

# Power for Purpose

“You will receive power ... and ... be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8, NASB).

By Randy Hurst

In my Pentecostal upbringing, I really wanted the Holy Spirit baptism, but didn't receive it for seven years. It wasn't until I reached a point of desperation for what only the Spirit could provide that I finally received. For all those years I wanted the Holy Spirit baptism for the wrong reason. I wanted it simply so I could say I had it. For the most part, the purpose of this wonderful blessing escaped me. I wrongly viewed the Baptism as a point of arrival instead of what it is — a point of entrance into a life of Spirit-empowered witness for Christ.

## Jesus' promise

Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus promised His disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”<sup>1</sup>

The last of Jesus' words recorded by Luke are these: “That repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 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.”<sup>2</sup>

It would seem that a task so great, proclaiming Christ's message to all the nations, should commence immediately. But Jesus told the disciples to wait in the city to be “clothed with power from on high.”

Remember the American Express commercial? A person is on a trip away from home without the necessary resources and is advised, “Don't leave home without it!” Jesus was telling His disciples essentially the same thing — that they should not begin their mission without being equipped to accomplish their task.

## **Purpose**

Jesus clearly stated that the essential purpose of the Spirit's empowerment is to be Jesus' witnesses. The Holy Spirit baptism is a promised gift to all believers.<sup>3</sup> But receiving the gift is not a guarantee that the promised power will be used for its intended purpose.

I heard an intriguing fact on the radio: 95 percent of all sport utility vehicles sold in the United States are never taken off the road. Of course, during Minnesota winters, four-wheel drive is a great help in snow and even on city streets. But why would someone need four-wheel drive on the freeways of Southern California? These vehicles were equipped for a purpose for which most are rarely, if ever, used.

I believe this illustrates many people's experience concerning the Holy Spirit baptism. They receive this wonderful gift, yet they don't put it into action or may not even fully understand the purpose for which this equipping power was given.

## **Vocal, vital and valid witness**

Jesus' promise to His followers was that they would be His witnesses wherever they went. Unfortunately, many equate being a witness merely with their speech, or what has come to be termed "witnessing." But effectiveness in reaching the spiritually lost requires a witness beyond words.

The apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Thessalonica: "Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."<sup>4</sup>

Paul's witness was not merely what he said ("not ... in word only"), but also how he said it ("in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction") and who he was ("you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake").

Our witness is comprised of what we say (vocal), how we say it (vital) and who we are (valid).

## **Vocal witness**

Our message is Jesus. It is the Christ-centered message the Spirit will honor and use. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would glorify Him.<sup>5</sup> After the Day of Pentecost, the first Christians boldly and clearly witnessed about Jesus as He promised they would.<sup>6</sup>

In Acts 2, the multitude was amazed because they heard those who had been filled with the Holy Spirit speaking in the languages of the unbelievers who were gathered. When they asked what was happening, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, stood and explained that this was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in the Old Testament concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Then he clearly and boldly preached Jesus Christ, and about 3,000 people were added to the church that day. In Acts 3, Peter and John were going to the temple to pray, and a man lame from birth was healed. Peter again used the opportunity to proclaim Jesus, and about 5,000 believed the message.

In Acts 4, the priests, captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees were so disturbed that they put Peter and John in jail. The next day the rulers, elders, scribes and high priests challenged them: "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke boldly about Jesus: "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."<sup>9</sup>

When the Early Church was born, the message of the believers always focused on the person Jesus Christ. As they boldly and clearly proclaimed Jesus, great numbers believed.

Today this same message — Jesus — must be clearly communicated to the spiritually lost of this world. The life of Jesus Christ is the turning point of all history. The world's calendar is hinged on His birth. He is thought of by many as a teacher, a philosopher, or even a prophet, but every person must be confronted with the reality of who Jesus truly is — the sinless Son of God who gave His life to pay the penalty for our sins. They must be given an adequate witness and opportunity to accept His

offer of forgiveness and everlasting life and personally submit to His lordship.

