

STRANG REPORT: Claim the Gift of Pentecost

Editor's Note: Although Pentecost 2024 has passed, the need for the Holy Spirit's power has not. Enjoy this column from Charisma CEO and bestselling author Stephen Strang.

Pentecost Sunday falls on May 19 this year. It is a time for action, and also reflection on how Pentecost is uniquely central to Spirit-led living.

In the late 1800s a Holiness movement began, emphasizing purity, zeal and devotion to Christ. People began praying for a new baptism in the Holy Spirit. At Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, a handful of students of a Holiness preacher named Charles Parham prayed on New Year's Eve 1900 to receive this baptism in the Holy Spirit. First, a young woman named Agnes Ozman began to speak in an unknown tongue. Soon other students did. When Parham heard this, he believed it confirmed his theory of tongues being the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Parham began going around the country preaching about Spirit baptism, and in the summer of 1905 he took his teaching to Houston where a young Black preacher named William Seymour heard the message and believed. Seymour began leading prayer meetings at 216 Bonnie Brae Street in Los Angeles that attracted so many people the house's foundation collapsed. The group was forced to move to a vacant former livery stable at 312 Azusa Street, from which one of the great revivals of the 20th century got its name.

Someone prophesied that what happened at the Bonnie Brae meetings would go around the world, and it has. These events marked the birth of the Pentecostal movement, which has become one of the fastest-growing religious movements in history.

Sadly, because many Christians in that era believed the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit died with the apostles in the first century, they weren't open to this new outpouring. (This is called "cessationism.") So, when the baptism of the Holy Spirit was poured out at Azusa Street, Christians struggled to know what to call it. Most settled on the term "Pentecostal," referring to the day of Pentecost and the Greek word for 50 days after Easter.

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Years ago, a friend told me he believed people flocked to Benny Hinn's healing crusades because they knew they'd see miracles and feel an anointing they rarely, if ever, experienced in their own churches. This is what people long for. We want to feel and experience God's presence. It's something beyond words, and it's why some people shake or fall or exhibit other behaviors as they are overcome with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It's also why in the book of Acts the believers were thought to be drunk on the day of Pentecost.

But how does the average believer grasp that Pentecost power for themselves and put it to work in their life for the glory of God and the building of His kingdom?

Billy Wilson, the current president of Oral Roberts University, once told me the three things he believes need to happen for the church to move into a moment of acceleration, to be energized by the baptism of the Holy Spirit and see revival take root and spread around the world:

1. Listen to the voice of God.
2. Be willing to say yes to the difficult task.
3. Be led by the Holy Spirit to be a witness in your community.

This is the importance of Pentecost Sunday. It is also why Pentecost Sunday should be considered along with Christmas and Easter as the foundational days in Christian faith.

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Pentecost Sunday commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and followers of Jesus. For me, the power of Pentecost Sunday serves as a reminder of divine empowerment, spiritual renewal and a call to mission. I believe that through the Holy Spirit, I receive God's power, guidance and wisdom to live out my faith.

The universal mission of the church is held in Pentecost. Just as the disciples were commissioned to be witnesses of Christ "to the ends of the earth," I am called to share the message of salvation with others as we have done in "Charisma" since 1975. The power of Pentecost equips me with boldness and love to engage the people and places around me, to extend the kingdom of God on earth.

I hope that on this Pentecost Sunday 2024, you will join me and the "Charisma" magazine family by pressing in to Holy Spirit's presence for your life. Share the Good News of Jesus with friends and family, maybe praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and even asking your restaurant server at lunch after church if there's anything they'd like you to pray about for them. Let's take our gift of Pentecost and honor God by stewarding it every way possible.

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