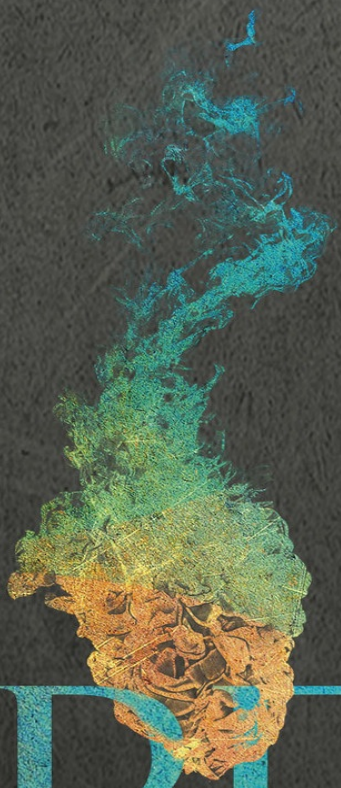


# OPEN TO THE SPIRIT

*God in Us, God with Us, God Transforming Us*

SCOT McKNIGHT

**Praise for**

## *Open to the Spirit*

"Frederick Dale Bruner once called the Holy Spirit the 'shy member of the Trinity.' Scot McKnight draws on his learning and his life to help us know better the One who 'transforms and transcends' mere human abilities."

—JOHN ORTBERG, senior pastor of Menlo Church and author of *I'd Like You More If You Were More Like Me*

"This biblically rooted, honest, and impressively comprehensive account of the person and work of the Spirit should persuade all Christians everywhere of the need for more of the Spirit in our lives. It is exciting to have a book that brings together the Word and the Spirit, making such a persuasive case for the need of both and rooting it all in real life. It is a gift to the whole church."

—Lucy Peppiatt, principal of Westminster Theological Centre

"Reading Scot McKnight's latest book evoked within me a renewed openness to the Holy Spirit. Combining his usual astute biblical and theological wisdom with his accessible and down-to-earth stories and personal anecdotes, he whets our appetites to live more responsively to the Spirit. He reminds us that when we live wide-open lives to the Holy Spirit, we step into God's world of newness and re-creation. May the Lord who is Spirit use this book to reflect his glory among his people!"

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"McKnight has done it again—he has provided the church with a rich resource for personal and communal growth. *Open to the Spirit* provides a guide for exploration into how God communicates, indwells, and empowers Christians for lives of holiness and mission."

—DR. SARA BARTON, Pepperdine University chaplain

"In *Open to the Spirit,* the eminent New Testament professor and scholar, Scot

McKnight, offers a breathtaking invitation to an interactive life with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is often the most neglected member of the Trinity (unless you are Pentecostal or charismatic!). This book puts the Spirit front and center. As in all his works, Scot brings a balance of scriptural truth, sound theology, and practical application. I found this book particularly, of all of his, more focused on Christian spiritual formation and experiential transformation, which makes it an important book that should be required for seminarians, pastors, spiritual directors, and Christian educators. But then again, I cannot think of a single type of Christ follower who would not be blessed by this deep dive into life in the Spirit."

—JAMES BRYAN SMITH, author of *The Good and Beautiful God*

## Books by Scot McKnight

*The Hum of Angels: Listening for the Messengers of God Around Us*

*The Heaven Promise: Engaging the Bible's Truths About Life to Come*

*The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others*

*Embracing Grace: Discovering the Gospel that Restores Us to God, Creation, and Ourselves*

*Praying with the Church: Following Jesus Daily, Hourly, Today*

*The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*

*Fasting*

*One Life: Jesus Calls, We Follow*

*The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited*

*Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church*

*A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together*



# OPEN TO THE SPIRIT

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*God Transforming Us*

SCOT MCKNIGHT
FOREWORD BY DAVE FERGUSON

WATERBROOK

OPEN TO THE SPIRIT

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Almighty God, Unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

—THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

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# FOREWORD

## *Open to the Spirit: God in Us, God with Us, God Transforming Us*

Have you ever had a brush with greatness? It's that moment when you see or meet someone famous or influential. Maybe you've seen this person in the movies or on television. He or she may be a sports star, a celebrity, or a world-renowned author. You've heard about him, read about her, but then suddenly, you have the opportunity to meet the person!

I had a brush with greatness when I was on a field trip with my high school German class to The Berghoff Restaurant in Chicago. I had just finished my Wiener schnitzel and stood up with a classmate to leave the restaurant. As I opened the door to leave, guess who walked in? Ernie Banks! Now, if you don't know Ernie Banks, it just means you've never lived in Chicago and don't know much about the Chicago Cubs (Scot's favorite team!).

Ernie Banks is a Hall of Fame first baseman who hit 512 home runs and was an eleven-time All-Star. He is beloved by Cub fans for his consistent positivity when times were tough. He was known for saying, "Let's play two!" instead of just one game! Respected for being a kind man and a model citizen, fans simply referred to him as "Mr. Cub." So when he walked through that open door, I turned to my friend and said, "That's Ernie Banks!" Immediately we pivoted and said, "Excuse me, Mr. Banks, could we get your autograph?" He not only signed an autograph for my friend and me but began to make the rounds and talk to every kid in our class. Then he said to our teacher, "Hey, how about I take you to Wrigley Field and give you the tour!"

I was very familiar with the legend of Ernie Banks, but I never imagined I'd get the opportunity to meet him in person. For years I had read the *Chicago Tribune* sports section and knew all his stats and respected his glowing reputation.

What an unexpected surprise to not only meet "Mr. Cub" but also to discover he was everything I'd always heard.

What Scot McKnight does in the remarkable book you're holding is to open the door for you to experience a brush with greatness. *Open to the Spirit* is about someone most of us have heard of and many of us have read about for a long time, but maybe you never got a chance to know. He is one of only three persons consistently present throughout the entire story of Scripture, yet there remains so much mystery and intrigue. The Bible begins by describing his moving over the earth (Genesis 1:2), and it concludes with him speaking to us (Revelation 22:17). We know *about* him, but too often we don't really *know* him.

By now you know that I'm talking about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is a mystery to so many of us. Most of us can get our heads around God the Father, and through the account of Jesus's life, we have a good picture of God the Son, but the Holy Spirit seems so much more mysterious.

With a scholar's mind and a pastor's heart, Scot opens up the Scriptures and introduces us to the greatness of God's Spirit. With the credibility of a professor and the authenticity of a fellow Christ follower, Scot takes us on a journey in these pages by sharing from his life. He tells about being closed to the Holy Spirit, which allows many of us to identify with him. He then goes on to describe bravely opening himself up to whatever God has for him and challenges us to do the same.

*Open to the Spirit* is a rare kind of book, one that is grounded in solid biblical theology but at the same time, very accessible and readable. It is refreshing to learn from someone like Scot, who has the authority of an intellectual but writes as if you are reading from his journal.

I was talking to my wife, Sue, about the Holy Spirit and we both agreed that "open" is probably not the word we would use to describe our early understanding of the third member of the Trinity. When I was a kid, a renegade group in my home church started asking God's Spirit to do miracles; they were then politely asked to leave and find another church. When Sue was young, her family attended a local Bible church. On one unusually lively Sunday morning, someone started speaking in tongues, and her reflex was to pray, "God please don't let me speak in tongues, please don't let me speak in tongues," afraid she would burst into a foreign language and embarrass herself.

While I wasn't very open, God's Spirit was gently knocking, wanting to give me a brush with his greatness. When I was in college, I started going to

"Spirit-filled" churches, mostly because they had better music and were less boring. I was becoming open.

When I ruptured my anterior cruciate ligament playing basketball in a church league, I collapsed to the hardwood in serious pain. It was the opposing Assembly of God team that gathered over me, laid hands on me, and started praying for healing. I immediately felt better, looked up, and said, "You guys better stop praying like that or I'm going to believe in this stuff!" The doors to my heart and mind were opening.

When my cousin, who grew up in a church like mine, suddenly became Spirit-filled and his whole life was clearly transformed, I became even more open.

For the last twenty-five-plus years as a pastor, I've found myself becoming more and more open to whatever God has for me. Just this week I sat down for a lengthy conversation with some friends more experienced than I am to learn about the Holy Spirit's work in healing prayer. I would like to think I'm now wide open.

As you prepare to read *Open to the Spirit,* let me challenge you to make this your prayer: "God, I'm open to whatever you have for me." Just say that prayer as you turn from one page to the next and move from one chapter to another.

And as you pray and read, be prepared for a brush with a great God!

—Dave Ferguson, coauthor of *Finding Your Way Back to God* and *Starting Over*

# FIRST WORDS

The most passionate, the most intimate, and the most significant element of the Christian faith is that God—the creator of all and the world's redeemer—has chosen not only to communicate with us but also has chosen to indwell us. I sometimes marvel that the vastness and immensity of God could become an infant, then a child and a youth, and then a young man who would die and be raised for us. That same God takes up residence in you and me, not just once but permanently.

A famous Christian, Augustine, once said that we, in our innermost being, cannot find rest until we come to rest in God.[1] Let's turn this around: we cannot find rest until we rest in God's own resting in our hearts.

I hope you will pause with me to consider the immensity of the privilege we share, in that God indwells us in the Holy Spirit. I hope you will bow before God in thanks and praise.

In making us for himself, God made us Spirit-receptive, or what is sometimes called "spiritual." We are created with a spirit, which means we are created by God to be Spirit-receptive. To be Spirit-receptive means that we are open to God, to God's own indwelling presence. We are open to releasing the grace and power and glory of God in our lives. It is not just that we are empty vessels in need of a filling. We also are created to be Spirit-receptive in the sense that God's presence is in us and ready to display God's glory through us.

In writing this book about the Holy Spirit, I have examined what the Bible says. At times I will have to pause to discuss difficult ideas and some texts that are in need of explanation. But don't lose contact with the book's seminal idea: God is alive and well and indwells us. And God wants to transform us into persons

who demonstrate the grace, love, peace, and justice of God. Hence, I urge you to pray the prayer at the end of this short prologue.

Before you embark on reading this book, I'd ask you first to consider three words: *Spirit, Bible,* and *open*. These words form the heart of what this book is about.

We will focus on the Spirit. This is not a scholarly treatment of the Third Person of the Trinity, though I have read a good number of the scholars' treatises. Nor is this a systematic theology of the Holy Spirit.

Which leads to my second word. We will take a close look at what the *Bible* says about the Holy Spirit. This is not a book about books about the Holy Spirit, but a book about what the Bible teaches. My specialization is the New Testament, so there will be an emphasis on New Testament teaching. But I also draw at times from the Old Testament. More could be said about the Old Testament, but it would surely have made this book half again as long as it is already.

Which brings us to our third word, *open,* which captures my top concern as I write. This book will encourage you to be open to the Holy Spirit every moment of every day. What you or I may know already, combined with what we hope to learn about the Spirit, will do nothing in our lives unless we become increasingly open to the Spirit. Remember, we are talking about the Spirit of God, the One who was sent by God to transform us into Christlikeness.

This is my prayer for you, for me, and for all who read this book. I urge you to pause and pray this along with me:

> Lord, I am open to the Holy Spirit.
> Come to me, dwell in me, speak to me
> so I may become more like Christ.
> Lord, give me the courage to be open.
> Lord, I am open to the Holy Spirit.
> Come, Holy Spirit.
> Amen.

1

# OPEN AND SHUT

If you want to strike up a conversation with a stranger, carry a book about the Holy Spirit. Make sure the title is visible to those around you.

I was on a flight from Colorado Springs to Chicago, and a book about the Spirit was fully visible in the net pouch in front of me. The woman seated next to me was reading a book about finding a new spouse, and during a lull when neither of us was reading, she said something and I said something back and then she tapped my Holy Spirit book. She mentioned that she had grown up in a church that *never, ever* talked about the Spirit.

But it turned out that the pastor at her new church in Dallas recently did a sermon series on the Spirit. My fellow passenger said, "I never knew how important the Holy Spirit is, and it has rocked my world."

I'm not a person who welcomes commercial-airline conversation. I much prefer silence and even distance from a stranger sitting about as close as the airlines consider tolerable (which is not the same as comfortable). But God's Spirit used the cover of that book and the few things I had told my flight-mate in response to her questions for the woman to tell me about some struggles in her life. Years ago there had been a divorce. My fellow passenger had three daughters, one of whom had been starting a business when her husband "came out" and abandoned her daughter and their son. With misty eyes, my fellow passenger told me an amazing story of redemption involving her grandson.

I listened (wishing my psychologist wife, Kris, were present to hear more of what the woman was saying). I felt gratitude to God for caring for this family. The woman finished with, "I've learned to hand this all to God and trust God to

take care of us all." I had wanted silence in the airspace between Colorado and Illinois, but the Spirit opened me to a story of redemption.

The Spirit is like that. That is, if we are open to the Spirit.

As it turned out, the woman seated next to me was more open than I, but the Spirit opened me up to what the Spirit was doing during the flight.

A sticking point when it comes to our understanding of the Holy Spirit is that humans are *not* open to the invasive, transcending, and transforming presence of the Holy Spirit. There are, of course, reasons why we are not open. Two that come immediately to mind are (1) we don't want transcending power, and (2) we don't want the transforming presence of God because we'd rather stay the way we are.

## A Little Shut, and Pretty Much Not at All Open

I encountered the Holy Spirit before I knew the Holy Spirit even existed, and back then I was definitely not open. My mother, bless her young-mother heart, believed the Spirit would guide me in my decisions even when I was a preschooler. I was four years old and my family lived in a sleepy village in central Illinois, not far from the Mississippi River.

Our village wore the name of Roodhouse. My father was a high-school teacher who coached the track-and-field team, and my mother's major responsibility was managing and nurturing three children. I was by far her greatest challenge, not least because our safe village made my wandering away commonplace.

I was behaviorally conditioned in midafternoon to walk to the high school to join the track team at practice, which is a way of saying my mother was behaviorally conditioned to find some respite from keeping an eye on me. One day she told me there was no track practice that day, and so I was not to walk to the high school. (I failed to mention earlier that walking there entailed crossing a [mostly] sleepy highway.) Sleepy or not, it was a highway, and at age four I was trusted to cross it alone.

I walked over to the high school three or four times a week during track season, but I was told not to on that particular day. My mother knew I would want to go, so she countered my anticipated wandering by saying, "Just listen to the little voice inside you." The little voice was important to my mom. It was her way of referring to a combination of memory, conscience, and the guidance of

the Holy Spirit. She believed this little voice would remind me to stay home. Which, of course, it did.

I went to the high school anyway. Once I got there I realized I was alone, but I preferred being alone at that moment. I ran on the dusty grit of the cinder track, imagining some grand victory. Then I jumped into the long-jump pit with the gusto of a four-year-old, and I did some shadow high jumping, since the contraption wouldn't go as low as I could jump.

I was having a jolly good time at my own Olympics when I noticed my mother pull up in the family's Nash. She got out abruptly, and this four-year-old knew he was in deep doo-doo. I don't remember the details, but I do recall—nearly sixty years later, mind you—what my mom said.

My mother said, "I told you to listen to the little voice inside. Did you?"

I came back with, "Yes, I did."

"And what did that little voice say?"

A four-year-old's disarming moral argument popped into my head: "It told me I could go!"

My mother would have none of it, my father would have none of it, and it created a family story that also included my mother's lack of faith in the little-voice theory of moral guidance. On the plus side, though, the little-voice theory was my first encounter with belief in the Holy Spirit. When I told this story to my granddaughter, who is nearly the same age I was at the time of the event, she said, "Papa, you didn't have your Listening Ears on!" She's right. My ears were shut.

Even at the tender age of four I wasn't open.

## Weirdness Led Me to Being Shut Rather Than Open

Move forward about five years. It was a hot Sunday summer evening, and the Apostolic Holiness Church in Herrin, Illinois, was holding services. (Herrin was another sleepy town deeper into southern Illinois, near where my grandparents lived in Johnston City.) The service began in a predictably similar fashion to our Baptist church, with greetings, a prayer, and a hymn or two. I had been warned that there would be noticeable contrasts with our anti-charismatic Baptist church. But all I observed was that the Apostolic Holiness folks did what we did but with a little more verve and verbal interaction with the leader.

Bored as only a preteen could be, I had stopped paying close attention when an odd noise broke out. To swipe words from the inimitable narrative of Andy Griffith,[1] what it was, was Pentecostal worship. The pastor had announced it was prayer time, so everyone prayed—out loud. The place erupted—suddenly everyone was a chatterbox of prayer.

I was now fully alert. Some of the people were raising their hands; some walked forward (far too early in the service, at least according to Baptist custom) and knelt at the platform. Others stood at the front with hands raised. One person flattened himself on the floor. The hubbub continued for about five minutes. It sure broke up the boredom.

While I don't remember a word of the sermon, the invitation was entertaining. Lots of folks came forward to announce they were accepting the Lord's salvation, including a woman whose beehive hairdo drew my attention. My grandmother muttered that it was the woman's third trip to the altar in three weeks. Grandma added that the woman "didn't have enough salvation to last her a week."

Now that I think about it, my father was a mild Calvinist (he was a fan of the English Calvinist Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon as well as Horatius Bonar, another Calvinist). My dad explained that Grandma was an Arminian who thought people could lose their salvation. In contrast, we believed in "eternal security," which meant "once saved, always saved." Our theory was way more comfortable. Anyway, that was my earliest encounter with Christians who seemed to take for granted that the Holy Spirit was right there during evening worship: they felt the Spirit's presence and acted accordingly.

My grandmother told me later that she wasn't a "charismatic," a word she pronounced with serious displeasure. Rather, she was "Pentecostal," which to her was the most serious sort of Holy Spirit Christian. For my grandmother, charismatics were the soft, modern version of old-time, all-in Pentecostals.

That single experience at my grandparents' church just about ruined me on the Holy Spirit. Perhaps because of how I had been nurtured into the faith, that experience struck me as beyond weird. If that was what Holy Spirit religion meant, I wanted no part of it.

## Arguments for Being Shut Off When It Comes to the Holy Spirit

The anti-charismatic context of my home church contrasted sharply with the

Apostolic Holiness service. They both played a part in my slamming shut any openness to the Spirit.[2] Little did I know how eccentric these Pentecostals were, nor could I have anticipated that the broader movement of those who are open to the Spirit would end up nearly 600 million strong.[3] So big is this movement that one of America's chief historians of the church, Martin Marty, told *New York Times* writer Laurie Goodstein, "If I were to buy stock in global Christianity, I would buy it in Pentecostalism."[4]

But the world in which I was nurtured opposed Pentecostalism and all its kindred spirits. Not only that, we had theology and arguments and slogans to back up our shutting down of the Spirit. (My church upbringing sheds light on the theme of Francis Chan's book that the Spirit was, for us, the "forgotten God."[5]) About the only mention of the Spirit I heard in those days was on the radio listening to Don McLean's famous song "American Pie." When he spoke of "the three men I admire most," he mentioned each Person in the Trinity, including the Holy Ghost! In his inimitable rhyme, McLean sings: "They caught the last train for the coast."[6]

The Spirit of God might as well have left for the coast, as far as my Baptist fellow believers were concerned. We had a cupboard stocked with arguments against charismatics and their Spirit-based theology. Among them:

- "The (glitzy) gifts (such as tongues, prophecy, and miracles) were for the apostolic period only."
- "In the New Testament, not every conversion led to speaking in tongues, so tongues cannot be seen as the sign of conversion."
- "There are not two baptisms—one by water, one by the Spirit—but just one baptism."
- "The Holy Spirit does not want all this attention. The Spirit gives testimony to the Son, so this charismatic stuff must be wrong."
- "Christians who are obsessed by the Holy Spirit are the most prone to theological error and to chaos. Eventually their enthusiasm and mysticism will cool, and Pentecostals will be like the rest of us. Either that, or they will turn to some kind of heresy."
- "Those who are most enthralled with the Spirit are the most shaped by their inner experiences—emotion and personal feelings. They also are the

least theologically trained."

- "Charismatics believe in a two-stage theory of salvation: first you become a Christian; next you get the second blessing or you get filled with the Spirit or you enter into the Higher Life or you get fully sanctified and perfected and become sinless."
- "We need to focus on salvation and justification and the cross. All this talk about the Spirit distracts from that focus."

The sum of the matter in my church context, though not explicitly acknowledged, was this: Our theology was one of the Father and the Son, and the Spirit was ignored, neglected, or minimized. At best the Spirit got "third place" in the God-contest for supremacy.[7] To put all our nervous-about-the-Spirit rationalizations into one tight bundle, we reduced the Spirit by resorting to reason, to intellect, to the mind, and to the Bible. In doing so, we relegated the Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Trinity, to an idea that our superior logic and careful theology had made irrelevant. Behind our avoidance of the Holy Spirit was the fear that if we were to let the Spirit loose, chaos was sure to result. A free-ranging Spirit was unpredictable and uncontrollable. How could we allow such a Being to intrude on our most cherished habits, routines, and ideas?

Put into another bundle, we believed in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Scriptures.[8] Surely God's revelation in the Scriptures provided all the teaching, all the guidance, and all the insights we needed pertaining to God and God's ways.

The arguments were deeply flawed, and reading them now makes me and those who believed as I did seem embarrassingly naive. But back then, it all seemed quite convincing. It justified my natural inclination to remain closed to the Holy Spirit. I learned in my church world to silence the Spirit.

## Unlocking the Closed-In Way of Life

This book attempts to make clear what the Bible reveals about God's Spirit. Readers can also see it as the story of my conversion from the anti-charismatic movement to an affirmation of the centrality of the Holy Spirit and the importance of the Spirit for the Christian life. I have come to believe, along with theologian Clark Pinnock, that the Spirit works in "a hundred thousand ways"[9] and that it is not my responsibility to do anything but to be open to the radical and sometimes surprising flow of the Spirit in our world. I believe that is what

the Bible teaches, and I hope the time we spend pursuing the truth about the Holy Spirit will lead you to a similar belief.

During World War II, a miracle took place repeatedly in the village of Le Chambon in southern France. Residents of the town, André and Magda Trocmé were deeply committed Christians who lived out their village's commitment to rescuing Jews who had been displaced from their homes.

So open was their own home that they didn't lock their doors. Against the pleading of the Jews who found shelter with them from the Nazis, Magda refused to lock her doors. But because the door was always open, something quite special happened that can serve as an image of the Holy Spirit for you and me: "A few days after the conversation with the refugees, Magda returned from working all day at the Cévenol School and found flowers everywhere in the house: in the kitchen, in the dining room, in her husband's office."[10]

Here is an image to live by: if we leave the doors and windows of our lives open to the Spirit, we may find surprising flowers in our lives.

Each of us is designed by God to be receptive to the Spirit. We are Spiritual beings. We can be open or we can be shut, but we can't deny our design. We are built to be a home for the Spirit. Dorothy Sayers, a brilliant thinker and English novelist, once said, "The spiritual [element in each of us] is so utterly a part of our nature that we cannot cast [that element] out; if we deprive ourselves of the eternal Absolute, we shall inevitably make an absolute of some temporal thing or other."[11]

Sayers was right. I am deeply aware that those responsible for my early Christian training somehow wanted us all to grow spiritually but were nervous about the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We could trust text printed on paper, bound between the covers of a Bible. But the Holy Spirit? How could we ever control a God as elusive as the Spirit?

I changed directions on the Spirit because of what I found time and again in the Bible. (Don't be surprised when you see how frequently I anchor my thoughts in the Bible. In fact, be encouraged.) Our faith is grounded first and foremost in the Bible. In the chapters that follow, we will explore more than a dozen biblical themes about the Holy Spirit. Each theme examines a dimension of what the Spirit can accomplish in our lives if we remain open to the Spirit's work.

The Bible points us constantly to Jesus. The Christian faith gathers itself around Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord, the Second Person of the

Trinity. These terms point us toward Jesus as being central to all things in the universe. Many today have little patience with the church, but they love Jesus. They have concluded that if Jesus believes it, they are all for it. So let's start there. What did Jesus believe about the Spirit? More importantly, how did Jesus *practice* the Spirit? Was Jesus *open* to the Spirit?

# 2

# JESUS WAS WIDE OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

The New Testament Gospels are unlike the other gospels that didn't make it into our Bible. For example, there is a story about Jesus as a boy making mud birds in a puddle and then, to dazzle those around him, waving his hands and sending the birds off flying.[1] That tale didn't make the cut. It doesn't portray the real, human Jesus of the four Gospels.

However, we know that the human Jesus had to learn mathematics; he had to learn the names of friends; and he had to grow in wisdom and knowledge like the rest of us. He also had emotions.[2] In fact, the Gospels let us in on how Jesus felt: he was exasperated, he wept, he wailed, he got angry with other people, and he even cried out in despair. But he also expressed victory and triumph.*[1] C. S. Lewis, in a letter he wrote to Mrs. Frank Jones, rejoiced over Jesus's real human emotions: "God [could], had He pleased, have been incarnate in a man of iron nerves, the Stoic sort who lets no sigh escape Him. Of His great humility He chose to be incarnate in a man of delicate sensibilities who wept at the grave of Lazarus and sweated blood in Gethsemane."[3]

Jesus was a real human being, which means he grew Spirit-ually by learning to be open to the Spirit. I know busloads of Christians who deny this was true of Jesus. Other Christians would like it not to be true, so they choose to avoid the truth. Most of us, however, would prefer to not explicitly deny a plain reading of the Gospels. So I'll say it again: Jesus was human and because Jesus was a human, he needed to be empowered from day one with and by the Holy Spirit. If this is

true—and I am about to show how this is found in the Bible—then it is true that you and I need the Holy Spirit. Even more so.

## How Did He Pull off the Miracles?

Jesus healed people; he exorcised demons and unswirled a storm at sea. He knew things in people's hearts before they expressed them. How did he do these things? I will begin with Peter, a disciple who knew because he was there. Peter gave a sermon that was heard by a gentile named Cornelius, who himself had experienced a life-altering vision. In his sermon, Peter said this about Jesus:

> You know…how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth *with the Holy Spirit and power,* and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, *because God was with him.*[*2]

Peter was pointing out two things. First, what Jesus did is accurately characterized as "doing good" and "healing." *How* Jesus did these things is clear: "God anointed Jesus…with the Holy Spirit and power." Jesus did these things "because God was with him." Jesus's kingdom powers were at work in him because he was *wide open* to the Holy Spirit.

Peter and others who wrote the New Testament don't leave us any room for doubt. Jesus, as a human, did all that he did—living, eating, praying, conversing, healing, teaching, doing good, rebuking, defending—by the power of the Spirit.

The highly regarded Wheaton College professor, the late Gerald Hawthorne, summarized his study of Jesus and the Spirit in these words: "The Holy Spirit was the divine power by which Jesus overcame his human limitations [such as being limited in knowledge and bound by physical space and human strength], rose above his human weakness, and won out over his human mortality."[4] Unlocking the doors so the Spirit can come in begins with Jesus, the perfectly wide-open human.

## Jesus, the Spirit-Filled Man

What often has been overlooked needs to be made clear.[5] Every major facet of the life of Jesus is a Spirit event—so much so that we need to see that the more

Christlike we become, the more Spirit-ual we become. Again, the closer our Spirit-uality gets to Jesus, the more dependent on and empowered by the Spirit we will be.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke open with the baptism of Jesus: "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him."[*3] This same event is described by John:

> Then John [the baptizer] gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' "[*4]

John saw the Spirit descend on Jesus. He knew the Spirit-anointed Jesus would have a perpetual filling of the Spirit and would go about plunging people into the Spirit.

A window was opened into the Spirit-prompted religious experience of Jesus, which is captured in the word *Abba:*

> As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."[*5]

When the Father announces that this Jesus is God's very beloved "Son," Jesus knows that God is his special, loving Father. This event was an epochal moment in Jesus's spirituality. From this point on, Jesus will be known as Son and he will teach his followers to call God "Father."

To call God "Father" ushers us into an intimate relationship with God, and it is one that Jesus himself knew personally. How so? Jesus's reference to God as his Father shows the trust of Jesus, the intimacy of Jesus with God, and the interactive relationship of Father and Son in the life of the man Jesus. This is a Spirit-ual reality because it was when the Spirit came upon Jesus that this reality was announced to the world.

## Spirit-uality in Times of Testing

The temptations, or testings, of Jesus are connected to the Spirit. "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit," Luke wrote, "left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where for forty days he was tempted by the devil."[*6] Jesus was *led* into the wilderness for testing, and he *succeeded* in overcoming the temptations *because* he was filled with the Spirit.

Jesus knew he was being empowered by God's Spirit. For his opening-day sermon in his hometown, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah:

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
> because he has anointed me
> to proclaim good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
> and recovery of sight for the blind,
> to set the oppressed free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.[*7]

Why did Jesus select this passage? First, at that time it was Jesus upon whom the Spirit of the Lord was resting. Second, Jesus's work all would be done in the power of the Spirit: proclaiming the gospel to the poor and to the prisoners and to the blind and to the oppressed. Jesus was announcing in Jubilee-like fashion the "year of the LORD's favor."[*8] All of these are Spirit-prompted acts.

When Jesus read from Isaiah 61, he could well have reminded those in the synagogue that fifty chapters earlier, the same prophet, Isaiah, had said this about the coming Messiah:

> A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
> from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
> The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
> the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
> the Spirit of counsel and of might,
> the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
> and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.[*9]

Jesus was a Bible reader, and he knew that these great words about the Spirit, God's *ruach* (roo-ach), pertained to him and the new age God was ushering in through him. We should not be surprised that Jesus at times attributed his powers to the Holy Spirit. "If it is by the Spirit of God," Jesus declared, "that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."[*10] Hence we read in another gospel that the "power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick."[*11]

In everything, Jesus was a charismatic, or pneumatic,[*12] person. What is evident in the lives of those who are wide open to the Spirit was present in Jesus. He could discern the motivations of others; he could see what might happen if he continued on the same path; he had a vision of Satan's downfall; he had an unusually explicit prayer life wrapped up in his experience of God as his Father. Further, he could predict and prophesy the future, and he possessed an unusual sense of authority. One more thing: not a few theologians have wondered if Jesus's sighings were signs of his speaking in tongues.[*13]

Keep in mind that the Crucifixion and the Resurrection are events also empowered by the Holy Spirit. The writer of Hebrews summed up the life of Jesus as a sacrificial offering of himself to the Father through the eternal Spirit. The apostle Paul wrote that it was the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, or perhaps we could say the Father raised Jesus from the dead by the Spirit.[*14]

## When Did God Unleash the Spirit?

Jesus was a Spirit-drenched man. Jesus did what he did because he was wide open to the Spirit, more open to the Spirit than any human in history.

We can back up thirty years from his opening-day sermon to the events surrounding his birth. With Jesus's arrival, God unleashed the Spirit afresh on earth. To Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, the angel revealed that her son would be "filled with the Holy Spirit"[*15] and would "go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah."[*16] The same angel let Mary know that she would become pregnant when "the Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."[*17] When Mary went to visit Elizabeth, we are told "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."[*18] Then her silenced husband enters the story: "His [John the Baptist's] father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and

prophesied."[*19] We are told, too, that John lived in the desert and "became strong in spirit."[*20]

One more. When Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple to dedicate him and offer their sacrifice for their son, an old man named Simeon grabbed the baby and sang a praise song. God had finally, finally sent the Messiah to Israel. But before Simeon sang and before he grabbed the baby, "the Holy Spirit was on [Simeon]. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah." The old man was "moved by the Spirit" to go into the Temple to meet the Messiah and his parents.[*21]

## The Days of the Spirit Unleashed

It is customary to date God's unleashing of the Spirit at Pentecost (see Acts 2). But Luke, who ought to have known since he wrote Acts as well, presents the days *leading up to Jesus's appearance on earth* as a special unleashing of the Holy Spirit on the principal people in the story: Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, and most especially John the Baptist and Jesus.

Each was empowered by God's Spirit. John Levison, professor at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, has researched the Holy Spirit in the ancient world more than almost anyone else. At the end of his lengthy academic study *Filled with the Spirit,* Levison concluded: "God breathes into every individual a spirit that can be filled with understanding, a spirit that rolls over the tongue in a flood of peculiar eloquence, a spirit that can be the locus of holiness or, under the care of the careless, a commodity to be traded for lucre."[6]

Jesus was the Spirit-filled human among humans. Was he different from us? Not in his need for and dependence on the Spirit, except that he was *always* wide open and we are not. I agree with Gerald Hawthorne when he wrote that Jesus "*needed* the Spirit's power to lift him out of his human restrictions, to carry him beyond his human limitations, and to enable him to do the seeming impossible."[7] With Jesus, a new age has begun: the Age of the Spirit. If Jesus could do his ministry only by the power of the Spirit, and if special but ordinary humans such as Elizabeth and Mary and Simeon could do their ministries only by the power of the Spirit, then you and I especially need to be more and more open to the Spirit.

To be a follower of Jesus is to be open to the same Spirit to whom Jesus was

wide open. The good news is that the Spirit at work in Jesus is available to us.

Are you open to the Spirit as Jesus was open?

If you are open to the Spirit, you will hear from God. Why? Because every page of the Bible tells us our God is a God who speaks. God may speak in a variety of ways, but these are true: God has spoken, God is speaking today, and God will continue to speak. It begins when we see Jesus himself as the Speech of God.

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*1 For texts about Jesus's emotions, see Matthew 27:46; Mark 3:5, 12; 6:3; 7:34; 8:12; 14:33; Luke 10:21; 19:41; John 11:33, 35, 38.

*2 Acts 10:37–38

*3 Matthew 3:16

*4 John 1:32–33

*5 Matthew 3:16–17

*6 Luke 4:1–2

*7 Luke 4:18–19

*8 On Jubilee, read Leviticus 25:10 and Isaiah 61:1–2; echoes of the Jubilee of Leviticus are heard in the Isaiah verses.

*9 Isaiah 11:1–3

*10 Matthew 12:28

*11 Luke 5:17

*12 The word *pneumatic* means "Spirit-y" or "Spirit-ual." The Greek word for Spirit/spirit is *pneuma*.

