

1. Who Is the Holy Spirit? Be Filled With The Holy Spirit

An old American Indian legend tells of an Indian who came down from the mountains and saw the ocean for the first time. Awed by the scene, he requested a quart jar. As he waded into the sea and filled the jar, he was asked what he intended to do with it. “Back in the mountains,” he replied, “my people have never seen the Great Water. I will carry this jar to them so they can see what it is like.” Billy Graham told this story when teaching about the Holy Spirit. He stated: “Attempting to write a book on so vast a subject as the Holy Spirit is like trying to capture the ocean in a quart jar. The subject is so infinite – and our minds so finite.”¹

When approaching the subject of the Holy Spirit, I am aware that we are dipping our toes into a vast ocean! By reading this study, I hope God may inspire you to ask Him for a more profound experience and relationship with the Holy Spirit. There are many different approaches to this topic among churches worldwide. Some denominations emphasize the Word of God and minimize the importance of the Holy Spirit, while others emphasize the work of the Spirit over the Word of God. The truth is that the Holy Spirit is bigger than our differences. He is not limited by our theology and is promised to every believer, so we must understand what He desires to do in our lives and welcome Him wholeheartedly.

The Lord Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, “**He blows where He will**” (John 3:8). The writer C.S. Lewis described the lion Aslan, his central character in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, with the following words: “He isn't safe, but He's good.” Since Aslan represents Jesus in the story, it is commonly assumed that this description refers to Jesus. I think that these words apply to all members of the Trinity, and especially to the Holy Spirit. He isn't safe, but you can trust Him because He is good.² We cannot predict what He will do, but we know that the Spirit is faithful in revealing God’s purposes. He promised us His presence and will work His purpose through us.

Some older English translations speak of the Holy Spirit as the “Holy Ghost,” and for some, this can seem a little frightening. The terms Holy “Ghost” and Holy “Spirit” are complete synonyms; one derives from the Old (Saxon) English “*gaist*,” and the other from the Latin “*spiritus*.” Like the Latin word “*pneuma*,” they both refer to breath or wind and speak of the animating power of God. Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot know the life of God.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. (Romans 8:16).

It is helpful to note that the Holy Spirit is not a “ghost” but a *Person* with attributes! He has all the characteristics of personhood. Let’s look at some of the Scriptures that speak of His personhood:

The Holy Spirit speaks: “**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches**” (Revelation 2:7).

¹ Billy Graham. *The Holy Spirit*, W Publishing Group, 1978, p. vii.

² R. T. Kendall. *Holy Fire*. Charisma House, 2014, p. xxxiv.

The Holy Spirit leads: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

The Spirit comforts: “He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

The Spirit guides: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:13).

The Spirit can be grieved: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).

The Holy Spirit is sometimes described as the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9) or the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7). He is how Jesus is present with His people.

What is He like? In the original Greek language of the New Testament, He is described by Jesus as the *Parakletos*, translated into English as the *Helper* in the following passage:

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever (John 14:16).

The word *parakletos* can be translated as “one called alongside,” i.e., a counselor, a comforter, and an encourager. Jesus said the Father would give us “another” counselor. The word for “another” means “of the same kind.” Another way of saying it is that the Holy Spirit is just like Jesus! We can relate to the Holy Spirit in the same way as we relate to Jesus. The only difference is that Jesus is not with us in bodily form now. We learn to connect with God differently, through our faith and in a spiritual sense. God is preparing us for eternity from the day we are born from above.

He Was Involved in Creation

We see evidence of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the opening verses of the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the “waters” (Genesis 1:1-2). When God created man, He “formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). The Hebrew word implied here for breath is *Ruach*, which is also the word for “Spirit.” The *Ruach* of God brings physical life to man formed from dust. Likewise, He brings spiritual life to people and churches, both of which can be as dry as dust!

He Came on Particular People at Particular Times for Particular Tasks

Something happens when the Spirit of God comes upon people. He does not just bring a nice warm feeling. He comes for a purpose, and we see examples of this in the Old Testament.

Bezalel, the Artist. The Holy Spirit filled people for artistic work as in the life of Bezalel, who was used to design and create the furniture of the Tabernacle of Moses: “with skill, ability, and

knowledge in all kinds of crafts-to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship” (Exodus 31:3-5). It is possible to be a talented musician, writer, or artist without being filled with the Spirit. However, their work often takes on a new dimension when the Spirit of God fills people for these tasks. His presence has a different effect on people. There is a far more significant spiritual impact when the Spirit of God is touching us, and His wind is filling our sails, so to speak, and energizing our efforts. This can be true even where the natural ability of a musician or artist is not particularly outstanding. The Holy Spirit can touch hearts and change lives completely. No doubt, something like this happened in and through Bezalel.

In leadership, God often uses those who feel weak, inadequate, and ill-equipped. When they are filled with the Spirit, they become outstanding leaders. A notable example of this was Reverend E. J. H. “Bash” Nash. As a nineteen-year-old clerk in an insurance office, he came to faith in Christ and was a man full of the Spirit of God. It was written about him that there was nothing particularly impressive about him...He was neither athletic nor adventurous. He claimed no academic prowess or artistic talent. Yet John Stott (whom he led to Christ) said of him: "Nondescript in outward appearance, his heart was ablaze with Christ." The obituary in the national and the church press summed up his life like this:

Bash was a quiet, unassuming clergyman who never made the limelight, hit the headlines, or wanted preferment. Yet, his influence within the Church of England during the last 50 years was probably greater than almost any of his contemporaries. There must be hundreds of men today, many in positions of responsibility, who thank God for him, for it was through his ministry that they were led to a Christian commitment.