## **Vital witness**

Our words must have vitality. How we say things communicates as much as what we say. Passion is contagious. It is not necessarily conveyed by volume, but rather through evident sincerity and conviction. To be convincing we must first be convinced. If we're not moved by our message, it's unlikely we will move anyone else.

Our emotions, attitudes and actions are as much a part of our message as our words. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul said, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."<sup>10</sup>

The apostle Peter wrote, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."<sup>11</sup>

Notice that both Paul and Peter emphasize a witness that includes more than mere words. Paul says our speech should "always be with grace." Peter says we should speak "with gentleness and respect."

## **Valid witness**

The validity of our witness is related to the credibility of our lives. Effective witness depends on character. This has always been true. But in a culture that is increasingly skeptical of Christianity, it is even more critical. The content of our message will be greatly hindered if our manner and actions are inconsistent with our words. With many people, especially those we know personally, our own testimony of the difference Christ has made in our lives and its consistent proof through our actions will be what compels them most.

In many countries, Christianity is not a prominent religion. The Christian population is small, and Christian media do not exist. This can offer a great advantage in evangelism, because the first witness unbelievers in those countries receive is from someone they know personally whose life has greatly changed after receiving Christ. They do not have to overcome negative perceptions that come from knowing people who communicate a Christian message but whose lives do not affirm it.

In a society in which people are rapidly losing faith in the integrity of leaders in government and the business world, the personal credibility of Christians is not merely an added blessing in witness, but an essential requirement.

## **Power**

People often think of the Holy Spirit's empowerment only in terms of signs and wonders and spiritual gifts. But the word translated "power" in Acts 1:8 is wonderfully comprehensive. It simply means "ability" and applies in practical ways to everyday life.

The Holy Spirit supplies whatever it takes to help us accomplish what is needed. That is all we really need — whatever it takes. The Holy Spirit enables ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

The Holy Spirit empowers our witness in what we say. As He did for the New Testament Christians after the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit gives us the internal motivation to speak about Jesus, confident in His (the Spirit's) convincing work. The early Christians prayed for that kind of help: "Grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence."<sup>12</sup>

The Holy Spirit also helps us in how we speak — to communicate Christ as Paul did "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."<sup>13</sup>

The Spirit moves us in our witness with a sincere, compelling passion. And the Holy Spirit enables our character to become what God has called us to be as the fruit of the Spirit — the nature of Jesus Christ — becomes evident in our lives.

The power Jesus promised His followers is for every aspect of Christian living, enabling us to do and be whatever our Lord has purposed in our lives. The Holy Spirit baptism opens the way to a life of effective witness for Christ in what we say, how we say it and who we are.

All Scriptures are from the New American Standard Bible [unless otherwise noted].

[1](#) Acts 1:8

[2](#) Luke 24:47-49

[3](#) Acts 2:39

[4](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:5

[5](#) John 16:14

[6](#) Acts 1:8

[7](#) Acts 2:16-18; Joel 2:28,29

[8](#) Acts 4:7

[9](#) Acts 4:12

[10](#) Colossians 4:5,6

[11](#) 1 Peter 3:15,16, NIV

[12](#) Acts 4:29

[13](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:5

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## **Spirit-Filled Living**

By Jeff Brawner

Have you ever felt inadequate as a Christian? Have you struggled to be faithful, to really love people and to share your faith? Have you wondered if you “have what it takes” to love and live for the Lord? If you answered “yes” to any of those questions, you’re a candidate for a Spirit-filled life.

In order to experience the power God wants to give us, we must first recognize that we are inadequate. We don’t have what it takes to be

dedicated, effective followers of the Lord. Even with the best intentions, our own power isn't enough to get the job done.

Thank God we don't have to depend on our own power! God is eager to give us His enabling power. He makes us both faithful and fruitful by empowering us to live a Spirit-filled life.

Romans 10:17 says that faith (our ability to trust and believe) comes by hearing (perceiving and understanding), and that hearing comes by the Word of God. Four essential elements of a Spirit-filled life described in the Word can awaken your faith and lead you into a new level of God-directed living.