*13 In order of mention in the text, Mark 2:8; Luke 4:30; 10:18; Matthew 26:42; 24; 7:28-29; and on sighings, Mark 7:34

*14 Hebrews 9:14; Romans 8:11

*15 Luke 1:15

*16 Luke 1:17

*17 Luke 1:35

*18 Luke 1:41

*19 Luke 1:67

*20 Luke 1:80

*21 Luke 2:25–27. In modern English we use lowercase for the human spirit and uppercase for the divine Spirit. The Greek New Testament, however, didn't make such a distinction, so we have to interpret which Spirit/spirit is in mind. But this is clear to me: the Spirit of God is what gives to humans their spirit, and that means the human spirit has *a universal human connection line to the divine*

*Spirit*. So, did John grow in the Spirit or in spirit? I think the former, but perhaps forcing a distinction misses the whole point!



Part 1

# Open to the God Who Speaks

3

# OPEN TO THE GOD WHO SPEAKS IN THE LIVING WORD

Jesus was wide open to the Spirit, and so were the apostles. If there is a secret to experiencing the fullness of the Christian life, it is this: we need the Spirit to empower us to live as God wants us to live. In fact, we *cannot* live the Christian life until we are open to the Spirit.

This being the case, why are so many Christians nervous about the Spirit and hesitant to open themselves to the Spirit?

I was closed to the Spirit until a camp experience in Muscatine, Iowa, when I was in high school. My conversion experience was a Spirit-baptism kind of drenching. It was sudden, powerful, and life-altering. I did not speak in tongues or prophesy or have a word of knowledge. But it was without question a Spirit-drenched experience.

This is what happened. Dr. Benson, a well-mannered Bible-college president, entered the high school boys' heat-soaked cabin on the first night of camp. We were full of energy and mischief, but two counselors already had grabbed our attention enough that we were willing to give the man an ear. Dr. Benson wanted to explore with us what he had talked about that morning regarding the Holy Spirit. He said we needed to be filled with the Spirit.

He gave out a Campus Crusade tract affectionately known as the Bird Book. It explained that we needed Christ to be on the throne of our lives and the way to do that was to surrender to the Spirit. The verse of the week, or at least it was the verse that stayed with me, was Ephesians 5:18. I'll quote it in King James

English since it was the Bible I used at the time:

> And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.

Dr. Benson left the cabin, and the other boys and I went to bed—meaning we turned out the lights and talked. I was stirred in my soul. I went to church camp to have fun with my friends and my girlfriend, Kris (who is now my wife). But in the morning, I got up early with my heart (at least partly) warmed by Holy-Spirit talk.

I wandered over to the canteen, which was closed. So I walked to the campsite area to pray and ponder. I sat under a tree and did what Dr. Benson told us. I prayed, "Father, forgive me of my sins. And Holy Spirit, come inside and fill me."

Something mighty happened. I had little idea of what I was doing, but God knew. From that moment my life has been completely different. Not perfect, but different. I had a Spirit-baptism kind of drenching conversion.

I have mentioned already that I was attending a non-charismatic church. I suspect that had I spoken in tongues I might have gotten into deep trouble. But still, I was having a charismatic experience with God's Spirit.

On the Friday night following the Tuesday-morning Spirit event, I stood up to give a testimony. What came out of my mouth was that I wanted to give my life to ministry. And I had no idea where that came from, since all I had ever wanted to do was be a coach and teach high-school German.

The sudden speaking of what God was prompting me to do was another Spirit-led event. From that week of being open to the Spirit and the Spirit's flooding my soul, I suddenly had a desire to read the Bible, to pray, to fellowship with Christians, to go to church, and to serve Christ as a Bible teacher. After high school I attended a Christian college, and then I entered seminary. I stayed with it until I had completed work on a PhD in New Testament, and here I am at my computer some forty-six years later with three and one-half decades of professoring behind me.

I could say I was open to the Spirit, but it is more accurate to say that God's Spirit blew through the barely conscious opening in the door of my spirit. God's Spirit came in and took up residence.

Bible professors have specialties, so when I'm asked what my discipline or

academic specialty is, I say, "Jesus." It's true. I don't believe there has been a single academic year in my career when I did not teach a course on one of the Gospels or a course about Jesus. It is January as I write this, and in the previous fall term at Northern Seminary I taught Jesus and the Gospels. Thirty years of teaching the course and you could say my career has been enveloped by a Spirit-prompted openness to Jesus.

To speak here of being open is not to focus on what we have to do, the conditions we have to meet, or the rules we must follow. Being open to the Spirit has nothing to do with struggling to meet a standard. Rather, to be open is an inside-out and upside-down approach. To be open means God's grace is at work in us through the Spirit. Openness is not a game of strategy and intense planning, like chess. Rather, being open is a dance in which we listen to the beat of the Spirit and respond to the Spirit's promptings. Every time we are open to the Spirit's steps, the Spirit takes us to Jesus, the Living Word.

The Jesus to whom the Spirit introduces us is bound to disturb us. We have developed a habit of making Jesus nice, but Jesus doesn't play nice. As Dorothy Sayers put it,

> The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused Him of being a bore—on the contrary; they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him "meek and mild," and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.[1]

When Jesus first announced his mission, he didn't do a seeker-sensitive thing. He didn't take a poll to discover what spiritually inquisitive people in Galilee were looking for. No, Jesus stood up in an obscure corner of the world and spoke about the kingdom of *God* being at hand, just under the skin, and ready to break out! This man was radical, and the Spirit—if we are open—will take us to that same Jesus.

## Do We Want an Unsafe Jesus?

As we listen to a conversation between Jesus and his disciples, we discover a

crescendo of power falling on the disciples. It begins when Philip asked Jesus: "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus responded: "Don't you know me?" Let's give Philip a break. He wasn't being dense; it's just that the first-century disciples didn't have the benefit of two thousand years of Christian theology to clarify the incarnation of Jesus.

Jesus then ramped the first answer up a notch with this: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." And then one more notch: "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"[*1] Bear in mind that a faithful Jew of that time believed there was one and only one God, the God of Israel. For Jesus to say he and the Father were one was astounding. In fact, Jesus's statement either was blasphemy or the biggest claim ever made.

If we pause long enough to let what Jesus said sink in, we learn this: *when we see Jesus we see the Father.* Jesus then jumped way ahead by making an unexpected promise: "Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these." People such as Philip, along with other followers of Jesus, would do even greater things? How will this be possible? "Because," Jesus announced, "I am going to the Father," where the Savior would become their power-intercessor. "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."[*2]

How will Jesus empower his followers? The volume reaches a crescendo: Jesus empowers people by sending them *the Spirit.* In these chapters of the gospel of John, the Spirit is called the Advocate or (to use the Greek term) the Paraclete. Now the climactic trumpet blast: *the mission of the Paraclete is to witness to Jesus and to glorify Jesus.* Jesus announced, "When the Advocate comes…he will testify about me."[*3] In fact, Jesus said the Spirit "will glorify" Jesus.[*4]

The Spirit is sent to take us to Jesus. When we expand on this, we run into the classic Christian belief in the Trinity. This is how theologians explain it:

> **The absolute oneness of God (the Father) unleashes the Son,**
> **and the Father and the Son unleash the Spirit,**
> **and then the Spirit is unleashed into all Christians for the purpose** ***of glorifying Jesus to the glory of the Father.***

Where the Spirit is, Jesus is being exalted; where Jesus is not being exalted, there the Spirit is absent. Any claim about the Spirit can be tested by how Jesus-centered it is. To be open to the Spirit is to be open to the Spirit's introducing us

to Jesus and to the Spirit's keeping us in the presence of Jesus.

Perhaps talk about the Trinity and intertrinitarian relationships makes you dizzy, so here's something from Charles Schulz's famous *Peanuts* to clear your head. Schroeder loved classical music and Lucy loved Schroeder but had to fight for his attention. Schroeder was playing a classical composition and Lucy rested her elbows on the piano but with her face away from him. She was lost in the music. She turned to observe that it was beautiful but wondered aloud what it was. Still playing, Schroeder informed her that it was from Bach. Lucy, unimpressed with language she didn't comprehend just said it was excellent.

Whether or not we comprehend the complexities of the Trinity, it's still beautiful because the Spirit takes us to the beauty of Jesus and to the glory of the Father. Every time.

## Bible Readers Find Jesus

Many books have been written about how Jesus and the early Christians read what we call the Old Testament. One conclusion is clear: they learned to find Jesus when they read the Old Testament.

Jesus talked with those who walked with him on the road to Emmaus. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."[★5] Jesus saw himself in the Law and in the books of prophecy, and he saw John the Baptist in Elijah, and he knew the whole of the Bible anticipated his arrival.[★6] How? Through the Spirit.

The apostles learned to read the Bible from Jesus, and they expanded Jesus's own Bible reading through the power of discernment given by the Spirit. This Spirit-bestowed discernment was evident:

1. When Paul understood that God had promised the gospel long before through the ancient prophets.[★7]
2. When Paul realized the seed of Abraham was Jesus.[★8]
3. When Paul claimed the Spirit was manifesting mysteries from God.[★9]
4. When the writer of Hebrews expounded the Son as superior to all previous revelation and used words from the Old Testament to say the same Spirit is speaking yet again.[★10]

If we pay attention to the cross-references in the margins or center column

of our study Bibles, we will find literally thousands of cross-references to the Old Testament in the New Testament. The big point is that the Spirit of God led Jesus and the apostles to find Jesus over and over again in the Old Testament.

Here is one more example. Open your Bible to Exodus 34, and then do the same for 2 Corinthians 3, and read both chapters. You will observe the apostle Paul seeing Jesus outdoing even Moses in manifesting the glory of God. And Paul clearly states that the same Spirit is at work in us when we read the Bible.

## The Everyday Meaning of the Spirit's Taking Us to Jesus

Whenever we talk about Jesus, the Spirit is at work in the speaker *and* the listener to draw both of them to Jesus. One of my students and her husband were in a taxi when Debbie struck up a conversation with the cabbie about Jesus. They discussed who Jesus is and what he did. The cabbie then said, "So Jesus is King?" In striking up this conversation, one that was prompted by the Spirit, Debbie was participating in the Spirit's leading people to Jesus.

It reminded me of a conversation I had on a plane. The man next to me was an East Coast professor of theoretical mathematics, and he was with his girlfriend, who also was a theoretical mathematician. When he asked me what I did, I told him I was a professor. Then he asked me what I taught. I said, "I don't teach theoretical mathematics. I teach the Bible." He asked about my "discipline," a very professorial kind of question. I told him, "I focus on Jesus." As our jet flew over the Rockies, this young Jewish professor and I had a twenty-minute conversation about Jesus's parables and what they told us about who Jesus was. The Spirit was there.[2]

A second point: it is the Spirit who makes us so engrossed and so enveloped and utterly joyful to gaze upon Jesus. Once a student came to talk to me after my Jesus of Nazareth class, but she didn't want to discuss my lecture. She said, "I grew up in the church, but we didn't hear much about Jesus. I love this class about Jesus and I love Jesus. Can we just talk about Jesus?" We let our minds wander through some stories and sayings about Jesus, and the student was filled with joy. That joy comes from the Spirit's taking us into the presence of Jesus so we can gaze into his face.

Here is a third opportunity to let the Spirit take us to Jesus. Open your Bible to one of the Gospels; choose a chapter, say, Mark's first chapter. Or choose two chapters, such as Matthew's eighth and ninth chapters. Or choose the sixth

chapter of the gospel of John, where "God wrote His own autobiography."[3] Begin reading and let your mind go into its wandering phase as you allow the Bible to take you to Jesus. Each of the Gospels has but one mission: to take the reader to Jesus.

You will hear Jesus talk, watch him act, listen in on private conversations, and even stand back to observe his pointing a long finger at some kind of sin. Then you will see him scoop up the marginalized, the children, the sick, and the lonely. He will embrace them in his arms of grace and love and restoration. The Spirit shows us more and more of Jesus.

In chapter 1, I mentioned André Trocmé, who was ministering the gospel in Le Chambon, France. One of his small groups comprised poor men from the community. A book came up in discussion, one that denied that Jesus was real. In his attempt to disprove the book's thesis, André found himself proclaiming Jesus. "If [Jesus] was a real man, then the Sermon on the Mount was made for people on this earth; and if he existed, God has shown us in flesh and blood what goodness is for flesh-and-blood people." The Spirit was at work.

> All of this [Trocmé] said calmly to the ten men who were present. He had not planned to say these things, nor had he planned to take any particular action after their talk, but suddenly they found themselves on their knees together. Each made a confession to God of his own weaknesses, as the young people in Saint-Quentin had done, and they all stood up. They found themselves looking at each other with new eyes, without defensiveness, shyness, or pride. They all felt the spirit of God in them, and decided to go right home to bring that extraordinary new awareness to their wives and children.[4]

Trocmé talked about Jesus and the Spirit came upon them, and that's because the Spirit was present taking them to Jesus! That's what the Spirit does.

Finally, I suggest something for you to do at the end of the next Sunday worship service you attend. Pause during worship music. Stop singing and listen to the praise and worship as it directs you to Jesus. And as Scripture is being read, watch how the texts take you to Jesus. As the sermon is preached, pause long enough to ponder how this sermon is leading you to see the glory of Jesus. (If the sermon isn't, you may need to do this yourself.) When the elements of communion are taken, intentionally move your mind to say, "Jesus is the bread"

or "Jesus is the wine." Then focus your attention on the reality that in eating and drinking, you are ingesting Jesus as the One you love and the One you believe in and the One you worship.

Are you open to the Spirit who speaks in the Living Word and takes you to Jesus?

The Spirit's mission is to draw people to Jesus, and that means you are drawn to Jesus as the Living Word just as you are drawn to the written Word. Spirit-prompted people love the Bible.

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*1 John 14:8–10

*2 John 14:12, 14

*3 John 15:26

*4 John 16:14

*5 Luke 24:27

*6 Matthew 5:17–20; Mark 9:13

*7 Romans 1:2; 1 Corinthians 5:3–5

*8 Galatians 3:16

*9 1 Corinthians 2:7–10

*10 Hebrews 1; 3:7–11

4

# OPEN TO THE GOD WHO SPEAKS IN THE WRITTEN WORD

Some Christians are so Bible-focused they seem to forget that God is not the Bible. God is a Person, and the Bible is paper. The Bible has a purpose: to help you hear God speak to you. But the paper becomes the voice of the Person only when we are open to the Holy Spirit. Our God is a God who speaks, and God speaks to us through our reading of the Bible.

In 1973 after my sophomore year at Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I spent the summer in Austria as a missionary. We went door to door with gospel tracts, we held evangelistic tent meetings, and we made friends. In addition, all the interaction with Austrians did wonders for my German. At the end of the summer, when teams from most of the European countries gathered, I met a Pentecostal Christian from Montana.

This comes to mind because in our conversations, my side was always littered with Bible verses and his with the Holy Spirit. At the end of one frustrating conversation, he dropped the mic. "If the Holy Spirit ever left planet Earth, you Baptists would never know because all you've got is the Bible." He had a point: our Holy Spirit was contained and confined by the Bible. For us, the Holy Spirit's role was limited to unleashing what was in the Bible.

The guy from Montana cracked the thin shell that protected my beliefs, and it's a testimony to the potency of his words that I still remember them. For the paper to become Person, we have to be open to the Spirit's speaking to us—straight to us—through our reading of the Bible. Instead of reading the Bible in a

simple literal form, as I had been taught, I needed to be open to the Spirit's speaking to me through the words of Scripture.

## Spirit, Bible and Bible, Spirit

If some Christians diminish the Spirit in their focus on Scripture, it must be said that others diminish Scripture in their focus on the Spirit. We need to avoid both extremes. We must not ignore the Bible in favor of hearing from the Spirit, and we must not idolize the Bible to the exclusion of hearing from the Spirit. We have to open ourselves to the Bible's power to unleash God's Word to us through the Spirit of God. To be open to the Spirit is to be open to reading the Bible as God's personal Word to illuminate our minds and hearts.

How does that work? Before we get there, a story.

Justin Gill, one of my students, has illustrated what can happen when we read the Bible, whether our own experience is this dramatic or not:

> While studying 1 Corinthians 2 for the high school Bible study, the Holy Spirit came into the room in a way that I had no teaching or theology to explain (and I still don't have a clear one). It was like the Spirit filled the whole room. I was scared and comforted at the same time. I didn't even look up, but just kept my face down. I knew the Spirit's presence was a challenge and a demand for my commitment to God's call into ministry or trusting myself about going into politics. I had a fifty-cent coin on my…nightstand, so I told the Spirit that I would flip the coin and trust the result like the Apostles in Acts 1 in their casting of lots. Heads for Christ, the head of the church, tails the eagle for America. It hit the…basement floor and never moved. Didn't roll or even bounce. I crawled over to the coin to see if it had landed on heads—it was heads—and I wept as I committed to obeying the Spirit's call to be a minister of the gospel.[1]

This may strike some of you as too dramatic, just as the Spirit's work in the casting of lots in the Acts of the Apostles[*1] was a bit on the dramatic side. Such moments may be rare, but their rarity is no measure of the lack of the Spirit's presence. The Spirit is zealous for the truth and power of the Bible as God's Word. Why? Because the Spirit was part of the Bible's creation, which means the

Spirit is present with everyone who reads the Bible. The Spirit desires to speak to each of us as we listen to Scripture.

Some of our encounters with the Spirit are so deep they shift our lives in a moment. Such experiences can happen when the Scriptures are read aloud in a worship service or when sitting in a Bible study group or a classroom as the Bible is being read silently. And they can happen when we sit alone, reading the Bible in a quiet place. Some people look for such an experience every time they hear or read the Bible, but those experiences do not happen every time. New Testament scholar *par excellence* Craig Keener was right when he wrote: "All Christians should read Scripture as people who are living in the biblical experience."[2] It is the Spirit that makes that happen.

## The Bible and the Spirit

The text and message of the Bible are generated by the Spirit, Bible reading is attended by the Spirit, and the Spirit's mission is to open us to God's Word. If the Spirit generated our Bible, then the Spirit always is present to the reader, even if the reader is not open. The following passages make clear the close relationship between the Spirit and the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is *God-breathed* [or more literally, *God-Spirited*] and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
>
> We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God *as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*.

So, *as the Holy Spirit* says: "Today, if you hear his voice…"

The *Holy Spirit also testifies* to us about this. First he says:

"This is the covenant I will make with them
after that time, says the Lord.
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds."

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances *to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing* when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.[*2]

Paul wrote that the entire Bible is *theopneustos,* which could be translated (as in the New International Version above) as "God-breathed," but one also could say God-Spirited. That is, God generates our Scriptures by sending the Spirit to the author to make sure the words are God's. The Bible you hold is both Spirit-generated and Spirit-breathing.

## How to Read a Bible That Is God-Spirited

Kris and I have enjoyed reading Marilynne Robinson's novels *Gilead, Home,* and *Lila.* We also both like to read the works of our favorite essayist, Joseph Epstein, and our favorite short-story writer, Flannery O'Connor. You could list your own favorite authors. But no one claims these authors wrote God-Spirited writings. Christians make a very high claim about the Bible. The Bible is unlike every other piece of literature. But we claim more: we claim *God speaks to us* as God's people and as individuals whenever we open this Book to listen to it. We claim further that this happens because *the Holy Spirit attends our listening to God's Word.*

How do you read such a book? How do you become open to the Spirit in the Bible? Is there such a thing as a Spirit-prompted reading of the Bible? I repeat: since the Spirit generated the Bible, every reading of the Bible is attended by the Spirit. But how does this work? Here is a diagram I use in my classes, and I ask one question: Where do you locate the Spirit? On the right side, on the left,

at the top, at the bottom, on both sides, or on all sides?[3]




The following questions are designed to help us think where we locate the Spirit's work when we read the Bible. These questions will lead you to answer on one side of the chart or the other.

- Does the Spirit give us insight to understand what is said in its original context (right side of the chart), or does the Spirit lead to deeper penetration in our spiritual formation (left side of the chart)?
- Does the Spirit give us, as Christians, a special interpretation, or does the Spirit empower us to receive the message?
- Does the Spirit help us understand what the Bible *says* or what the Bible *means*? Is the Spirit in your community's past, or is the Spirit in your community's present? Which of these—past or present—has the most influence on how a Christian should read the Bible?
- Is the Spirit present in the Bible so that everyone who reads it is influenced by the Spirit, or is the Spirit now present in you influencing you as you move from interpretation to formation and reception? In the diagram, where do *you* locate the Spirit?

You may wonder where I stand on these questions. I have used this diagram for my entire academic career, and it continues to provoke profitable, even if sometimes insoluble, discussions. At one time I was confident the Spirit belonged exclusively on the left-hand side, with illumination, formation, and meaning. But that view is short winded. The Spirit created the Scriptures, the Spirit attends every reading of the Scriptures, and the Spirit is involved at every moment of our attention to the Scriptures.

Hence, I see the Spirit surrounding the whole map. The Spirit grabs us where we are and takes us into the presence of God. Then we are dropped back into our world, having experienced a fresh encounter with God. I believe, too, that it is in our living out and practice of Spirit-guided readings of the Bible that our understanding of Scripture is deepened. I believe then in a "Spirit hermeneutics," as Craig Keener has called it, a Spirit-prompted reading of the Bible.[4]

## Entering into Spirit Hermeneutics

What can we do to nurture our reading of the Bible in the power of the Spirit? I suggest we consider the following as reliable guides in how to read the Bible in a Spirit-prompted manner.

### *With Others*

First, when we read the Bible we do so knee-deep in a community that shapes the meaning we assign to words, what we think about the words we read, and what we choose to see as we read. Baptists see Baptist things, and Anglicans see Anglican things. Pentecostals, Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Nazarenes do the same. This is the glory and the limitation of the "communion of the saints," but it also is the way of wisdom as we read the Scriptures. We need to read the Bible in conversation with other Bible readers. Others keep us honest and expand what we can hear in the Bible.

### *Intentionally Reverent*

If the Bible is God's personal Word to us, then we enter God's presence whenever we open a Bible. It is reverent to find quiet, to tune out all distractions, and to do whatever else it takes to enter into the presence of God as we read Scripture. Some may kneel, others may stand, and yet others sit. What matters is

that we find a posture of reverence before God.

*Prayerfully*

Third, pray as you read. There are any number of prayers appropriate for Bible reading, but my advice is to use some well-designed prayers and then over time to adapt one or all of these into your prayer before Bible reading. Here is my favorite:

> Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.[5]

*Listening*

Fourth, listen to the words in a receptive mode. To listen is to be open to hearing from God. The most important implication of learning to listen to the Bible is that we are to be open to *let the Bible take us where the Bible goes.* We are not to pressure the text into saying what it doesn't say. We are not to recast the words so they say what we would prefer to hear. Nor are we to tune out what we don't like and amplify what appeals to us. Genuine listening means being open to going where the Bible goes.

*Ponder*

Fifth, pause and ponder its words, no matter how long or short the passage. We may focus on a series of chapters, one chapter, a paragraph or two, or even a word. We can't decide in advance what the Spirit will do, so we have to wait on the Spirit to use the Word to speak to us.

*Respond*

Finally, respond to the Bible. One of the all-time great words about the Bible is from the letter of Jesus's brother James to Jewish Christian churches:

> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what

> it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*3

The words of James sting and bite: God gives us the Word and the Spirit works in us as we read God's Word so we will be transformed into Christlikeness. The Christlikeness of the Christian fellowship is the ultimate form of reading the Bible well. That is, the Word speaks to us, and we are to be open by God's grace; and then in God's Spirit-generated power, we are to do what the Word calls us to do. We don't decide what that call will be. Instead, we wait, listen, and respond to the Spirit.

Are you open to the God who speaks in the written Word?

This may be what you are thinking now: *Is the Spirit limited to the Word, or does the Spirit still speak to us apart from God's written revelation? Are we open to the Spirit speaking today in a fresh, unexpected, up-to-the-minute way?*

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*1 Acts 1:23–26

*2 2 Timothy 3:14–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21; Hebrews 3:7; 10:15–16; and 1 Peter 1:10–11

*3 James 1:22–25

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# OPEN TO THE GOD WHO SPEAKS IN THE PROPHETIC WORD

Two years after my encounter with the Pentecostal Christian from Montana, I had married. Kris and I went back to Austria and England as summer missionaries. We were ministering with a godly, passionate, intelligent pastor in England.

He told me that he had spoken in tongues without ever seeking the spiritual gift and that it was a watershed experience. It had frightened him somewhat because he had been initiated into Christianity in a world similar to mine—one that was closed to the Spirit. This pastor's spiritual authenticity, his theological orthodoxy, and his testimony almost converted me on the spot to believing that some people received the Spirit in ways that exceeded what I believed was possible. Over the next year I read both passages in the Bible about speaking in tongues, and I read the critics.

I became convinced that Christians could authentically speak in tongues. I also became convinced that the gift of prophecy might still be active in the church. I was not among the tongues speakers or prophets, but I didn't dismiss such spiritual gifts out of hand.

Then I began to wonder if I might speak in tongues. So one day after a long time spent reading the Bible and praying, I asked God for the gift of tongues and I opened my mouth. Not wide but enough so that whatever might happen could happen. I tried this two or three more times, but I never did speak in tongues. My desire for it waned, and I figure if God wants me to speak in tongues I will.

In a later chapter we will examine the gift of tongues more fully. But for the moment, I want to draw our attention to the reality that God uses tongue speaking to speak to us, because our God is an interactive God. The same goes for the gift of speaking prophetic words.

## Our Interactive God

Two very important roles in the Old Testament—the roles of priest and prophet—set the tone for our interactive relationship with God. When the people of God, the nation of Israel, wanted to speak with God they went to the priest. He was responsible for taking the people's heartfelt praise, prayers, confessions, and petitions to God. But that all changed with the coming of the Redeemer. Jesus is the great high priest and we too are priests. As the apostle John informs us, Jesus "has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father."*[1]

But in the days of ancient Israel, priests went to God on behalf of the people, and his acts conveyed the people's needs, requests, and longings to God. However, if the people wanted to hear from God, they went to the prophet. (Or more likely, the prophet came to them.) A prophet communicates a message from God to the people. Bible readers know the names of many prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, along with Daniel, Zechariah, Amos, and the short-winded Obadiah. Alongside them we have Elijah and Elisha. Each had the same calling: to communicate God's Word to the people and to do so with a very clear purpose.

From the beginning, God established a means for humans to communicate with God (a priest) and a means for God to communicate with the people (a prophet). God is inherently a communicative God who longs for a two-way relationship with humanity. God speaks to us, and God wants us to speak back.

Does God still speak to us through prophets? The New Testament mentions a bundle of prophets and that means when the people of God became freshly open to the Spirit, more (not fewer) prophets were let loose. The New Testament has more to say about prophets than many of us realize—and much more than some of us want to admit.

## Prophets Then

When Peter preached the first sermon on Pentecost, he saw what happened when

God's people were freshly open to the Spirit. He could think of no better way to describe it than to use the prediction made by the prophet Joel:

> I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
> Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
> your young men will see visions,
> your old men will dream dreams.
> Even on my servants, both men and women,
> I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
> and they will prophesy.[*2]

The mark of Pentecost and the mark of the new Christian movement is renewal through openness to the Spirit. The sign? God would speak to the people through prophets. In the New Testament era, God's Spirit would empower "both men and women" to be prophets. There is no indication in the New Testament that the gift of prophecy would either die out or that it would be assigned exclusively to famous preachers and pastors. Young and old, men and women—God raises up prophets among them all.

Peter's fellow apostle Paul made prophecy an important item in his list of spiritual gifts. "To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom" and "to another prophecy." Paul listed "first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers."[*3] Later he wrote that when Christ ascended, he sent gifts of the Spirit to the church. Again, Paul made a list. "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers."[*4] Why these gifts and the other gifts? Paul indicated the purpose is "to equip [God's] people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith…and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."[*5]

The New Testament mentions a number of prophets who were active in the early church. Agabus, for instance, prophesied the arrest of Paul.[*6] In the same chapter of Acts, we are told that the evangelist Philip had "four unmarried daughters who prophesied."[*7] Paul made it clear that the gift of prophecy and prophets would be given to the church. He even had to tell the church of Thessalonica not to "quench the Spirit." Which meant, "Do not treat prophecies

with contempt but test them all."[*8]

We can stack a few more Bible verses on top of these. It is accurate to think the New Testament apostles are counterparts in important ways to Old Testament prophets, so we can say the apostles are prophets. The refrain in the book of Revelation, "whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches," is the language of the prophets.[*9] Add to this the fact that there were clear signs that Mary, Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna too uttered words of prophecy when they sang their songs in those famous passages that are read or sung today during Advent and Christmas.[*10]

Those who desire to anchor their faith in the Bible must conclude that God speaks to God's people through prophets. God did this in the Old Testament; God did this in the New Testament through apostles and prophets. And God's Spirit is unleashed so that all sorts of people—men and women, old and young—might utter words of prophecy.

To deny the gift of prophecy in the church is to quench the Spirit.

## Testing Prophecies

Some prophecies are fraudulent.[1] Not everything said by someone who claims to be prophesying can be trusted as coming from the Spirit of God. Fraudulent prophecies in the Bible spew from the mouths of false prophets.[*11]

Three tests apply to any claim to prophecy, and they are as vital today as they were in the time of Moses.[2] First, a prophecy and the moral character of the prophet need to match each other. Good prophets speak good prophecies.[*12] Second, a prophecy must be consistent with the message of the Bible and turn out to be accurate.[*13] Paul made it clear: "No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God [that is, prophesying] says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."[*14] Third, a prophetic utterance is to result in glorifying Jesus by building up the church.[*15]

If prophecy is alive and well today, so too must be the process of testing the prophecy. As Paul told the church at Corinth, "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said."[*16] We might add one more testing criteria, this one from Gordon Fee: "Paul argues for the absolute need for intelligibility in the assembly."[3] He's right. What we cannot understand

will not impress us!

## Prophets Today

A preacher mounted the pulpit in the Hall of the House of Representatives. She announced the text, stood under the gold statue of the Republic's symbol (an eagle), and preached for more than an hour to a hushed, amazed, packed house. The text, "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." That was prophetic preaching in the center of power, and the preacher was Harriet Livermore. On the steps was none other than President John Quincy Adams, no friend to evangelical preachers, no friend to the message Harriet delivered, and no friend especially to a woman showing up to speak like a prophet about his government.[4]

In our own time, seminary teacher Jeff Louie shared a story of how the Spirit still prompts people to know and to speak in ways that transcend what would have been said/known otherwise.

> One Sunday, I was introduced to the fiancée of a member of our church. I frequently meet engaged couples, but this was the only time that I felt compelled to phone the young woman and ask, "Is this an arranged marriage?" Her reply was, "Who told you?" No one told me. As a result a dialogue ensued. The episode had a great ending and she is now happily married. How does one know these things? I am not surprised that God can give such knowledge.
>
> A church member once told me the story of his chronically ill coworker. One day he approached her and said, "In three days you will be well." He had never said such a thing in his life. He was just as surprised as the coworker. He prayed for three days, and on the third day, the coworker became well. When the whole story was told to her, she became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. What prompted this man to say such a thing? I am convinced that it was the Spirit of God.[5]

Yes. I believe we need to commit ourselves to being open to the gifts of knowledge and prophecy. Perhaps you have heard from God as you listened to your pastor's sermons or in private conversation with a fellow Christian or while

reading a book. The Lord has used the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in my life and in the life of the church. I draw your attention to his potent words on our wishful thinking about what a church ought to be, as well as our constant carping about the church for not meeting our expectations. He revealed how destructive such thinking can become.

Bonhoeffer wrote about this in his incomparable book *Life Together,* which addresses our dangerously dreamy ideas that lead to disillusionment:

> On innumerable occasions a whole Christian community has been shattered because it has lived on the basis of a wishful image….But God's grace quickly frustrates all such dreams. A great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves, is bound to overwhelm us as surely as God desires to lead us to an understanding of genuine Christian community….Only that community which enters into the experience of this great disillusionment with all its unpleasant and evil appearances begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it.

Then come prophetic warnings and the promise of moving beyond wishful thinking to real church life.

> Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial….Because God already has laid the only foundation of our community, because God has united us in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that life together with other Christians, not as those who make demands, but as those who thankfully receive.[6]

The bright day of Christian community dawns wherever the early-morning mists of dreamy visions are lifting. Confession time: I'm a Bible professor who sees the vision of Jesus and the vision of Paul and the vision of Revelation, and then I look at one church after another. I can let my understanding of those

visions destroy the church by spending time, in *Mad Magazine*–like satire, criticizing and upbraiding and calling out the church for its shortcomings. This is how some bloggers gain their audience, and some people anoint themselves as "prophets" to justify their sharp-tongued approach. But being critical is not the same as being prophetic.

Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, entered that discussion with a powerful reminder: the church is for sinners, the Lord's Supper is there for those who confess their sins, and everyone in the room is in need of grace. When I see the church as a hospital for sinners, I expect less of the church but somehow get the more that the church has to offer.

Are you open to prophetic words today?

The Spirit works in a thousand ways, including through prophecy, because our God is a God who speaks. In the next chapter, we will dip into how the Spirit speaks to us and through us when we intercede before God.

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*1 Revelation 1:6; see also 5:10; 20:6

*2 Acts 2:17–18, quoting Joel 2:28–29

*3 1 Corinthians 12:8, 10, 28

*4 Ephesians 4:11

*5 Ephesians 4:12–13

*6 Acts 21:10–11

*7 Acts 21:9

*8 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21

*9 Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22

*10 Luke 1:46–55, 67–79; 2:29–32, 36–38

*11 Exodus 7:8–11; Jeremiah 23:11; Matthew 7:15; 24:11; 1 John 4:1; Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10

*12 Isaiah 28:7

*13 Deuteronomy 13:1–5; 18:22

*14 1 Corinthians 12:3

*15 1 Corinthians 14:3

*16 1 Corinthians 14:29

6

# THE SPIRIT OF GOD INTERCEDES FOR US

Some Christians seem to think prayer is one-way communication. The assumed sequence is: (a) we put in our request to God; (b) God hums and beeps a bit; and (c) a little light blinks and we get a response. In such cases, God seems to be more like an ATM machine. You key in your PIN and out comes God's answer.

But that does not square with what we learn in the Bible. When the Spirit of God becomes present in you, as we see in Scripture, an interactive relationship with God begins. The God of the Bible is a Conversationalist.

Abraham spoke with God and even bargained with the Almighty. Moses hiked up a mountain and spoke with God, and God kept up his part of the conversation. David's prayers in the psalms are loaded with interactive moments, and who doubts that God spoke to the ancient prophets?

