

## **SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR DUMMIES**

Privileges and Pitfalls, Gifts (Normal and Weird)  
and Spiritual Superstars – Unveiled!

## **Forward**

These teachings originally appeared as a blog. It is written in a conversation, almost tongue-in-cheek style. That's not to discount the authenticity of the things of the Spirit, only to make them real, more approachable, accessible to those who may feel unworthy to approach the subject. The book may be used as a personal study, or small group discussion.

When I was a Christian new-bee, I needed the power of the Holy Spirit in my life to overcome bonds of the past and walk in present-day righteousness. The problem was that I didn't have any reference of what it meant to walk in the Life of the Holy Spirit AND be more-less normal. All my models of walking in the Spirit (i.e., tele-evangelists, faith healers, etc.) were people that I either didn't want to be like, or simply were not me.

Jesus was normal. Yet he did very non-normal things. I wanted to be a normal guy who, like the rest of the "Spirit-filled" wing of the Church, did non-normal things – but still be me all the same.

This material seeks both to teach about Spiritual gifts and serve as a reference as how the Lord's gifts work in everyday life. My prayer for you? That the breath of God will come alive in your heart in very natural ways.

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## I

### IT'S JUST A SPIRIT THING

One day my daughter asked me about "spiritual gifts." It happened after I had told her that from a very early age I had prayed for her and her sister to be prophetesses.

I began this practice of praying over my kids early on in both my daughters' life's. In Joel 2:28-29 it says in the days there will be of the outpouring of the Spirit, young and old will experience the wondrous and mysterious ways of God – that this would no longer be limited to just a few chosen prophets, but all would have equal access to the Holy Spirit – including kids. This prophecy was fulfilled in Acts 2:16 and has remained true ever since. So, why *wouldn't* we pray our kids become prophets?

"What's a 'prophetess,'" she asked.

"It's a person who can sense God's word over a person or situation and share it with others to encourage them in the faith. It's one of the spiritual gifts," I added.

"What's a 'spiritual gift?'"

Huh? What did I miss here? Here's a kid, raised in the church her whole life – involved in worship leading, Bible study, and other spiritual leadership and she asks, "*What's a spiritual gift?!*" Her friend was with her. She didn't know what a 'spiritual gift' was either.

This caused me to think: perhaps there are others out there who haven't had the opportunity to be filled in as to this phenomena we call spiritual gifts, and just the Spirit in general. So I'm stepping out. For our purposes, I'm going to spend a bit of time just talking through the gifts and making random comments here and there. The intent, of course is that, once revealed, they will be used.

So, let's talk about spiritual gifts. I'm putting it right out there.

## **All In All**

Paul writes to the church of Corinth, "Each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that" (1 Corinthians 7:7). This means that each Christian has at least one spiritual gift.

*Period.*

I define a spiritual gift as, *an accolade, given by the Father through the Holy Spirit, to followers of Jesus for the edification of the Church and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.*<sup>1</sup>

I used to think one person had one gift, another had another gift, and another had another gift. There's a piece of that which is true, yet I have come to understand every Christian has equal accessibility to ALL the spiritual gifts because each Christian has the Holy Spirit residing in them (we'll talk about that later).

Scripture is pretty clear that the Spirit dwells within the community of the faithful *and* within the individuals of that community as well.<sup>2</sup> The Spirit is the true gift from God and all gifts reside within Him. Potentially, he can distribute any gifts to any one of us. Usually, however, people find themselves majoring in just a few gifts.<sup>3</sup> We'll look at that later, too..

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Peter 4:10.

<sup>2</sup> See 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 2:22, and 1 Corinthians 6:19.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:7 and Romans 12:6.

Spiritual gifts aren't rewards. They don't happen once you've attained a certain age, or a rite of passage – like spiritual puberty or something like that. They are bestowed on any one who has given him or herself to Christ and entered into the life-long journey of following Jesus, young or old. This means that whenever an elementary student, teen, young adult, or old person accepts Christ they enter into a new birth which includes the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Age has no bearing here.

### **With or Without You**

No lasting ministry happens without the empowerment and gifting of the Holy Spirit. We can do a lot of great things on our own but, in the words of the Psalmist:

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.

Psalm 127:1

Think about what the disciples must have thought when they heard Jesus telling them NOT to engage in ministry until after they had been empowered by the Spirit (Acts 1:4,5). How disappointing! After all they've been through – miracles, teachings, healings, his resurrection – I would have been completely pumped to hit the road and get this party started.

Yet Christ told them to hang loose until they were baptized in the Spirit. They were to wait in Jerusalem for an essential element of all ministry: The Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> He knew ministry based on one's own emotional fuel, and even sincere passion, is short-lived,.

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<sup>4</sup> See Acts 1:4.

On the other hand, ministry empowered in the Spirit would be forever fruitful and lasting.

