

God's Power for God's Purpose (in You and Me)
Acts 2:1-12, Ephesians 5:18

Robert Louis Stevenson, when about 6 years old, was standing at his window one night watching a lamplighter at work. One by one, the man would light the streetlamps as he walked down the road. Young Stevenson watched with fascination. His nurse asked what he was doing. The boy answered: I'm watching a man make holes in the darkness.

We need holes in the darkness today, don't we? What darkness has lingered in your life? In the lives of those around you? Where do you most need the light to break through? Where do you need the touch of the Spirit of God today?

The light we need is available to us. In fact, every believer already possesses all the power and help of God. What the Holy Spirit did for the first Christians, he is waiting to do for us. The Spirit came upon them in that upper room where they were gathered; my prayer is that our hearts would be such a dwelling place today.

Receive God's Spirit (vs. 1-4)

Here's the situation. Jesus' followers number around 120, in a hostile world of more than 25 million. The very people who executed Jesus are now the enemies of his followers. What they did to him, they stand ready to do to them. Yet Jesus has charged them with reaching that massive hostile world. Nearly 1/3 of our world confesses to follow Jesus. .0006% of their world did.

If we were in their shoes, we'd be doing something. We'd organize strategies, start ministries, plan programs, do all we could. [P] They knew better.

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all in one place" (v. 1). Pentecost was the 50th day after the Passover Sabbath. Jews from around the world were crowded into Jerusalem for this religious holiday.

Meanwhile, Jesus' church was crowded into a single room – about 20 in number. Why? Earlier, Jesus had assured them that when he left, his Father would send another Counselor to them, the Holy Spirit. Then he promised them, *"I am going to send you*

the one my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Then right before his ascension, their Master told them one last time to wait in Jerusalem for the “gift” of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4).

And so they risked their lives to meet in an upper room of a Jerusalem house. Here, they prayed constantly for God’s protection and his Spirit’s power – for 10 long days after Jesus’ ascension until the day of Pentecost came. Despite their differences, and the persecution which threatened their very lives, they prayed with one heart & mind.

And God kept his word. “Suddenly” (immediately, without warning) a sound like the blowing of a “violent” wind came from heaven (v. 2). It filled the house where they were meeting together. Jesus had earlier likened the Spirit to the wind (John 3:8).

Both are more powerful than human strength, able to overwhelm us instantly. Both are unseen but very real. Neither can be predicted. And both are essential to life.

Next “*what seemed to be tongues of fire*” came from heaven, then “*separated and came to rest on each of them*” (v. 3). Fire is a consistent metaphor for the holiness and presence of God. John the Baptist had predicted that Jesus “*would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire*” (Matt. 3:11). The prophet Joel had earlier predicted such an event (2:28), a promise Peter would soon quote as he preached to the gathered nations.

These “tongues of fire” were emblematic of the anointing and empowering of God – a visible sign and seal of God’s promise now realized. And they came to rest “*on each of them*” (Ac. 2:3b), showing that each believer would be equally and similarly empowered by the same Holy Spirit. No clergy/laity distinction here!

Here was the result: “*All of them were **filled** with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them*” (v 4). “Filled” does not refer to a quantifiable experience, but to a yielded & submitted life – one now directed & driven by another – namely, the Spirit of the Living God. (We will encounter this word again in a little bit).

Then each of them “*began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*” This is not a reference to the gift of tongues described by Paul (1 Cor. 12; 14). At Pentecost, all experienced these “tongues”; at Corinth, not all did. At Pentecost, no interpreter was

necessary (“*we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!*” v. 11); at Corinth, tongues were not to be used in public without an interpreter. At Pentecost, the people recognized the “tongues” of the disciples as their own languages; at Corinth, the “tongues” used were not capable of common human understanding (1 Cor. 14:2).

In short, the Holy Spirit enabled the Pentecost believers to witness to their faith in the languages of those who had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast. But the point of the passage is not the disciples’ witnessing in languages they had not previously learned, but *the Spirit* who enabled such ministry. The Pentecost gift was not the many languages, but the one Spirit.

Previously, the Spirit would come “*on*” individuals for specific acts and times of service (judges, prophets). Now, after Jesus’ atoning death and resurrection, the Spirit chooses to dwell “*in*” us. He came into the lives of God’s people at Pentecost, and dwells in us eternally!