Jesus called God "Father," a term of special intimacy, because his experience of interacting with God was the same as that of speaking with his own father. The apostle Paul described having interacted with God and being lifted into heaven to hear about profound mysteries.[*1] It doesn't end there. One of Paul's great expressions is that when the Spirit comes upon a person, the first thing that happens is that the Spirit-prompted person addresses God as *"Abba,"* the Aramaic term for "Father."[*2]

When Paul and his ministry colleagues wanted to do mission work in Bithynia (modern-day northern Turkey), the Bible records, "The Spirit of Jesus

would not allow them."[*3] In a vision, God made it clear that Paul was to go to Greece instead.[*4] The Bible exhibits again and again the two-way communication between God and God's people.

## Has God Stopped Responding to His People?

Are we to conclude that God decided to stop doing what he did repeatedly with Abraham and Jesus and Paul and the other apostles? Has God changed? No. Is the God we worship the God who speaks? Yes. Does God arbitrarily turn his audible button to mute? No. Our God is an interactive God.

St. Augustine is perhaps best known for his famous *Confessions,* one of the most influential books in the Western world. Augustine wrote: "For you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless till it finds its rest in you."[1] This famous line expresses Augustine's words to God, but the second famous line in *Confessions* shows God speaking to Augustine through the voice of a child. Augustine was in pain in his search for God and wondered aloud why he should not convert to Christianity. As he wept beneath a fig tree, we pick up with his narrative:

> So saying, I wept, my heart crushed with very bitterness. And behold, suddenly I heard a voice from the house next door; the sound, as it might be, of a boy or a girl, repeating in a singsong voice a refrain unknown to me: "Pick it up and read it, pick it up and read it." Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began to ponder most intensely whether children were in the habit of singing a chant of this sort as part of a game of some kind, but I had no recollection at all of having heard it anywhere. I checked my outburst of tears and arose, taking this to be nothing other than a God-sent command that I should open the Bible and read the first chapter I found, whatever it might be….
>
> In high excitement, therefore, I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for I had left my copy of the Apostle Paul there when I had risen to go aside. I seized it, opened it, and read in silence the first heading I cast my eyes upon: *Not in riotousness and drunkenness, not in lewdness and wantonness, not in strife and rivalry; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh and its*

> *lusts* (Rom. 13.13-14). I neither wished nor needed to read more. No sooner had I finished the sentence than it was as if the light of steadfast trust poured into my heart, and all the shadows of hesitation fled away.[2]

Various explanations attempt to account for the child's voice and the words that were repeated. But what does not vary is that God spoke to Augustine and Augustine's life was radically changed for the glory of God and the good of the church. We know about Augustine only because the Spirit spoke through a child.

I ask our questions again: Is our God the God who speaks? Has he now ceased speaking, or does God still speak today? One of my friends told me she was in prayer for over a period of twenty-four hours and heard God speak to her. Another friend told me recently he's praying a lot but getting no answers. Still, he added, he keeps praying anyway.

## What Happens When We Don't Know What to Say?

You may well believe in the ATM God, the God who dispenses whatever you want in response to your keying in the correct PIN. But you may also find that when you pray, your requests seem to be turned to the mute setting. This time it is not God who is silent, but your prayers that have been silenced. Sometimes we don't know what to pray for or how best to intercede for a person or a situation. Sometimes the situation itself is so confusing or possibly so daunting that it silences our prayers. Other times something inside us—lack of clarity or doubt or incessant questions—leads to a decision not to pray.

But the Spirit is there and knows exactly the things that seem to paralyze us. The Spirit shows up at our side with the ability to speak and to pray and to intercede for us. Perhaps in our non-praying we have stepped out of the way, giving the Spirit a new opportunity to pray for us. In either case—when we pray faithfully and when we can't find a way to pray—the Spirit is our constant interceder.

Trevor Hudson is a pastor in Johannesburg, South Africa, and one of my favorite writers on spiritual formation. He has told a story that perfectly illustrates not knowing how to pray, then realizing he was deep in prayer.

> Paul teaches us that the Spirit prays within us with groans that words

> cannot express….I remember my first experience of this happening in my life. I was at university studying for pastoral ministry, a time of intellectual searching around the big questions of faith and belief. The pain of my country at that stage of its apartheid history weighed heavily on my heart. I found myself wrestling with what it meant to be a faithful follower of Jesus. One weekend I came home to stay with my parents. It was late at night, and I could not sleep. I got out of bed and knelt before God with all the tossings and turnings of my burdened heart struggling for expression. I could not find words to express what I was experiencing. As I began to speak to God, I heard unintelligible sounds coming from my mouth. Now I can only describe it as the groaning of my spirit calling out to God from my very depths—a sense of inner surrender and release.

How do we evaluate such mutterings? Trevor continues:

> The experience puzzled me for some time. Fortunately I had a good friend with whom I could speak about such matters….My friend listened patiently and then asked one question: Had my experience drawn me closer to Jesus Christ or pushed me farther away from him? Immediately I knew the answer.[3]

Trevor sent me a signed copy of his book. On the title page he wrote, "Dear Scot, May we always be *open* to the *Holy Spirit Here and Now,* God bless, Trevor."[4] Being open to the Spirit means at times being open to the Spirit's speaking when we have no words. The Bible teaches us about our wordless, Spirit-prompted prayers.

Read this passage carefully:

> For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, *"Abba,* Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children….
>
> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we

> ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies….
>
> In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*[5]

Each of us is indwelt by the same Spirit who indwelt Jesus. This is the same Spirit Jesus sent to us. Each of us has a Spirit-prompted groaning for love, justice, peace, and the desire for the reconciliation of all creation. This same Spirit who indwells us and who groans through us also, to invent a new phrase, "groans us" into intercessions before God when we can't find the words. Even more, that Spirit takes our dissatisfactions and questions and worries, then groans our desires "in accordance with the will of God."

This passage teaches us that God's Spirit takes our prayers and improves on them. The Spirit takes our worries and sets them before God, and takes our consternation and resolves it in God's presence. *We become more confident and more settled because we know the Spirit transcends our inability in prayer. The Spirit transforms our ability in prayer into the fullest measure of intercession before God.*[5] To put this in biblical terms, the Spirit is like a priest serving before God, taking our feeble and muted desires and turning them into brilliant communications with the Father.

Have you ever wondered if your worries are actually offerings given to God by the Spirit? Have you wondered if your total silence is the Spirit's pure prayer on your behalf?

## A Desperate Prayer of Groaning in the Spirit

Miho is the teenage daughter of Sachi, a loving mother who struggled in prayer for her daughter. Miho's suffering with depression was hard for Sachi to watch, though she prayed and learned an even deeper surrender to God. Then it happened: Miho was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer that the doctor said was incurable. How did Sachi respond? These are her words of groaning in the Spirit as she became increasingly open to the Spirit:

About one year before Miho's cancer was discovered, I had started learning a type of prayer called contemplative prayer. This is a kind of prayer you do without words or thoughts. You just place yourself in God's presence. We might call it a Be-Still-and-Know-That-I-Am-God kind of prayer, after Psalm 46:10. Perhaps for me it was the prayer of surrender.

In this life and in this world things happen. Many of them don't make sense. People die in earthquakes, and a young person like my daughter dies from cancer. I don't understand why these things happen, but when an absurd situation arises, instead of sweeping it under the rug and pretending it doesn't exist, I acknowledge my full awareness of it. I acknowledge that the situation is there and that it absolutely sucks. I don't try to understand or explain it away, but I simply hold the absurdity in my mind. It's almost like carefully wrapping my hands around something fragile. I don't hold it tight or throw it away, but I let it sit quietly on the palms of my hands.

And that's how I come to the presence of God in contemplative prayer. In this prayer there's a lot of silence. Silence to quiet my soul from emotional disturbance, silence to wait on God, silence to simply enjoy and rest in the merciful presence of God. Not only do I stay silent, but often God also becomes silent. Not that He ignores me, but His quiet presence teaches my soul that there are things beyond my understanding and explanations; it is an enriching silence. I said earlier that I confessed that He was enough for me when I was praying for my daughter, and that, too, came naturally in the context of contemplative prayer.

Nevertheless, what held me up was not the prayer of supplication, but rather the prayer of silence. As I held Miho on the palms of my hands and prayed, sometimes God encouraged me to ask boldly, sometimes led me to intercede for others, and sometimes He simply let me cry in His arms.

It's not that I gave up on healing or I was resigned to accepting everything as "God's will." It was more like anticipating an invisible and unimaginable glory of God—I was holding my breath and waiting intently for God's glory to be revealed. Perhaps to wait on

> God's glory means to let Jesus shine in me, whom I can only meet through suffering.[6]

This is a beautiful story of tragedy, a story of Sachi groaning in the Spirit as she sat silently in God's presence waiting for God to reveal his glory to all. Prayer, when swallowed up by the Spirit, takes us to new places in the presence of God. But it is the Spirit who takes us there.

Are you open to the Spirit's intercessions in your silence?

The Holy Spirit communicates with our spirit in a variety of ways, and we've looked so far at the Living Word, the written Word, the prophetic word, and the Spirit's interceding for us in prayer with "wordless groans" in prayer. We turn now to the root of it all: to the new presence of the Spirit within us, a presence that transcends and transforms.

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*1 2 Corinthians 12:1–10

*2 Galatians 4:6

*3 Acts 16:7

*4 Acts 16:9–10

*5 Romans 8:14–16, 22–23, 26–27



Part 2

# Open to the New Creation of the Spirit

7

# OPEN YOURSELF TO THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT AS A NEW PRESENCE

Daniel Wallace, a highly respected professor of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, had learned to live without conscious dependence and awareness of the Spirit. But his son's cancer at age eight woke Dan up. Here are his words of confession that what he needed most was a deep encounter with the Spirit.

> Through this experience [of his son's cancer] I found that the Bible was not adequate. I needed God in a personal way—not as an object of my study, but as friend, guide, comforter. I needed an existential experience of the Holy One. Quite frankly, I found that the Bible was not the answer. I found the scriptures to be helpful—even authoritatively helpful—as a guide. But without *feeling* God, the Bible gave me little solace. In the midst of this "summer from hell," I began to examine what had become of my faith. I found a longing to get closer to God, but found myself unable to do so through my normal means: exegesis, scripture reading, more exegesis. I believe that I had depersonalized God so much that when I really needed him I didn't know how to relate. I longed for him, but found many community-wide restrictions in my cessationist[*1] environment. I looked for God, but all I found was a suffocation of the Spirit in my evangelical tradition as well as in my own heart.[1]

Dan tells us in his joy-filled story that he (re)discovered the Spirit, the presence of God as a Person in his life. The new encounters renewed his faith and gave him hope to face one of life's most serious challenges—suffering in the face of his child's pain and need for healing.

If we are to enter into an abundant kind of life, one of growth and victory over sin and systemic evils, then we need Someone who transcends our inabilities and who can transform our abilities. What we need is God's presence in us, and this is exactly what Jesus promised to give to anyone who wanted to join his team of Spirit-empowered humans.

It was just like Jesus to teach with an image drawn from concrete realities. So to inform his disciples of the power of God's new presence, he used a wonderful image: "living water." The image of living water then became a source of all sorts of profound new insights into Spirit-theology in the New Testament.

## From Living Water to God's Spirit

One of the most perceptive and unusual conversations in the life of Jesus can be reduced to these statements:

> Jesus and his disciples journeyed through Samaria, a region some of his Jewish contemporaries avoided.
>
> Jesus was tired and needed water from a public well while his disciples went into the village to purchase food.
>
> A Samaritan woman came to the well, and Jesus asked her to draw some water for him.
>
> His request surprised her since he was crossing a well-known boundary that separated Jews from Samaritans. She was puzzled, and this is what Jesus said to her: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."*[2]

Water that is contained in a well is not running water. But water that flows from a spring, emerging from a source, that is what "living water" means. Jesus wanted the woman to see beyond water sitting in a well to something deeper. According to Jewish tradition, water drawn from a well can't purify, but running

or "living" water can. What is more, the living water Jesus speaks of will become an inner source of constant renewal and power.

Jesus continued by telling the Samaritan woman this: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*[3]

What is this living, running, flowing water?[2] Jesus interpreted "living water" for us three different times. Later in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, he revealed that he was talking about the Spirit and was urging her to become open to the Spirit. "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the *Spirit* and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is *spirit,* and his worshipers must worship in the *Spirit* and in truth."*[4]

Three chapters later, this time when Jesus was in Jerusalem, he spoke of "living water" yet again:

> On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." *By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive*. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*[5]

The living, flowing, bubbling water Jesus spoke of is not the clever image of a preacher but the Holy Spirit available to each of us. It's what Dan Wallace wanted and got when he had an encounter with God as Person.

## From Living Water to the Advocate

For centuries, Jews longed for the Spirit who was to accompany the arrival of God's prophesied new covenant. In the first century, Jesus promised to send that Spirit to his followers—and to us. In a few words, Jesus made his promise explicit:

> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world

> cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.[6]

The term behind *advocate* is *Paraclete,* which refers to a legal advocate and at the same time to Someone who would accompany those for whom he would be the advocate. The Paraclete will be with us forever; the Paraclete is the Spirit of truth; the Paraclete counters the world's system of death; the Paraclete is both "with" us and "in" us.

But that's not all. The Paraclete enables us to be obedient by teaching, reminding, and empowering us through his presence with us and in us. The Paraclete leads us into God's peace. The Paraclete keeps us focused on Jesus. That is, Jesus did not abandon us as orphans; God loves us so much that God shares his Presence with us.[7]

Jesus's promise to send the Paraclete to his followers would resonate strongly with his Jewish audience. They knew the history of God's presence among their ancestors in the tabernacle in the wilderness and in the glory of God's presence in the Temple in Jerusalem. These connections were made clear in the promises of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Someday God's presence would no longer be limited to specific locations; rather, it would go radically global!

God announced the day when God would grant his special presence with each of us. Again, this is why the Day of Pentecost is so important to you and me. It is far more than a day on the church calendar; it is the day when openness to God's Spirit was matched by God's flooding and filling his people with the Spirit.

That's the day when everything changed. Those who ignore or suppress the Spirit deprive themselves and others of God's great gift.

## From Talk of Living Water to Being Filled with the Spirit

This was my conversion verse: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit."[8] I just now opened my old King James Bible (Scofield Reference edition, Morocco leather cover, gold-trimmed pages) to that verse. Roughly half the verses on the page are underlined—some in black and some in red. My first reading of Ephesians was marked up with a black pen, and that verse is not only underlined but I placed parentheses on each side of the

verse to give it double emphasis. I learned from this verse that we can be filled with the Spirit if we are open to the Spirit. Gordon Fee, perhaps the world's most important scholar on the Holy Spirit, said this verse is the "ultimate imperative" in Paul's letters![3]

Paul introduced the idea of being filled with the Spirit by using an idea that everyone living in the Roman Empire would have recognized: drunkenness. The god of wine, Bacchus, son of Zeus and Semele, was powerful, versatile, and winged. But he was primarily associated with ecstasy and intoxication. Thus, Bacchus was the party god, and he was celebrated with wine in excess, uncontrolled orgies, and filthy language. Such celebrations often were called *bacchanalia,* and it appears at times they were perceived as religious ecstasies.

The Christians of Paul's churches knew from past experience and from observation the temptations of wine. Hence, Paul urged Christians to convert from the ecstatic control of wine to being filled with the Spirit.

The god of Bacchus haunts every community. People turn to the bottle to push down their pain, to swallow their sorrow, and to repress harsh realities such as poverty, broken relationships, dull work, anger, resentment, guilt over some sinful action, or loneliness. Sometimes it leads to stubborn, life-sapping addictions. Others think celebration can't become celebration until they reach into the circle of an inebriating buzz. But alcohol does not alter reality; it only suspends our encounter with the harshness of life. Further, drunkenness prevents the joy of true celebration from occurring.

Instead of advocating domination by intoxication, Paul taught how we can be formed by the Holy Spirit. Noticeably, Paul brought this up in the context of Christian worship. How are the followers of Jesus to be "filled" with the Spirit? By "speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."[*9] Here's how Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar, N. T. (Tom) Wright explains it: "If you want to celebrate—and why not?—then you know what to do. Let the spirit fill your hearts and lives, particularly your minds and imaginations. Use all the resources of the rich Christian tradition—its poems, its pictures, its liturgies, its hymns—to help you do so."[4] But we are not filled with the Spirit accidentally. No, we must seek the Spirit's filling, we must request the Spirit's filling, and we must receive the Spirit's filling. In other words, we must be vulnerable and open to the Spirit.

## Are You Open?

How do we get the presence of God's Spirit in us? Peter answers in his famous sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The "promise" of the Holy Spirit is "for you and your children and for all who are far off." It is for everyone and anyone who is open. He tells us we are to *turn from* our past and with receptive hearts, minds, and souls *turn toward* Jesus and the Spirit. Then he tells us to be baptized in "the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."*10

Our one question now is more complete: Are you open to the new presence of God in your heart?

Are you open to what happens when God becomes present?

In the next chapter, we will return to the first act of the Spirit in our Christian life.

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*1 The term *cessationist* refers to the view that the more miraculous spiritual gifts ceased at the end of the age of the apostles.

*2 John 4:10

*3 John 4:13–14

*4 John 4:23–24

*5 John 7:37–39

*6 John 14:16–18

*7 John 14:16–18, 23–27; 15:26–27

*8 Ephesians 5:18, KJV

*9 Ephesians 5:19–20

*10 Acts 2:38–39

8

# OPEN YOURSELF TO THE NEW DAY OF THE SPIRIT

Some years back I was invited to preach seven sermons over six days during the season of Pentecost. As I was preparing, I landed on the best statement ever about the Holy Spirit: a quote from my doctoral supervisor at the University of Nottingham, James D. G. Dunn.

Back then, I was preaching sermons, not writing a book, so I wrote down the quotation. But years later, to use the quote in one of my books, I needed the exact wording and a precise source to cite. So I wrote to Jimmy, asking if he could recall where he had written the line. This was his response:

"Good question, but one I can't recall. I said quite a lot along the same lines in *Jesus and the Spirit,* and probably also on my early *Expository Times* pieces on 'Rediscovering the Spirit' (1972, 1982), which come from our time together in Nottingham when it is likely that you heard me on the subject. Sorry I can't be more help."

If the author can't remember his own lines, how could I? I couldn't find the source, so I had to drop the quotation for that writing project. But one day I was wandering through my commentaries on the book of Acts, and I spotted Jimmy's commentary on Acts. It triggered a memory, and on page 12 I found the citation. For me, this statement best captures what the Spirit does:

> The prominence of the Spirit in Luke's narrative from Pentecost onwards makes clear beyond doubt that for Luke the mission of the

> church could not hope to be effective without this empowering from God (the Spirit of God) which *transcends human ability and transforms human inability*.[1]

The Spirit empowers us beyond what we could do on our own and transforms our existing gifts, abilities, and talents to advance God's glory. The Spirit takes us beyond ourselves, taking what we have and making it better and taking what we don't have and making it something.

## Words That Clarify the Meaning of Spirit

The Bible opens with a two-verse introduction that conveys the biggest picture possible: in the beginning God created it all. Then the Bible explains how that happened: there was chaos called *tohu va-bohu,* usually translated "formless and void," along with a colossal cloud of impenetrable darkness over it all.

Enter now the *ruach*: "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." The word *Spirit* is what we commonly see as the English translation of *ruach*. It also can be translated as "wind" or "breath." When we read biblical references to *ruach,* it can be puzzling to try to discern in each instance if it refers to the divine spirit, the human spirit, or just wind. And at times, the wind is God's Spirit blowing where it wants. At other times, it is the breath we breathe, and without that breath our bodies die. At other times, it is the Spirit of God.

We need to see that the spirit that gives us life is connected to the Spirit who grants life (see, for example, Genesis 2:7) as well as eternal life.[2] So when I say repeatedly that we need to be open to the Spirit, I mean we need to let God suffuse the spirit of our birth and creation as humans with God's own Spirit. Only in that way can we become all we have been created to become. To be open to the Spirit, then, can mean releasing what God has created in us. It also can mean letting the Spirit wash over us to revive our spirits. And it can sound like a divine guest taking up residence in the deepest part of our souls. All of this and more is what it means to be open to the Spirit.

Here is a bold but beautiful confession to stand on: wherever there is life, there is the Spirit.*[1] Without the Spirit who is Life itself, there is no life. Which means we must see the Spirit reaching out into all of creation. Creation and every person on earth are suffused with the presence of the Spirit. Yet at the same time we recognize the particular work of the Spirit in our spirit accomplishing the

work of redemption.

Old Testament scholar and spiritual-formation writer Richard Averbeck has written about this beautifully: "The Spirit of God is the person of God who vivifies [makes alive] the spirit of people to God."[3] If we are given spirit at creation or birth, it is God's Spirit who animates us with transformed, eternal life.

A puzzling promise in the Old Testament holds that the *ruach* or divine Spirit would be poured out on the people of God. Isaiah predicted the day of the coming *ruach,* and because these lines are not known as well as some others, I quote them in full:

> But now listen, Jacob, my servant,
> Israel, whom I have chosen.
> This is what the LORD says—
> he who made you, who formed you in the womb,
> and who will help you:
> Do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant,
> Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.
> For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
> and streams on the dry ground;
> I will pour out my *Spirit* on your offspring,
> and my blessing on your descendants.
> They will spring up like grass in a meadow,
> like poplar trees by flowing streams.
> Some will say, "I belong to the LORD";
> others will call themselves by the name of Jacob;
> still others will write on their hand, "The LORD's,"
> and will take the name Israel.*[2]

God creates all and sustains all creation by the Spirit.

Each human has or is a spirit.

God's Spirit blows over all creation and all humans like the wind.

And someday, God will revive this world by blowing mightily with the Spirit. This reviving will awaken the human spirit into Spirit-prompted living.

This is revealed not only by Isaiah but also by Ezekiel in one of the most powerful chapters in the Bible. Before we continue, consider this: the Spirit was not invented on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit—and God's *ruach,* our *ruach*—appears throughout the Old Testament, long before the events recorded in the New Testament. In Ezekiel 37, it is God or the Spirit of God who asks the key question.

> The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"[*3]

Can these bones live? That's the big question. Can God do a mighty work and take dead bones and make them live again? Or can God send revival among God's people and set them ablaze?

What God says next is a bold and beautiful and breath-giving prediction:

> Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.' "[*4]

The prophet spoke the words as God had directed him, and what happened? Here is the greatest story of dead bones rattling and new life exploding into full view.

> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.
>
> Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they

> may live.' " So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.*[5]

Many New Testament readers need to see a few more words from this magnificent chapter in Ezekiel. The prophet foretold this: "I will put my Spirit in you and you will live."*[6]

What the prophet describes here is as much Old as it is New Testament. So we ask, when does this happen? When God restored the exiles to the land, when God's Temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem. And this word of God continued to find new expressions when God sent his Son, when the Day of Pentecost came, when the gospel branched out through the Roman Empire and into the whole world, and whenever God awakens the sleeping saints and they are revivified to live as God wants them to live. The Day of Pentecost is no more and no less dramatic than the dry bones piled in the valley suddenly turning into living bodies, for that is what Pentecost does to each of us: it takes our deadness and brings it to new life.

## The Spirit Arrives Afresh

Jesus entered into the joy of the Bible's Spirit-spirit-wind dance by announcing that the days foretold by Isaiah had arrived. Jesus was conversing with a seeker named Nicodemus. In the quotation from the Bible that follows, I put the "spirit" words in italics. Notice that the same Greek word, *pneuma,* (which is Greek for the Hebrew *ruach*) of the original New Testament is translated in the New International Version with three different terms: "Spirit," "spirit," and "wind."*[7]

> Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the *Spirit.* Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the *Spirit* gives birth to *spirit.* You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The *wind* blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the *Spirit.*"*[8]

To a first-century listener, these words of Jesus would have been astounding: Jesus was claiming to have the power to do what God did at creation. Jesus was saying he had the power to *create new life, to turn the chaos of sin and evil inside out to cleanse it, and to do this work of new creation through the power of the Holy Spirit.* The Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation and who had been predicted to come to hover over Israel is the same Spirit who, during the conversation quoted above, hovered over Nicodemus. And not just over Nicodemus on the night he met with Jesus, but over all the Nicodemuses who are open to the fresh air of the Spirit![4] Once again, Richard Averbeck is worthy of a careful listening: "Using the analogy of a ship driven by the wind…we can 'put up the sails' in our lives and thereby take advantage of the blowing of the Spirit in and through our lives. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit as long as we have our sails up."[5] When the sail gets filled with the Spirit, we enter the new day of the Spirit.

## Conversion Is a Gradual Work of the Spirit

I am a Chicago Cubs fan, which means I have been the object of ridicule and the butt of jokes—often aimed at me by Cardinals fans. My son played minor league baseball in the Cubs organization and now works as one of their scouts. About four years ago, he explained to Kris and me the plan that was designed by the team's owners, the Ricketts family, and the president of baseball operations, Theo Epstein. They decided they would strip the ball club back to its framework and rebuild the team piece by piece.

No one had confidence in the plan except a few inside the Cubs organization, including our son Lukas. When I told students at Northern Seminary the plan, they chuckled. It sounded like such a far-fetched plan to design a team that would win the World Series and be sustainable for the long term. One by one, players were drafted and prepared to carry out the grand design.

Late summer in 2015, I said to my son, "Luke, this team is fun and they are good." Even my father, a lifelong Cardinals fan, said, "These young Cubs are fun to watch." I wrote the words above on October 27, 2016, when the Cubs were playing in the World Series. It was hard to concentrate on this book that entire month. I am now editing these same words after the Cubs *won* the World Series in a dramatic, late-game rally led by Kyle Schwarber after a rain-delay pep talk by Jason Heyward in the seventh game. This once-in-a-century victory happened

only because of a gradual conversion process. One by one, people started to believe. The owners, the front-office personnel, the coaches, and the team's manager, Joe Maddon. Then the players and one fan after another believed.

In her Christmas letter, our friend, fellow parishioner, and serious Cubs fan Laurie Nelson wrote, "I didn't quite know how to be a Cubs fan with real hope." She wanted to remind her friends that "perspectives can change" because that's "what Jesus can bring."

Both new creation and the new day of the Spirit work on us individually, one by one.

The original creation began with the light and darkness, then waters and sky, oceans and lakes, land and vegetation, sun and moon and stars, fish and birds and land animals, and finally the creation of Adam and Eve. Then God assigned tasks to all of creation, one by one, through the power of the *ruach* of God.

The process was the same with Jesus and the new creation: one person at a time. Jesus preached the gospel and offered the kingdom, then one person after another—first his mother and father and their kin, and then the apostles and their kin, and the brothers and sisters of Jesus and their kin, and on and on it goes. One by one new creation begins to impact the world.

## The Night-Time Visitor

Here's how this type of thing begins.[*9] Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a member of a powerful religious party that often was troubled by what Jesus said and did. And Nicodemus was no garden-variety Pharisee; he was a member of the Jewish ruling council. Old "Nic at night" secreted his way to Jesus under cover of darkness to avoid being associated with Jesus. Still, in coming to talk to Jesus he was clearly open to the Spirit. He knew Jesus must be from God, given the powerful goodness evident in Jesus's life.

Jesus made it clear to this leading religious leader that he must be "born again." The word *again* could also mean "from above" or "anew," and all of these meanings apply. Jesus offered Nicodemus new birth because new creation is unleashed by the *ruach* who has come from above and makes all things new. This is what it means to be born anew:

**God's Spirit hovers over us and unleashes new creation into us.**

**God's Spirit draws us to believe in Jesus, the Son of God.**

**God's Spirit enters into those who are open to God in Christ.**
**God's Spirit begins to transform us into Jesus followers.**

One by one, people who are open to the Spirit are drawn by the Spirit into the circle of Jesus's courageous followers. Did you know that Nicodemus was on hand to open Jesus's public ministry, then appeared in its middle, and returned to close it in a later chapter of the gospel of John? In the seventh chapter of the gospel of John, Nicodemus is seen standing up for Jesus when some of the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest Jesus and have him done away with.*10 Nicodemus was rebuked by the leaders for his standing with Jesus in such a tense moment. After Jesus's death, a man named Joseph came with Nicodemus to take the risk of finding a burial place for Jesus and anointing him with burial ointments.*11

One step at a time, Nicodemus went from being a secret visitor to making a public statement by identifying with Jesus at Jesus's most vulnerable moments. In doing so, Nicodemus risked his life for Jesus. God's *ruach* was hovering over this man's life, and it all began one night that became his new day in the Spirit.

Are you open to a new day in the Spirit?

Here is a prayer that could help you open yourself to God's Spirit giving you new life:

> Lord, I am open to the Holy Spirit.
> Come to me, dwell in me, speak to me
> so I may become more like Christ.
> Lord, give me the courage to be open.
> Lord, I am open to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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*1 John 6:63; Romans 8:20

*2 Isaiah 44:1–5

*3 Ezekiel 37:1–3

*4 Ezekiel 37:4–6

*5 Ezekiel 37:7–10

*6 Ezekiel 37:14

*7 For accuracy's sake, know that John's gospel is in Greek, and the Greek term for *ruach*/Spirit is *pneuma*. But Jesus would have used a term in the dialect of his day, Aramaic, and that means he would have used *ruach* (or, to be precise, *rucha*).

*8 John 3:5–8

*9 John 3:1–21 (But it is hard to know where the conversation with Nicodemus ends, when the words of Jesus end, and when we are reading John's own words.)

*10 John 7:50–52

*11 John 19:38–42

9

# OPEN YOURSELF TO A NEW BAPTISM

Too often we sell God and ourselves short. A short novel is called a *novella,* and a short gospel could be called a *gospella.* A gospella creates *Christianellas,* little versions of the kind of Christian God designs for us to become.

New creation and the new birth are the opposite of this; they are designed to create a new, abundant, and robust life.[1] God's gospel aims at a multifaceted and many-textured transformation: of you and me as individuals, of you and me in the context of a community of believers, and of you and me in the context of cosmic transformation. Here is what the gospel offers us, according to New Testament scholar David deSilva:

> God offers you the means to become reconciled with him and to become a new person who will want and love and do what is pleasing to him because the Spirit of his Son will live in you and *change* you.[2]

Such a gospel understands salvation as more than a moment and deeper than a decision, and it is shaped for more than a solo life. It understands salvation as God's people being reformed by the Spirit and formed by Christ. According to M. Robert Mulholland Jr.'s definition, "Spiritual formation is the great reversal: from being the subject who controls all other things to being the person who is shaped by the presence, purpose and power of God in all things."[3] This

transforming work of the Spirit in you, over time, is the greatest display of the Spirit's work in our world.

And what of the sacraments of the Christian community, sacraments such as the Lord's Supper and baptism? How are we to understand the purpose and meaning of rites and observances that accompany the work of God among God's people? If Christianellas are little Christians, then maybe we can say baptismas are little baptisms. It is wrong to take for granted this commemoration of God's work in making us a new creation. The Spirit is doing big things in us and in the world and in our sacraments, if we are open. So how is it that when it comes to baptism, the Spirit often is ignored or even suppressed? We will see in what follows that the fullness of baptism can be found only if we are open to the Spirit.

## Baptism in the Story of the Bible

Jesus took Israel's story and turned it inside out:

- Jesus turned Passover into the Last Supper.
- Jesus turned the presence of God in the Temple alone into the presence of God in the heart of each believer.
- Jesus turned the wine of festive celebrations into the wine of his presence and the kingdom, all celebrated at the Lord's Supper.
- Jesus turned the priestly bread of the Temple into his own body to be consumed by his followers. He did the same with the manna the children of Israel consumed in the desert.
- Jesus turned the practice of fasting into the practice of feasting.
- Jesus turned the Law of Moses into the Sermon on the Mount.
- Jesus took the rite of circumcision, combined it with the waters of purity, and formed it into new-creation baptism. Like John the Baptist, he summoned all who were open to the Spirit into the water to get drenched.

Baptism is a time-honored practice in the church that continues to be misunderstood and undervalued in the minds of many Christians. Does it have a hand in our salvation, or is it merely a symbolic act? Which comes to us first, the gift of the Spirit or the gift of baptism? Should we baptize infants or adults only, and only upon a person's profession of faith? Why are so many of the baptized not transformed spiritually? Should we sprinkle a few drops on the person, pour a

little more water on him and let it run down his face, or go all the way and dunk him in a pool of water?

These questions can be summarized into two types of questions:

1. What does baptism actually *do* to us?
2. What does baptism mean?

We can answer both questions once we realize the importance of the Spirit in baptism.

## One Baptism, Not Two, Not Three

There is only one baptism. My charismatic, holiness, and Pentecostal friends who believe in a second work of grace or Spirit baptism or a second blessing of God will balk at this. I ask for their grace as we explore what the Bible has to say about baptism. But first, let's define our terms.

Non-charismatic Christians believe there is one baptism, a baptism in water that is connected to the gift of the Spirit. (Some ignore the connection, which is why I am calling our attention to the connection in this chapter.) Charismatics and others think there is a water baptism and then a second blessing, or second baptism, referred to as the baptism in the Holy Spirit. I have my doubts that the New Testament teaches this, but even if it doesn't, I am confident that charismatics are saying something profoundly important.

That is why I'm focusing on a text in the New Testament that states explicitly there is one baptism. I know from personal experience and from the testimonies of others that often there is a subsequent fresh experience of the Spirit of God in mighty and life-changing ways. To believe in one baptism is not to discount the need for ongoing and even fresh fillings of the Spirit. In fact, I affirm them.

But I doubt the teaching that there are two baptisms, one in water and one in the Spirit.[4] Paul wrote that there is one God, body, Spirit, and hope. Then he added: "There is…*one* baptism."[*1] This one and only baptism is a baptism in water. There's an even more nuanced way to say this, and I pray this nuance can bring the one-baptism folks into closer alliance with the two-baptism folks.

The *one true* baptism for each of us is the water-and-Spirit baptism of Jesus himself. John the Baptist announced this baptism using these words about Jesus: "He will baptize you [in water] with the Holy-Spirit-and-fire."[*2] Jesus will

baptize people with water, and that water baptism of Jesus is a Spirit-and-fire[*3] baptism. This is where the nuance comes in: our baptisms are nothing more than being baptized into the water-and-Spirit-and-fire baptism of Jesus![5]

This emphasis on one baptism matters because it opens the door for us to explore three dimensions of our baptism.