Jesus didn't seem concerned about age, gender, education, social standing, if you knew Greek, or took systematic theology in seminary. Indeed – and to that point – I've seen elementary kids speaking in tongues and old ladies healing the sick. Jesus was all about "who lives in you." He knew that anyone, even uneducated men (Acts 4:13), could do big things for God. Why? Because it wasn't about them at all. It was all about who was living in them.

Our fuel comes from above.

### **Take Away**

As we get into this book we'll look at this phenomena called "spiritual gifts." We'll look at what Scripture says about the Spirit, and share some experiences that highlight the thing. My hope is that your awareness and potential of "God in you" would not be limited, but reach beyond the skies.

You may even get a few "aha" moments, too. One of my first "aha's" came as I realized that – while God does give us the desires of our hearts – he gifts us according to his desire, not ours.<sup>5</sup>

For now, it's enough to know that the Holy Spirit is the big gift. Stick with that. Everything flows from him being the gift. From there it's a no brainer. Anyone (rich or

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<sup>5</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:11.

poor, young and old, boomer or toddler) has the capacity to minister in the gifts of the Spirit.



## 2

### **AND ON AND ON AND ON AND ON AND ON IT GOES**

#### **I Did It My Way**

There is an essential relationship between using one's spiritual gift and the Father's will. Some of us dream of all the things that will happen when we finally give our life's to Jesus.

I'll finally find my soul mate. I'll finally get on stage and rock the world like I've always wanted. I'll finally be that superstar evangelist. I'll finally be whatever I want to be and step into the fulfillment of all my dreams. And so it goes. Yet, nothing about is about me.

Jesus says it best.

Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

John 5:19

Even when Jesus did ministry, it demanded a one-on-one syncing with the Father. If the Father was doing it, fine. He willingly disciplined himself to that and, in that, it was okay to move forward. If the Father was absent, or doing something else, Jesus went that way instead. He intentionally confined his activities. For Jesus, it had to be all about what the Father was doing or it was nothing at all.

There are few stigmas with regard to spiritual gifts that we'll touch on throughout the course of this book. We'll look at our motivation for operating with the gifts, the myth of needing to be perfect to have gifts, abuses of gifts, and finally, towards the end of the book, share encouragement for those who've been out of the streams of the Spirit for a while.

For now, let's look at the most essential springboard when it comes to you using your gifts.

### **Without Love, You Ain't Nothing, Nothin', Nothing. Without Love You Ain't Nothing At All**

Have you ever seen someone trying to do something without being led of the Spirit. I have. It's a sad. Sort of embarrassing, too. They just putter along in the power of their own strength and, at the end of the day, go down in flames.

Gifts can be used from a variety of motivations – just as any other “good work” can. But Scripture is clear, a person can have it all. He or she can move mountains or fathom all mysteries and knowledge, but without love it is nothing.<sup>6</sup>

We often forget there is a relationship between what we do down here and his greater purposes up there (you know the line, “On earth as it is in heaven”) We get cruising along in our independence we forget what it means to “walk in the Spirit,”<sup>7</sup> “keep in unity [step] with the Spirit,”<sup>8</sup> or even that we can grieve the Spirit with our

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6 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

7 Galations 5:16

8 Ephesians 4:3

actions.<sup>9</sup> We are called to do everything in sync with the Spirit of God, which includes the operation of the gifts.

*So you're saying it's possible to use one's spiritual gift independently of the Spirit?*

Left to our own devices, we can do a lot of things independently of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts are no different. If I run into the street decided to sing a ten minute rock-opera in tongues (which, theoretically, I suppose, I could do) it would be as fruitless if I was to stand on a street corner and teach Christian Mysticism, it would be equally fruitless – and may even get in the way of what God is really doing on that day. Yet, if I take that same gift and, when prompted by the Spirit, exercise it his perfect pleasure, it will bear fruit. And bearing good fruit is everything in God's eyes.<sup>10</sup>

### **Lord, I Lift My Name on High**

Don't fool yourself. God uses broken people. Fruitfulness is a mysterious combination of spiritual discernment and Christian character. Just because you have an incredible gift doesn't guarantee interior perfection, spiritual nirvana, or deliverance from one's character defects, addictions, or anything else that falls short of the glory of God. This is why the operation of gifts need to be managed under the balanced wisdom of solid spiritual leadership.

A tremendously broken person can have a tremendously powerful spiritual gift – which, I admit, is a bit odd. You'd think a person operating in the gifts of the Spirit would have it all together. Many do, but some do not. People are broken. Their

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<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 4:30

<sup>10</sup> John 15:4, 8 and 26.

ministries can be fragmented as well. I know of a young man who has struggled as a believer his entire life with pornography, and yet he has the gift of prophecy. Go figure.

### **The Dark Side of the Moon**

Then there are those who come off as spiritual big-wigs, and look the part but in actuality are wolves in sheep's clothing. Even though they are immensely gifted, they are doing the stuff outside of their relationship with Jesus and will go suffer for it.<sup>11</sup>

The TakeAway? While spiritual gifts are wonderful tools in the toolbox they are just wonderful tools in the toolbox. They do not automatically assure a "greater spirituality," a perfected character, nor even assurance to heaven.