The Holy Spirit is the one who enters in and brings life where there was death – He is the one who gives us rebirth, grants us spiritual gifts, calls us into kingdom work, and centers our lives around the glory of Christ. If you have surrendered to the Lordship of Christ, then you have his Spirit. The question is, does his Spirit have you? [P]

Yield to the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He can still do in our lives what he did in his first followers. Do you desire to be used for his kingdom purposes? Ephesians 5:18 is key to accomplishing this work: “*Do not get drunk on wine ... Instead, be **filled** with the Spirit.*” There’s that word again: *filled*. Just as someone drunk with wine is “under the influence,” so a Christian is to be “under the influence” of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we intentionally yield to the Spirit, so that we can be continuously directed and empowered by the Spirit. The first Christians needed this power, and they knew it.

Now, let’s learn how to make the reality of Pentecost our own – God’s power for God’s purpose – personified in you and me.

First, *praise God for His Spirit's work in bringing you from death to life.* It is the Spirit who takes our spiritually dead hearts and brings them back to life, so that we are able to confess with our lips Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead. Just as we have the Son of God to thank for purchasing our salvation, we have the Spirit of God to thank for birthing it in our own lives! And that's not all – once the Holy Spirit makes us new, he moves in; he comes to dwell within you forever.

So I must also ask, have you experienced the newness of life birthed by the Spirit? Have you surrendered to the lordship of Christ, turning from your sin and embracing the forgiveness provided through his death and the new life provided through his resurrection? If you haven't, put your trust in Christ. Pray for the Holy Spirit to enter in and do his life-changing work and to live in you forever.

Second, *admit that you need the Spirit's power.* Not just his presence, but his power. Zech. 4:6 proclaims: “*Not by human might, but by my Spirit' says the Lord Almighty.*” Paul adds, “*The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power*” (1 Cor 4:20).

We cannot change lives without the power of the Spirit at work in us. We can do nothing of eternal significance unless he does it through us. Some of us don't like being dependent on others; we're convinced we can do it ourselves. This step is the hardest for most, but it's essential: we must admit that we need him. We need him as desperately as these first Christians did. Only then will he move in power in our lives.

Third, *be cleansed from all that prevents the Spirit's work.* We are seeking the power of the Holy Spirit, so before asking to be filled, ask to be cleansed. Take a moment for a moral inventory. Write on a sheet of paper anything which is hindering the Spirit's work in your life. If you're not sure, ask him and he'll show you. Confess these sins to God and receive his cleansing.

Last, *ask the Spirit to direct and empower your life.* Will you do this, right now? In prayer, say, “Holy Spirit, thank you for the new life you have created in me. Thank you for making your home in me. I need your power to accomplish your purposes. I

yield my life to you. Cleanse me. Fill me. Transform and direct my mind, my will, my energy and abilities. Work through me so that this world clearly sees Jesus. Amen.”

Then believe that he will. Nowhere does the Bible describe how it “feels” to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Some will feel something unique; others will not. I seldom do. The proof is in the results, not the feeling. So step out in faith, believing that the Spirit has empowered you, for he has.

And do this daily. The literal Greek is, “*Be continually filled.*” Whenever sin corrodes your relationship with him, confess it and claim cleansing. Stay in communion with him throughout the day.

As you do, remember that God empowers us according to his purpose for us. The Holy Spirit never empowered a Christian in the Book of Acts except to make him or her a more effective servant and witness. If we are not willing to live the love of Christ and to share the life of Christ, we will not have the power of the Spirit. If we are, we will. Make this your daily experience.

But this is not merely an individual experience – a “me and the Spirit” thing. No, Christ is the head. We are the body. And the Spirit enlivens us, unites us, and creates something unlike anything else in this world. The coming of the Holy Spirit established a unique fellowship. On Pentecost, 3,000 new believers suddenly shared something that had never been shared before. They knew that their sins had led to Christ’s death. But now, they are forgiven. Now, they have new life. Now, God’s own Spirit has made His home in them.

Suddenly, they are part of a new fellowship where they can share the hard truth about themselves and experience the kind of freedom, healing & restoration that can only come from the Spirit of God. From the coldness of a life focused on self to a passionate life set on fire for Christ. More and more people were attracted to them – to the life they now possessed – to the unique fellowship they shared.

The Church must always be that. We are to be a different people. A place where one can come and drink deeply of the living water that is Jesus Christ – where we are filled with the Spirit and moved by the Spirit to live joyfully and purposefully.

Does God still move? Can we see “Book of Acts miracles” today? Can we make holes in the darkness? With the Holy Spirit in us – carrying the power of God to accomplish the purpose of God – yes we can.