## Baptism in the Third Dimension

The first two dimensions reveal that our baptism is a baptism into the death and then, second, into the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus died and was raised; our baptism is an entry especially into his death and therefore into his resurrection. Paul asked the Romans this question: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"[*4]

The third dimension of our baptism is *the gift of the Holy Spirit.* When Jesus came out of the water at his baptism, the Spirit descended on him. And that same Spirit is sent by Jesus in our baptism, even though we may experience the Spirit afresh many times during our own journey. Peter connected water baptism and the Spirit when, after preaching to Cornelius and observing his conversion, he stated, " 'Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."[*5]

Clearly the gift of the Spirit is connected to baptism in water. Paul put this thought into words: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."[*6] Here we see that baptism and Spirit are connected. Later Paul will tell one of his favorite church-planting friends: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth [baptism] and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior."[*7]

These are the three dimensions of baptism: death, resurrection, and Spirit. It is the third dimension, the Spirit, that creates in us a transforming and transformed life. Here's an example of the third dimension of baptism at work.

## What Baptism Means: The Dance of Grace

The whole Christian life can be characterized as a life of baptism, and it is a

baptism that occurs inside a person and works its way out into the structures of society. It is baptism with the third dimension, the Holy Spirit. This is the story of one of Northern Ireland's heroes, Ken Newell, a Presbyterian pastor whose life was transformed from "growing up Orange" (Protestant in Northern Ireland) into a loving life of reconciliation between staunch Protestants and staunch Roman Catholics.[6] Newell begins his moving memoir[7] on a note I want to emphasize:

> I was fortunate to discover early on in my life that the dynamic of the Christian faith lies in its creating an internal process of change, which St Paul calls "transformation" (Romans 12:2). In retrospect, I see that most of the changes in me have taken place slowly. Sometimes they have taken years. On other occasions, the extreme nature of the violence erupting around me has demanded a more rapid response, which I have found morally inescapable.
>
> Our baptism into Christ is a baptism into Spirit-powered transformation, but such a transformation…will always require that "inner disarmament" that reduces our feelings of suspicion, hatred and hostility and turns us decisively towards our brothers and sisters who share this island with us. The path to healing the ancient rift between our peoples lies in respecting each other's cultures, cherishing each other's dignity and working together to strengthen every movement towards social inclusion, ecumenical cooperation, political partnership and—ultimately—reconciliation.

Newell describes his surrender to Christ, an experience of knowing he was "embraced by a divine love." He wrote that while attending a university, he formed his first relationship with a Catholic. It was like "travelling into a strange new world." Inherent to Newell's transformation was breaking out of the narrowness of his evangelical world. As a missionary in Timor, he encountered deep fellowship with Roman Catholics. Later, after Newell had gone back home and was serving as a pastor, an IRA member intentionally drove into a mother and her three small children, killing the children. It was then that a peace movement began in Belfast. But it presented a challenge to Newell in the form of working across denominational lines with a Catholic priest, Father Denis Newberry.

Newell needed Spirit-prompted discernment:

> The more I entered the deep silences of my spirit, the more the voice within, which I took to be Christ's, remained clear and persistent: "You can't change your country, but you can change your own lifestyle. Go for it!" I finally yielded to this inward prompting and one morning,…I walked the 75 metres down Magdala Street, which is adjacent to Fitzroy [the church Newell was pastoring], and rang the doorbell of Fr. Newberry's house. A most pleasant friendship developed between us that resulted in some groundbreaking initiatives in our area.

There followed one beginning after another and one Spirit-prompting after another. All of these were wrapped up in Bible studies together and prayer meetings and reconciliation services that generated transforming encounters between Northern Ireland's Presbyterians and Northern Ireland's Catholics. Together they sought ways to cross boundaries and find the peace that Jesus Christ establishes in our baptism. While there remains more than a little way to go in Ireland—in both Northern Ireland and the Republic—it is the Spirit-prompted life of baptism into Christ that has formed the foundation for that reconciliation.

That's what my and your baptism means: it means we have died to sin, Satan, systemic evil, and sickness. But it also means we can live our entire lives dancing before God—and before God alone—in the third dimension of the Spirit. We can apply this to politics as well as to personal morality. It can apply to which job we take and how much we earn and how much money we give away. And it clearly applies fully to interpersonal relations. It often takes a long, slow growth, but the Spirit presses us into the transformation that witnesses to our baptism.

We know from the Bible that God—not baptism—saves us. But we also learn that God saves us "through the washing of rebirth."[*8] Peter spoke of our baptism when he wrote the words "baptism that now saves you," pointing out that it does so "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."[*9] God saves, but *God has chosen to use baptism as the event into which we are plunged in order to be saved.* Yes, it symbolizes salvation in Christ, but it is more than a symbol. Baptism *is the act whereby we enter into the redemption of God in Christ through the Spirit.*

A lightly regarded or neglected baptism creates little Christians, but the fullness of baptism creates, as David deSilva has stated, fullness in the Christian life.

Listen again to Paul who speaks simultaneously of Jesus and therefore of us and the first two dimensions of our baptism: "The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."*10

But how can we be "alive to God" once we have died to sin? By the Holy Spirit we die and are raised to new life. So we need the third dimension of baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter pointed out that our baptism leads to a "pledge of a clear conscience"; Paul wrote that it leads to "renewal" and to our entire body becoming an "instrument of righteousness."*11 How? We have to be open to the Spirit's empowering work in us.

In short, in the death of Christ we die to sin; in the resurrection of Christ we are raised to a new kind of life; and in the Spirit we are empowered to live our lives to God.

Are you open to living a baptismal life?

Are you open to the third dimension of baptism, the Spirit of God?

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*1 Ephesians 4:4–5. Many think these verses quote an early Christian creed.

*2 Matthew 3:11, my translation

*3 To tie "Spirit" and "fire" together is to say the Spirit judges and purges us from sin and empowers us to live in a Christlike manner.

*4 Romans 6:3

*5 Acts 10:47–48

*6 1 Corinthians 12:13

*7 Titus 3:5–6

*8 Titus 3:5

*9 1 Peter 3:21

*10 Romans 6:10–11

*11 1 Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5; Romans 6:13

10

# OPEN YOUR SPIRIT TO A NEW SELF

We are not always open to transformation. Sometimes we are closed to it. John Levison, a master scholar on matters pertaining to the Holy Spirit, prayed the following words to God's Spirit:

> Holy Spirit,
> I'm not so fond of transformation.
> I'm not so hungry for adaptation.
> I'm not so keen on modification.
> "Leave things as they are." That's my earnest prayer.
>
> But how can I ask you for this?
> And how could you possibly answer this prayer?
>
> What could I be thinking?
> How little could I know you?
>
> You're torrential.
> We're sopping, sodden, soaked.
> Caught in the downpour of your craving
> to transform us from inside out
> and also from outside in.
> Amen[1]

Alongside this honest prayer, here's the confession of another talented New Testament professor, Dan Wallace. He admitted that "the last few years have shown me that my spiritual life had gotten off track—that somehow I, along with

many others in my theological tradition, have learned to do without the third person of the Trinity."[2] John Levison and Dan Wallace, both exceptional Bible scholars, are not alone. Many of us ignore, suppress, or choose not to be open to the Spirit. Others are more open, and for those of us who wonder, there is a surefire test to know if the Spirit is at work in our lives.

## How Do We Know If We Are Open to the Spirit?

I have struggled with this question: Am I genuinely a Christian? I have known and conversed with many others who have struggled with the same question. How does one know? The best answer I've seen comes from those who have studied conversion from the standpoint of sociology and psychology. Once I read the literature on conversion, I began to see the conversions of Peter and Paul, not to ignore Cornelius or Priscilla or Phoebe or James, in much clearer light.

The literature from the fields of sociology and psychology suggests the telltale sign of a conversion is *the retelling of one's autobiography*. I remember a seminary student saying to me, "In my BC [before Christ] days, I used to smoke pot all the time." This person, who is my good friend, divided his life into BC and AC (after Christ) days. That way of telling his story demonstrates conversion. The surefire test to know the Spirit is at work in your life is observable change as you grow toward Christlikeness. It doesn't have to be dramatic, and it doesn't have to be giant leaps from selfishness into selflessness. Rather, what we look for is visible change, shifts, movements, and growth.

You'll find one of the best examples of life-story alteration in the Bible in Paul's letter to the Galatians. In the passage I'm about to quote, I translated the *I* as *Ego* and created my own translation:

> My Ego died to the Law through the Law so that my Ego could live for God. My Ego has been crucified with Christ. My Ego no longer has a life, but instead Christ is alive as my New Ego. The physical life my Ego now lives is a life of faith in the Son of God who loves this New Ego and gave himself for this New Ego.*[1]

It's clear that the Ego of Paul's past life was dead and Paul had a New Ego. Everyone, not just corporate executives or professional athletes or people running for president, has an Ego. Infants, children, teenagers, and adults, both males and

females—you can't get rid of the Ego any more than you can change your DNA. It's what makes us who we are. The issue is, whose Ego do we have? Is it the fleshly Ego, the sinful Ego, the Before-Christ Ego, or the Spirit-prompted Ego? Is it the Ego of selfishness or the self-denying, Christ-conforming Ego?

## Moving Toward Vision, Openness, and the Spirit

The late Dallas Willard taught philosophy at the University of Southern California for decades and wrote several influential books. I want to focus on *Renovation of the Heart*. He knew that you and I live from the heart outward, which means the heart is in need of renovation if we are to become the "New Ego" God made us to become. Listen to Willard's words:

> Spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.[3]

So the New Ego that the Spirit wants for us is the Ego of Christ, or what often is called Christlikeness. How does the old Ego become the New Ego? Dallas Willard famously proposed three letters: *V, I,* and *M,* which stand for:

- *Vision*
- *Intention*
- *Means*[4]

These three words direct us to see the vision of the New Ego of Christlikeness, to acquire the intention to become Christlike, and to exercise the means of the spiritual disciplines to be available to God's Spirit and God's graces. Together, these go far in the process of transforming us into the New Ego.

I suggest three other letters to improve on Willard's three letters. The three additional letters serve to carry through the emphasis of the book you are reading. I suggest *V, O,* and *S*. VOS stands for *Vision, Openness,* and *Spirit:* A *Vision* of becoming a Spirit-prompted, Christlike person; an *Openness* to the work of God's grace; and a recognition that the means is the *Spirit* of God at work in us.

- **V**ision of the New Ego, or Christlikeness
- **O**penness to God's grace

• Spirit as the agent of transformation

I trust it will work for you as it does for me. I want to pull in Willard's support for my emphasis on being open. He began his book *Renovation of the Heart* with these words:

> When we *open* ourselves to the writings of the New Testament, when we absorb our minds and hearts in one of the Gospels, for example, or in letters such as Ephesians or 1 Peter, the overwhelming impression that comes upon us is that we are looking into another world and another life.
>
> It is a divine world and a divine life. It is life in the "kingdom of the heavens." Yet it is a world and a life that ordinary people have entered and are entering even now. It is a world that seems *open* to us and beckons us to enter. We feel its call.[5]

Our Ego needs to learn to die so we can learn to live out the Ego of Christ in us through the Spirit.

Our old Ego's inertia meets its match when it encounters the Spirit. David deSilva put it like this: "God's gift of the Holy Spirit introduces into our lives an imbalanced force, a force for which sin and self-centeredness are no equals, freeing us from the inertia, in effect, of the impulses of what Paul often calls our [old Ego]."[6] For the "imbalanced force" of the Spirit to do its work, we need merely to be open to the grace of God's Spirit.

## The Vision Is Christ and Christlikeness

How does this happen? Time and again, Jesus said, "Follow me." Those who are wide open to following Jesus learn through the Spirit to follow Jesus by gazing into the transforming face of Jesus:

> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*[2]

As we gaze into the face of Jesus, the Spirit hovers over us the way the Spirit hovered over primeval matter to turn it all into God's ordered creation. The

hovering Spirit transforms us into Spirit-prompted mini-Christs. That's what the Bible says. The New Ego is Christ himself made real in us by the power of the Spirit. So how do we gaze into the face of Jesus? I suggest three actions: watch his actions, listen to his words, and observe his character.

## Open to the Spirit as We Watch Christ

I'd like to quickly sketch two-plus chapters from the gospel of Mark, beginning with Mark 1:21.[*3] Here are Jesus's actions: he eradicates the evil spirit from an under-the-control-of-Satan person, and then he brings the redemptive and healing powers of the Spirit to the sick and demonized people. The press of the crowds drives Jesus more deeply into the heart of his Father, so he withdraws to pray, surely a reminder that Jesus's mighty deeds are the result of God's Spirit at work in him.

Following a time of solitary prayer, interrupted as it was by his closest followers who reported to Jesus the growing expressions of people's needs, Jesus resocializes a man into his community by cleansing him of the social stigma of leprosy. Then Jesus offers forgiveness of sins to a man and cures his paralysis, showing that forgiveness is life-giving whereas sin is death-dealing.

In the midst of all this, Jesus summons people to follow him and welcomes them to evening dinners with him. Jesus challenges the fasting customs of the day because the kingdom's presence means feasting not fasting, but he predicts that after his resurrection and ascension they will fast again. Jesus then challenges the way observant Jews of his day obey the Sabbath commandment. Why? Not because Jesus does not honor the Sabbath, but because he believes the Sabbath is designed by God for the liberation of persons—that is the Sabbath is for refreshment, healing, and redemption. They, on the other hand, seem to be turning it into a chore of duties and restrictions.

All of this, surprising to some and unsurprising to others, gets Jesus into deep trouble with the guardians of Galilee, the Pharisees in concert with the government-based Herodians. In fact, they plot to get Jesus killed. Those who are surprised by the surreptitious plot are the crowds of people in need of the redemptive healing of Jesus.

To gaze into the face of Jesus is to be open to the Spirit's transforming work as we gaze. It means we see that Jesus is the center of the gospel, we see that Jesus is empowered by God's Spirit to bring redemption to every dimension of our

lives, and we see that lives are transformed from the inside out. Person after person who encounters Jesus in these passages becomes a story of "before they were redeemed by Jesus." The Vision in the acronym VOS is Christ and Christlikeness.

## Open to the Spirit as We Listen to Christ

I often have observed that the most authoritative moment in a Sunday-morning service is when Scripture is read aloud. Why? Scripture is the pure Word of God, while our preacherly words are at best commentary on those pure words. So in hearing the words of the Bible, we are given what is uppermost in importance. I will limit myself to three special sayings of Jesus, pure words from God for us, beginning with these:

> Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.[*4]

Then to these:

> No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.[*5]

And a third:

> Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels,

> and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.*[6]

What do we learn from these pure words of God? First, that the humble and gentle Jesus brings a Spirit-prompted renewal to the "weary and burdened." His renewal is "rest," a term that combines the practices of Sabbath, the joy of family fellowship, and the anticipation of the kingdom.

Second, we learn that what Jesus brings is far more powerful than the ordinary wine of the day's doctrines. In fact, the wine of Jesus's teaching is so powerful it bursts the wineskins of the former teaching.

Third, the core summons of Jesus is *to slay the old Ego,* to urge us to turn from that Ego to follow Jesus. That means we are to surrender the old Ego to the New Ego of Christ. Again, the *V* in VOS is a vision of Christ and Christlikeness.

## Remain Open to the Spirit as We Observe His Character

Christians have only one thing to offer to the world, and that is *Jesus himself.* Christianity is about a Person. Our Vision is Christ, and our Lord is more than a system of thought or a method of redemption. Until our Vision becomes about Jesus, Christianity is nothing more than a philosophy. When Jesus is central, Christianity shifts from ideas into the Living Word of God roaming about, working, alive and active in our world.

This is why in the middle of John's gospel, we read that some Greeks approached a follower of Jesus named Philip. The Greeks make this request: "Sir, …we would like to see Jesus."*[7] These non-Jews evidently wanted to meet Jesus personally. Jesus's response reveals his character at its deepest, but it may well have surprised his followers as well as the Greeks. Why? He said the mystery of who he was—his character—is tied to the mystery of what God's mission for him was: to die and to be raised.

Here are the words of Jesus:

> The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves

me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*8

If all we have to offer the world is Jesus, understand that the Jesus we offer is the *Jesus who died for the sake of others*. He is the One who reveals that the way to the kingdom is the way of a New Ego. Our Vision is Christ, the Christ of the cross, and we are to watch, listen to, and observe this Christ in the mode of openness to the Spirit. VOS: Vision, Openness, and Spirit.

That Vision is of a Christ who gave himself for us. The longer we watch him, listen to him, and observe his character, the more enthralled we become with him and the less enthralled we become with ourselves. The more we make VOS part of our lives, the less old Ego we have and the more we have of Christ's Ego becoming real in us through the Spirit.

Are you open to the New Ego, the Ego of Christlikeness?

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*1 Galatians 2:19–20, my translation

*2 2 Corinthians 3:18

*3 In what follows, I summarize Mark 1:21 through Mark 3:7–12.

*4 Matthew 11:28–30

*5 Matthew 9:16–17

*6 Matthew 16:24–27

*7 John 12:21

*8 John 12:23–26

11

# OPEN YOURSELF TO A NEW POWER

Bethany is a student at Northern Seminary. She is a young Christian leader who is open to the power of the Spirit. Bethany grew up in a small town in Wisconsin, where she says she attended "a small, nondenominational church that was nestled on the edge of town and looked very similar to the tiny, white, church-shaped piggy bank that we passed around every week in Sunday school."[1]

When she says "small," she means it. "Five of the congregants were my parents (who were the pastors), my two siblings, and me. So if attendance hit twenty, we were thrilled."

Bethany's parents were successful in child-rearing, but children become teenagers. The teen years press children into new realities and challenges. Bethany's struggles, similar to those faced by many other young women, had to do with her body image, some unhealthy non-eating habits, and her sense of identity.

Her parents helped her see that her body-image problems were multidimensional and she needed to be reshaped by the Spirit to face the attacks that were damaging who she was becoming. She also was advised to enter therapy. This good advice did not diminish the power of the Spirit, but it recognized that God has given us rich resources in counselors and therapists.

In seeking God and professional help, Bethany developed a habit of prayerfully reading the Bible. For a time she read Galatians 5 over and over in a posture of open listening to the Spirit. In part because of this habit, she came to access God's transforming power.

> One of the clearest catapults to my recovery occurred one day when I had just gotten out of the shower and was standing in front of the full-length mirror in the bathroom. All of a sudden, I felt the Lord pull a veil off my eyes and for a split second I saw my body through the eyes of Truth. Then, instantly, the "truth" was gone again. The skeleton that I saw looking back at me scared me into the motivation I needed to keep praying, seek counseling, and start eating. Ultimately, it showed me that the Bible is alive, the spiritual realm is active, and that prayer works! As I continued to pray and to get help, the Lord continued to heal the patterns of my mind and break through the veil of lies.

Bethany was relentless in her pursuit of the Spirit's power to achieve victory.

> As I stood on my parents' advice, I prayed for four years for the Holy Spirit and fire (Acts 2), reminding the Lord that I was fearful but that I wanted to receive the gifts that He wants for His people. The summer I graduated high school, when I'd gone up to an altar call at a friend's church for prayer about something else, I felt a rushing wind push me down onto the ground. I felt a river start to flow through me and pour out of me in streams of tears. A woman on the prayer team knelt down next to me. She quoted, "Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). I immediately felt the fullness of joy come into me. I could not contain it. It bubbled out of me in joyous laughter as His presence, love, and peace blanketed me. What wonderful consequences of a four-year-long prayer!

Let's not pretend that people who are open to the Spirit will find sudden victory every time and that life will bound from one joy to another. Prayer is not a magical potion that cures all ills. Also, the forces that seek our harm are real and truly are out to destroy us. So let's also not pretend that an eating disorder, to use Bethany's story as an example of a destructive and potentially deadly force, can always be prayed away. Rather, let's seek multidimensional help from God's Spirit along with wise counselors. Let's be open to God's speaking to us in various ways.

A few years after being healed of her eating disorder, Bethany found herself

in another struggle. Her openness to the Spirit led to yet another encounter.

> Five years after being "baptized" in the Holy Spirit I was struggling with another stronghold due to my own choices. A major spiritual battle came with it, and a demon would constantly taunt me: hissing, snarling, and speaking to me. I spent a lot of time praying that the Lord would get me out of that pit, and one morning the Lord appeared in my room. He was surrounded by a bright, shining light, and He was speaking in another language to the demon(s). From that moment forward the demon was gone, and another season of healing began.

What I have learned about the Spirit since my high school days is that the Spirit does what the Spirit wants. I don't get to decide what is permissible and what is prohibited. The Spirit works according to the Spirit's will and according to what is needed. Some people have incredible experiences, while others have next to none. I have read numerous, credible accounts of people who believe they had a vision of Christ. I have not had that experience, but I have to be open to what the Spirit wants to do and rejoice in whatever the Spirit chooses to do.

The Spirit is connected to the image and the presence of wind in the Bible because the Spirit is invisible and unpredictable. Also, the Spirit is like a fire because it consumes, provides heat, and gives light. The Spirit also is like a river because it flows and provides fresh water. If you are genuinely open to the Spirit, you will learn that you are open to a power unlike anything you've ever known. Bethany needed that power, she was open to that power, and she experienced that power.

Many of us need to ponder why we are not more open to this kind of power. There is no reason to remain closed to it because the Bible speaks often of Spirit-prompted power and promises it to us.

## God Has Promised Us New Power

In the Old Testament, God promised to do something new: break new ground and send his Spirit. God would transform his people into a righteous people through the new covenant. Isaiah predicted that God would "make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the gentiles,"[★1] calling it a "covenant of

peace."[*2] Then there is this famous passage from Jeremiah:

> "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
> after that time," declares the LORD.
> "I will put my law in their minds
> and write it on their hearts.
> I will be their God,
> and they will be my people.
> No longer will they teach their neighbor,
> or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,'
> because they will all know me,
> from the least of them to the greatest,"
> declares the LORD. [*3]

Perhaps the most important words come from Ezekiel:

> I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit [Spirit] in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh….
>
> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit [Spirit] in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.[*4]

The new covenant work will be a "new Spirit," God's Spirit unleashed in all of God's people for new creation. Don't miss the significance of what God did as God fulfilled his own promise.

## JESUS HAD THE NEW POWER

Jesus healed a man who was blind and mute. The crowds loved Jesus, but the Pharisees said he was somehow allied with "Beelzebul, the prince of demons." So Jesus put the Pharisees on the witness stand:

> And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.[*5]

If Jesus's power is like the Pharisees' power, and if the accusations of the Pharisees against Jesus were accurate, then the Jewish leaders as well were allied with the demonic world. *But,* if Jesus exorcised demons and healed the blind and mute by the power of the Spirit of God, then his works of power were demonstrations of the transforming, transcending power of the long-expected, Spirit-empowered, new covenant now unleashed. God's long-ago promise was being fulfilled before their eyes.

"Make your decision," Jesus was saying. "Are you open to the Spirit of God at work in me?"

Now for another quick theme.

## Jesus Gave Us the New Power

The same Holy Spirit at work in Jesus is available to you in the here and now. (God's new covenant did not have an expiration date.) To become open to this, you and I need to be reminded of two passages from the gospel of John: "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."[*6]

Because Jesus has gone to the Father and from there sent to us the Holy Spirit, we have the Power to do even "greater things than these!" Read this account of Jesus's words to his disciples:

> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on [or better, *into*] them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."[*7]

The promise of God's new covenant, repeated to Jesus's followers in the locked room, became a gift. Jesus gifted the Spirit to his disciples. We need to ask ourselves if we are genuinely open to the promise that Jesus made to his followers at that Pentecost-like event that occurred in the locked room (as recounted by John) and to his followers at the Pentecost of Acts 2 (as told by Luke). These events prove that Jesus's gift of the Spirit to us has been offered. At Pentecost new powers were unleashed. Are we open to the gift of the Spirit?

If all this is true, you might wonder what kind of works we can do. From these passages the answers sound like some of the experiences we saw with Bethany at the start of this chapter. And because we all struggle against a variety of forces, we can add the power to overcome whatever we encounter:

- Power to exorcise demons and conquer evil through the Spirit.
- Power to conquer disease through the Spirit.
- Power to announce sins forgiven by Jesus and power to conquer sin through the Spirit.
- Power to witness to the world and conquer spiritual death through the Spirit.
- Power to speak other languages and conquer world divisions through the Spirit.

Our world believes evil can be resisted but that, in the end, evil will win. Disease, it is said, will inevitably lead to death. Meanwhile, sins are thought to be either the hobgoblin of silly minds or besetting and unconquerable enemies.

Even in the Christian community, we see a lack of belief in the Spirit's power. You won't hear these articles of faith from the pulpit, but they are widespread nonetheless: witnessing to others the truth of Jesus's redemption and the power of the Spirit is either too difficult, not my gift, or impossible in a world like ours. The multitude of languages that divide the earth's people prove that Pentecost has not ended division, and the ongoing and often-violent divisions should put an end to dreams of unity.

No matter what the modern biases tell us, the *experiences* of the earliest Christians tell a completely different story. They knew what Jesus had done because they had seen it, and they had touched him with their hands.[*8] When Paul pressed the Galatians to see the source of the Christian life, he asked if it was the "flesh" or the "Spirit." He appealed to their experience of the Spirit and the

Spirit-empowered miracles among them.[*9] When Paul got into debates with the Corinthians, none of their differences had to do with the unleashing of the Spirit among them.[*10] This much is clear: the first Christians experienced the power of the Spirit of God at work in their midst.

There's something about the Spirit that will not let us go, just as the Spirit wouldn't let Bethany go in the story at the opening of this chapter. The Spirit was present mightily in Jesus, and no one can deny that. The Spirit took a ragtag group of no-name Galileans and turned the Roman Empire inside out. The Spirit broke through language, cultural, and social barriers to unite Jews and gentiles, tax collectors and fishermen and an anarchist. The Spirit brought together an outcast from Samaria with the promised Jewish Messiah, a Roman centurion who witnessed the crucifixion with the Savior on the cross, and a Pharisee named Nicodemus with Jesus.

The same Spirit is in you and with you, and the Spirit can transform your abilities. The same Spirit who was at work two thousand years ago can transcend your inabilities to make you a mighty witness and doer of Jesus-glorifying works.

Are you open to the Holy Spirit who brings you new power?

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*1 Isaiah 42:6

*2 Isaiah 54:10

*3 Jeremiah 31:33–34

*4 Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26–27

*5 Matthew 12:24, 27–28

*6 John 14:12

*7 John 20:19–23. The Greek word behind "breathed into" is *enephysesen,* and the *en* at the beginning means "in" not "on." This is language of intimacy.

*8 1 John 1:1–3

*9 Galatians 3:1–5

*10 1 Corinthians 12–14



Part 3

# Open to the People of the Spirit

12

# OPEN YOURSELF TO A NEW PEOPLE

Jesus told a seeker named Nicodemus, "The wind blows wherever it pleases….So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."*[1] That was Jesus's way of opening a conversation by introducing a mystery. This was a conversation about the unpredictable, uncontrollable, and unstoppable work of God's Spirit in the world. None of us can control the wind; likewise, only God's Spirit determines where to blow and on whom.

Someone else who didn't decide how she would be met by God's Spirit was Monica Coleman. Sometimes she walked to the front of the sanctuary at the end of a church service to ask for prayer. But one time she decided instead to simply kneel in front of her pew. Here's what happened. "I thought my prayer in my head and began to whisper it out loud. When I opened my mouth, something different came out. They were not the words I tried to say. I closed my mouth. I continued to praise God in my mind….I tried to say the words aloud, but it happened again. I knew instantly—I was speaking in tongues."[1]

Before this, Monica had observed fellow parishioners exercise the gift of tongues. "Someone spoke in tongues, and someone else interpreted. It was a holy word for our church community. It was a word directly from God."[2]

But when she knelt in prayer at her pew, Monica was confused by her Spirit-prompted speaking. She hoped it would end. Her friend Cynthia led her to the altar for prayer. "She [Cynthia] and I stood before the altar, not standing out much among the other people who were moving to the front of the church. We moved to the right and began to speak to each other in tongues. A minister that we knew from a Harvard doctoral program stood in front of us, and we had a

three-way conversation in tongues."[3]

As we saw from Jesus's words to Nicodemus, the wind blows where it wants. Monica believed in the Spirit, and when she was open to the Spirit, the Mighty Wind of the Spirit took her to levels she had never expected. Mentioned prominently in her memoir is the importance of a local family of faith, a fellowship, a church where the Spirit has been and is being unleashed.

## Spirit-Prompted People Are Church People

In *Hillbilly Elegy,* his best-selling, profanity-laced, and profound memoir of growing up in Appalachia, J. D. Vance expresses gratitude for his grandparents, Mamaw and Papaw, his sister Lindsay, and others. During his childhood, community was his lifeline:

> At every level of my life and in every environment, I have found family and mentors and lifelong friends who supported and enabled me.
>
> But I often wonder: Where would I be without them? I think back on my freshman year of high school, a grade I nearly failed, and the morning when Mom walked into Mamaw's house demanding a cup of clean urine [to enable her to pass a drug test]. Or years before that, when I was a lonely kid with two fathers, neither of whom I saw very often, and Papaw decided that he would be the best dad he could be for as long as he lived. Or the months I spent with Lindsay, a teenage girl acting as a mother while our own mother lived in a treatment center. Or the moment I can't even remember when Papaw installed a secret phone line in the bottom of my toy box so that Lindsay could call Mamaw and Papaw if things got a little too crazy. Thinking about it now, about how close I was to the abyss, gives me chills.[4]

Americans, unfortunately, have been shaped by the thoughts of Henry David Thoreau and his sometime-friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, by the social vision of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, and by the religious autonomy of Roger Williams. The thinking of these respected figures from history emphasizes individualism and self-reliance and rarely values the importance of others and

community. Such individualistic values sound noble and even responsible, but they can lead people to believe that following Jesus and participating in a church are almost mutually exclusive pursuits.

If you are responsible for the way you live—including the way you practice your faith—why would you need a congregation of fellow believers? Wouldn't that be a cop-out, the weak person's way to avoid taking responsibility?

Such a conclusion denies the truth of how Spirit-prompted people live. They are joined together in the metaphorical Body of Christ, the church, which physically is the fellowship and community of those who follow Jesus. A Spirit-prompted Christian life is about learning to live in fellowship with other Spirit-prompted people. In that community we learn to live the gospel at the deepest levels. Kevin Vanhoozer, an evangelical theologian, once observed that "it is the life of the church, not the commentary [our explanations of the faith], that is our most important form of biblical interpretation."[5]

The Spirit drives Spirit-filled people to the Body of Christ. When we are open to the Spirit who creates the church, we will be open to God's community, the church.

## Live as the Body of Christ

The metaphor of God's people as the Body of Christ pops up on nearly every page of Paul's letters in the New Testament. Paul wrote:

> Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. *For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body*—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.*[2]

New-covenant people need new-covenant presence and power. These are given to the new people of God, the church, the Body of Christ. The deepest Spirit-life is a Body-life, and this Body helps us grow into the kind of maturity the rest of the world does not know.

In 1973 I was a college student participating in a summer missions trip to Europe. The summer program ended in Brussels with a conference for the mission agency's long-term and short-term workers throughout Europe. The

speaker for the week was a Californian, Ray Stedman, author of the book *Body Life*. At that time, this book was sparking a revival of church life in California—in Palo Alto near Stanford University. Kris and I became proponents of reviving churches through Body Life.

Essentially, Stedman's theory was that the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers were given to the Body of Christ to equip and empower the lay people to do the "work of the ministry."[*3] The Spirit isn't just given to pastors and priests, the so-called religious professionals. Instead, Stedman argued that pastors help everyone else do the work of the ministry.

Before Stedman's then-radical proposal, very few churches talked about spiritual gifts and many Christians stood solidly against the validity of certain of the more supernatural spiritual gifts. But today, very few churches ignore the spiritual gifts. Many offer a course that helps people discern their spiritual gift(s).

The most important dimension of Ray Stedman's ministry was this: he generated an openness to the Spirit on the part of *every member* in the church. Suddenly, God's people recognized that every believer has a spiritual gift and everyone can contribute. That meant the church's ministry was the reflection of everyone, not just the pastor.

Stedman's biographer, Mark Mitchell, described a Body Life service on a typical Sunday evening at Peninsula Bible Church, the congregation pastored by Ray Stedman.[6] Prior to the revival of Body Life, evening services had lacked life and bodies. But after Ray returned from a conference, he decided to hand the mic over to the audience. He asked those in attendance to speak honestly about their struggles.

When a male leader divulged some of his sexual struggles, the congregation began to open up. People would share their needs, including one man who said he didn't have a car. Then an elderly lady said she'd give her car to the young man who needed it. Honesty prompted fellowship, and fellowship prompted a congregation to live out the vision of Body Life.

I cannot emphasize this point enough: what now is seen as common throughout the church was *unknown* in non-charismatic churches before Ray Stedman's proposal that churches live out a Body Life. The Spirit leads each of us into the Body of Christ.

## The Spirit Creates the Church

Too many Christians believe in their hearts that they don't need the church—that they can follow Jesus on their own. My reading of the New Testament uncovers these four truths:

1. The Spirit is part of the new-covenant promise.
2. The new covenant creates the Body of Christ through the Spirit's work.
3. Christians are to live in the Spirit. And to live in the Spirit means to function as a member of the Body of Christ.
4. There is no such thing as the isolated-from-church Christian in the New Testament.

One cannot be filled with the Spirit and reject the church. I say this with the understanding that a surprising number of people have been abused—emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, sexually, physically—by church leaders and congregations. For them, being "done" with the church is a necessary step to take for their own health and not a form of wandering from the faith. I grieve over the sins of the church that drive people out. But the general truth remains that God's new covenant creates a new people, the Body of Christ. A Lone Ranger Christian is not described in the New Testament.[7]

Consider again verse 13 from 1 Corinthians 12: "We were all baptized by one Spirit *so as to* form one body." We weren't baptized to form the isolated life on Walden Pond with Henry David Thoreau or to find an autonomous church of one, as Roger Williams did. We weren't baptized in the Spirit to form our own brand of spirituality apart from the fellowship of other Christians. We were baptized into the Spirit to become part of life in a community of other Spirit-prompted people.