### **Waiting**

And, this is for those of you who have neglected or even forgotten about your gifts.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps you used to be in a place where you used your spiritual gifts all the time but, today, those days are long gone. I have great news for you: You haven't lost it! They are still there. They may be buried under a miso-mash strange doctrines, limited belief systems, or self doubt. But look again. You'll see they are still there, buried deep within. And God is patient. He is waiting for you to get back in touch with him again through them.

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 7:21-23

<sup>12</sup> Its easy to neglect our gifts. Like young Timothy of old, we also need to stir our gifts from time to time. See 1 Timothy 1:5-7.

Perhaps you've been a very naughty fellow and think that you deserve to lose the good things God has given (and you probably do). But God doesn't play it that way. You think you can't out-sin your gifts. God has promised that he will never ever take away your gift.<sup>13</sup>

### **Let the Good Times Roll**

Many older saints are now in places where circumstances have left them on the banks of the river, far from where they were yesterday and nowhere they thought they'd wind up. Perhaps you are one of them, thinking the glory days are over or, even worse, God is no longer doing the same exciting things anymore. Don't be fooled. He is the same God as then and, just by choosing to do so, you can reenter the rapids and minister in the same wonderful ways you used to, you so many years ago. I have been at numerous gatherings over the past couple of years where the Lord has said to those gathered, "The glory days are not over!"

What a wonderful thing to realize that the Lord is still alive and well and – perhaps like the days of old – using the aged among us to bring forth his purposes! I think of Abraham, Sarah, Noah, and Zechariah, just to name a few.

Paul writes to Timothy,

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

2 Timothy 1:6

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 11:29.

Some of you may have – for whatever the reason – stepped away from the stream and think the glory days are over or, worse yet, his purposes for you have been completed. Don't believe it. Time to rise and jump in again! Sure, you may need to blow out the cobwebs and re-sharpen your sword a bit but when the dust settles and you reengage your gifts in the glory of God, you will find they are still there like never before; still fruitful, still glorious, and still evangelizing and edifying people of all ages in the all-consuming love of the Father.

### **Take Away**

Like the Spirit himself, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are once given and never revoked. They are as good for as long as the world needs to be evangelized and the church needs to be edified, which is quite a long time.

Additionally, we need to demythologize the “possessors” of the gifts. We sometimes yearn for gifts (and to use gifts) believing they assure some sort of spiritual nirvana, or level of maturity, before they can be given and used. This is so far from the truth. God gives because he is a giver, not because we are worthy of the gift. Unfortunately we all know stories where the character of a person is rotten. But that is not the character of the gifts. It's painful to see gifted people go down, but Jesus is still there, still waiting for them to come around and, in his timing and grace, once again be gloried through him or her.

Highly gifted people still put on pants one leg at a time. They still clean up after company. And they all need to get their tires changed at the shop. While it's true that God gives the gifts,<sup>14</sup> the gifts don't lift anyone out of the domain of ones

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<sup>14</sup> See James 1:17.

humanity and – speaking counter-intuitively here – are often given to very broken people. This makes it devastating when a highly gifted, or highly beloved leader, suffers a terrible moral fall. How can such a gifted person, such a wonderful saint of God, go down in an addiction? How a person who is so magnificently anointed on Sundays can drop into the depths of depression on Monday. How a “man of the cloth” do abominable things to others his private life that break up an entire faith community?

It happens.

And, when the mainstream media gets ahold of it, it can really challenge us with “loving our neighbor” through it all. In situations like this we need to take caution (and extend grace). There is always a purpose. I’m reminded of Jesus’ words to Peter after his mishap. “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22;31-32). We need to be weary of throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

Finally, like all things fruitful, they are to be used in living concert with the love and will of the Father as revealed in the Holy Spirit.

### 3

#### **EVERYBODY HAS A LITTLE BIT OF SOMETHING**

At a college Bible study a conversation about the gifts may sound like this.

“I was reading about the gifts in 1 Corinthians and I believe God has given me the gift of hospitality.”

“Me, too,” a girl from across the circle adds. “Funny, I think he’s given me that, and a bit of mercy as well.”

Peter pipes up. “For me I think it’s teaching.”

“Yes, yes,” everyone agrees. “Peter, you are a great teacher.”

Shirley is hesitant, but chimes in all the same. “You know, I think God has given me the gift of raising the dead.”

Awkward silence.

And so it goes.

#### **Hurry Up and Wait Upon The Lord**

When Jesus left earth for heaven, he expressly forbade his followers NOT to do any ministry until they had received the empowerment of the Holy Spirit,<sup>15</sup> the source of all the gifts.<sup>16</sup> Jesus’ own giftedness and effectiveness in ministry was based solely on his relationship with the Father through the Holy Spirit. He knew it would have to be that way for his followers, too.

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<sup>15</sup> See Acts 1:4-5.

<sup>16</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:4.