## **The promise of a Spirit-filled life**

(Acts 1:4,5; John 16:7)

As His time on earth came to a close, Jesus commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem to be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4,5). This instruction highlights two important principles.

First, it reveals our need. Jesus commanded (not suggested) that His followers wait for power because the greatest danger they faced was not failure to act, but attempting to act in their own strength.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not about the bubbly feelings that accompany a "bonus blessing." It is about our absolute need for divine help in order to live a spiritually effective life. Jesus wanted His followers to grasp the urgency of that truth and recognize their utter dependence on God's enabling power.

Second, it reveals the Holy Spirit's nature. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the "Comforter" or, in Greek, parakletos. That same word was used in other Greek writings to describe a character witness in a trial. In other contexts, it describes a specialist in any field who could supply missing knowledge or insight needed to solve a perplexing problem. It also refers to an encourager who knows exactly what to say or do when a person is suffering physically or emotionally.

Most important, a parakletos isn't a something, but rather someone.

When Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit, he consistently used the pronouns "he" and "him." Paul's benediction at the close of 2 Corinthians includes

the phrase “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” The word “fellowship” was used to describe a traveling companion or a close, trusted associate. In other passages, Paul often mentioned being led or guided by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit isn’t an interpersonal force. He wants to be as real and as personal a part of our daily lives as Jesus was to His disciples. That’s what the Lord had in mind in John 16:7 when He promised that the Spirit would come into the disciples’ lives and continue ministering to them after His departure. As you read the Word, notice the ways Jesus worked and walked with His disciples. That’s exactly the kind of intimate fellowship the Holy Spirit wants to share with us.

### **The purpose of a Spirit-filled life**

(Acts 1:8)

“But you will receive power,” Jesus promised in Acts 1:8, “when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (NIV). The text suggests two purposes for the power (in this context, “divine ability”) the Spirit offers us.

First, we are given the divine ability to be. Notice the cause-and-effect relationship of the phrases “receive power” and “be witnesses.” Being filled with the Spirit does far more than enhance our abilities; it revolutionizes our identity. The very act of being filled with the power and the person of the Holy Spirit as promised by Christ gives us the first-hand experience that is the very definition of the word “witness.” Far more than our words, our very life becomes our testimony to the truth of God’s Word.

Second, we are given the divine ability to do. Behavior is the inevitable consequence of character. In other words, who we are determines what we do. With the new identity the Holy Spirit puts within us comes the power to actually do the will of God and to reflect Him in both our character and our conduct.

Of course, all believers have received the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, as Romans 8:9 tells us, they wouldn’t be believers in the first place. It is the



Holy Spirit who convinces us of our need for salvation through Christ and then makes Christ's work real in our lives. Receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit does not elevate us to some "higher class" of Christianity. We are all forgiven, cleansed and made a part of God's eternal family. But experiencing the promise of the Father makes it possible for the ministry of the Holy Spirit to reach us at a deeper, more intimate level. We become divinely enabled to dynamically reflect the reality of a living, loving God.

### **The precedents of a Spirit-filled life**

(Acts 2:1-4; 8:14-19; 10:44-48; 19:1-7)

The impact made by the first-century believers when the Holy Spirit worked in and through them set a precedent for the way the Holy Spirit wants to work in and through us. In each passage above, two points are evident: (1) All were filled. The fullness of the Holy Spirit isn't for a select few but for every hungry believer. God's plan and promise is for every one of us, not just those who happen to be apostles or leaders. (2) All spoke with tongues (languages) they had never learned, expressing unrestricted praise and prayer.

Again and again in the Early Church, the release of Spirit-enabled prayer and praise was exemplified by speaking in tongues. Tragically, many modern believers have allowed themselves to miss out on this important dimension of the Spirit-filled life, usually because of confusion about doctrine or concern about abuse, whether real or merely perceived. I suspect they would be more interested in discovering what they have been missing if they understood two important biblical facts.