No church is perfect, especially if you and I are part of it. That's the point: we need the Spirit to transcend our inabilities in regard to fellowship and love, and we need the Spirit to transform our natural abilities into spiritual gifts that build up the Body of Christ. All genuine, Spirit-prompted giftedness is designed to build up a local body that is part of the universal Body of Christ. I quote from well-known professors of theology at Duke Divinity School, Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon:

> There are those who contrast the often-boring organizational, institutional church with the allegedly carefree, free-floating Holy Spirit. These tend to be the "I'm spiritual but not religious" crowd.

> Sorry. The Holy Spirit rests upon bodies, first on the crucified body of Jesus, then on the often full-of-holes and beaten body of Christ, the church.[8]

Just as children such as J. D. Vance can't make it in life without family and friends, so the Christian can't make it without a church. I will repeat what others have said, even if they are using the verb *grow* in a way that makes the English teacher's chalkboard screech: if it takes a village to grow a child, it takes a local church to grow a Christian.

If you live in the same community where you grew up, you probably have become acclimated to the people who live there. But even then, it is rare not to encounter new faces. Every year at Northern Seminary I have students who have relocated to northern Illinois. They tell me how hard it is to find a new church. I remind them that at their former church, it took a long time to find themselves in deep fellowship with others. It will take at least that long to find deep fellowship in a new church.

Why is deep fellowship so elusive? Because church fellowship is about learning the stories of others and their learning our stories. It involves learning how to adjust to one another, to make strangers into friends. But this is what church is, folks. It is not a fellowship of everyone's-the-same, but a fellowship of everyone's-so-different. Which is exactly why we need the Spirit to transcend our inabilities and transform our abilities!

Are you open to living your life in fellowship with others?

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*1 John 3:8

*2 1 Corinthians 12:12–14

*3 Ephesians 4:11–12, KJV. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

13

# OPEN YOURSELF TO A NEW KIND OF LEADER

If my very busy blog is a reliable indicator, many Christians have what might well be called a leader problem. Some have been burned by church leaders; some have been silenced; some have been overpowered; some have been ignored. I have heard from people who have been lied to, betrayed, exploited, and even cheated by their leaders. I consider this one of the most significant issues in the church today.

For a variety of reasons—many of them very good reasons—it's not unusual for Christians to be suspicious and deeply distrustful of leaders, especially pastors and priests. Just like the rest of us, leaders can be susceptible to the lure of power, choosing to feed their egos and manipulate people rather than caring for their needs.

The Bible exposes bad leaders; it does not endorse them. And the Bible endorses good leaders even as it exposes bad leaders.

Those who want to be leaders and those who want good leaders all need to be open to the Spirit. If they remain open to the Spirit, they will be open to a different kind of leader. How so? The New Testament makes clear that Spirit-prompted leaders use their gifts for the good of others, while leaders who consolidate their power and abuse their authority are closed to the Spirit.

I cringed when I heard that a well-known leader said, "Good leaders impose their will on their congregations." That is the way of Caesar, not Jesus, the Ruler of the universe. The New Testament approach to leadership stood explicitly,

constantly, and boldly in stark contrast to the way of Rome.

In the Roman Empire, the term *emperor* said it all. By the middle of the first century, the old Roman theory that the emperor was nothing more than the first citizen among citizens had all but disappeared. By the time of Jesus, the emperor had institutionalized his penchant for (1) unlimited power over life and death, (2) rampant self-indulgence, (3) immunity from any penalty of law, and (4) unbridled ambition. The people in every first-century church were familiar with this approach to exercising power. The emperor of Rome went hand-in-hand with building one's own empire and overpowering all opponents to protect and consolidate the emperor's control. There are too many churches run the way the emperor dominated the empire. The Bible casts a vision for a very different kind of leader.

Think about the Bible with me. Israel's leadership can be traced through a series of movements. We have the era of patriarchs, when families were the center of the people. Following that era came the arch leader, Moses, who never had the title of king and prophet of the nation, but who nevertheless functioned in those roles. Then came the judges, who were glorified tribal leaders; they were either fantastic leaders or little more than glorified pagan idolaters and power mongers.

This led to a momentous shift, beginning at the time of the prophet Samuel, to a succession of kings of Israel. Saul was a deeply flawed, failed king. David was the greatest king of Israel, but his son Solomon turned to foreign women and other excesses and abuses of God's law. Following Solomon, Israel split into two kingdoms, each led by a different king.

To keep the king (depending on the timing, either one king or two) in line, God raised up prophets to tell the king what was right, what was wrong, where the nation was headed, and what God's redemption or judgment could mean. From the time of Moses on, there also were priests who were called to mediate between the people and God through a system of sacrifice and worship, centered first on the movable tabernacle and later in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The prophets knew what kind of leader God wanted, so I don't want to suggest that no one knew the best form of leadership until Jesus came to the earth. In fact, Jesus embodies the ideal form of leadership that had been made clear by the prophets.[1] Consider Isaiah's words about the ideal leader:

> The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—

the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.[*1]

You can't ask for a leader better than one on whom the Spirit rests, who is filled with wisdom and counsel and the fear of God. This same leader, Isaiah continues, will end injustice and establish peace.[*2] Isaiah 42 combines these attributes and strengths with compassion and kindness:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.[*3]

With the coming of Jesus the Messiah, early Christians had two options. The most prevalent and familiar forms of leadership were the Roman way and the misused Israelite way. That is, both adhered to a model of leadership that relied on *power.* If we want to understand Spirit-prompted leaders of the new covenant, we need to understand these models as well as how the prophets described the ideal leader. The way of power did not reflect the way of God's new covenant.

Leadership was in for a colossal reversal, but it would reverse all things by turning back to the way of Isaiah. With the reversal came true leadership. As we will soon see, a true leader is fully Spirit-prompted, and Spirit-prompted leaders are not like Roman emperors or the majority of the kings of Israel. Instead, they are like Jesus, who is the vision described in Isaiah 11 and 42.

## The Revelation of a Revolution

Oddly, Jesus's title is *Messiah,* which means king, priest, prophet, and (for some) warrior. Jesus redefined what each of these terms means, and his new definitions eliminated the familiar and ungodly practices of a warring emperor and quenched the unbridled ambition welling up into uncontrollable consolidation of power. His view of what the Messiah looked like also ran counter to what many Jews thought the Messiah would be. Starting with Jesus, leadership would never be the same.

Here is the moment when he redefined *Messiah,* which created a new kind of leader for anyone who is open to the Spirit. As you read the Bible passages that follow, please read slowly. The words of Jesus need to be studied and savored, because a revolution is underway. Jesus's new style of leadership rests on two developments that undermine and reverse the system that existed before: the Revelation and the Revolution.

## The Revelation of the True Leader

> Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."
>
> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.*[4]

The revelation is that Jesus, a native of Galilee, a backwater if ever there was one, is the long-awaited Messiah. Under the old system, the one who accepted the title *Messiah* would, like Herod and Nero, have become emperor or king with a sword in his belt and power in his heart. But the Revelation unraveled the meaning of *king* and *emperor* and any other power-centered title that denoted the consolidation of power at the top.

## The Revolution of True Leadership

> He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."
>
> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."[*5]

Here's the colossal reversal of Jesus's Revolution: *this Messiah rules by dying.* And his death took place at the city dump, on a bloody cross in full public view. Crucifixion was a disgusting, humiliating, and fear-inducing form of capital punishment carried out by the Romans. Rome threatened, "My way or the cross!" But Jesus countered the way of Rome with his Revolution: "My way is the cross."

The Revolution is twofold. First, the Messiah would rule through crucifixion. And second, to be a disciple of Jesus was and is to become open to a life shaped by an instrument of death, not by a throne or a sword. In dying for others, Jesus chose a path that led, not to a life of power and ease, but to the redemption of others. The two opposing yet operative words in leadership, then, are *me* or *others*.

Spirit-led leaders use the gift of power for the good of *others,* not for their own aggrandizement. Spirit-prompted leaders die to self for the good of others. Recall that the vision of Isaiah's leader was the leader as Servant, not as self-serving emperor. Jesus led by being the Servant of all. This is why Jesus told his disciples, during his last week on earth:

> But you are not to be called "Rabbi," for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth "father," for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*[6]

Spirit-controlled leaders take deep risks, but not with the goal of consolidating power.

## Leaders Use Their Gifts for the Good of Others

When I was taking a sabbatical in Assisi, Italy, Kris and I walked every morning down the hill from San Rufino church toward the Basilica of Saint Clare. We then turned right at the piazza and walked the paths to the great Basilica of Saint Francis.

I was not aware then that along that same piazza, during World War II a clandestine act of courage opposed the face of evil. In the back of a shop along the piazza of Santa Clara, a courageous, atheist businessman printed false identity papers for Italian Jews and Jewish refugees. In giving them false identity papers, he protected them from Mussolini's fascists and Hitler's National Socialists (the German Nazi party).

During the same period of time, a private citizen who was a devout Christian used his leadership and power for the good of others. This man often would rise early and ride his bicycle across Florence and into the Tuscan hills on his way to Assisi. At the church known as San Damiano, he would take his bike indoors, remove the seat, be given papers by a courageous priest, fill the tube with false identity papers and photographs, and leave to deliver the identity papers to Jewish refugees.

If Gino Bartali, Italy's greatest cyclist, were to be caught doing this, he would have been executed. Bartali saved hundreds of lives. He was driven by his faith, his prayers, his decision to do what was just and right, and the secret system that started with Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa in Florence.[2]

Think of Bartali on his bike, not as a biker but as a leader, the kind who was providing documents to others so they might live. He wasn't a pastor—and not

many of us are—but he used his gifts of leadership for the good of others. He risked his life for others.

## Leaders Who Are Cross-Formed

From Jesus on, in the communities connected genuinely and faithfully to the crucified Christ, there will be no more human kings, emperors, judges, or patriarchs. There will be but one King, one Emperor, one Judge and Patriarch, and his name is *Jesus.* This new kind of leader was crucified, so from Jesus on all faithful-to-Jesus leaders become followers of Jesus and that means all followers are to be cross-shaped. What does that mean? From Jesus on, Spirit-prompted leaders are servants of others. Like Bartali, they will risk their lives for the good of others. Most Christians who struggle with church leaders struggle with leaders who are not using their leadership for the good of others but for the good of their cause and their reputation.

The most incomprehensible moment of leadership in the Bible becomes the most comprehensible. It occurs in the first chapter of Acts.[*7] Judas had abandoned Jesus, so the remaining disciples needed to replace him to maintain their number at twelve. Did they discuss the qualifications and qualities and skill set of potential replacements? Did they vote and lobby for the next leader? No, because they did not have worldly interests in mind. They simply looked to God and the Spirit and—yes, you are reading this right—rolled the dice. (In Acts it's called "casting lots.")

The choice came down to two people, Matthias and Barsabbas, and they asked God through the Spirit to indicate God's choice by means of the roll of the dice. You can do this only if you believe it is God's Spirit who is in charge and that a cruciform Lord is in control.

The apostles had learned cross-shaped leadership. John Nugent, a friend and wonderful professor of the Bible, is right:

> We just do not find any of the attributes of "take-charge," worldly leaders commended in the New Testament. We are never told that church leaders should be attractional, charismatic, decisive, persuasive, commanding, accomplished, or even educated. Despite the fact that he embodied many of these attributes, the Apostle Paul publicly renounced them. To him this was necessary so people

would see what Christ has done and not what he was doing (1 Cor 2:1-5).[3]

Worldly leadership relies on the extraordinary ability of superior people. It elevates exceptional people, gives them power, trusts that they will use their power responsibly for the good of the organization, and expects them to get things done. Quite simply, this is not how Jesus framed leadership.

This next statement by John Nugent brilliantly expresses what the new kind of leader is to be in the church that lives under a crucified King: "The congregation doesn't elevate the leaders so they can get the work done; leaders elevate the members so they can do the work of the body."[4]

Faithful leaders of the Spirit-created and Spirit-formed church may have titles, but they do not have power. They have an office at the church, but they are not to be identified according to worldly categories: the size of the congregation's budget, how much money they are paid, how big their house is, how many acres the church occupies, how many books they have written, how many satellite campuses the church claims. I could go on. These forms of measure are all about size, about *me,* about the Ego, about how important someone is. Faithful-to-Jesus leaders are known by their ability to follow Jesus and to lead others to follow Jesus. They are known for the sacrifices they make and the lives they have invested in.

Thus, new leaders have but one mission: to empower others to be open to the Spirit and to encourage others to be open to cross-shaped leaders whose responsibility is not to govern, rule, or impose. The cross-shaped leader serves others. Just like Jesus.

Are you open to a cross-shaped, new kind of leader?

Are you open to *being* a cross-shaped, new kind of leader?

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*1 Isaiah 11:2–3

*2 Isaiah 11:4–9

*3 Isaiah 42:1–4

*4 Mark 8:27–30

*5 Mark 8:31–38

*6 Matthew 23:8–12

*7 Acts 1:15–26

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# OPEN YOURSELF TO A NEW ORIENTATION IN LIFE

"What do you do?" is one of the most common questions Americans ask of one another. What they're seeking is information about the person as well as the person's social status and worth.

Sometimes what we do for a living is conveyed by what we wear. At times, Kris and I will see someone in a public setting and think the same thing: *That frumpily dressed, absent-minded fella carrying a bulky briefcase is surely a professor somewhere.*

Clothing stereotypes abound: engineers look tidy and carry a pen or two in their shirt pocket; class-conscious young adults dress in a style that calls to mind a location, such as the environs of tweedy, horse-country gentry. The same clues apply to shirts worn by fans of sports teams—Cubs versus White Sox as just one example. However much you wish you didn't make assumptions based on stereotypes, you still find it difficult to believe that a guy in overalls could be a stockbroker.

Speaking of which, being a deacon is one of the things I do. Or, since Anglicans prefer more ecclesial-sounding terms, what I do is called *the diaconate.* Which means at times I wear a clerical collar, and at times I have worn the collar to an airport. Because of my collar, what I do for a living and what others think I do don't match up. I'm not a pastor or a priest in the traditional sense, only a deacon.

Once at the airport a man came up and said, "Father, would you pray for

me?" So I did. I didn't alter the course of the conversation by saying, "Friend, I'm not a priest, I'm a deacon. But as a deacon and as a Christian brother, I'd be glad to pray for you." Instead, we went to a quiet place, he shared his burden, and I placed my hand on his shoulder and prayed for him. I may not have been as official as he thought, but God hears the prayers of all of us. The man expressed his appreciation and said it helped him face his anxieties.

Wearing a clerical collar routinely reminds me that the Christian life is about serving others. People expect pastors to be oriented toward ministering and serving. (Speaking of clerical garb, the alb—a fancy word for a white, blousy, where's-the-back-pocket-of-my-slacks, rope-tied choir robe—is another matter altogether, but that's for another discussion.)

## Spirit-Prompted Gifts Orient Us Toward Others

To be part of the Body of Christ is to receive a new orientation, or spiritual gift. Each Christian is given something to do for the sake of others. Those orientations are called "spiritual gifts." I prefer to translate this as "Spirit-prompted gifts" because *spiritual* often conjures images of something ethereal, not the work of God's Spirit. Hence, the modifier *Spirit-prompted* gets right to the Source.

The big idea is that we are given a gift, but we are not given a gift so we can hoard it or become famous for it. Rather, we are given a gift to exercise for the sake of other people. When a gift is not being used for others, a Spirit-prompted gift is nonexistent. Better yet, it is not Spirit-prompted.

A revealing passage in 1 Corinthians makes three golden points about Spirit-prompted gifts. First, though there clearly are a variety of gifts and ministries and workings-of-God, they all come from one and the same Spirit.[*1] We don't get one set of gifts from Zeus and another from Aphrodite. The Spirit-prompted gifts all come from the one true God whose Spirit distributes them to us.

Second, every Christian is granted one or more gifts.[*2] Every member of a body is needed—just as we need toes and fingers and shoulders and knees. Toes without knees or big bones on either side of the knees are a monstrosity. So too, each of us has a gift and therefore each of us is needed. Consider this: the healthiest, most vibrant churches are those in which each person's gift is exercised for the good of others, and each person is encouraged to use his or her gifts.

Third and most importantly, the gifts are "for the common good."[*3] We are not given gifts so we can grow personally, though we will grow in learning how

to use our gifts. We are not given gifts so we can be known for our gifts. Instead, we are given gifts for the good of the church, and by this Paul meant primarily the good of our local church's ministries. When we become open to the Spirit, we receive an entirely new orientation in life. We switch from the old Ego to the New Ego. We become contributing members of the Body of Christ. We become other-oriented.

## Derwin in the Elah Valley

Recently I co-led a tour of Israel, where we made a stop at the Elah Valley. This valley is known to Bible readers as the location of the contest between David and Goliath.*[4] A doctoral candidate in the group who came closest to Goliath, at least in terms of size, was Derwin Gray. Derwin played football in high school and at Brigham Young University, although he is not a Mormon. He was drafted by an NFL team and played six seasons for the Indianapolis Colts and the Carolina Panthers.[1] He not only had been converted by the power of the Spirit but the Lord had also called him into ministry. He graduated from seminary with honors and planted Transformation Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The church has been recognized as one of the fastest-growing churches in America.

Derwin is a big man with a big voice and a powerful capacity to preach and speak. And he loves to discuss theology. There in the Elah Valley I asked him to read 1 Samuel 17 as our group walked across a field and gathered near the famous stream associated with David's five smooth stones. Derwin prayed and then began to read. He knew the Lord had been on David's side, but he had the voice of Goliath. His booming voice echoed off the walls of the Elah Valley.

Derwin had had a terrible stutter at one time. And though it occasionally manifests itself in his speech now, the Lord has given him a transcending power to speak. That day I heard a miracle of God's own doing as Derwin read a passage from the Bible.

In his book on *Famous Stutterers,* Gerald McDermott sketches the lives of twelve famous people who had a stutter,[2] including Moses, who told God, "I am slow of speech and tongue."*[5] McDermott wrote that those who stutter will need to seek transcendence, so I quote again the line from my teacher, Jimmy Dunn: "The prominence of the Spirit in Luke's narrative from Pentecost onwards makes clear beyond doubt that for Luke the mission of the church could not hope to be effective without this empowering from God (the Spirit of God) which *transcends*

*human ability and transforms human inability*."[3] Yes, only the Spirit gives what transcends and transforms.

Like so many others who have experienced an empowerment from the Spirit to serve God, Derwin's life is a life for others. If God calls, God gifts. And what God gives is a gift for the sake of others.

## Growing into Using One's Gifts for Others

At Church of the Redeemer, our associate pastor—we call her a curate—is Amanda Holm Rosengren. A talented and intelligent pastor, Amanda had to undo some self-perceptions. She also had to embrace God's gifts and God's calling on her life to serve others. As you read this story, note how Amanda grew in confidence as she embraced God's call on her life for the sake of others. She begins with a kind of backing up into the wrong door to discover her true calling.

> I never intended to be a pastor. If you'd told me in high school or in college that this is where I'd end up, I'd probably have laughed in your face. No, for me, my journey to the pastorate was more circuitous and unintentional. Ever since I was little, *my* intention was to be famous. (Insert a wry smile here.) For most of my growing up [years], "famous" meant being a "famous" concert pianist. I was classically trained and excelled in music; in fact when I went to college, I was accepted into the music conservatory of a well-known Christian liberal arts school. But once I got there, I realized that at that point I didn't like music for music's sake, but rather because I was good at it—it was an idol. And I also realized that my mind needed more than the "just music" of the conservatory. So I switched into the English literature program, where I thrived. And that's when I discovered theology.
>
> When I took my first class in theology, I discovered that I had a natural penchant for it, and my professor encouraged me to consider theology as a career path. So a new idol developed: I was going to become a famous woman evangelical theologian and save the world with my daring mind and academic prowess. (Yes, that was meant to be humorous.)…Though I began in an M.A. program,

> I soon switched to an MDiv program, not because I'd sensed a call to pastoral ministry, but because I loved languages and wanted to study Greek and Hebrew![4]

She gradually learned, in contrast to her initial perceptions, that she was wired to serve others.

> At the seminary I attended, MDiv students were required to take several different personal assessments as part of their training, including a version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which assigns 4 letters to describe how an individual functions in the world. When I took the MBTI and discovered that I am an "F" (feeler) and not a "T" (thinker), I was absolutely devastated! I retook the test over and over, trying not to see if (without outright lying) I could come up with a different result—but to no avail. Not only that, but the descriptor for my four letter type was "The Counselor." To me, counselors were on a lower level even than pastors!

One day the Spirit got through to Amanda in a class when she heard these words: "You're going to be a pastor." She said, "I practically fell out of my chair." Her response?

" 'God, if that's you, you're going to have to make me want it.' And he did. It took a situation that turned me inside out and upside down with pain to do it."

Of all her words in her story, I like these the most because they have become obvious in her life to all who know her: "I also discovered that I was pretty good at walking alongside other people who were in pain, that something in me came alive when listening and praying and giving counsel to others."

Church of the Redeemer recently celebrated Amanda's tenth anniversary of serving the congregation. God has taken her considerable gifts in music and transformed them into leading worship. He has taken her hesitancies and transcended them with preacherly boldness, and our church has embraced her as one of our pastors. Those who attend worship may see her as someone preaching and singing, but we see Amanda, our pastor. She has a mix of giftedness that complements the gifts of others and makes our church a local Body of Christ.

## An Amazing Variety of Gifts

The New Testament helps us out by providing lists of the Spirit-prompted gifts.[*6] I want to emphasize something behind the lists: first, no two lists are identical, and second, the gifts as mentioned *are merely illustrations* of the sorts of things the Spirit is doing through us for the Body of Christ. So instead of working to figure out which gift in the composite list is yours, ask yourself this question: *What is God doing through me for my local Body of Christ?* Whatever that is, that's your gift.

At our church Amanda plays keyboards; Gil holds infants and prays for them; Jay integrates the fellowship; Kris meets and listens to and gets to know a variety of new visitors; Dan keeps our vision close to our budget; Ethan communicates our vision; Kevin does so many things I can't begin to count them; Stephanie teaches and guides our teachers who teach our children (and grandchildren). I'm not sure it's wise to plug each of these persons into one of the gifts on the list. Rather, whatever God gifts a person to do for the church is that person's Spirit-prompted gift.

## A Variety of Gifts Designed for Unification

Gifts work in two ways; one is counterproductive and even detrimental, while the other is an approach that builds up other people. First there are those who are not open to the Spirit. They use their gifts for self-congratulation (the way of the Roman Empire). In contrast, there are those who are open to the Spirit. They make use of their gifts to bring the church into a unity of worship and fellowship (the way of Christ).

Paul wrote that God assigns a gift to each person "so that there should be no division in the body" and so that all the members "should have equal concern for each other."[*7] At Church of Redeemer we need Jay Greener, our pastor, to exercise his shepherding, pastoring, and compassionate ways, just as we need Laurie Nelson exercising her deep gifts of hospitality for our weekly time of fellowship, just as we need Debbie Richards forming the rhythm of our worship by playing the djembe or cajon. When we all exercise our Spirit-prompted gifts, we are drawn out of ourselves and toward one another.

Are you open to the new orientation the Spirit has for you?

Are you open to the Spirit's gifts in others to edify you?

For the Spirit-prompted gifts to work well, we need the Spirit-prompted

fruit as well. They are mates lost without each other—which is why the fruit of the Spirit is the focus of the next chapter.

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*1 1 Corinthians 12:4–6

*2 1 Corinthians 12:7

*3 1 Corinthians 12:7

*4 Read the story in 1 Samuel 17.

*5 Exodus 4:10

*6 Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 27–28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10–11

*7 1 Corinthians 12:25

15

# OPEN YOURSELF TO A LIFE OF LOVE

The first "fruit" of the Spirit is love.[*1] Love appears at the top of Paul's list of Spirit-prompted fruit in Galatians. While these verses can be read as a list of nine separate virtues, they also can be read as a description of one big virtue, captured in the word *love,* along with eight smaller ones. When it comes to love, three wild but very Christian ideas rush to the front of the room for immediate attention:

**Love is the most important Christian virtue,**
**love is to be shown even to our enemies, and**
**this kind of love is beyond difficult.**

It's easy to say you love everyone until you run into a sworn enemy or a bad neighbor or a grumpy coworker or a family member you thought would not show up for Thanksgiving dinner. If we are going to become a people formed by love of God and others, we need more than our own strength. When it comes to loving people, we need the power of the Spirit to transcend and transform us. When it comes to Spirit-prompted gifts, we need Spirit-prompted love.

## First, Love

When it comes to the list of the Spirit-prompted fruit, Paul wrote: "But the fruit of the Spirit *is* love." Love is the first and most important virtue. A Spirit-formed and Spirit-prompted person is measured by loving God and loving others. Not simply loving God, but loving God *and* loving others, including one's enemies.

Paul emphasized love by mentioning it first three different times in his letters.

> For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
>
> Do everything in love.
>
> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*[2]

Behind Paul was Jesus who taught love as the most important virtue. When Jesus was asked by a snarky theological expert to identify the most important command in the Bible (read: Old Testament), he answered with the Jesus Creed in these words:

> "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these.*[3]

Again, whether you read the words of Jesus or the apostle Paul—or John or James or Peter—the same thing becomes clear: love is the most important virtue. You can fill in the blanks for what is most important in your church, but for the early church the most important thing was love.[1]

## The Challenge of Loving One's Enemies

To a world that effectively taught that one could (and should) love one's neighbors but could hate one's enemies, Jesus said: "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."*[4]

Soon after, Jesus uttered words that confuse us, but they are well worth understanding. He said, "Be perfect." What did he mean by that? In this context, to be perfect means to be like God in loving people indiscriminately—which, by definition, includes your enemies. Thus, loving enemies and being perfect belong together.

Love is such a wonderful theory for life until your theory bumps into an

enemy. Jesus was asked, "Who is my neighbor?" We need to now ask, "Who are our enemies?" You may prefer to respond, "I love everyone and have no enemies." Let's consider the groups of enemies that most readily come to mind for most Americans:

- Those in a higher economic class (the elites, one of the groups singled out by classism).
- Those in a lower economic class (the so-called undeserving or the deplorables, who also are victims of classism).
- Those who hold to a religion that is different from ours.
- Those in our religion who differ on what we are convinced is central to right belief and practice.
- Those in a different political party.
- Those in our political party who differ with us on key issues.
- Those with a different sexual orientation, and those who share the same sexual orientation as we do but who differ on how to regard those of a different sexual orientation.
- Those of a different ethnic background.
- Those who share our ethnicity but differ from us in how to regard those of other ethnicities.

If you still insist that you have no enemies, let me ask: When was the last time you invited someone to join you for coffee or a meal who comes from one of the groups just mentioned? Or have you *ever* shared significant time and possibly a meal with anyone from any of these groups?

We have enemies, at least most of us do. If no one from the groups above rings a bell, consider someone who spread lies about you, someone who lied to you, someone who betrayed your trust, someone who stole from you, someone who lured you into a compromising situation, or someone who did harm to a member of your family. Give it some thought. You have enemies.

But love remains central, no matter who the other person is and no matter what the person did to you or to someone you love.

## Four Ways to Love Your Enemies

On a practical level, here are four things to keep in mind when it comes to loving your enemies.[2] Christians must begin with God's own love. If it is true that "God is love,"[*5] then we can't genuinely love until we are loving others the way God loves. So love for the Christian begins with watching how God loves, and I suggest that we see this in four themes.

*One.* God loves by forming covenants with people. Covenants involve a radical and rugged commitment of two parties—God and humans—to one another. But this kind of covenant owes its origin to God's choosing to love creatures who fall far short of perfection.

*Two.* God's covenant with us involves a commitment to be present or to be with us. God *wants* to be with us. God made it a priority to be present with his people: in the Temple in Jerusalem and later, in the Messiah, named *Immanuel* (which means "God with us"). For two thousand years and for all eternity, Jesus is God with us, Immanuel. And what's more, God is with us in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*Three.* God's covenant commitment of presence communicates that God is *for* us. God has our back. God is in our corner. And more. God is in front, behind, alongside, under, and above us. On top of that, God is *in* us in the Spirit. In all these ways God is for us.

*Four.* God's love involves being with us and for us in such a way that God becomes a *transforming presence* in us. Genuine love then is growth into what God wants of us, and this means we are back to the word *open.* When we are open to God's covenant to be with us and for us, we also are open to the transforming presence of God in the Spirit.

One can easily be excused for asking how it is that love can be transforming. We moderns are prone to ask a related question: Is love unconditional or conditional? These two questions are answered if one understands how God's covenant love works. God's love for us is God's rugged commitment to be with us, to be for us, and to work in us so that we become who God wants us to be. Our love in response, then, is reversed. We make a rugged commitment to be with Someone (God) and to be for Someone (God) in such a way that we work together (with God by being open) to become who God wants each of us to be. We also make a rugged commitment to be with others, to be for others, and to grow together to become the people God wants us to be.

This all leads now to asking about the Spirit and love, even when it comes to loving our enemies.

## What Does It Mean to Love Our Enemies?

If love means a rugged, or covenant, commitment to be with and for someone else in the way of transformation, then we are called to love our enemies in that way. Please go back through the list earlier in this chapter and ask yourself this question: *Am I willing to be ruggedly committed to a person who is my enemy?*

Let's make it more specific: *Am I willing to love the person who betrayed me in such a way that I will be present in her life, to be for her in such a manner that she knows I've got her back, and am I willing to be with her as we learn to walk into Christlikeness together?* I suspect that when we put it that way, we all will balk.

Our balking is precisely why we need the Spirit. The Spirit is the One who can transform us from people who love only the people we like and the people who are like us, into people who love the people we don't like, the people who are different from us, and yes, even our enemies. This may be one of the most beautiful verses in the entire Bible: "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."[6]

This all comes from the Lord, and the Lord who gives these gifts comes to us as the Spirit. What comes from the Spirit is our transformation into Christlikeness.

Given that love is the first virtue and given that God's covenant is a rugged commitment to be with us, to be for us, and to be a transforming presence in us, what are we to do? It could be boiled down to these simple steps: (a) see the need and (b) respond to the person. To love others as God loves us is the biggest challenge we face. The only hope we have is to be open to the Spirit who can transform us from hatred and resentment. Or perhaps more common to our everyday experience, the Spirit can transform us from being people who offer little more than a cold shoulder to those we don't like and to those who aren't like us.

The Spirit can transcend us and make us into people of prayer for everyone we know, including our enemies. We can then form new, reconciled relationships with our enemies. I know of nothing other than a miracle of God's Spirit-sent grace that can lead us into lives marked by love for everyone.

Love is about responding to the needs of others in a way that secures our commitment to them. I mentioned early in this book the power couple of Le Chambon, France, André and Magda Trocmé. During World War II, they

created an entire village of protection for Jews who were in danger of losing their lives. Here is how one of the storytellers describes Magda's relentless love: "For her…a person either opens the door or closes it in the face of a victim….That person there—that pursued, terrified person before her—needs help, not a closed door. *That person's need* is the basis of ethics, not any sentimental love she may or may not feel for the refugee and not any calling she may feel to be morally noble."[3]

Are you open to a life of love? Love for everyone?

Perfect love, the kind the Spirit prompts in us, casts out fear. In place of fear, this Spirit-prompted love generates confidence and a new kind of assurance.

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*1 Galatians 5:22–23

*2 Galatians 5:14; 1 Corinthians 16:14; Colossians 3:14

*3 Mark 12:30–31

*4 Matthew 5:43–48, here quoting verses 44–45 and then verse 48.

*5 1 John 4:16

*6 2 Corinthians 3:18



Part 4

# Open to the Virtues of the Spirit

16

# OPEN YOURSELF TO THE SPIRIT IN A NEW ASSURANCE

I have received more than my fair share of letters stitched together by fear. Some of our brothers and sisters are deeply anxious about their salvation. Some of them wonder if the sin they have committed is enough to damn them to hell. Others are deeply concerned they have not believed in the required manner.

They write to me to ask if I can help them become more assured of their salvation. They probe me for solutions to their deepest anxieties, and I do my best to answer them. I should say that *we* do our best, because I have learned that these letters require not only my Bible stuff but also Kris's listening ear. She sees things in their letters that I do not see, and her counseling wisdom is invaluable.

Part of the anxiety over salvation or the lack of assurance has to do with not comprehending the significance of the indwelling Spirit of God. Learning about the Spirit won't immediately resolve each fear or suddenly overwhelm a person with joyous assurance, but it is an important consideration. And it begins with this gospel news:

**The Spirit who speaks in the living and written Word,**
**who intercedes,**
**who discerns,**
**who unleashes new-creation life,**
**who forms us into a New Ego,**
**who creates a new people and new leaders and a new orientation**

**shaped by loving others,**

**is God's first installment in you and in me of the gift of eternal life.**

**God is good.**

**God can be trusted.**

**God will make good on his promise to complete our redemption.**

In other words, if you have the Spirit dwelling in you, then eternal life is in your future.[1] In speaking of the Spirit as the "first installment," Paul gives to us the kind of image that is as clear now as it was then: when you make your first payment on a car, on a home, on a boat, or a motorcycle, you are pledging that you will return with the remaining payments until the debt is gone.

The gift of the indwelling Spirit is God's first installment to us on a promise that God eventually will redeem us to the uttermost, bring us to the banqueting table in the new heaven and new earth, and grant us eternal life forever in the kingdom of God. Three times Paul uses this image:

> [God will] set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a *deposit,* guaranteeing what is to come.*[1]

> Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a *deposit,* guaranteeing what is to come.*[2]

> [The Holy Spirit] is a *deposit* guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*[3]

In each text, Paul says the Spirit is a deposit (a first installment) and that the Spirit who is deposited in us *guarantees* "what is to come," which is clarified in the third text above. "Our [eternal] inheritance" is at the same time full "redemption." Knowing the Spirit is at work in us should give us a new assurance about our relation to God and our hope for eternal life.

Now back to the question with which we began the chapter: *How can you know if you really are saved?* You can know you have eternal life…

if you are open to the God who speaks in Jesus Christ,

or open to the God who speaks in the Bible,

or open to the God who speaks through prophets,

or open to the God who speaks through the Spirit in your prayers and in discerning God's will in this world.

Let's be fair and let's be honest: no one is continually open to the Spirit in all these ways. But if you see marks in your life of being open to God speaking to you in these ways, then you can know that the Spirit is at work in you for an eternal redemption.