Many times, in our new-found fervency in Christ it is so hard simply to “wait on God” before stepping out in ministry. But he knows what he’s doing. Wait, I say. Wait on the Lord. He will see the thing through. And the thing will be so much greater – and be so much more fruitful – than if you just jumped into the ring.

### **Just An Old Fashioned Love Song**

When we peruse the lists of spiritual gifts as outlined in Scripture we tend to clump them into two categories: the *normal* gifts and the *weird* gifts. (Come on, you know it’s true.)

The normal gifts are ones that are, well... normal. You know, ones we can understand with our rational minds, or ones that are prevalent in the culture. These would include gifts of teaching, administration, hospitality, mercy, service, giving, and encouragement, gifts that are pretty much in the box.

This differential between what is normal and what is weird has everything to do with the culture of residence. What’s regarded as weird here (in the states) may be perceived as completely ordinary – perhaps even an essential go to – elsewhere. A typical Ugandan, for example, would have no problem going to an exorcist, while that would be our last resort. In a culture where spirits and curses are a part of life, this is a normal “go to,” perhaps even before making an appointment with a medical specialist.

While I’ll make an argument later why I feel this imaginary line between normal and weird gifts should be thrown out, for the sake of the continuing discussion, I’ll play the game.

That being said, here is an example of what may be understood as a normal gift of the Spirit (hospitality) in action:

When I was a college student attended a Friday night gathering with lots of other students, tons of food, a really nice house, and an hour long Bible study.

I lived for these Friday evenings. Every time entered the house I felt like I was coming home – welcomed unconditionally with smiles, hugs, attention, and, perhaps most significantly, with honor. Whether I was having a great day or a rotten day I could walk into the kitchen, nab a glass from the cupboard, wander into the living room, plop down on the sofa, kick off my flip-flops, and even take a nap if I wanted. It just felt normal there. I didn't have to look the part, play the part, or act the part. It was *safe* just to be me. Something about being there lifted my spirits and made me feel human. When I left their house I felt renewed, affirmed as a child of God, and at peace in my soul.

I later learned that the hosts of the home had (and had been practicing) the spiritual gift of hospitality, the gift of welcoming people and making them feel like family. It was as if I had been invited into the very heart of God.

The gift of hospitality is a so-called normal gift of the Spirit. It is invitational. You don't have to be a spiritual heavyweight (or even look weird) to pull it off.

## **Wired For Weirdness**

When we think of the weird gifts, we tend to think of the extreme cases; people walking around like wizards, speaking in low airy voices and raising their bushy eyebrows up and down as if to say, "You do know what I'm talking about, right? And – if you can't grasp where I'm coming from – God will make it clear to you."

Welcome to the world of weirdness. This is the often polarized world of healing, discernment of spirits, dreams, prophecy, tongues, visions, exorcisms, raising the dead, and so on. This is not Kansas, Toto. You may have heard the term "revelatory" associated with these gifts. That is because their actions depend solely on revelation for them to work.

So-called "revelatory gifts" seem more supernatural, or greater, than the normal gifts because of their platforms. A person with the gift of mercy, or compassion can pretty much stay undercover. Not so with the revelatory gifts. They are right up there, front and center, for all to see.

Because of their "lime-lightedness," and their potential for abuse (which I'll speak about in a later chapter), many churches have simply shielded away from them, refraining from their use when the church gathers. That action, in itself, arouses suspicion and does nothing for the cause. The overriding reality: Unfamiliarity breeds weirdness.

In the long run, the curbing of spiritual gifts for the sake of maintaining a "steady and predictable" worship environment does more harm against the healthy use of the gifts of the Spirit than for them.

Here is an example of a weird gift of the Spirit in action:

At a church healing service I found myself standing before a young man when, in my spiritual vision,<sup>17</sup> I saw him as the ringleader of a three ring circus. He was dressed in a red coat and tall black hat and everything, like the ones in the movies – and standing in the center ring. It was a small, knee-high ring which, as I watched, began to enlarge and grow in its parameter. Within a few moments the ring expanded completely out of my sight.

I was amazed. I opened my eyes and told the young man that I believed God was going to expand the parameter of his tent – that everything he knew was going to be multiplied and increased in a very significant manner. This happens to me often. I'll get a vision, and then the interpretation, through the gift of wisdom, as to what the vision means. Though there are times I have nothing to say about what I get. When this happens I either look to someone else around me to interpret, or the person intuitively knows it's meaning. That's the best, as it eliminates my own personal bias. In the best case scenario, our job is to deliver the mail, not to read it. In this case, I had the interpretation of the vision and shared it humbly, knowing I could be wrong. He winced a smile and returned to the pew. The service ended and we all went home.

A few weeks later he pulled me aside after church and shared some recent events that had occurred in his life. A firm – with an entirely different product and focus than what he was schooled for – had contacted him “out of the blue” and had offered him double the salary of what he was then making.