Those who knew him well and worked with him never expect to see his like again, for rarely can anyone mean so much to so many as this quietly spoken, modest, and deeply spiritual man.³

This man, E.G.H. Nash, may not be famous here on earth, but God knows him. This type of testimony inspires us to want to be as effective as we can be for Christ, for it is the same Spirit who works in all of us, regardless of our abilities. God can use us as He wills through the power of His Spirit.

What examples come to mind of ordinary people becoming extraordinary due to the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives?

Throughout the Scriptures, we see the Holy Spirit filling people and giving them strength, leadership gifting, and power. God significantly used *ordinary* people when the Holy Spirit came upon them. For instance, we can think of Samson, the Strong Man. On one occasion, the Philistines tied him up by binding him with ropes. Then, “The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands” (Judges 15:14). When the Philistines turned to the charms of Delilah to overcome him, Sampson finally gave in to her and confessed that His Nazarite vow of long hair was the source of his anointing.

³Nicky Gumbel. *Questions of Life*. Kingsway Publishing, Eastbourne, England, 1993, p. 131.

Delilah then had his hair cut while he was sleeping. When she brought in the Philistines to capture him, he thought that he would shake off the bonds of the Philistines, but the Holy Spirit had withdrawn His presence. Then, she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him" (Judges 16:20). Without the Spirit of God, we can do little that has real eternal value (John 15:5).

Let's think of Isaiah, the prophet. We see how the Spirit of God came upon the prophet Isaiah and used him to prophesy about the coming of the Messiah, "to preach good news to the poor...to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners and to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:1-2). The coming of the Holy Spirit of God to a person or a church can set people free from anything that binds them and deliver them from the powers of darkness.

The Father Promised the Spirit's Coming.

Under the New Covenant, the law would be internal rather than external. God spoke through the prophet Joel:

I will pour out my Spirit on all people, your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

John the Baptist Linked the Holy Spirit with Jesus

Life is like a hard, dry sponge being dropped into the water without an infilling with the Holy Spirit. We need to be dipped and submerged into the character of Christ, and the only One who can do that is the Holy Spirit. When the Jewish leadership asked John the Baptist whether he was the Christ, he replied: "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16).

Jesus was a man filled with the Spirit of God, but also God coming in the form of man. In his humanity, He modeled to us His need for the Holy Spirit to do the work of His Father. The Spirit of God descended on Jesus in bodily form at His baptism by John the Baptist (Luke 3:22). The Scriptures tell us that He was "full of the Holy Spirit" before being "led by the Spirit into the desert" (Luke 4:1), where Satan tempted Him. After the temptation, Christ returned to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" (v. 14). In a synagogue in Nazareth, Christ read the lesson from Isaiah 61:1, quoting the prophet Isaiah's writing that we mentioned earlier, "the Spirit of the Lord is on me." Jesus read the passage before saying, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Jesus Predicted the Holy Spirit's Presence to Come to God's People

At the Feast of Tabernacles, thousands of Jews would come to Jerusalem to celebrate how God kept them and provided for them in the forty years of wandering after they went out of Egypt. On

the last day of the feast, they remembered the time when Moses brought forth water from a rock for the thirsty nation. They thanked God for His provision of water in the past year and prayed that He would do the same in the coming year. The Jewish people looked forward to a time when water would pour out of the temple as a river (as prophesied by Ezekiel 47), becoming deeper and deeper and bringing life, fruitfulness, and healing wherever it went.

On the last day of the feast, Jesus stood up and proclaimed that He is the living water. He said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart (the original word means *belly* or innermost being) shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38, Revised Standard Version). Jesus was saying that the promises of Ezekiel and other prophets would not be fulfilled in a physical place, such as the temple, but in a person—the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Rock of Israel that pours forth water for the nation (Exodus 17:6). The Holy Spirit was poured out after the Rock (a picture of Christ) was struck, speaking of His crucifixion.

John the Apostle explained that Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit “whom those who believed in him were later to receive” (John 7:39). He added that “up to that time the Spirit had not been given” (v. 39). The promise of the Holy Spirit was not fulfilled until the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Passover. Jesus told His disciples, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from high” (Luke 24:49).

The promise by God that He would send the Holy Spirit was so that God's people might have power from on high. Just before Christ ascended to heaven, He again promised, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts. 1:8). However, they still had to wait and pray for another ten days. Then, on the fiftieth day after Passover, on the Day of Pentecost: “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” (Acts 2:2-4).

The Spirit brings conviction of sin to those who do not know God. When the Apostle Peter preached to the Jews, the presence of the Spirit cut them to the heart on their need to repent, believe the Gospel, and be baptized to receive forgiveness for sin. Peter then promised that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He said: “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39).

We now live in the age of the Holy Spirit. The promise of the Father has been fulfilled. Every true believer in Christ receives the Promised One of the Father, the Holy Spirit. He is no longer given just to particular people, particular times, or particular tasks; the Holy Spirit is given to *all* Christians, including you and me.

You may wonder what it takes to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We need to be thirsty, ask God for His direction in our lives, and respond to His conviction when He shows us our sins. We need His filling not just once but continually.

Although Jesus promised He would never leave us or forsake us, we can limit the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives if we are insensitive to Him through disobedience. Our willingness and desire to live in harmony with the Spirit will keep us in step with the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Father, we need the infilling and power of Your Holy Spirit. Put a strong desire in our hearts, a thirst for the Holy Spirit of God, that you might use us in the days in which we live. Amen!

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