You can be assured of God's redemption…

if you are open to the new-creation life,

or open to the new message of God in Christ,

or open to a new presence of God in your life,

or open to the new day of the Spirit and a new baptism,

or open to a New Ego forming in you that is empowered by God's Spirit and leading you to see the church as the new people of God and your own family.

You can know you are in the kingdom of God…

if you are open to supporting cross-shaped leaders and to serving with new people of God,

or open to a new orientation to the Body of Christ as you offer your gift for the common good of the local church,

or open to a life shaped by love.

If you are open to some or all of these, then you can know the Spirit is at work in you for an eternal redemption. To anticipate what is to come, you can know you are on the path to eternal redemption…

if you are open to the freedom of the Spirit,

or open to the new holiness of love,

or open to the new fruit of the Spirit,

or open to victory in communication (the gift of tongues),

or open to victory over sickness and death,

or open to victory over the powers that war against God,

or open to worshiping God through Christ.

If you are open to some or all of these, then you can know the Spirit is at

work in you for life in the kingdom of God. These are signs of God's first deposit on your redemption. My emphasis here is simple: the presence of the Spirit in our lives brings a new kind of assurance.

## Assurance Sometimes Is Defeated by Doubt

There are times when a person is not sure that she numbers among the people of God, or not sure he really believes, or the person's faith is shaken by other Christians who put their confidence in certainty above all else. Or she fears she is not noticing enough growth or transformation, or he is shaken by doubts and fears. Even Jesus's earliest disciples doubted: "When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted."[*4] They doubted, even though they had personally encountered the resurrected Jesus!

My favorite writer on doubt—and thus my favorite writer on assurance—is Daniel Taylor. In his wonderful book *The Skeptical Believer,* Taylor describes believing and what he calls "Smoke Blowing."[2] A smoke blower makes claims with confidence; substitutes convictions for evidence; speaks in a way that anyone who differs feels stupid; treats opposing views as enemies in need of a thorough trouncing; and sees every debate as a chance to win, manipulate, and conquer.

A believer, on the other hand, knows faith involves risk, not complete certainty. Taylor wrote: "A believer is someone who buys stock in a promising company, realizing that it could go bust."[3] Believers hunger for meaning and they are—to use Taylor's words (and ours for this book)—marked by "openness to the spiritual, the unverifiable, the mysterious, the intuited, the imagined."[4]

When I was teaching undergraduates, many of whom were budding scientists, many expressed serious doubts about what the Bible said about human origins. Many said they had been assured that if they embraced evolutionary creationism, or evolution in any form, they would be denying the Bible. At times my students shared their tears and fears, and they often were asking for some assurance. Others were stunned into silence by some of the violent, deadly, vengeful actions attributed to God in the Old Testament. Others cringed at the Bible's seeming endorsement (or at the very least, tacit condoning) of slavery and less than egalitarian postures toward women. Doubts wounded their faith. They didn't want any smoke blowing; they wanted to hear more about believing.

I often pointed them to Taylor, who has been a skeptical believer. He has settled on these compass points:

> First, I remind myself that I have been invited not into an argument but into a story.
>
> Second, I recall that this story gives me not just something to believe but something to do.
>
> Third, I propose to myself that the real test of any story is what it asks me to love and what kind of life it requires me to live.[5]

Which leads me to consider how doubt and the Spirit can be united in a new assurance.

## The Spirit and Doubt

One way to handle doubt is to look at the work of the Spirit in us, checking for signs of our own openness to God's Spirit. The apostle Paul knew this, surely from his own experience, for he wrote words to which we need to listen well:

> Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.
>
> For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, *"Abba,* Father." The Spirit himself testifies with [better, *to*] our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*[5]

If you listened to these words well, you noticed that assurance arises in the heart of the person who sees the Spirit conquering the "misdeeds of the body." This person finds that he or she is being "led by the Spirit" and notices the heartfelt cry that God is our "*Abba,* Father." In all this the Spirit "testifies with [better, *to*] our spirit that we are God's children."[6] Later the apostle wrote: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless

groans."[*6] Once again we see that Paul was aware of the Spirit's praying inside his own body. The apostle John taught the same: "This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit."[*7] We know we are Christians because we sense the reality of the Spirit in us.

South African Methodist pastor Trevor Hudson has encouraged Christians by using this verse to remind us that "a prayer meeting is going on within our lives 24/7"[7] because the Spirit is praying. I am convinced that our doubts can dissipate over time if we simply look for what many theologians call the "inner testimony of the Spirit" in our lives. Sometimes it is internal assurance. That is, we know we number among God's redeemed because the Spirit tells us. At Easter, many of us sing a song that goes like this: "You ask me how I know He [Christ] lives?" The answer: "He lives within my heart."[8] That kind of internal witness corresponds to the assuring witness of the Spirit in us.

At other times, you or I look at our respective lives and notice clear steps of progress; at other times we look back and conclude, "I'm a new me, I'm a new creation, and I'm not who I was before." I know what this is like, for I was tormented, sometimes under some very heavy Calvinist ideas, as a college student. I kept struggling to know if I was one of the elect. I didn't have any assurance. Suddenly I was in a dark fog of doubt.

I talked to Kris about it; I talked to my pastor about it; and I talked to my favorite professor, Joe Crawford, about it. Crawford said to me, "Scot, get your mind off yourself and look to Christ," and oh did that help me. For a spell.

"No one," Daniel Taylor has observed, "can make sense of things all alone."[9] I couldn't. But over time I regained a measure of assurance, and it was largely because I was open to seeing the Spirit's transforming work of me: Day after day I began to hear the Spirit's testimony in the Word, to grow in my love for Jesus Christ, to find more and more delight in being with the people of God, to yearn to use my gifts for the Body of Christ. And I began to notice signs of transformation and victory and worship alongside signs of the opposite of each! Years later, I found myself wondering what had happened to my lack of assurance.

Are you open to the new assurance the Spirit can provide?

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*1 2 Corinthians 1:22

*2 2 Corinthians 5:5

*3 Ephesians 1:14

*4 Matthew 28:17

*5 Romans 8:12–17

*6 Romans 8:26

*7 1 John 4:13

17

# OPEN YOURSELF TO A NEW FREEDOM

I want to defend an incredible statement made by theologian Stanley Hauerwas and United Methodist bishop Will Willimon about the Holy Spirit. They wrote, *"The Holy Spirit is a wild, unpredictable character."*[1]

If the Spirit can be called *wind,* then the Spirit is unpredictable, invisible, uncontrollable, omnicompetent, and sovereign. We can reverse that statement. It is because the Spirit is invisible and unpredictable and powerful that we say the Spirit is like the wind. This powerful wildness of the Spirit can be captured in the word *freedom*. Those who are open to the Spirit find freedom and discover a divine wildness.

On the Day of Pentecost, some of the people who observed the outpouring of the Spirit thought the followers of Jesus were more than a little out of line. That's what we might call Pentecostal chaos: a divine disordering that will reorder everything under God's control.

This biblical statement may be the most radical news about the Holy Spirit: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."*[1] When we are open to direct access to God through the Spirit, we discover at least three new freedoms.

## A Freedom to Be Who God Created You to Be

By focusing on three words, we can understand and live in the freedom of the

Spirit. The three words are *we, all,* and *each.* Paul wrote, "We all…contemplate the Lord's glory."[*2] He also stated that "each" of us is given a gift. The Spirit gives me the freedom to be the me God wants me to be, and the Spirit gives you the freedom to be the you that God wants you to be.

I am expanding on the title of a book written by John Ortberg that has the subtitle *Becoming God's Best Version of You.*[2] Ever-vigilant theological types might raise a red flag about the book's title being too individualistic. It is this: *The Me I Want to Be.* They have a good point, but not at the expense of the necessary and deeply personal element of faith. God saves individuals and God transforms individuals. That salvation and transformation occur in the context of a community of faith, but you remain you and I remain exactly who I am, except in a group context. When you become open to the Spirit, you get to be the you that God designed only you to be.

There's more to this. When we become open to the Spirit, we are unleashed in freedom to be a special presence in our local congregation of the Body of Christ.

Kris and I share a meal with our friends Gil and Lesley Smith every month. When we first started getting together, we got to know one another and sized one another up. We are now growing to become sensitive to one another as we've learned to listen to one another. We have been regaled with stories about their boys and their daughters-in-law and their grandchildren. They have heard plenty about our family, and we do this over Middle Eastern food at Pita Inn.

On Sundays, the Smiths sit in front of our family at Church of the Redeemer. We have prayed with and for Lesley as she learned of her cancer and as she recovers from cancer. We have learned about trees and the environment, since the Smiths are arborists. We occasionally talk about bird watching and composting and gardening, and we share our family's joys related to Cubs baseball.

Most importantly, Lesley and Gil are a divine presence in our lives. They, like Kris and me, are open to the Spirit in a way that each of us becomes a special presence of God to one another. Alongside the freedom to be is the freedom to become.

## A Freedom to Become

The most radical statement that connects the Spirit to freedom is followed up

with a note of transformation. "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."[*3]

Think through these questions: Who were Peter or Paul or Junia or Phoebe when they first met Christ? Who were Macrina or Augustine? Or Thomas Aquinas or Teresa of Avila? Or Martin Luther or his wife, Katie? Or Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Mildred Bangs Wynkoop? What we know is that each of these believers became what God wanted them to be because they were open to the Spirit's transforming work.

## Kellye's Story

One of the assignments in one of the classes I teach is to write out one's story of conversion. One of my students is Kellye Fabian, whose parents divorced when she was a girl of six. Her mom remarried, and her mom's second husband was a quadriplegic.

The implication for Kellye and her sister was that they now would have to care for themselves. There was little to no faith at work in her family except in the heart of American consumerism, and they all had a driving ambition to make money. Kellye was good at it. She had obtained top grades in law school and landed a position with a top law firm. She married and had a daughter. Then the dream crashed, and she found herself locked in a spiritual prison.

In her paper Kellye shared what happened:

> In September 2001, a year and a half after my daughter was born, three things happened in a period of a year that changed everything: my daughter was diagnosed with epilepsy, my husband had a radical surgery and almost died, and my marriage ended in divorce. The amount of stress, worry, and hopelessness that enveloped me during this period of time moves me to tears even now, 14 years later.
>
> I was a single mom and traveled for work three times a week while a nanny and my ex-husband spent time with my daughter. And for *six years,* I fell into doing all the things a young, single, well-paid, successful lawyer who traveled to the best cities in the world might be tempted to do….I was drowning in loneliness and…a desperate search for something that would satisfy the deep

longing in my soul to be loved.[3]

Despite the absence of faith in her family, she started looking for a deep anchor in life. But still she found no freedom.

> In 2005, midway through what I have come to call "the dark years," I bought a Bible. I don't fully know why and I don't remember where I bought it. I had just left my first law firm as a way of seeking to tame my life and travel less so I could be with my daughter more. I remember trying to read the Bible, but feeling frustrated because I didn't understand it. I still have the Bible I bought and there is a note in the margin next to Romans 12:3, dated September 2005, that says: "Why don't I have faith?" Not long after writing that note, I wrote a poem called *My Plea,* which was a desperate cry for God—if he existed—to find me because though I was searching for him, I couldn't find him. My quest was motivated by desperation. More years passed.

During a trial, she overheard two lawyers mention someone named Bill, so she inquired who Bill was. They said they had been talking about Bill Hybels, pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in the Chicago suburbs. Once back home, still searching for liberation from her spiritual imprisonment, Kellye decided to attend Willow Creek.

> It was mid-November 2008 and I walked into the auditorium, sitting close to the front. I had never been to—or even heard about—a church like this….Within a few minutes, a young, dark-haired pastor with an Australian accent came up on stage wearing jeans and began to teach….Within about two sentences of the pastor speaking, my eyes welled with tears and I began weeping. Tears rolled down my face silently and fell into my lap. To say I was stunned doesn't explain how I felt. I had no idea what was happening, but I had a sense I can only describe as full and I didn't ever want to leave. I really considered whether it was possible to stay where I was sitting for the rest of my life….
>
> I eventually got up and decided I needed to tell someone what

> had happened. Because I had seen Bill Hybels on the Internet, I decided he was the person to tell; I didn't know anyone else. So, I walked over to him, introduced myself, and told him it was my first time there. He asked me what I thought and through tears, I said, "Well, I cried the whole time and I don't ever want to leave." He smiled, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "I think today was your day."

Remember when Kellye said she couldn't comprehend the Bible on her first attempt to read it? How do you explain what happened next apart from the intellectual and spiritual freedom of the Holy Spirit?

> [Bill Hybels] told me to go home and read the book of Luke in the Bible and to come back to him when I finished….Unlike every other time I had tried to make sense of what was in the Bible, this time the images, words, and concepts jumped off the page to me. I understood and began to have a sense of Jesus' actual life and presence.
>
> For a month—from mid-November through mid-December 2008—I read everything I could get my hands on, including all the Gospels and various other books in the New Testament. I went to Willow [Creek] each Sunday and learned about a concept I had never heard of before—grace. I was stunned to tears to learn that God would forgive me for the destructive behavior I had so willingly engaged in for years. On December 20, 2008, in my bedroom at home by myself, I wrote out a prayer to God in my black journal, asking for forgiveness, committing my life to following Jesus, and promising to do whatever he asked of me without delay. I no longer considered my life my own.
>
> Nothing in my life has ever had such a profound, lasting, dramatic impact than my commitment to follow Jesus. Everything changed.

What she found was an amazing freedom and the peace the Spirit brings to the person who is unshackled from false narratives about God and the church, from guilt and sin and self-pursuit, and from the fear that keeps many people

from exploring the gifts God gives. Kellye resigned from her partnership in the legal firm; she routinely provides free legal services; she has told all her family about her new life; she has participated in mission trips. She is now director of Resources and Experiences in Willow Creek's Discipleship Department and has devoted her life to helping people learn to follow Christ.

Kellye has been set free to become the person God designed her to be. Those who are open to the Spirit experience the incredible wildness of God's freedom to become far more than they ever knew was on their horizon.

## A Freedom to Belong

One of the worst critiques of a local church is that, for whatever reason, a Christian senses she or he doesn't belong. So let this be said with utter certitude: you belong. Why? Because anyone in whom God's Spirit dwells has been baptized into the Body of Christ, and everyone in the Body of Christ is a gift to the Body of Christ. That means you *belong.* And since you belong, so does your *gift*.

When I was asked to speak to a large gathering of women, I chose to talk about the importance of the church. But at the luncheon I heard stories from more than one woman that disturbed me. Some of the women at the table admitted they believe in the church, but their shared chorus was "But my church doesn't want me. My church won't recognize my gifts. My church would rather I leave."

When I hear such commentary, I grieve but then reaffirm that the Spirit sovereignly distributes gifts in the wildness of freedom and there is no gender discrimination with the Spirit.[4] There is no sign in the Bible that only men can teach or only men can exercise the gift of prophecy. No, the Bible shows a wild freedom in distributing gifts. Here's a quick biblical review of women exercising their Spirit-given gifts:

- Miriam led the children of Israel in theological worship.
- Deborah led the entire nation in worship, in military matters, and in government.
- Esther, a beauty queen, saved the nation from genocide.
- Ruth found a way to the people of God, and she became an ancestor of David and Jesus.

- Huldah was a prophet (not a prophet*ess,* since such a word is used only to lessen the contributions of women).
- Mary paved the way for Jesus.
- At Pentecost, the Spirit empowered young and old, men and women.
- Priscilla (or Prisca) taught Apollos (a man) and founded churches with Aquila.
- Junia, a woman, was a well-known apostle.
- Phoebe was the courier, reader, and first interpreter of the letter written by Paul to Christians living in Rome.
- Euodia and Syntyche were gospel coworkers with the apostle Paul.*4

It is the Spirit who chooses who does what in the Body of Christ. Our only responsibility is to receive the gifts that God gives. The Spirit is free to empower whomever the Spirit chooses, and that means we all are free in the Spirit.

Are you open to the wild freedom of the Spirit?

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*1 2 Corinthians 3:17

*2 2 Corinthians 3:18

*3 2 Corinthians 3:18

*4 Exodus 15:20–21; Judges 4–5; Esther; Ruth; 2 Kings 22:11–20; Luke 1:46–56; Acts 2:17–18; Acts 18:24–28; Romans 16:7; Romans 16:1; Philippians 4:2–3

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# OPEN YOURSELF TO THE SPIRIT FOR A NEW HOLINESS

My grandmother, as I mentioned in the opening to this book, was part of a Holiness Pentecostal church. That meant—among many wonderful things—that they believed in *entire sanctification*. It was thought that in this life Christians could reach a level of personal holiness in which they could stop sinning.

My grandma made the claim that she was entirely sanctified and no longer sinned. My family was Baptist, and we would have none of this. Here's what happened to make me think I had popped her sacred bubble. My grandmother's home phone was part of a party line, which means more than one home was hooked up to the same line. She lived in an area called Vinegar Hill, and she could pick up the phone and hear the conversations of neighbors who were using the phone. I was there when my grandma listened in on such a conversation, then watched as she later called a friend and repeated the overheard conversation.

My grandma then returned to the "setting" room, and I waited a few minutes before I turned the conversation to entire sanctification. Here is how it went:

I: Grandma, do you believe in entire sanctification?

She: Yes, I do.

I: Have you achieved it?

She: Yes, I have now for some years.

I: Grandma, I just heard you gossiping, and gossiping is sin. That means you are not sinless.

Her response was priceless. "Now Scot," she said with grandmotherly warmth and her customary twinkle in the eye, "gossiping is a mistake, not a sin, and God looks over mistakes." Enough said.

What does it mean, then, to be holy or "sanctified"?[1]

## Holiness and the Holy Spirit

Over and over the term *Spirit,* when used in the Bible, is introduced with the term *Holy,* as in "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the *Holy* Spirit" and "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the *Holy* Spirit."*[1] When the Bible calls the Spirit *Holy,* surely it evokes the bold opposite of the spirits of wickedness and evil.

So what does it mean to call the Spirit *Holy*? The answer is repeated so often by so many that nearly everyone raises his hand with the same answer: to be holy means to be separate or different. Fair enough, as Flannery O'Connor once wrote, "You are right, you just aren't right enough."[2] I want to propose a subtle but important shift in the understanding of the meaning of holiness. To keep with O'Connor's humorous prose, "I'm willing to defend this one like a fox terrier."[3]

The word *holiness* means to be in God's presence as one "devoted to God," and because of devotion to God it also means "to be separated from the world." This dual meaning strikes the right biblical balance. God is holy. To be with God, to be devoted to God, and to walk with God mean that the companion of God is separate from the world. Devotion to God entails the rejection of devotion to the world. But rejecting the world is not the primary emphasis. Holiness is first and foremost devotion to God.

We could translate the word *holy* as "devout" and we would be accurate. So we see that separation from the world is the impact or result, not the source, of holiness. Devotion to God doesn't mean isolation or withdrawal, as one finds among some sects. Rather, holiness means that in this world one listens and dances to the music of the Holy Spirit instead of the music of the world.

How can we become holy, or devoted to God? There are three dimensions to growing into holiness. First, we need to practice the spiritual disciplines that promote presence with God, because contact with God is transformative. Those practices are prayer, meditation and contemplation, Bible reading, and a solid diet

of good Christian influences, including movies and books. These spiritual disciplines are simultaneously denials of other influences, since playing video games or surfing the Internet is not as profitable as praying.

Second, we need to discipline ourselves to practice acts of goodness, holiness, justice, love, compassion, and beauty. Which at the same time means we need to say no to the use or overuse of alcohol, food, sexually provocative movies and literature, violence, anything that feeds hate (such as some news outlets and social-media posts). Instead, we need to say yes to good friendships; church participation; and acts of compassion, justice, love, goodness, and beauty.

Third, behind it all we need to remember that we do not make ourselves holy. We become progressively holy, or we grow sporadically into holiness only because of the grace of God's gift of the Holy Spirit in us.

## Holiness Comes from the Holy Spirit

From start to finish, from inside to outside, from top to bottom, the work of becoming holy—of sanctification—is the work of God through the Spirit, as these Bible verses make clear:

> [To Christians] who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *through the sanctifying work of the Spirit,* to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.
>
> For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a *holy life.* Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, *the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.*
>
> May God himself, the God of peace, *sanctify you through and through.* May your whole spirit, soul and body *be kept blameless* at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> …because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through *the sanctifying work of the Spirit* and through belief in the truth.[*2]

We already have mentioned the spiritual disciplines, but this must be emphasized again: We don't grow in holiness accidentally or simply because we want to. We grow if we have a vision to be more holy, if we are open to the grace of God's Spirit being unleashed in our innermost being, and if we surrender to the Spirit's work in our hearts.

The spiritual disciplines don't make us holy, nor do they make us loving. We don't become holy because we spend fifteen minutes in the Psalms every day. We don't become more loving by praying fifteen minutes following fifteen minutes of Bible reading. We don't even grow into Christlikeness by reading about Jesus, praying, and then spending fifteen more minutes in contemplation.

On their own, these practices don't accomplish the proper result. For these disciplines to do their proper work, we need to practice them as we are *open to God's Spirit*. In other words, the spiritual disciplines are practices that are designed to make us open to the Spirit and open to the presence of God, but they are not the Spirit.

## A Surrendered Person

There are four wings to the evangelical movement in the United States: the Reformed, the Anabaptist, the Restorationist, and the Holiness.[4] In the Reformed wing, there is an emphasis on theology, preaching, and social engagement at the level of culture. The Anabaptists emphasize local church, discipleship, justice, and peace. The Restorationists stress the courage to return to the Bible and start all over again. And the Holiness tradition brings an emphasis on surrender, turning from worldliness, and deepening one's personal spiritual life.

Here I bring our attention to an individual from the Holiness wing who expresses the beauty of holiness. Her name is Phoebe Palmer. In her day Phoebe was a world-famous evangelist as well as teacher of utter devotion to God.

As Palmer continued to pray and read the Bible and join in fellowship with others and carry on the ministry God had given her…Allow me to jump to her words:

> I felt that the Spirit was leading into a solemn, most sacred, and inviolable compact between God and the soul that came forth from Him, by which, in the sight of God, angels, and men, I was to be united in eternal oneness with the Lord my redeemer, requiring unquestioning allegiance on my part, and infinite love, and everlasting salvation, guidance, and protection, on the part of Him who had loved and redeemed me, so that from henceforth He might say to me, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever" (Hos. 2:19).[5]

Her prose is a bit old-fashioned, but this is the gist of it: Palmer knew that the Spirit was prompting her to surrender to God in utter allegiance and love for God and others. She also knew that God's covenant meant God would be faithful to her. Palmer was not known in her day for being a reclusive person of prayer given over wholly to the contemplation of God. She was known instead as someone who was "all in." She loved God, she loved her family, she loved her neighbors as herself, she loved those who needed the gospel, and she loved all those who were in need of compassion. What marked her holiness was a devotion to God that transformed her entire life, which is to say Phoebe Palmer was a model of Spirit-generated holiness.

## Holiness and God's Holy Will

God is holy and God wants us to be holy. Two Bible verses immediately come to mind: "Be holy, because I am holy" and "It is God's will that you should be holy [or sanctified]."[*3] To be holy is characterized by simultaneous devotion to God and separation from everything that is not godlike or Christlike. Yes, sexual sins and indulgence sins and greed sins and hatred sins are high on the Bible's lists. But remember that God's deepest will is for us to love God and to love others. God wants our devotion most of all, and that devotion will turn us away from sins.

Here's another way to say it: anything that is not loving—of God and of others and of self and of all God's creation—is unholy. But every act of loving God, others, self, or creation is holiness. Love is not an alternative to holiness. Holiness becomes visible when we love God, others, self, and creation. Holiness, I like to say, is love done well.

Notice that when Paul contrasted the works of the flesh with its opposite, he mentioned something positive and good: the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit grows on the branches of those who are "juiced" with the Holy Spirit.

It takes a lifetime and beyond to become holy. Most Christians believe that during this life we grow in holiness. But it is only at the resurrection—or at some divine moment of creation after death and prior to entering heaven—that we become finally holy. But even then, there is reason to consider that in the kingdom of God we might well eternally grow into more and more holiness.

It not only takes a lifetime; it also takes a church or a community of faith to display this new holiness. Here is one of the most memorable descriptions of the church in the whole of church history:

> For Christians are no different from other people in terms of their country, language, or customs. Nowhere do they inhabit cities of their own, use a strange dialect, or live life out of the ordinary….They inhabit both Greek and barbarian cities, according to the lot assigned to each. And they show forth the character of their own citizenship in a marvelous and admittedly paradoxical way by following local customs in what they wear and what they eat and in the rest of their lives. They live in their respective countries, but only as resident aliens; they participate in all things as citizens, and they endure all things as foreigners. Every foreign territory is a homeland for them, every homeland foreign territory. They marry like everyone else and have children, but they do not expose them once they are born. They share their meals but not their sexual partners. They are found in the flesh but do not live according to the flesh. They live on earth but participate in the life of heaven. They are obedient to the laws that have been made, and by their own lives they supersede the laws.[6]

That's what new holiness looks like. Idealistic? Perhaps, but probably not. Why? Because the Spirit has been unleashed, and those who are open to the Spirit can do a transforming work that makes God's people a shining display of loving holiness.

Are you open to the Spirit who brings a new holiness?

Holiness is the result of the Spirit's work in us, and that same Spirit is engaged in our deepest hearts in a battle between what is good and what is evil.

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*1 Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 12:3

*2 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:7–8; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13

*3 Leviticus 11:44; (1 Peter 1:16); 1 Thessalonians 4:3

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# LIVING IN WHAT IS GOOD WHILE REJECTING ALL THAT OPPOSES THE GOOD

At a dinner celebration, one of my colleagues, Wayne Gordon, founding pastor and community development leader, told a story about one of his first students, who earned the nickname Top Cat. Before Wayne became pastor of Lawndale Community Church, he was teaching at Farragut High School, a school in one of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods.

Top Cat had been absent for the first week of classes, so Wayne, after taking roll yet again, asked the class where Top Cat was. The students said he worked the night shift at a gas station, so he had trouble getting to school in time for first period. Soon after, Wayne was introduced to Top Cat, and the teacher found a way to get the student to class.

For four months, Top Cat was in class every day. His academic performance put him at the top of the class. He was bright and filled with potential.

But Top Cat was in a battle, and so was Wayne. One day Top Cat's seat was empty when the bell rang at the start of class. Wayne asked if anyone knew where Top Cat was. One student hesitantly said, "Mr. Gordon, didn't you hear? There was a shooting at the gas station last night, and Top Cat was hit and he died." Wayne was brokenhearted.

As he told this story during his talk at our dinner reception, he began to weep. He said such senseless loss occurs far too often in the Lawndale area of Chicago. By this time, Gordon was pastor of Lawndale Community Church, and

he said there was not a family in his congregation of more than a thousand that hadn't experienced a murder. Gordon had buried (not all of them murder victims) seventy-five people just in 2016. The week before his speech, he buried a seventeen-year-old woman who accidentally had been shot through the neck.

Wayne Gordon knows one of the deepest moral battles of our day: the battle for souls of America's youth in the inner cities.

Like the rest of those dwelling in areas such as Lawndale, the battle for the soul is a daily, hourly, minute-by-minute battle. Will young people succumb to cynicism, anger, hatred, and violence? Will they give up hope and seek to make a living through drug dealing? Will they bury their hurts and wounds in alcohol and drugs and sex? Or, as Gordon has helped people do for decades, will they seek the face of God, prepare themselves through education, nurture themselves with good friends and fellowship, and embrace the power of the Spirit against stiff odds? Will they choose to show love, kindness, and goodness to those around them? No battle is more challenging than a moral battle in the face of what seems to be sure defeat. The battles at the center of the stories of Narnia, Middle Earth, and Harry Potter are visions of the struggle. Such stories can help us with the real moral battles of our day.

But first we need to ask, what are we looking for in the moral battle of life?

## The Big Picture Comes First

Paul wrote in verse 1 of the fifth chapter of Galatians that freedom is why Christ liberated us. All that matters, Paul wrote a few verses later, is "faith expressing itself through love."[*1]

Let's begin with the big-picture in view: we are designed by God to live by faith in Christ, and that faith generates in us a love for God, self, and others. When we have that faith-love dynamic, we are set free. To have faith means to be open to turn ourselves toward God, to gaze upon the face of Christ, and to surrender to God's gift of the Spirit.

Freedom, faith, and love become fruit. Fruit is something that sprouts and blossoms and flourishes into food because of sunshine and minerals that prompt growth. A tree is capable of turning elements of nature into fruit. The fruit of the Spirit grow into maturity *because of the life of God—the Spirit—in us.* We are not responsible for the fruit; God is. We don't create the fruit; the Spirit does.

Freedom, faith, and love become the fruit of the Spirit. And now one more.

The fruit of the Spirit, if you look at them collectively and carefully, shape a person in the context of Christian and church fellowship. I'll quote Gordon Fee's well-known words:

> Most of these items [listed as being the fruit of the Spirit] have to do not with the internal life of the individual believer but with the corporate life of the community. While it is true that individuals must love, work toward peace, express forbearance, kindness, and goodness, and be characterized by gentleness, in Pauline ethics these virtues characterize God's relationship toward his people. The Spirit bears fruit in our individual lives for the same purpose, to be toward one another the way God is toward us.[1]

Freedom, faith, love, fruit, and fellowship. Here we have the most important words in our spiritual battle because they tell us where we are headed. We are engaged in a spiritual battle that is waged over each word, each day, in each of us and in each community of faith.

## Understanding What Is Evil and What Is Good

My personal battle is not similar to Wayne Gordon's far more systemic battle against violence and evil. And your battle may also be very different from that. But at some level, each of us faces a deep moral battle between good and evil on a daily basis. The earliest Christians encountered both a moral and a systemic battle, and their great apostle Paul had the ability to articulate the alternatives: life or death. Paul set them out as nothing less than a choice between what was morally evil and what was morally good:

| What Is Evil | What Is Good |
|---|---|
| Sexual immorality | Love |
| Impurity | Joy |
| Debauchery | Peace |
| Idolatry and witchcraft | Forbearance |

| | |
|---|---|
| Hatred, discord, jealousy | Kindness |
| Fits of rage, selfish ambition | Goodness |
| Dissensions, factions | Faithfulness |
| Envy | Gentleness |
| Drunkenness, orgies | Self-Control[*2] |

In the Bible, the items listed on the left are called "the works of the flesh," which taken together constitute systemic immorality. The virtues shown in the right-hand column are the fruit of the Spirit, which also can be systemic, but which are always good. Everybody wants to be part of what is good, and nobody wants to be characterized by evil. So how can we become more open to the fruit of the Spirit and more resistant to the works of the flesh?

Paul's words in the letter to Christians in Galatia provide the clues we need.

## What Is Good Does Not Grow from the Law of Moses

The big problem in Galatia can be described like this: Paul's missionary efforts among gentiles yielded new house churches that discovered redemption in Christ, freedom in the Spirit, and the power of God at work in their community. Following on his heels, Jewish-Christian "law imposers" entered the community to say that new gentile believers had only begun their conversion process. The full conversion process, they insisted, meant gentile Christians would have to embrace the whole Law of Moses. In other words, gentile males would need to undergo circumcision.

Paul reacted to such teachings with an emotional letter we know as Galatians. He pointed out that the fruit of the Spirit do not grow from the soil of Moses's Law. Paul interrogated the Galatian Christians with a series of questions, each of which has an obvious answer.[*3]

Essentially Paul is saying, "I would like to learn just one thing from you: (1) Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or *by believing what you heard*? (2) Are you so foolish? After beginning *by means of the Spirit,* are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?…So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and

work miracles among you by the works of the law, or *by your believing what you heard*?" The incorrect answer is "works of the Law," and the correct answers are "believing the gospel and receiving the Spirit."

This is nothing less than a verbal smackdown utilizing God's method of answering Job at the end of Job's story. It's an approach that asks questions that all have the same answer. Here is the big conclusion: the power of the Spirit was unleashed among the Christians in Galatia, not by the Law but by God's grace unleashed by the Spirit. We will not find the power of the Spirit dwelling in people and empowering them to choose what is good other than by faith in Christ and openness to the Spirit.

Many of us have become far too complacent. We take our Christianity casually, and we think the moral life is a snap. We need to think again.

## We Need to Recognize the Moral Battle

The most famous battle image in the New Testament occurs in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. In that letter he wrote that we are engaged in nothing less than a cosmic battle: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."[*4]

Many of us seem unaware of the cosmic forces that continue to wage war against God, and some people have chosen not to believe in such evil forces. Others think this is little more than metaphor, superstition, or philosophical spirit-talk. They don't accept the literal reality of systemic evil and the world's anti-God influences and power. But Paul believed in spirits and demons, and he knew these sinister spirits were (and continue to be) at work in all places, including the heart of the individual and the heart of each country's leaders and the heart of the youth in our inner cities.

Earlier Paul had written to the Christians in Galatia: "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want."[*5]

C. S. Lewis, in what many think is his most profound work, *The Screwtape Letters,* famously summed up our uneasiness with this battleground and our willingness to wish it away:

> There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall

> about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.[2]

In my years of conversing with Christians, this statement from Lewis comes to mind perhaps more than any other. Why? Because I've heard people say the devil emptied their car's tank of gas and others who think the influence of the demonic is imagined hocus-pocus.

The Bible is clear on the matter of good and evil. The spirits, the powers, the principalities are at work to bring death and destruction, and hence the list of what is evil is the list of death. Behind all this is the devil. But the Spirit of God is at work to bring life, and that is why the list of what is good can be called the List That Brings Life. We will get nowhere morally until we admit we are engaged in a moral battle. How can we live in the List of Life? On this the Bible could not be more clear.

## Walk, Follow, Live, and March in the Spirit

I will quote the precise expressions that Paul used: "walk by the Spirit" and "if you are led by the Spirit" and "live by the Spirit" and "keep in step with the Spirit."[*6] Paul urged the Christians living in Galatia to take up a new way of life. That is, he urged those who were (and are) tempted to think the resource for a Spirit-prompted life is the Law of Moses to reject such thinking. The way to escape the List of Flesh and Death is to walk, follow, live, and march to the tune of the Spirit. Once again, it's all about the Spirit.