Remembering the vision of the ringleader and the expanding center ring, he

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<sup>17</sup> Don't let the word “vision” be intimidating. By “spiritual vision” I mean something I saw in my mind, upon the screen of my imagination.

decided to go for it. When he told his boss he was leaving he, in attempt to keep him firm leaving, not only matched the new firm's offer, but increased it multifold. Then, when the potential new firm realized he was waffling and reconsidering staying at the old firm, they increased *the increase of the doubled salary* and finally won him back! That's not all, within three years he had built a house and fathered two children.

This is a wonderful example of how a weird gift worked. It edified, affirmed, blessed, stirred hope, and pointed to purpose and fulfillment in his walk with the Lord.

### **Breakfast of Champions**

All gifts are credible and provide wondrous ways wherein God manifests Himself to others – normal or weird. Yet not all Christians believe this. Reasons vary, ranging from theological belief, denominational praxis, or just plain fear (or what some would call lack of faith). That leads to a trend that is both unBiblical and dangerously arrogant: that we are free to believe in, and practice, the gifts of the Spirit according to our personal preferences. I can see a cafeteria line. There you are with a tray in hand, perusing the spread of goodies before you.

"What can I help you with?" The chef smiles.

"Hmm..." You ponder. "Give me a small spoon of wisdom, a bit of mercy – "

" – Fine choice, sir!"

"An how about a dab of teaching, and just a tad of hospitality on the side?"

"Might I recommend a small dish of compassion to go with that? They actually go quite well."

"No, thank you. Just the hospitality."

“Whatever you prefer.” The chef smiles. “Might I recommend our Special of Day? It’s a well-rounded slab of discernment of spirits, poached in a lovely garish of exorcism, prophecy, and essence of Spirit?”

“Oh, no, thank you.” Seeking to be polite. “Maybe next time.”

“As you wish, sir.” The chef smiles and looks to the person next in line. “And you, ma’m, what would be your fancy on this fine day?”

Contrary to consumer belief, we are **not** free to pick and choose gifts that make sense to us up and against those who don't – or even place historical limitations forbidding the operation of gifts we “have trouble” with. Scripture is clear:

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit,  
and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Corinthians 12:11

It is God himself who distributes the gifts and he distributes the gifts as he desires. Who are we to pick and choose the ones we consider theologically relevant? We need to trust God. He knows how we are wired and chooses gifts for us in accordance to our temperament, personality, and culture (for the most part!). The thing here has everything to do with our spiritual posture. Are we truly and sincerely open to the Father for any gift he has for us? Even if it flies in the face of what we’ve been taught, what would the church look like if we risked stepping from our comfort zones and into the world?

## **Back-Masking Love’s Song**

On the song called, *Judas Kiss*, released by the original band Petra on their album, *More Power to Ya*, a thread of squiggly-squirmy noises appear just before the song begins properly. Their album was released at the height of a season in music where secular artists the same. They called it *bask-masking*, a process where things were firstly recorded and then those recordings were reversed and laid onto the vinyl. One could only really understand what had been originally recorded if you were to spin the record backwards on your turntable and hear that some believed, to be subconscious messages filling out minds without our knowledge. There was considerable fear about this among some circles because apparently an influential band of the day did it and, when played backwards, it said, "Satan is Lord. Satan is Lord." Petra decided to get on board with that as well.

"Hey – that's back-masking," I said while listening to the beginning of *Judas Kiss*. "I wonder what it says?"

I slowly turned the disc backwards around with my finger to hear those cleverly placed words, *Why are you looking for the devil when you should be seeking the Lord?*

*Busted!*

I share that to say this: Many believers have amazing potential to be used of God in revelatory ways but, because of theological back-masking (intentional or otherwise), they are unavailable to fully live out his invitation. It's happened to many, including myself.

As a young believer I had actually been taught by sincere followers of Christ that the spiritual gifts were no longer "effective" for our day and age. They were good for the

early church because they had no Bible, they told me. When the Bible was made, the gifts became obsolete. They even had Scripture to back it up.

“What about the normal gifts,” I’d ask.

“Oh, they are okay. It’s only the weird ones that died out when the Bible was written,” they’d say.

What did this do to me and, more importantly, the way I did life? Whenever I spotted someone using a spiritual gift... well, it had to be a counterfeit and, in short, whatever they were doing had to be “of Satan.”

### **Imitation, The Sincerest Form of Flattery**

Now I had spent enough time under Satan’s dehumanizing influence and wasn’t about to return to that. I mean, heck, that’s why I needed Jesus in the first place.

At the same time, I had a little something-something going for me. I knew that Satan was the ultimate counter-fitter. Mocking, deceiving, and preventing everything God was about. I also knew that God was bigger than Satan. Not only did he create Lucifer, but destroyed his power of death at the resurrection. It stood to reason that if Satan had spiritual gifts, then God would have them as well. If not, then what was he counterfeiting? In other words, if all the devil was doing was copying God, then *what was he copying?*

And that’s where I needed to be. Surely God wasn’t going to set me free me from the bindings of the enemy, fill me with his Spirit, and call me into the continuation his miraculous work with a powerless hope and questionable praxis in his revelations that are no longer relevant and for this day and age!