First, the essence of speaking in tongues is prayer and praise. It is not a badge we wear to prove how wonderfully God has blessed us. Instead, it releases within us the kind of Spirit-enabled communion with Christ that Paul described in Romans 8:26 when he said that the "Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." That's what the visitors to Jerusalem witnessed on the Day of Pentecost when they heard the Spirit-filled disciples praising, worshiping and declaring the

wonders of God in their own languages. In contrast, when Peter stood to speak he didn't do it in tongues but in his native Aramaic.

That leads us to the second fact: the expression of speaking in tongues has both a personal purpose and a corporate purpose. More specifically, it is a corporate gift and a personal grace. This clears up the confusion often caused by Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 14:5: "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy ... so that the church may be edified." Not everyone has the ministry of tongues in a church service, but everyone can and should have the manifestation of tongues in his or her personal life with God.

### **The preparations for a Spirit-filled life**

(Acts 1:12-14)

The first way the disciples prepared themselves for the promise of the Holy Spirit was by simply showing up in obedience to Christ's command. If God is going to work powerfully in our lives, we must be available.

A second act of personal preparation is illustrated in Acts 1:14: "They all joined together constantly in prayer." This brought the disciples into two different "alignments" that set them on course toward becoming empowered partners of the Holy Spirit. First, they needed oneness with God. Prayer is essential to spiritual alignment. It is impossible without a heart that is surrendered to God and forgiven. Second, they needed oneness with each other. Prayer plays a vital part in relational alignment. Genuine reconciled relationships allow the release of God in and through their lives.

### **The perpetuation of the Spirit-filled life**

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul told us to keep being filled up with the Holy Spirit. The baptism in the Holy Spirit was never intended to be a one-time experience. Rather, as we continue to seek and surrender to the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, the result is an ongoing life of released power and realized potential.

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## **Receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

By Scott R. Erickson

## **These five biblical principles will help those seeking the Holy Spirit baptism:**

**1.** The seeker should be spiritually prepared. Acts 2:38,39 says: “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” (NIV). We are spiritually prepared for the Baptism if we are born again. This promise from God was not just for the Day of Pentecost, but for everyone thereafter who would believe. The spiritual birthright of every Christian is to seek, expect and experience the same baptism in the Holy Spirit that was promised and given to the New Testament Christians.

**2.** The seeker should realize that the Holy Spirit has already been given. The disciples were initially commanded to wait in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4) before beginning their ministry. This was the beginning of the Holy Spirit’s new relationship with believers. Once the Holy Spirit had been poured out in the Upper Room, believers no longer needed to wait in the same way for this fullness. The Book of Acts records after the Upper Room narrative four times when people were filled immediately by the Spirit of the Lord, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues either explicitly stated or implied by the context (Acts 8:14-19; 9:17; 10:44-48; 19:1-7).

**3.** The seeker should be aware that the Holy Spirit is received by faith. Several instances in the New Testament remind us that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a gift. All of us have received gifts from loved ones, parents or individuals who wanted to show us kindness. Gifts are something we don’t earn; we simply accept them and acknowledge the kindness of the giver. Galatians 3:14 says, “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus

Christ, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” Faith is the means through which we receive the gift.

**4.** Seekers should know that the Holy Spirit enables, but the believer does the speaking. In every instance in the New Testament where people received the gift of the Holy Spirit, they were the ones who spoke in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. The Holy Spirit does not control a person like a puppet. We find this clearly in Acts 2:4: “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” He “enabled,” He did not coerce.

**5.** Seekers should not fear that they will fall prey to a counterfeit experience. The Word of God teaches that God gives only good gifts to His children. “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 11:13). God will not allow another spirit to interfere with His sincerely seeking child.

Not everyone receives the Baptism immediately. Even the disciples waited in the Upper Room for 10 days before being baptized in the Spirit. Waiting is not cause to give up. Remember, the Baptism is promised to every believer. Many believers are baptized soon after leaving an altar where they had sought the Baptism. They may be at home or going about their business the next day. The key to receiving the Baptism is to continue to seek it in faith. God’s desire and promise is to baptize each believer with the Holy Spirit.