One word captures all four of these terms: it is the word *open*. First, we are to *walk* by the Spirit. How so? Paul wrote using a famous Jewish religious term for "walking" according to the Law of Moses. He used the word to set up a contrast. He wrote that it is not the Law of Moses but the Spirit whom we are to walk behind. Thus, to walk by the Spirit is to learn the *way of the Spirit*. The Spirit is the only inner resource who leads to faith, love, and freedom.

Second, we are to *be led by,* or to *follow,* the Spirit. Paul here used a term that means "to be led." Jimmy Dunn has spoken of the Spirit in us as a "deep-rooted passion or overmastering compulsion"[3] because he knows Paul was talking about an inner resource, the Spirit, who is at work in us to transform us. Dunn

continued with these important words: "God, as it were, recognizing the power of human desire [the flesh], gives to those who open themselves to him a power (the Spirit) which is stronger than human desire. To surrender to that power is to be enabled to rise above and overcome the baser human instincts and appetites [again, the flesh]."[4]

Third, we are to *live* by the Spirit. This digs down more deeply even than walking and being led. We now realize that our very life needs to be animated by the Spirit. We get new-creation life by the Spirit; we are born anew by the Spirit; we experience a new presence of God by the Spirit; we have a new baptism in the Spirit; we have a New Ego and a new power at work in us by the Spirit. Our entire life is based on the Spirit, and the really sad news is that too often we settle for far less. Meanwhile, if we but open ourselves to the Spirit, a whole new life can begin and be sustained.

Fourth, Paul's most picturesque term comes last. It is to *march* or *keep in step* with the Spirit. Someone is calling out the steps or beating the march cadence and drawing a line, and those who are open to the Spirit can learn to march in that line and to keep in step with the beat of the Spirit.

## Nine-a-Day

As we cultivate the fruit of the Spirit, we must remind ourselves we are engaged in a moral battle. How can Wayne Gordon or someone like you and me cultivate what is good and defeat what is bad? How can we feed the virtues of the Spirit and shut out the works of the flesh? Chris Wright has told the story of a British medical establishment's recommendation that every person eat five portions of fruits or vegetables every day. This is referred to as 5 A Day. Wright suggested that the list of the fruit of the Spirit offers a different kind of diet, a Nine-a-Day diet of Spirit-prompted nutrients.[5] Wright is director of the worldwide ministry called the Langham Partnership. He has mentioned that his predecessor, John R. W. Stott, used to pray this prayer every morning. I can think of no better way for us to open ourselves to the daily practice of the presence of the Spirit:

> Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more.
>
> Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.
>
> Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.[6]

To live in the List of Life and not in the List of Flesh and Death, we need an inner resource that can empower us to do what does not come naturally. That inner resource for moral renewal, headed as it is by love, is the Holy Spirit. John Stott's prayer can be ours.

Are you open to the Spirit as your inner resource for transformation?

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*1 Galatians 5:1 and 5:6.

*2 Galatians 5:19–23

*3 Galatians 3:2–5

*4 Ephesians 6:12

*5 Galatians 5:17

*6 Galatians 5:16, 18, 25



Part 5

# Open to the Victory of the Spirit

# 20

# OPEN TO NEW VICTORY OVER SIN

The work of the Spirit is transformative in two ways. We grow more loving (or holy or Christlike); we also grow less sinful and unloving and unholy and unChristlike. This doesn't happen automatically or at a fixed pace. It especially doesn't happen all at once. We don't wake up one day still a non-Christian, get converted, and the next day wake up entirely Christlike. Christlikeness is a lifelong learning process, and if truth be told, often there is plenty of room to continue to grow even for those who have been in Christ for decades.

Late in his life, the apostle John wrote a letter that was jam-packed with the word *love.* He was all about loving God and loving others. I wonder what he'd say about his early days of following Jesus. One of the first episodes that we hear about is that John was sent to the Samaritans to share the gospel. They didn't care for John's message, so he returned to Jesus. John and his brother asked Jesus an unloving, unholy, unChristlike question: "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"[*1]

I'm glad he didn't have access to the nuclear button. My point is, of course, that John was transformed over a long stretch of time from unloving attitudes and dark prayer requests into a loving, Christlike, holy man. Another way of saying this is that John steadily found victories over various sins.

The Holy Spirit is at work in you just as surely as the Spirit was at work in John. What made a person an apostle was not super-Spirit-uality. What made a person an apostle was to follow Jesus during his lifetime and to be sent out by him personally. The only super-Spirit-ual one was Jesus. John was an ordinary fisherman from Galilee who was open to the Spirit. Over time, the Spirit

transformed him. He gained a measured victory over sin.

If there is victory, there also is sin. Sin often is defined as breaking or violating or rebelling against one of God's laws (see the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20). When we sin, we choose to act contrary to one of those laws. That's a start, a basic definition, but God wants so much more than simply obedience to moral laws. In fact, the deepest will of God is that we believe in Christ and love God and love others with every globule of our being. I call this the Jesus Creed.[1] So to sin is to be unbelieving toward Christ and unloving toward God and others. Sin defaces the mission of God in this world—the mission of reconciling things in Christ. Odd as it may sound, the word *perfection* (or *imperfection*) comes to mind when I think of sin as it is defined and portrayed in the New Testament. Jesus used the word "perfect" to capture the character he wanted for his followers,[*2] but he didn't mean perfectionism or sinlessness. We have to ask what perfection means in Jesus's statement. Kathleen Norris, one of my favorite writers about Christian living, gets this exactly right: "Perfection, in a Christian sense, means becoming mature enough to give ourselves to others."[2] That's it! Sin marks the person who squirrels away his or her heart entirely for the self and refuses to love others. Sin is self-absorption just as love is other-orientation—or perfection, in the parlance of Jesus.

With this in mind, how can we gain victory over sin by living with an other-orientation?

Openness to the Spirit empowers us to gain victory over the self-centeredness of sin, just as the Spirit transforms us to become more holy, more loving, and more Christlike. I suggest there are three elements to how the Spirit can lead us into victory over sin.

## Acknowledge That Living in the Way of Jesus Is a Battle

You and I are involved in a battle against an anti-Christ force. Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann described the battle against the self: "I always considered that salvation does not consist of focusing on one's self [what we can get out of salvation], but in being liberated from one's self by turning to what is real, to God, the world, etc."[3] Often in the Bible, the "self" is rendered as the "flesh."

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of

> the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.[*3]

The selfish flesh battles for "what is contrary to the Spirit" and the Spirit comes right back, battling for "what is contrary to the flesh." It's a battle we can't ignore or deny.

At the time of Jesus and the apostles, Judaism frequently spoke of each human having two *yetzers,* or desires—a good one and a bad one. The good yetzer urged a person to follow the Torah, while the bad yetzer urged the human to disobey the Torah. In the Dead Sea Scrolls we read that God set in each human two spirits, one a spirit of truth and the other a spirit of falsehood.[4] Paul stood on the shoulders of this thinking but jumped off with a new orientation to the yetzers. His orientation was based on his belief in the indwelling Spirit. So Paul posed not two yetzers in the battle, but the flesh (the self) and the Spirit. These two engage in battle in each person.

We are caught up in the battle whenever we are tempted to cheat on taxes, whenever we want to shade the truth to protect ourselves, whenever we linger over an image or long for what is not ours. Now on to the second element in finding victory over sin: we have to face the facts about sin itself.

## Two Unavoidable Facts About Sins

We need to be convinced of two facts related to sin if we are to pursue victory. The *first* is to clarify that sin begins with sensual and sexual desires. That is what sin looks like, if you will. "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery."[*4]

Then Paul listed perversions of religion: "idolatry and witchcraft."[*5] He then turned against sins of desire, power, and domination, as he listed "hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy."[*6]

Finally, when our desires go unchecked, we fall prey to "drunkenness, orgies, and the like."[*7] These are sins of distorted, corrupted desire. These are expressions of a fleshly self that wants control over the body and other bodies, that wants to manipulate the gods, that wants pleasure, and that wants ecstatic

escape into unbounded pleasures.

The *second* fact about sin—if we are to face the reality and lure of the flesh—is this: sin is *final separation from God.* Those who prefer sin to God are not God's people. Those who live like this don't even want to be in the presence of God or in the presence of God's people.

Paul confirmed this when he wrote: "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."[*8] Those who are devoted to and controlled by distorted desire are not God's people; as a result, they will not be in God's kingdom. It doesn't matter if you are a well-known pastor or a widely read blogger. If you are living a life of unbridled desire, God's Spirit will find you out. It doesn't matter if your church thinks you're a theological and biblical genius, the Spirit knows what you are oriented toward.

The Spirit knows our sin, and makes our sin known to us. That is, if we are open to the Spirit.

## Because of Jesus, a Heartland Evangelical Turns Pacifist

One of America's best preachers is known only to a few of us. His name is Brian Zahnd, and his story of ministry—from a megachurch star to a pastor of a much smaller church designed for the disciplines of following Jesus no matter the cost—has been told in the book *A Farewell to Mars: An Evangelical Pastor's Journey Toward the Biblical Gospel of Peace.* I stood in Brian's study when I heard some of that journey, but the fuller story is in his book.

Chapter one, first sentence: "It was my worst sin." I continued reading. "It was January 16, 1991….America was going to war! That was what I was excited about….The bombing of Baghdad. A real shooting war. And it was going to be on TV!…Like the Super Bowl!" The story continues: "Friends were invited to the viewing party. We ordered pizza. We watched a war. On TV. America won."

For fifteen years he didn't have second thoughts about having attended the War Party. But one day, in prayer, the Spirit spoke to him: "That was your worst sin."

Zahnd wrote: "That whisper was a devastating blow. I wept and repented and wept. Had I been so shallow, so desensitized, so lacking in Christlikeness that I could think of war and violent death as a kind of entertainment?"[5]

He now preaches the way of Jesus, and along the way the Spirit reminds him of his sins and shows him that sin leads to death.

Like Brian Zahnd, we also need to face the facts of sin. The Spirit wants us to see sin for what it is. You and I must face the facts about what sin is if we want to find victory. We turn now to how we can find victory, which comes by being wide open to the Spirit's transforming powers.

## Faith Is Your Way Forward

This chapter presents the truth about the battle between the Spirit and the flesh. In the beginning we need to see that we are in a battle and we need to face two facts about sin. Then we move forward by faith, which leads to love. Behind these true statements lies a deeper reality: we don't first turn our back on sin and then pursue holiness. We pursue God in faith, right from the start. We enter into God's presence and God's very presence transforms us. God's presence in us through the Spirit turns us from sin toward holiness.

This kind of faith-turning toward God (and away from the flesh) is a Spirit-prompted work of God's grace. "A saint," Schmemann wrote, "is thirsty not for 'decency,' not for cleanliness, and not for absence of sin, but for unity with God."[6] Such a thirst for union with God, for worship of God, for the ecstatic joy of loving God, is the Spirit's work that gives us victory over sin.

Back to the meaning of sin. If sin is self-reliance and self-centeredness, then the Spirit's fruit will be loving, holy, and Christlike living. Never lose sight of these words from Paul:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*[9]

To achieve victory over sin involves first becoming people who are shaped by love, which is a virtue that orients life toward others. Victory over sin and the flesh produces an inner sense of well-being and contentedness (joy and peace and forbearance) and becomes thoughtful toward others (kindness, goodness, and

gentleness) as well as faithful in our relationships with others (family, friends, church, community). Finally, the inner self is no longer out of control but is marked by "self-control," which means Spirit-controlled.

Before we move on to the Spirit-given gift of tongues, keep in mind two things: the virtues listed just above are fruit, which means they grow on our own trees of life because of the energies of God at work in us. The energies of God are unleashed in us when we live by faith in God's Spirit to transform. And second, all this happens if we "live by the Spirit" and "keep in step with the Spirit." The words *live* and *keep in step* are what I mean by *openness to the Spirit*.

Are you open to the victory over sin?

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*1 Luke 9:51–56, here 9:54

*2 Matthew 5:48

*3 Galatians 5:16–18

*4 Galatians 5:19

*5 Galatians 5:20

*6 Galatians 5:20–21

*7 Galatians 5:21

*8 Galatians 5:21

*9 Galatians 5:22–26

21

# OPEN TO A NEW VICTORY IN COMMUNICATION

Matthew Bates, a gifted Bible teacher, was dissatisfied with shallow responses to the gospel that did not lead to the convert's personal transformation. He decided to go back and reexamine the meaning of the words *faith* and *belief* (or *believe*) in the Bible.[*1]

What does *believe* mean, and what is *faith*? Bates concluded his very fine study with this: faith means allegiance. When I read his book, I said, "Yes, that's it!" Prior to that, I had fumbled along with connecting faith to obedience or faith to love with a view of faith that was getting bigger but not clearer. Bates showed that faith as allegiance also includes the important theme of trust but also love and obedience and surrender.

For decades I have been a huge defender of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous words about "cheap grace" and "costly grace." Bonhoeffer connected costly grace to discipleship. I agreed there was more to the meaning of faith than trust, but I had never locked onto a term that brought all the themes into clear light. Bates did that for me. He took my thoughts and made them far better, while adding plenty of his own insights in the process.[1]

The Holy Spirit often takes our fumbling, somewhat incoherent attempts at communication and ramps them up into full clarity. Occasionally that form of Spirit-prompted communication goes beyond anything we are capable of putting together. There are in the Bible three and perhaps four ways the Spirit clarifies our words and even our non-words: public missionary tongues, private praying in

tongues, public church revelation in tongues, and perhaps singing in tongues. Here's the big point: each form of the practice of this spiritual gift takes our fumbling excursions into communication and shapes them into clarity.

## Victory in the Tongues of Evangelism

I was listening to a weathered evangelist who launched into what was at that time a radical openness to the Spirit. At the time, at least in my religious circle, all things charismatic and, in particular, tongue speaking, were held in deep suspicion. With tears in his eyes, John R. Rice regaled us with a story of traveling on an airplane to Germany while sitting next to a gentleman who knew no English. The evangelist knew no German, but he was prompted by the Spirit to talk with the man. The old evangelist, who was by no means a charismatic Christian, shared the gospel in a language he could not speak. Before the flight landed, the German man had prayed to receive Christ.

After that, the two men resumed their inability to speak to each other. I believed the story then, though it came as a huge surprise, and I believe it now.

I call this the missionary tongue of evangelism, which owes its origin to the Day of Pentecost. In the book of Acts we read, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."[*2] Jews throughout the Roman Empire had come to Jerusalem for this religious festival. Luke, writing in Acts, mentioned: "Each one heard their own language being spoken."[*3] We can debate whether this was a miracle being worked in the speaker or the miracle was that the hearer was able to instantaneously translate an unfamiliar foreign language. Either way it is the Spirit giving profound victory in communication. The Spirit can transform our abilities or, as in this case, can transcend our (language) inabilities.

## Victory in Prayer

Once I was commuting to work with a fellow professor who was a charismatic Christian. We were discussing tongues when he said, "If you'd like me to pray in tongues for you, I will." I had not known that one could pray in tongues at will. I had believed that tongues speaking and praying was an instance of involuntary seizure by the Spirit, who would take charge of a person's communication with God. Since that day I've heard a number of others speak in a similar manner of

their private prayer life. My colleague simply wanted to show me what praying in tongues looked like.

The apostle Paul mentioned this kind of victorious communication in prayer with God. "Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God" and, unlike prophesy, which is for the whole congregation, such tongue speaking edifies only the one communicating with God. It is the person's spirit praying.[*4] Notice that in this same passage in 1 Corinthians, Paul indicated that he privately prayed in tongues more than any of them.[*5] The key to understanding the victory of communication with God in praying in tongues is found in another of Paul's letters.

He wrote that the Spirit takes our inability to communicate into the world of direct communication. "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."[*6] That is the Bible's own clear definition of this second kind of tongues speaking, what I call victory in private prayer.

## Victory in Public Church Revelations

Though Paul seemed to hold that tongues are for private prayer, he also indicated that if someone speaks in tongues in the public assembly there needs to be a Spirit-prompted interpreter present. Listen to these words: "The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, *unless someone interprets,* so that the church may be edified."[*7] He repeated this idea a few verses later: "For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say."[*8]

Paul thought tongues is primarily a private form of special communication with God. But in addition, if two or three are prompted by the Spirit to speak in tongues in the assembly, it could be edifying as long as an interpreter is present.[*9]

Any hesitations on Paul's part aside, Spirit-prompted tongues and Spirit-prompted interpretations are a victorious moment of God's speaking to the gathered church. In such situations, it is common to hear later that the congregation discerned more deeply the will of God, discovered a more precise understanding of problems at work in the church, or penetrated into a more complete practice of discipleship. Tongue speaking is designed by the Spirit to edify the congregation, not to magnify the speaker or interpreter.

## Victory in Worshipful Singing

Twice in the New Testament we read of *singing in the Spirit:* "I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding"[*10] and "speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit."[*11]

The first verse especially connects singing to tongues, since tongues is a language spoken with the spirit, while prophecy, which is public and understandable to all, is communicated with understanding. I believe Paul is describing either a private or public Spirit-prompted song that is sung in a language not known to the congregation. Following Paul's directions, such a song is to be followed by a Spirit-prompted interpretation.

Here is the big idea again: this kind of song, which I heard in my grandmother's church, can be, when done properly, a victorious communication of humans who need a Spirit-prompted boost in their worship of God.

## Wisdom with Tongues

I believe in the Bible's wisdom for guiding the church. Those who were open to the Spirit at times were empowered with gifts to communicate in a manner that transcended their inabilities with language. Sometimes believers can speak in a language they do not know for the glory of God; others can pray privately in a way that edifies. Other people can speak in tongues in public, in a setting where the Spirit prompts an interpretation for the whole assembly. And yet others either in private or in public are empowered to sing ecstatically in a way that glorifies God.

These are described in your Bible and in mine. Tongues speaking took place in Jerusalem and Caesarea and in the city that was central to Paul's missions, Ephesus.[*12] There is nothing in the Bible that says such Spirit-prompted expressions were in effect for only a few decades following Jesus's resurrection. Nor is there a biblical teaching that limits the practice of speaking in tongues to initial experiences when the gospel first enters a community.

At times, those who speak in tongues parade their giftedness as a sign of their spiritual status. At times, churches that permit public speaking, praying, or singing in tongues do so recklessly by not insisting on the presence of a Spirit-prompted interpretation. So the earliest Christians, knowing how easily this gift could be misused, devised basic principles for the practice of the gift of tongues. Above all,

the gift should honor God and not be a badge of honor for the tongues speaker. Next, the impact of tongues in the church should be the mutual edification of all the people and peace among all Christians. We are to speak in tongues as those who love God and love one another. (Don't forget that the Bible's famous chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, is designed to constrain self-glorification and to promote an other-people orientation with respect to the spiritual gifts, especially tongues speaking.) In addition, if an interpreter of tongues is not present, the tongues speaker is to speak to God in silence or at least to pray for an interpretation.*13

The big picture must be kept in mind: tongues are a gift of communication; and it is the kind of communication that gives us victories over our inabilities to communicate. Anything that detracts from communicating with God and with one another in the power of the Spirit needs to be diminished.

We must emphasize that abuses of the gift are no reason to be closed to the gift. We are called by God to be open to the Spirit, because it is the Spirit who is working to transform us and who is bringing the world to Christ. We find victory in communication through the Spirit. Those who are open to the Spirit are to be open to whatever the Spirit may do, and the Spirit may very well—following the New Testament pattern—prompt you to evangelize, pray, speak, or sing in a tongue you do not know.

Are you open to the Spirit who grants victory in communication, sometimes in miraculous ways?

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*1 The Greek word for "faith" is *pístis* and the word for "believe" is *pisteú*. Sometimes English readers of the Bible are not aware that these two English words are derived from one common root in Greek.

*2 Acts 2:4

*3 Acts 2:6

*4 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 14

*5 1 Corinthians 14:18

*6 Romans 8:26

*7 1 Corinthians 14:5

*8 1 Corinthians 14:13

*9 1 Corinthians 14:26–28, 40

*10 1 Corinthians 14:15

*11 Ephesians 5:19

*12 Acts 2:1–4; 10:44–48; 19:1–6; probably also in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17)

*13 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; 14:5, 26, 28, 33

22

# OPEN TO NEW VICTORY OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH

God is the author of life itself, and God can *and sometimes does* reverse sickness, disease, and death to create a new life.

One of our deepest frustrations is that those we love are not always healed of their sicknesses. We can more easily accept the death of the aged, even if increasingly we expect people to live into their eighties or even nineties. It is the death of the young or of those in their prime that frustrates us.

But some who are seriously ill recover. Sometimes God, in the power of the Spirit, turns back the powers of death, but not always. That's our reality.

The Spirit can be the power of God unleashed. Michael Green, in his exceptional book about the Holy Spirit, tells this story:

> I once met a girl who awoke to find herself gripped by the Spirit of God at 2 a.m. She [had a disability], and at once her hip was cured —a hip, incidentally, that had defied the efforts of the country's best doctors—and she found herself praising God in tongues. Now she is doing a remarkably useful piece of Christian service.[1]

I've read lots that was written by Green, and I have friends who know the man personally, so I trust his word. Along with Green, I believe the Spirit can transcend our inabilities and do a mighty work.

In keeping with this, it's helpful to think about what sociologists call

"plausibility structures."[2] The Western world is immersed in science and empiricism, and this has meant that miracles have come to be dismissed out of hand. Miracles fall outside our plausibility structures, outside our reality. We have been enveloped in a closed universe, so Westerners are closed to spiritual beings, to the Holy Spirit, to God at work in the world. Therefore, we are shut to healing miracles.

If you believe miracles fall beyond the realm of possibility, you almost certainly won't experience a miracle. *Why pray,* we tend to say to ourselves, *when I can go to a doctor?* Our plausibility structure has been shaped to allow healing to be determined by science and medical professionals and pharmaceuticals and diet. We often don't pray when we get sick or when others get sick. That's evidence of our plausibility structures at work. We may well resort to serious prayer only when the condition deteriorates and defies medical treatment. A case of pancreatic cancer or devastating injuries resulting from an auto accident might be so hopeless that we resort to prayer. We finally seek something that transcends our plausibility structures.[*1]

The Bible's plausibility structures are otherwise! The people of the Bible not only believed in a world that was open to God's miracles but they also accepted miracles as a rather common occurrence. We will get nowhere in a victory over disease and death until our plausibility structures change, and it begins by being open to the Spirit. This book challenges the plausibility structures of the Western world with a plausibility structure shaped by the Bible's radical openness to the Spirit.

## Jesus and the Apostles Healed People

Jesus's ministry is described by Matthew as one of teaching, preaching, and healing.[*2] Jesus did his mighty deeds by the power of the Spirit (just as we do). Jesus said it overtly: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."[*3] The gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus healed people of all sorts of sicknesses and diseases, including leprosy, paralysis, fever, demon possession, blindness, the inability to speak, and death![*4] We read one amazing story after another of Jesus's victory over disease. Given the skepticism of our age toward supernatural intervention, we need to become open again to the power of the Spirit at work in Jesus.

The apostles extended and expanded Jesus's victory of disease and death.

Not only did Jesus send them out to do what he had done,[*5] but we find Peter, John, and Paul healing people of a variety of symptoms. Peter was empowered by the Spirit to give a lame man legs that worked, but there's more. For Peter, ministry seems to have become nothing less than a circus of mighty miracles, including bringing someone back from the dead.[*6]

A disciple in Damascus named Ananias prayed for Saul (later renamed Paul) to receive his sight, and Saul's sight was restored.[*7] Paul himself did some mighty miracles: he blinded a magician, gave fresh legs to someone who was physically disabled, and exorcised a demon.[*8] In these apostles the Spirit of God accomplished victories over disease and death. We definitely need to become open all over again to the power of the Spirit.

It comes as no surprise then that one of the Spirit-prompted gifts is miraculous powers, including healing.[*9] Such a gift is Spirit-prompted, not personally chosen. It is designed to glorify God and to be exercised in the context of love. It should edify the church and bring peace among the people of God. That such a gift was exercised can be seen in the instances we just mentioned. It also is seen in the healings and other miraculous powers that appear to have been the norm for the churches planted by Paul. He asked of the Galatians, hardly the happiest of his churches: "So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and *work miracles* among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?"[*10]

## Resurrection by the Spirit

Sometimes we say, "God raised Jesus from the dead" or "God healed that person," but it is striking how often in the New Testament we see that resurrections are attributed to the Spirit of God. It makes me wonder why more people are not saying, that the "Spirit raised Jesus" or the "Spirit healed" someone.

Here are a few examples:

> And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.[*11]
>
> It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is

a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*[12]

> When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*[13]

Big idea now: God has given us the Spirit; the Spirit is the gift of God's own Life itself; this Life transcends our physical or natural body, and by the power of the Spirit our natural bodies will be raised as Spirit-created—a new kind of glorious (but still very real and physical) bodies. Sometimes Christians devalue the importance of the body, but the Bible teaches the exact opposite. How so? The Spirit takes up residence in our bodies, not to take us into a spirit-world of nonbodies, but to make physical the reality of the Spirit-prompted life.

As Gordon Fee has written, for some bad reasons the Christians in ancient Corinth "thought the presence of the Spirit negated the body's value; Paul argues the exact opposite: The presence of the Spirit in their bodily existence is God's affirmation of the body."[3]

Now the download for each of us to ponder: if the Spirit has been unleashed *in our bodies already,* isn't it true that we need to be open to that Spirit's work in healing us and healing others? I'd say yes. How about you?

## Healing in The Meantime in the Power of the Spirit

Recall where we began this chapter: Sometimes God in the power of the Spirit turns back the powers of death at work in sicknesses and diseases, but not always. That's our reality. Death is not always the final word; sickness is not always the final word; those who are open to the Spirit do sometimes experience healing and resurrection. We are not yet in the new heavens and the new earth, when all tears and sickness and death will be removed. We live between the Pentecost and the kingdom, that is, in an era when the Spirit is unleashed but before the fullness of redemption occurs. We dwell in an era we might call The Meantime.

In The Meantime we are summoned to be open to the Spirit's transcending and transforming power. This begins by embracing a world that is more than what we see, taste, feel, and sense. It begins when we comprehend our universe as open to the work of God and the Spirit. It begins also by recognizing that the Enlightenment—the shift to science and empiricism that continues to shape the

thinking of you and me and everyone else in the West—has clouded our minds. We have suppressed the work of the Spirit in our world. As missionary and theologian Donald K. Smith wrote, "This core/heart belief [the Enlightenment worldview] in Western cultures has made it nearly impossible to perceive the genuine working of the Holy Spirit."[4]

In *Miracles,* New Testament scholar Craig Keener wrote about Ed Wilkinson, a man not given to being gullible, and his young son Brad. It is a story of faith and healing and the power of the Spirit. Brad had atrial septal defect: he had two holes in his heart. As the date for surgery drew closer, Brad "asked his father, 'Am I going to die?' Ed answered his son honestly: not everyone facing heart surgery dies, but during heart surgery that is always a possibility."[5] In that father's response we face the "sometimes" in The Meantime. But this young boy wanted more.

> "Can Jesus heal me?" the eight-year-old asked. Aware of how often faith had been abused, the father cringed. "I'll get back to you on that," he responded. A few days later, after some anguished prayer and engagement with Phil 4:13, he shared his resolution with his son. God does heal, but whether he would heal in Brad's case or not, they still had hope of eternal life in Jesus.[6]

Everyone around them prayed. You can guess the sort of finale to this amazing story, but the three-hour surgery began as expected with all involved knowing the young boy might not wake up. Well before three hours had passed, the doctors came to speak with the anxious parents.

Here is the singular news:

> The surgeon explained that there was nothing wrong with Brad's heart—even though the holes were clearly there the day before. His lungs were also now normal. "I have not seen this very often," the surgeon explained. While this sort of spontaneous closure could happen in infants, it was not supposed to happen in an eight-year-old.
>
> "You can count this as a miracle." The pulmonologist added, "Somebody somewhere must have been praying." The hospital risk manager added firmly, "You can see from the films: this was *not* a

misdiagnosis."[7]

Are you open to the victorious power of the Spirit over death and disease?

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*1 It is true that some are so *open* to healing they refuse to see doctors or rely upon the medical sciences. The concern of this chapter is about those whose plausibility structures shut them to the possibility of God's power in miracles.

*2 Matthew 4:25; 9:35

*3 Matthew 12:28

*4 All found in Matthew 8:1–9:34.

*5 Matthew 10:1–8

*6 Acts 3:1–10; 5:12–16; 9:32–35, 36–43

*7 Acts 9:17–19

*8 Acts 13:6–12; 14:3, 8–10; 16:16–18; 19:11

*9 1 Corinthians 12:9–10, 28, 30

*10 Galatians 3:5

*11 Romans 8:11

*12 1 Corinthians 15:44

*13 Ephesians 1:13–14

# 23

# OPEN TO THE NEW VICTORY OVER THE POWERS THAT WAR AGAINST GOD

How did the United States of America, a nation that prided itself on liberty, freedom, and equality, become a nation that enslaved millions of Africans? Historians point their long, judgmental finger at a number of catalysts:[1]

- The shifting of sub-Saharan Africans into the Mediterranean region by seventh- and eighth-century African Muslims.
- The Portuguese and Spanish practice of exploiting slaves.
- West African traders—in this case not European colonial powers—who sold slaves to European merchants.
- The seventeenth-century white European fixation on enslaving those with black skin.
- The European consumption of sugar, coffee, tobacco, and cotton, which were commodities imported from North and South America and the Caribbean. The production of these commodities was highly labor-intensive.

Perhaps most painfully, slavery was said to be justified by the Bible[*1] and by Aristotle in his work *Politics*. In most cases, Christian advocates and participants were at the heart of this moral collapse.

Slavery propped up economies from Maine through the Caribbean and

down to Brazil. Slavery overwhelmingly entailed personal, physical, sexual, and familial violence and exploitation. One of the world's great historians of slavery, David Brion Davis, has summed up these conditions: "Much of the New World, then, came to resemble the Death Furnace of the ancient god Moloch—consuming African slaves so increasing numbers of Europeans (and later, white Americans) could consume sugar, coffee, rice, and tobacco." I have no words for how we—not they—as Christians have acted. We all are implicated in what the church has done.[2]

New World slavery did not end in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation. The lasting impact of slavery is felt today in every city in the United States, in the Caribbean, and in South America. The numbers of slaves in the world today staggers the mind. The United Nations estimates that number at 21 million. The percentage of two particular slave subgroups remains consistent: 25 percent of all slaves are forced into commercial sex services, and about 30 percent of all slaves are under the age of eighteen. Males make up about 46 percent of the total, and females 54 percent of modern slaves.[3]

It is one thing to read about slavery, but it is entirely different to be in its midst and to encounter the dark forces. The moral darkness remains in the seemingly insoluble problems of racism, the far-reaching influences worldwide that contribute to and benefit from slavery, and the soul-crushing looks on the faces of enslaved youth who show us the face of systemic evil destroying human beings. One African American student told me, "This is my story, too."

How can human beings create, establish, systematize, participate in, contribute to, and then ignore, rationalize, or diminish the consequences of such widespread systemic evil? The Bible points out that humans are not alone in creating and sustaining such evil. We are assisted by what Scripture refers to as "principalities and powers." In this chapter, I will reduce those terms to The Powers.

Humans alone cannot accomplish evil on such a massive scale. Beyond human trafficking, we participate in racism, sexism, materialism, classism, and many other evils. Without the invasive control of the demonic, without the possessive seizure of control by The Powers, humans would find it difficult to enact and maintain these evils in society. The Bible never minimizes the consequences of human decisions, but the Bible also describes our world as inhabited by The Powers, shaped by The Powers, and even at times under the control of The Powers. The problem then is cosmic personal forces. The solution

is the victory of God over the cosmic powers through Jesus's work on the cross, in the Resurrection, in the rule of King Jesus over all that exists, and in the power of the Spirit to wage battle against The Powers.

## The Spirit's Battle Against The Powers

The Bible tells the story of a cosmic battle. We often miss this because we can become so familiar with the Bible that we fail to recognize its stories of purpose, journey, battles, and the final, decisive triumph of God. We see the Bible's narrative influencing and informing the story power of C. S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia,* J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Hobbit* as well as in his *The Lord of the Rings,* and J. K. Rowling in *Harry Potter.* And beyond, in the works of Flannery O'Connor and Charles Dickens. While each of these writers have or had their own genius and beliefs, their ideas and stories tend to be rooted in the Bible's story of a cosmic battle.

The Bible begins in a garden and ends in a garden. The Bible begins with humans serving God in a cosmos shaped as a temple, but humans then surrender themselves to the dark forces of the serpent. From the day the fruit was tasted, the cosmic battle began. Humanity will end the story in a garden in which a new kind of temple will be the center, a temple called "Lamb." In the middle of the story is the temptation of Jesus, the great battle in the wilderness, and the cross, the battle on Mount Zion. Both of these events are filled with cosmic-battle themes.

God made The Powers, but humans have at times surrendered themselves to the evil world to turn God's good Powers into corrupted, evil Powers.[4] In this chapter I restrict my use of The Powers to the corruption of God-established Powers. God is in control, and he creates angels and kings and governors and rulers and bosses and managers and presidents and vice-presidents and households. These are God-established points of leadership in the world. But the humans in these institutions time and again have opened themselves to the corrupting influences of the Enemy. That Enemy often is called *the serpent* or *Satan* or *the devil* or *demons* or *evil spirits*. All these names describe the supernatural beings that work to turn God-established institutions designed for our good into Powers-controlled institutions shaped for destruction, disease, and death.

## Broken Solutions to Systemic Horror

In Kent Haruf's novel *Eventide,* two children are abused by their uncle. Joy Rae and Richie, the unprotected children, are brutalized with a belt by their uncle Hoyt Raines.

The children's parents fear Hoyt too much to intervene. Hoyt suddenly disappears and the legal system and courts intervene, sending the children to foster care. Hoyt must be found and jailed before the children will be safe. After the court's decision to send the children to foster care and following a social worker's attempt to console the parents and the children, we hear this conversation.

> [Rose (the social worker) to the man she loves:] I've felt like weeping all afternoon. I told them everything would be all right. That was a lie. I didn't tell them the truth. This isn't any kind of a priority for the police. The police aren't going to find her uncle and they won't get their children back. Those kids will be kept in foster homes till they're eighteen or till they just run away. Everything is not going to be all right.[5]

Neither the system of parenting in love and responsibility and protection nor the police system designed to find the abusive uncle so the children would be safe would work for the good of these two children. Rose is right; often seemingly insignificant members of our societies—children of the poor, the poor themselves—don't have the resources or the advocates to get the wheels of justice turning. These two children were likely to wilt away through systemic neglect. What plays out in this heartbreaking novel is played out daily in the lives of abused or abandoned children all over the world.