The essence of the Great Commission (the call for all followers of Jesus to go all over the planet sharing the good news and teaching others everything that they



themselves have been taught) includes, by default, manifestation of spiritual giftedness to get the job done. That is how Jesus did it. That is how Jesus is still doing it. Scriptures such as John 14:12, Luke 10:17, Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-18 and pretty much the entire book of Acts lend credibility to this reality. (Although the reference from Mark above is not included in many of the original manuscripts, it describes the normative activity of the early church.) Gifts of everything from teaching to exorcism were considered normative descriptives of the activities early church. Imagine that!

### **Does The Devil Really Have All The Good Music?**

Still, I wondered. Was the devil really behind all this, or was there really something to it? I talked to a lot of people. The answers were all over the charts.

Pentecostals told me Satan indeed counterfeited all the gifts – gifts of tongues, healing, hospitality, mercy, etc., – and that, in itself, was proof they were still around. Evangelicals told me that only the normal gifts of the Spirit were currently operative. Before the Bible was published, we needed the weird gifts but, today the Scriptures have become God’s revelation which is (and rightfully so), the “living, breathing Word of God” (Hebrews 4:12). Fundamentalists were quite skeptical of all things experiential. If any behavior crossed that rational line, it was tossed out completely. And everybody used Scripture to support their arguments.

Once I was tanning on a beach when a couple of good people from Campus Crusade for Christ came up to me and asked, if I were to die “tonight,” would I go to heaven. I sat up and we had a wonderful conversation. At one point I asked one of them about the revelatory gifts of the Spirit – especially the gift of tongues. (I was particularly struggling with tongues.) The surfer dude gave me a very interesting look and, with a

twinkle in his eye, told me that I would have to seek those answers out for myself. What an amazing answer – probably the gift of wisdom!

For me it came down to the simple axiom: It's either all or nothing. I wasn't about to pull a Thomas Jefferson and decide what part of the Bible was "of God" and what part wasn't "of God." I had seen the normal gifts played out in powerful ways. What was good for one was good for all, I thought – even if I had serious intellectual struggles with them (or if the praxis of the gifts were not my particular cup of tea).

So I took him up on it. I prayed, read Scriptures, studied examples from Church history and tradition. It was evident. At the end of the day I came to the understanding that all the gifts of the Spirit were still valid and being poured out on the church today... Yes, even the weird ones.

### **Was Jesus Tongue-Tied?**

In the course of my research I found it interesting that over the course of His three-year ministry, there is no evidence that Jesus ever spoke in tongues. The Scriptures show Jesus exhibiting all the other gifts of the Spirit – everything from compassion to deliverance – but not tongues, nor their interpretation. This doesn't knock the weird gifts out of the game. He normally operated in the miraculous, revelatory activities of the kingdom. But it does make one cause for wonder.

Through the years I have come to believe Jesus did indeed had in spoke in his prayer language for the following reasons:

- ◆ He often retreated by himself to pray. We don't know what happened during those time of intercession, adoration, and communion but tongues may have been an expression of his worship.

- ◆ Scripture assures us that Jesus did a host of other things – teachings and miracles – that have simply gone unrecorded (John 21:25)
- ◆ Tongues were the first sign of the Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost – the first fruits of the Jesus’ own ministry.
- ◆ Additionally the early church regularly enjoyed the miraculous power of the Spirit as they preached the Word. Signs, wonders, miracles, conversions – along with persecutions – were daily occurrences in the growth of the Church.

Part of the trouble with accepting the more supernatural side of God’s *charisms* comes from our “first world” worldview. Part of my own unintended bias against the gifts had to do with the fact and simply because I was an American. Since then I’ve seen, by and large, the more technological (or “first world”) a culture is, the more likely it will lean on rational expressions of spirituality and less likely to participate into the power of the unseen. They may eventually resign any given situation or event to having a spiritual base, but it will not be their first go-to.

Other countries, what may be called “second” or “third world” cultures, are much more able to buy into a “middle world” understanding of what’s happening around them. They intuitively carry a spiritual understanding that blends within the material world and call it, *commonplace*. This world, sometimes called, the “excluded middle,” includes a normative belief in demons, curses, angels, and the like.

This latter understanding and recognition of the blending of the spirit world with the material world speaks of both God (who himself is a Spirit) and the incarnational extension of Christ, who either brought heaven to earth, or revealed heaven’s existence among us, depending on which way you look at it.

## Take Away

We are reminded the gifts of the Spirit – those we can mentally understand (such as mercy, teaching, helps, and administration), along with those that are more mystically centered (such as tongues, discernment of spirits, visions, dreams, prophecy), and so on – are equally given by God,<sup>18</sup> for the evangelizing and edification of kingdom,<sup>19</sup> and the extension of the ministry of Jesus (often called *The Great Commission*).

We need to take a hard look at the boundaries between normal and weird gifts and talk them as if they were just one thing. Instead of classifying them and ranking them and judging them, I prefer to see them like a savory stew hanging in a pot dangling over a robust fireplace. The meal is filled with all sorts of ingredients – from chunks of vegetables, roots, spices, perhaps even a little goat meat. The woman of the house dips her ladle deeply into the pot, as she desires, and various things bubble to the surface. Something like that.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Ephesians 4:8.

