVersion Bible app. Just download the app and search for "Rekindle the Flame.")

I will also pray for a rekindling of the Holy Spirit's flame in my life and in the global church. We are in desperate need of fresh fire today. The church is sick with hidden sin and weak with moral compromise. We have left our first love. Could it be that God is giving us this special "time out" to prepare us for the coming harvest?

Do you have the fire of Pentecost? The apostle Paul tells us that all Christians should have a spiritual temperature that reaches the boiling point. In Romans 12:11 he commands us to be "fervent in spirit." The Greek word for "fervent" is *zeo*, which means "to boil like hot liquid or to glow like hot metal." I challenge you to use this extra time to examine your

heart in these areas:

- Am I fully surrendered to God in all areas? Is Jesus truly my Lord?
- Have I allowed the things of the world to steal my passion for Jesus?
- Do I need to repent of any hidden sins or unhealthy habits?
- Is spending time with the Lord a priority, or have other things become more important?
- Am I using my spiritual gifts to serve others?

Am I bold enough to share Jesus with others? Or am I ashamed of my faith?

Have I fully surrendered so the Holy Spirit's oil can flow through me in fullest measure? Or have I blocked the flow of that oil with my own selfishness?

If you are willing to take this risky journey, please join me as we pursue a fresh Pentecost. You can say this prayer as you begin:

"Lord, please set my heart ablaze. Send a fresh wave of the Holy Spirit to my church, my city and my nation. We need another earth-shaking revival like the great awakenings of past generations. Do it again, Lord. Let the book of Acts be repeated in my lifetime. Unleash the full force of Pentecost, and let me be a part of it. I don't want to be a spectator in this movement. I want to be in the very middle of it! Let me heart burn with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and let me carry that fire everywhere You send me."

READ MORE: Fire up with the power of Pentecost at .

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