How do you explain such systemic neglect and abuse of children? Don't we need more than human systems—either government systems or broken family systems or communities that fail to care for one another—to comprehend the depth of the disorder? We can explain this sort of seemingly unconquerable systemic horror and abuse only by acknowledging that The Powers are at work.

## Personifying The Powers

In the New Testament we see routine—yes, routine—encounters between Jesus and the apostles, and demonic forces. In many of the encounters, we witness the

liberating power of the Spirit in exorcisms.[*2] But there also is a noticeable *personification* of special terms that reveal a truth that God wants us to see: The Powers are active agents of evil. They are not a generalized influence that, at times, sways decisions and affects actions people take. Rather, terms used to name The Powers are specific. The terms include *the Flesh,* portrayed as a controlling agent; *Sin,* shown to be an active power; *the Law,* which serves as a prosecuting lawyer; and *Death,* as a prowling beast seeking our destruction.

All of this shows us that Satan and his minions of evil are alive and well. They use the Flesh, Sin, the Law, and Death to turn us from the God who reconciles, the Son who redeems, and the Spirit who regenerates. You and I cannot explain the extent and the depth of brutality—along with the dehumanizing impact—of worldwide slavery on the basis of human action alone. The Powers at times and in places have seized control. After completing two decades of missionary work, the apostle Paul described his mission. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against *the powers* of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."[*3]

Paul knew it, and we need to reaffirm that battle today. This battle is as big as racism and as personal as our own experiences. One Christian who is not afraid to name the battle is Craig Keener, a seminary professor who tells a story about an attack by an evil spirit and the miraculous protection of God.

> In 2008 I experienced an abrupt, extreme, and unrelenting spiritual attack for two days; it made no sense in my immediate context. On the third day I was recovering, and my wife, son David, and I went for a walk. We paused under a tree that was some three stories tall, and within moments after we stepped out from under it, the tree suddenly split at the bottom—without uprooting—and crashed where we had been standing. Because of the tree's wide structure, all three of us would have been crushed to death. The information that reached us from Congo soon after this event made clear that this was a direct and deliberate spiritual attack, from which God had protected us.[6]

Many in our world will simply say, "That was pure luck" or "It was a random event at a random time for a random family." But people who are open

to the Spirit, who name the battle, and who are discerning the work of God will see the experience as Craig does. The Powers of the Flesh, the Devil, and Death were at work. Fortunately, so was the power of God's Spirit.

## The Victory over The Powers with Three Wounds

The New Testament identifies three moments when The Powers suffer mortal wounds. First, *when Jesus was tempted* he conquered the temptation of the devil, and I believe he did it through his trust in the power of the Spirit.[*4] Those temptations were not unlike the focus of The Powers: material supply, worship of the one true God, and rule of the world. The good news is that Jesus achieved the decisive victory. One of the most dramatic descriptions of the achievement of the cross is found in Paul's letter to the Colossians.

A second mortal wound inflicted on The Powers is *when Jesus died and was raised:*

> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.[*5]

That is, God has forgiven us, undone our death sentence, and given us new-creation life, and he did this by reversing the Law's prosecution against us and conquering The Powers. We need to notice, too, even if it is only implicit, that God does this through Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The Victory Event is what Jesus already has achieved: Jesus has undone death, created a brand-new life for each of us and for all creation, and he is now ruling over all.

But the third mortal wound is *when the Final Victory* arrives in the second coming of Christ. Until then the battle will rage and we are called to take back the territory lost to The Powers.

## Taking Back Lost Territory

Slavery, to return to one place where The Powers are at work in our world,

cannot be ended simply by legislation or by the strong-handed efforts of good people fighting for justice. The Powers will not be defeated by human efforts alone even if social activism remains vital and urgent.[7] We are engaged in a cosmic battle with The Powers, and we need the Cosmic Power of the Spirit if we want to transcend our inabilities and transform our limited abilities to work against slavery and its centuries-long impact in our culture. What can we do?

When the gospel began to make inroads into the Roman Empire, the apostles Paul, Peter, John, and others learned new languages and confronted new problems. They saw idolatries they hadn't known existed; they saw perversions of sexuality run rampant; they encountered slaveries unlike anything they had seen in the Holy Land; and they came face-to-face with The Powers running roughshod on a constant basis. After years of mission work, Paul had developed a strategy for taking back territory from The Powers.[*6] We are in a cosmic battle with The Powers, but Paul made it clear that God equips us with armor that protects us, while he also supplies us with offensive weapons.

There were at least four elements to Paul's strategy and therefore ours. *First, our battle begins with prayer.* After describing the armor and weapons, Paul wrote: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."[*7] One cannot battle The Powers until one rises from immersion in prayer. The much-respected and wise New Testament professor Klyne Snodgrass has offered this reminder: "Christians do not need to worry about evil," but why does he say this? His answer: "For they know how to pray."[8] Prayer arms us when we pray in the Spirit.

*Second, we ready ourselves for the battle by putting on Spirit-prompted armor.* Paul described the kind of armor we need. Every piece of armor is a metaphor for how the praying-in-the-Spirit Christian is outfitted. We are to wear these:

Belt of truth

Breastplate of righteousness

Shoes with the gospel of peace

Shield of faith

Helmet of salvation

Sword of the Spirit

These words run counter to typical approaches of our day. At the same time, though, they empower us for the kind of battle we are waging: a cosmic one. So many today think that if we form a caucus, raise some money, alert the world's

consciousness, and protest, protest, protest, that problems will be fixed. Without ignoring the value of activism, Paul made it clear that we battle a far more powerful foe: The Powers. Knowing this about our Enemy, we are fitted with more than activism and fund-raisers. We are fitted with truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Holy Spirit. Our activism, then, is preceded by prayer and the gospel.

*Third, we make the battle with The Powers more credible when we are obedient.* In Paul's description of the armor, one term stands out: *righteousness*. This term describes Christian behavior that conforms to the will of God as taught by Jesus and as prompted by life in the Spirit. What is the most potent Christian kind of activism? A Spirit-prompted life that conforms to the life of Jesus. *Righteousness* here means "Christlikeness" or "Christo-formity." A life like this makes our witness more credible because it becomes incarnate in an individual and in a community of faith that demonstrates an alternative to the way of The Powers.

It's important to understand that Paul spoke of the church as well as of individuals. We in a local Body of Christ are to be a "community of resistance" as we suit up for the battle with the pieces of God's armor. When we embody truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and the Spirit, we form resistance to the invasion of The Powers and so form a community unlike the world. We make our witness more credible by being an alternative.[9]

*Fourth, we take back territory through our common witness to the gospel.* Notice, too, that the armor begins with "truth" and ends with the "sword of the Spirit," which is the Word of God. The "Word" referred to is not simply the Bible. Remember that in Paul's day they didn't have the New Testament. The "Word" mentioned here is the Living Word named Jesus and the gospel message about that Living Word.

Truth and Word are the ways to penetrate the realm of The Powers and take back territory. As we are to pray in the Spirit, so we are to take the sword of the Spirit, making clear that the cosmic battle is a Spirit-led battle. Only the Spirit's power can finally reverse and end the systemic evils of our world.

A holistic approach is needed to end slavery in our world. It is not enough to sit back and pray weekly, just as it is not enough to engage The Powers without recognizing the spiritual forces at work behind slavery. One organization that proceeds holistically is Love146, a Christian organization led by Rob Morris. Love146 rescues children who are being trafficked and works to aid the children toward reintegration into society, while sustaining the children's integrity and

health.

Here is Rob's theme story at Love146:

> We found ourselves standing shoulder to shoulder with predators in a small room, looking at young girls through a pane of glass. All of the girls wore red dresses with a number pinned to their dress for identification.
>
> They sat, blankly watching cartoons on TV. They were vacant, shells of what a child should be. There was no light in their eyes, no life left. Their light had been taken from them. These children… raped each night…seven, ten, fifteen times every night. They were so young. Thirteen, eleven…it was hard to tell. Sorrow covered their faces with nothingness.
>
> Except one girl. One girl who wouldn't watch the cartoons. Her number was 146. She was looking beyond the glass. She was staring out at us with a piercing gaze. There was still fight left in her eyes. There was still life left in this girl….
>
> All of these emotions begin to wreck you. Break you. It is agony. It is aching. It is grief. It is sorrow.
>
> The reaction is intuitive, instinctive. It is visceral. It releases a wailing cry inside of you. It elicits gut-level indignation. It is unbearable. I remember wanting to break through the glass. To take her away from that place. To scoop up as many of them as I could into my arms. To take all of them away. I wanted to break through the glass to tell her to keep fighting. To not give up. To tell her that we were coming for her….
>
> Some time later, there was a raid on this brothel, but the children we saw, including the girl who wore #146, were no longer there. We do not know what happened to her, but we will never forget her. She changed the course of all of our lives.[10]

The Spirit wars against the Flesh, and sex trafficking is Flesh and devil wrapped into a systemic evil so deep it disgusts the heart of God. You and I need to know the battle and engage the battle with all the weapons the Spirit empowers us to use.

Are you open to the Spirit's power to gain victory over The Powers?

Are you open to the victory that comes through prayer, outfitting ourselves with the armor, the credibility of obedience, and taking back territory by the witness of truth in the power of the Spirit?

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*1 Exodus 21:21; Leviticus 19:20–22; 25:44–46; Colossians 3:22–4:1

*2 Matthew 12:28

*3 Ephesians 6:12

*4 Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13; Mark 1:12–13

*5 Colossians 2:13–15

*6 Ephesians 6:10–20.

*7 Ephesians 6:18

24

# WIDE OPEN TO THE SPIRIT IN THE WORSHIP OF GOD

Nothing is more resistant to The Powers of this world or more beautiful to the senses than the Body of Christ in a state of adoration of the Son of God. Some of our fellow Christians prefer to stand, some to look up, and others to raise their hands outstretched as the embodiment of their worship. Others (ahem, yours truly) prefer to sit or stand but remain still and so prefer the quiet side of worship. Some dance and sway. When I am with the non-instrumental Church of Christ folks, I love their capacity to sing *a cappella* with gusto and glory. However it is done, I consider the adoring people of God to be one of the grandest moments of my Christian existence.

Once a week is not enough. Nor is worship sitting alone in a church service and then leaving as quickly as possible the proper way to get all that is available in worship. Worship is fellowship and fellowship is worship. Worship, then, is what Christians do together and what empowers us to become what God wants us to be throughout the week.[1]

For more than three decades as a professor, I have followed the studies of Larry Hurtado, a specialist on early Christians at worship. In one of the latest summaries of his research, he drew attention to five elements of early Christian gatherings for worship in the Spirit. You might notice that his sense of *worship* is (accurately) broader than how we typically think of the term. Hurtado has pointed out these salient facts about the early Christians:

Their worship was *intimate* as they gathered in homes; they all participated;

one would have noticed the strong religious fervor of their worship and gatherings. Those gatherings were considered highly significant in the life of the believer, and there was a Spirit-generated *potency* in the impact of their faith and gatherings. Miracles and powers were at work.[2]

This last point is worthy of further consideration: genuine Christian worship is less about ecstasy, less about the aesthetics of the room, and far more about it being Spirit-generated adoration of God—Father, Son, and Spirit.

## Prayer, Song, and Confession

Notice that three central dimensions of what Christians have always done in their public worship—prayer, song, confession—are connected to the Spirit in the New Testament. When it comes to prayer, we remind ourselves of the beautiful transcendence of these lines:

> In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*[1]

We need to read those words carefully, for we learn something radically new in these lines from Paul: When we are praying, it is not *we* who pray. Our prayers are merely *entering into the prayer ministry of the Spirit* in us and for us and beyond us. We are not simply asking the Spirit to improve our prayers; we are asking only to enter into the true prayers of the Spirit for us.

When it comes to music and song in worship:

> Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*[2]

Even our songs, at which we work and rehearse and seek to be in tune with others, fall flat until they are seen as *entering into the music of the Spirit.*

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have publicly confessed their faith by reciting the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed or another statement of faith or confession. Our confessions are rote and dead if they are not animated by the power of the Spirit. Notice these words from the apostle John:

> Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.[3]

These words matter most: "Every spirit [person, now *open* to the Spirit] that acknowledges [confesses] that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit [person, in contrast controlled by The Powers] that does not acknowledge [or confess] Jesus is not from God." Confessions that do not focus on the truth about Jesus are not from the Spirit, and confessions that emerge from the Spirit's work among us—as the Body of Christ—point straight at Jesus.

One of the most common confessions of the Christian faith is the Apostles' Creed, which I print here in the traditional form.[4] Read it, confess it aloud, and see it as a way of expressing aloud what we as Christians confess to the world. Notice, too, its three-part structure: Father, Son, and Spirit.

> I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.
>
> And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
>
> I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.
>
> Amen.

Worship—our public worship, that is—is marked by prayer, by song, and by confession. These three dimensions of public worship (and private worship too) are directly connected to being open to the Spirit. Those who are wide open to the Spirit will pray, will sing, and will confess Jesus as the world's true Ruler. But in the Bible, worship is portrayed as far more than Sunday-morning public

worship and more than singing together in adoration of God.

## All of Life, Wide Open to Worship

Everything in life, not just Sunday morning at eleven o'clock, is worship. Worship, then, is every moment and element of our lives, everything we think, every feeling we emote, every word we utter, and every act we perform. Not only is all of life worship, but genuine worship occurs only by the Spirit. Only those who are wide open to the Spirit can turn all of life into worship. "God is spirit," Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."[*5] These are "the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."[*6]

Jesus did not have Sunday-morning worship services in mind; nor was he restricted to thinking worship occurred only in the Temple in Jerusalem. Because he was Jewish, he knew how the Bible understood worship—that it applied to all of life. All of life is worship for those who are wide open to the Spirit.

In an essay titled "Why Work?" Dorothy Sayers made this glorious claim: "Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he [or she] finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction, and"—now notice this —"the medium in which he [or she] offers himself [or herself] to God."[3]

In the most important book on worship I have read, David Peterson makes this his theme: "Worship in the New Testament is a comprehensive category describing the Christian's total existence."[4] At dinner recently, my friend Gil Smith said, "I didn't understand how my work as an arborist was worship until I was older. When I was younger I believed that, but only now do I see *how* it is all so true."

As I grow older alongside Gil, I am learning the same truth. Why retire when all of life is worship? Our work, then, is an offering of ourselves, of the people God designed us to be, toward God and toward God's people. This was Paul's big idea when he urged Christians to offer our bodies and selves on the altar as genuine Christian worship:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.[*7]

Our true and proper worship is to offer our bodies on the altar, not as a dead animal sacrifice as was common in Paul's world, but as a *living* sacrifice. Every day, every part of our body, every thought we think, every emotion we feel, every move we make. All of life is a living sacrifice right back to the God who redeemed us in Christ and empowered us in the Spirit.

Being wide open to our entire lives being acts of worship means *"engagement with [God] on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible."*[5] Genuine worship is offering ourselves through the Spirit in the work of Christ to the Father.

Any worship that equates worship with ecstasy, joy, or even fellowship falls short of participating in the full intent of Spirit-prompted worship. Peterson again: "Worship in the New Testament means believing the gospel and responding with one's whole life and personal being to the person and work of God's Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit."[6]

This is what is meant in this book by being *wide open to the Spirit*. It means offering ourselves to God all day long and with every globule of our being. This is why Paul could teach that the entire Christian life is about *living* in the Spirit, *walking* in the Spirit, and *marching in step* with the Spirit.

## An Appeal

I appeal to you: Is it not time for you to become more open, even *wide open,* to the Spirit? Is it not time for you to stand, sit, walk, march, and live in a perpetual state of openness to the Spirit? Is it not time to create a mind-set of asking yourself if you are open to the Sprit before and during everything you think, say, and do? *Am I wide open to whatever the Spirit wants in this thought, this statement, and this action?*

I ask you to pray—with total openness to whatever God might bring your way—this prayer:

> Lord, I am open to the Holy Spirit.
> Holy, Spirit, come to me, dwell in me, speak to me
> so I may become more like Christ.
> Lord, give me the courage to be open.
> Lord, I am open to the Holy Spirit.
> Come Holy Spirit.
> Amen.

*1 Romans 8:26–27

*2 Ephesians 5:18–20; see also Colossians 3:16–17

*3 1 John 4:1–5

*4 "The Apostles' Creed," Creed.net, www.creeds.net/ancient/apostles.htm.

*5 John 4:24

*6 John 4:23

*7 Romans 12:1

# LAST WORDS

When my agent, Greg Daniel, and I sat down over breakfast to discuss book topics, we agreed to a series of books that would reflect the perspective and insights of a Bible professor on topics about religious experience. We agreed on three topics: heaven, angels, and the Holy Spirit. This is the third of those books, but little did I know how much joy and learning each of these books would bring. I am grateful to Greg and to the fine folks at WaterBrook for what they have brought into my life, especially to Andrew Stoddard, Ron Lee, Chris Sigfrids, Kristopher Orr, and Pamela Shoup. Each has contributed encouragement, skill, and grace.

Some of my colleagues, students, and former students have read this book carefully enough to offer suggestions, corrections, and ideas. Thanks to Tara Beth Leach, pastor at Pasadena's First Nazarene Church; to Doug McPherson, who offered insights drawn from his own pastoral experience; to Justin Gill for discussing Gordon Fee's monumental study of the Spirit in Paul's letters with me in the columns of the manuscript; to Becky Castle Miller for many important suggestions that improved the book; to Kellye Fabian, whose keen eye found concepts and terms that needed more fine-tuning; and also to my colleague and pioneering theologian on all things Spirit, Cherith Fee Nordling. One of the world's best scholars on the Spirit, Jack Levison, interrupted his own work to read through this book carefully and make a number of suggestions, and I want to register my gratitude to him.

# NOTES

*Introduction: First Words*

1. St. Augustine, *The Confessions,* trans. P. Burton (New York: A.A Knopf, 2001), 1.1.1.

*Chapter 1: Open and Shut*

1. Darren Frannich, "Andy Griffith's Breakout Monologue 'What It Was, Was Football,' " Entertainment Weekly, July 3, 2012, http://ew.com/article/2012/07/03/andy-griffith-what-it-was-was-football/.
2. What I describe here is based on memory, and it combines experiences with my church, my parents, my Sunday School teachers, my pastors, my college teachers and friends, people I looked up to, and authors I read.
3. "Christian Movements and Denominations," Pew Research Center, December 19, 2011, www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-movements-and-denominations/. This study measures Pentecostals and charismatics.
4. Martin E. Marty, quoted in Laurie Goodstein, "More Religion, But Not the Old-Time Kind," *New York Times,* January 9, 2005, www.nytimes.com/2005/01/09/weekinreview/more-religion-but-not-the-oldtime-kind.html.
5. Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009).
6. Don McLean, "American Pie," *American Pie,* United Artists Records (UAS-5535), 1971.

7. I take "third place" from Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 10.
8. M. James Sawyer, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Scriptures?," in Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer, eds., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?: An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2013), 253–77.
9. Pinnock, *Flame of Love,* 15.
10. This story about the flowers can be found in Philip P. Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 163. A recent book has sought to diminish the significance of Trocmé and Le Chambon, and while it contributes the larger story to complement the work of Hallie, it contains many historical inaccuracies; as well, the obvious agenda running throughout the book has been denounced by principal persons who were there, including Trocmé's daughter Nelly. The book is by Caroline Moorehead, *Village of Secrets: Defying the Nazis in Vichy France,* The Resistance Trilogy 2 (Harper Perennial, 2015). Hallie's book remains a reliable story of Le Chambon and the Trocmés.
11. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Begin Here: A War-Time Essay* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940), 126.

### *Chapter 2: Jesus Was Wide Open to God's Spirit*

1. There are a number of collections of these Gospels. I use J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
2. For a study of emotions in the New Testament, see Matthew C. Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotions in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006).
3. C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume II: Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931–1949* (HarperOne, 2004), 764. Thanks to Gerald Hawthorne for pointing out this letter.
4. Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 35.

5. There are three very important studies on this topic: C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: S.P.C.K., 1975); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975); Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Dallas: Word, 1991).
6. John R. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 423.
7. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power,* 219.

### *Chapter 3: Open to the God Who Speaks in the Living Word*

1. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1995), 9.
2. Evangelism and what the gospel is can be confusing today. I believe the fundamental question in evangelism is, Who do you think Jesus is? or What do you think of Jesus? I have written a book on this: Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).
3. Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1987), 87.
4. Philip P. Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 68.

### *Chapter 4: Open to the God Who Speaks in the Written Word*

1. Justin Gill, conversation with author, November 7, 2016. Used with permission.
2. Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 5.
3. There are a number of sophisticated discussions of this topic, including: Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009); Kevin L. Spawn and Archie T. Wright,

eds., *Spirit and Scripture: Exploring a Pneumatic Hermeneutic* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013); John R. Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013); Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*. For shorter studies, I recommend Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Light After the Age of Enlightenment," in Jeffrey W. Barbeau and Beth Felker Jones, eds., *Spirit of God: Christian Renewal in the Community of Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 149–67; Richard E. Averbeck, "God, People, and the Bible: The Relationship Between Illumination and Biblical Scholarship," in Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer, *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit* (Biblical Studies, 2005), 137–65.

4. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*.
5. The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 236 (Proper 28).

### *Chapter 5: Open to the God Who Speaks in the Prophetic Word*

1. Gordon Fee says: "There is no Pauline evidence for the phenomenon known in contemporary circles as 'personal prophecy,' whereby someone prophesies over another as to very personal matters in their lives. Where such might appear to be the case (e.g., 1 Tim 1:18; 4:14), there is community affirmation (testing?) by way of the laying on of hands by the elders. Otherwise prophecy seems to be a strictly community affair, for the sake of the community's corporate life." See Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 170–71. I am grateful to Justin Gill for pointing out this statement by Fee.
2. James D. G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit: Pneumatology,* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 315–19.
3. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence,* 148. Justin Gill pointed me to this statement by Fee.
4. This story about Harriet Livermore is shared in Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 1–3.
5. Jeff Louie, "The Holy Spirit and the Local Church," in Daniel B. Wallace

and M. James Sawyer, eds., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?: An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2013), 236.

6. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible,* ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. G. L. Müller, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 35–37.

### *Chapter 6: The Spirit of God Intercedes for Us*

1. St. Augustine, *The Confessions,* Everyman's Library (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2001), 1.1.1.
2. St. Augustine, *The Confessions,* 8.12.28–29.
3. Trevor Hudson, *Holy Spirit Here and Now* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 2013), 103–4.
4. Emphasis added to "open."
5. This language is from James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 12. I will tell a story about this language in chapter 8.
6. Sachi, e-mail message to author, June 3, 2016. Used with permission.

### *Chapter 7: Open Yourself to the Work of the Spirit as a New Presence*

1. Daniel Wallace, "Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? The Uneasy Conscience of a Non-Charismatic Evangelical," in Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer, eds., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?: An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2013), 7.
2. For an excellent and brief sketch of the context for "living water," see Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary,* New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 99–100.
3. Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 722.
4. Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon,* 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 64.

### *Chapter 8: Open Yourself to the New Day of the Spirit*

1. James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles,* Narrative Commentaries (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 12, emphasis added. This section is based on the foreword I wrote for the new edition of Dunn's commentary: James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (1996; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), vii–viii, 12.
2. This is a point of contention at times among theologians and scholars; for one who thoroughly (and often) examines this question, see John R. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009) and John R. Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013).
3. Richard E. Averbeck, "The Spirit of God in the Hebrew Bible and Its Connections to the New Testament," in Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer, eds., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?: An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2013), 23. I encourage you to read the entire chapter by Averbeck (see pages 15–36); he provides a masterful and accessible study of the use of the terms *ruach* and *pneuma* (wind, breath, spirit, Spirit) in the Bible.
4. See John R. Levison, *Fresh Air: The Holy Spirit for an Inspired Life* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2012).
5. Averbeck, "The Spirit of God in the Hebrew Bible," in Wallace and Sawyer, eds., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?,* 27.

### *Chapter 9: Open Yourself to a New Baptism*

1. Someone whose wonderful book has called our attention to this problem is David A. deSilva, *Transformation: The Heart of Paul's Gospel* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).
2. deSilva, *Transformation,* 2.
3. M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation,* rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 27.
4. This has been discussed at length by pastors, theologians, and New Testament specialists. Here are two discussions: James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift*

*of the Holy Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970); Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit: In Biblical Teaching, Through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013), 57–62.

5. I owe this thought to a recent talk at our church by Ethan McCarthy.
6. *Orange* is a term used for those who fought for union with England.
7. Ken Newell, *Captured by a Vision: A Memoir* (Newtownards, Northern Ireland: Colourpoint, 2016), 10, 14, 28, 31, 63, 261–62. I express my thanks to Trevor Morrow, also a peace worker in the Republic of Ireland, for pointing me to Newell's memoir.

### *Chapter 10: Open Your Spirit to a New Self*

1. John R. Levison, *40 Days with the Holy Spirit: Fresh Air for Every Day* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2015), 133.
2. Daniel Wallace, "Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit: The Uneasy Conscience of a Non-Charismatic Evangelical," in Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer, eds., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?: An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2013), 2. A *cessationist* is someone who thinks the "sign gifts" were for the apostolic period and are no longer present in the church today.
3. Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 22. Original in italics except the word "process."
4. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart,* 77–92.
5. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart,* 9, emphasis added.
6. David A. deSilva, *Transformation: The Heart of Paul's Gospel* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 49.

### *Chapter 11: Open Yourself to a New Power*

1. This story was told to the author via personal correspondence. Used with permission.

### *Chapter 12: Open Yourself to a New People*

1. Monica A. Coleman, *Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey with Depression and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 99–100.
2. Coleman, *Bipolar Faith,* 100.
3. Coleman, *Bipolar Faith,* 101.
4. J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: Harper, 2016), 253.
5. Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Light after the Age of Enlightenment," in Jeffrey W. Barbeau and Beth Felker Jones, eds., *Spirit of God: Christian Renewal in the Community of Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 166–67.
6. Mark S. Mitchell, *Portrait of Integrity: The Life of Ray C. Stedman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 2004), 121–23.
7. I am grateful to Becky Castle Miller for help with this.
8. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 31.

### *Chapter 13: Open Yourself to a New Kind of Leader*

1. Thanks to John Levison for this point.
2. This story is told in Aili and Andres McConnon, *Road to Valor: A True Story of WWII Italy, the Nazis, and the Cyclist Who Inspired a Nation* (New York: Broadway Books, 2013), 245.
3. John C. Nugent, *Endangered Gospel: How Fixing the World Is Killing the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 134–35.
4. Nugent, *Endangered Gospel,* 135.

### *Chapter 14: Open Yourself to a New Orientation in Life*

1. Derwin Gray, "Pro Football Was My God," Christianity Today, March 3, 2014, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/march/pro-football-was-my-god-derwin-gray.html.
2. Gerald R. McDermott, *Famous Stutterers: Twelve Inspiring People Who Achieved Great Things While Struggling with an Impediment* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016).

3. James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (1966, repr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 12, emphasis added.
4. Scot McKnight, "Good News: Women in Ministry (Amanda Holm Rosengren)," *Patheos* (blog), December 23, 2014, www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2014/12/23/good-news-women-in-ministry-amanda-holm-rosengren/.

### *Chapter 15: Open Yourself to a Life of Love*

1. For more on this, see Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others,* 10th anniversary ed. (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2014).
2. I have written about this in a number of places, including Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 51–63; Scot McKnight, *The Hum of Angels: Listening for the Messengers of God Around Us* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2017), 39–43.
3. Philip P. Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 154.

### *Chapter 16: Open Yourself to the Spirit in a New Assurance*

1. Theologians have been debating for centuries whether or not someone can jettison one's salvation. Some say yes (Arminianism), and others say no (Calvinism). This section is not about that topic but about the assurance the believer can have, and assurance is both subjective as well as connected to one's faithfulness. I believe a Christian can choose to walk away from the faith and choose to forfeit one's redemption, but this is a conscious, willing state of a person. Anxiety about one's state indicates redemption; those who walk away from salvation aren't anxious but defiantly against the faith. For my study, see Scot McKnight, *A Long Faithfulness: The Case for Christian Perseverance* (Denver: Patheos, 2013). For a discussion of the views, Michael S. Horton et al., *Four Views on Eternal Security,* ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).
2. Daniel Taylor, *The Skeptical Believer: Telling Stories to Your Inner Atheist* (Saint Paul, MN: Bog Walk Press, 2013), 4. In this paragraph I am

summarizing some of his own discussions from pages 4–8. Taylor wrote an earlier book that was of much help to me in my own journey with doubt: *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian & the Risk of Commitment* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2000).

3. Taylor, *The Skeptical Believer,* 5.
4. Taylor, *The Skeptical Believer,* 5.
5. Taylor, *The Skeptical Believer,* 7.
6. For a solid defense of "Spirit himself testifies *to* our spirit" see Daniel Wallace, "The Witness of the Spirit in Romans 8:16," in Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer, eds., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?: An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2013), 37–51.
7. Trevor Hudson, *Holy Spirit Here and Now* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2013), 101.
8. Alfred Henry Ackley, "I Serve a Risen Savior," Word Music, 1961.
9. Taylor, *The Skeptical Believer,* 26.

### *Chapter 17: Open Yourself to a New Freedom*

1. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 46, emphasis in original.
2. John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).
3. Kellye Fabian, in a class at Northern Seminary, fall 2016. Used with permission.
4. For a fuller discussion, see Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 145–207, 227–47.

### *Chapter 18: Open Yourself to the Spirit for a New Holiness*

1. The Greek words behind the English words *holy* and *sanctified* are cognates, which means they are built on the same basic stem, *hágios*. I write about holiness in Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World*

*God's Design for Life Together* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 115–22.

2. Flannery O'Connor to Carl Hartman, 2 March 1954, in *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works,* Library of America 39 (New York: Library of America, 1988), 921.

3. O'Connor to Robie Macauley, 13 October 1953, in *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works,* 913.

4. For a good study of this, and one that contends the Reformed movement has too often ignored the other voices, see Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (2014; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

   It needs to be said here that while the African American churches in the United States at times may overlap with some of the theological emphases of the evangelical movement, they are not part of the evangelical movement. The same can be said of many Asian American and Latin American churches: while they overlap with classical evangelical theologies, those bodies *as bodies,* as opposed to individual leaders, have been historically ignored by the power brokers in American evangelicalism. I stand for a genuine ecumenical evangelicalism, but it requires (1) repentance from its historic racist and exclusionary practices, (2) sharing power intentionally over time before (3) any major shift will occur. I pray it will occur in my lifetime. For a powerful study of this topic, see Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

5. Phoebe Palmer, quoted in Charles Edward White, *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer as Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist and Humanitarian* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 16. This excerpt comes originally from her diary and can be found in Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer Jr., 1876), 39.

6. Bart Ehrman, ed. and trans., *The Epistle to Diognetus,* 5:1–10, in *The Apostolic Fathers,* vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 139, 141.

### *Chapter 19: Living in What Is Good While Rejecting All That Opposes the Good*

1. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker

Academic, 1996), 115. I am grateful to Tara Beth Leach for pointing me to these words of Fee's.

2. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), ix.
3. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians,* Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 300.
4. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians,* 300, emphasis added.
5. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017), 9–11.
6. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit,* 13.

### *Chapter 20: Open to New Victory over Sin*

1. Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others,* 10th anniversary ed. (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2014).
2. Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 57.
3. Alexander Schmemann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann, 1973–1983,* trans. Juliana Schmemann (Crestwood, N.Y: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 163.
4. For a good discussion of the *yetzers,* see W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology,* 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Sigler Press, 1980), 17–35. For the Dead Sea Scrolls, here is one text: "He created humankind to rule over the world, appointing for them two spirits in which to walk until the time ordained for His visitation. These are the spirits of truth and falsehood," 1QS 3:17–19.
5. Brian Zahnd, *A Farewell to Mars: An Evangelical Pastor's Journey Toward the Biblical Gospel of Peace* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2014), 25–26.
6. Schmemann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann,* 301.

### *Chapter 21: Open to a New Victory in Communication*

1. Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017);

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship,* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

### *Chapter 22: Open to New Victory over Sickness and Death*

1. Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 23.
2. For an important study on this idea, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1967).
3. Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 136. I thank Justin Gill for this citation.
4. Donald K. Smith, "The Holy Spirit in Missions," in Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer, eds., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?: An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2013), 244.
5. Craig Keener, *Miracles* (Baker Academic, 2011), 431.
6. Keener, *Miracles,* 431.
7. Keener, *Miracles,* 432.

### *Chapter 23: Open to the New Victory over the Powers That War Against God*

1. David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
2. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage,* 99.
3. My student Justin Gill did the research for these numbers. See Havocscope, *Human Trafficking: Prices and Statistics of the Modern Day Slave Trade* (n.p.: Havocscope, 2015), locations 74, 81, 332, and 72, Kindle edition. See also "Findings," The Global Slavery Index, www.globalslaveryindex.org/findings/?gclid=CMaq08Tq5LoCFS4aOgod_AoALA#overview.
4. A splendid brief discussion of this can be found in John C. Nugent, *Endangered Gospel: How Fixing the World Is Killing the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 41–49.

5. Kent Haruf, *Eventide* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 299.
6. Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 116.
7. For a brilliant academic study of the impact of New World slavery on black youth in the United States, I cannot recommend this book enough: Orlando Patterson, ed., *The Cultural Matrix: Understanding Black Youth* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 2016).
8. Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians,* NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 359.
9. For a very good study of this, see Timothy G. Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), esp. 160–65.
10. Rob Morris, "Her Name Became a Number. Her Number Became Our Name," Love146.org, https://love146.org/love-story/. I am grateful to Kim Jones for pointing me to this organization and for her efforts in advocating for the victims of sex trafficking.

### *Chapter 24: Wide Open to the Spirit in the Worship of God*

1. My thanks to Tara Beth Leach for thoughts contained in this paragraph.
2. Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 39–62.
3. Dorothy L. Sayers, "Why Work?" in *Creed or Chaos?* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1995), 101.
4. David G. Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 18.
5. Peterson, *Engaging with God,* 20, 283, emphasis in original.
6. Peterson, *Engaging with God,* 286.