<sup>19</sup> See Ephesians 4:11-13.

<sup>20</sup> Consider also the rationale behind Jesus' teaching in Matthew 13:52. "He said to them, 'Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.'" This encourages a wholistic approach to the gifts, as treasures new and old, as we share the Word.

## 4

### FEELING GROOVY

In the New Testament there are hallmark Scriptures regarding the gifts of the Spirit. Perhaps this is the time to look at them. You can look them up for yourself.

1 Corinthians 1.7;12.1-14.40

Romans 1.11; 12:3-8

Ephesians 4.7-16

1 Timothy 4:14

2 Timothy 1.6

Hebrews 2.4

1 Peter 4:10-11

As you read through the lists you will soon sense a couple of things. You'll see each gift is proactive and has its part to play in the general scheme of things. Conversely, each gift provides an avenue wherein the *others* experience and receive the work of God in their lives. When a person is operating in his or her gifts it is a win-win situation: the Kingdom expands and God is revealed.

We'll take a look at how to discover (and recover) your gifts in the next chapter. First we need to spend a bit of time on management and motives in the actual usage of the gifts, and for all activities really. Many of us – after being filled with the Spirit, or

equipped with a new anointing – tend to bottle-rocket it. We are lit, the fuze reaches the powder, and we're off flying through the atmosphere with the greatest of ease, this way, that way; over here, over there – it doesn't matter. God is getting glorified (or so we think). All too soon we burn out with a fizzle, not knowing if there was any real bottle to the rocket.

I was a kid once. I know how they work. Anybody knows you put the bottle rocket in a bottle. (I once tried holding them and blasting them off in my hand. That didn't go over too well!). The point of the bottle was for trajectory, maximum height, and a bang that everyone could hear. In this section we are going to look at the bottles under our rockets – motives and energy – and make sure they are solidly in place before lift off.

### **I'm Late, I'm Late For A Very Important Date**

There is a lot of business in the church today. People are very busy doing very important things. Like busy beavers, or scurrying ants, the activities of the faithful can sometimes take on a level of business never intended by our Lord. While we are a motivated people group with a wonderfully urgent message for the world to hear, many are wrung out, drop dead tired, burning the paschal candle at both ends.

Why is that? We figure, if we don't do "it" nobody else will. The truth is that nobody else *can* do it because we are doing it all for them!

We have the dangerous potential to be the most codependent group of people on earth – and all for good reason, I might add. We've been gifted. We've been called.

We've been commissioned by Christ himself to get the good news out in every which way, shape and form. It's a high calling.

On the other end of the staff, we will miss it if we think of ourselves too highly. We're called "sheep" for a reason! Many of us give our lives to Christ after a tone of extreme heartache and pain. We need healing in our humanity. I'm all about being *wounded healers*. But it's okay to have a season of rest, too. In larger churches, especially, there is such a drive for more – more disciples, more stage presence, more programs, more missions – you name it. It's like a whirling wash machine, frothing over with bubbles and about ready to blow up.

Who is really doing the work here? God or us? Why are we so dang busy, so ferociously consumed, so rattled and drained of the abundant life that Jesus died to give us?

### **God's Pace in this Place**

This hit home with me recently. I did a stupid thing. I tried to lead my church at the same velocity as another church I led. The other church, however, was a resource-sized church in the Houston area. The place I'm in now is a family-centered church in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire.

Big difference.

I cried out to the Lord. *We needed to do this and now. What about this program? We're looking precious time. Where is the passion for excellence in this place?*

The Lord's voice was clear, directive, and loving. *Go at God's pace in this place.*

Since then I've throttled back, enjoying ministry and watching God unfold things in his good time, and at his good pleasure. And it's been wonderful.

It got me thinking. What is it that thing makes us busy as ever for Jesus, even to the point of avoiding sabbaths? Why is there a tendency to jump into froth, and keep the froth going in spite of the fact there is no detergent in the machine?

Perhaps we are working off our guilt from the past? Or perhaps we are subconsciously working for our salvation. Of course we know it's all about grace, but is that reflected in our activities? Through the years I've seen many well-intended folks bring the OT law into a NT culture. Even though they know they've been freed from the law they still have a "law mentality" (sometimes falsely defined as *passion*) which runs them down to the ground. In essence, nothing has changed for them. They simply switched one law for another.

It's almost as if we have exchanged the old laws of sin and death – rules and regulations we were first forced to obey, now have been replaced by God's amazing grace – with a new law which really doesn't look that much different from the old one. We have embraced such a high standard of Christian responsibility, action, and behavior that the well-defined line between salvation by grace and salvation by works has been blurred.

If you are prone to business, here's some questions for you:



Have I subconsciously switched the law of the OT with a law of the NT?



- ◆ If so, didn't Jesus die to free me from all that?
- ◆ Do I think that if I fail God, God fails?
- ◆ What's with all the strife? Why am I so very, very driven?
- ◆ Weren't the nails driven in far enough for me?

### **Should I Stay or Should I Go Now**

It's a hard line to walk – that line between grace and works. The joy of the Gospel is a compelling motivation to work our substance out, but at the end of the day his call to us needs to be balanced by this one all consuming fact: We are only human.

*(And, he has made us so.)*

Of course I can sit around on the sofa like I used to and smoke bongos of Thai-weed and listen The Eagle's play *Desperado* on the record machine. But all that has changed. Dude, this ain't no party. This ain't no disco. This ain't no fooling' around. This is the real deal: the infusion of God's love into the world. Let the whole world know: Jesus is alive!

I'm not alone. Perhaps you've had similar conflicting thoughts. We need to be passionate and help each other, be about the business of the church, share God's love day and night, go the second – no third – mile, jump into endless activities for the sake of "the call." It's what we're redeemed to do and besides, that's how Jesus did it...

Not so fast there, Mario. Step back from the Formula 3 vehicle and take a long, deep breath.

These are all good works and perhaps even stem from pure motives. Yet, when we're not operating from a platform of sabbath rest (not to mention God's leading), real damage can happen. It gets dicier when our commit to ministry lies outside the range of our spiritual gifts.

### **The Need is the Call – Really?**

On a deeper level many are forced to make choices between doing things simply because there is a need. Is this good? Or, on the other side of the coin, if no one steps in, do I step in simply because nobody else will?

It has been said that, "The need is the Call" – meaning that if you are aware of a need (anything from global warming to a squeaky door in the woman's bathroom) it is your duty to respond to it. When that urge to fix everything, to do everything, or be everyone's all in all rises up and vies for your attention, this provides a prime opportunity to both examine your motives and realign yourself with what Scripture says.

I can't speak to your motives. But Scripture describes a beautiful organism, each with its particular place and function. It's called the Body of Christ. The Body works best when each individual is grooving in his or her own gifts, and not stretch across boundaries simply because there is a need. For a wonderful description of how it all works, spend some time in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

But Bill, you may say, you don't understand...

- ◆ *If I don't do it, nobody will.*
- ◆ *You don't get it. They are just not doing it good enough.*

◆ *My pastor is clueless. We've always done it this way and I'm going to show him how we used to do it.*

And so the pushbacks begin.

If you want to see a healthy model on how to walk right past a needy situation, avoiding stepping into a thing because it's not "being done good enough," or avoiding the impulse to show someone how to "do it right," look at Jesus.

If anyone was aware of the unmet needs around him certainly he was. Did he heal all the lepers, raise all the dead people back to life, bless every child he saw? Did he give all his money to all the poor?

Of course not. Any why was that?

Short answer. He sought to remain true only to what he saw God doing. Nothing more, nothing less.

Jesus' ministry was entirely disciplined and sacrificial to that end. It was disciplined because he made choices which limited his activity to the work of the Father around him. It was sacrificial in that, while he could have fixed everything (and he knew it), he sacrificed his desires on for the greater thing, his Father's good pleasure.

How many times did Jesus see the true condition others? Always. How many times did he walk right passed them. Many times. Why didn't he help or heal everyone he saw? Couldn't he have made everyone whole? Why didn't he call down the legions of

angels to bail him out of the cup of crucifixion? Why does he still allow all manner of evil to infiltrate the world and its people in this day and age?

Because Jesus disciplined himself (and still does) sacrificially to the will of the Father. If the Father wasn't/isn't doing it, then Jesus wasn't/isn't doing it either.

“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”

John 5:19

That means, that for Jesus, the need was not the call. His first and foremost call was to flesh out what God was asking him to do. When we understand that to be our priority, too, everything changes. Freedom! Not only do we receive the grace to overlook the tyranny of the urgent, we are released from our need to singularly save the world.

### **Everybody Wants to Rule the World**

One would naturally think that, if everyone only did the few things they were called to do, there would be a lot of things left undone, but that's not the case. More work – and higher quality work – is actually accomplished when people intentionally limit themselves to a mere few activities, concentrating solely in their areas of giftedness.

There was a time in my life while at a large church in the Houston area where I was burning the proverbial Pascal candle at both ends. We were in a tremendous season of growth and the energies of the large staff weren't overwhelmed with how we could grow the church, but how we could stay ahead of the growth that was overwhelming the church! It was a problem most churches wish they had. Needless to say, I – being

responsible for music, ALPHA, small groups, prayer ministries, and adult education – in addition to being the father of two cheerleaders and carrying on a struggling relationship with my wife – was a donkey on the edge.

One night I was driving to an event with a super-saint mentality. I knew there would be worship, a teaching (which I conjured up at the last minute), and a time of ministry. It would be up to me to be the lightning rod, or so I thought. At this time in my life I was hopping from one event to the next, laying hands on this person, teaching deliverance here, prophesying there. I was so swopped up in the expectation that ministry would fall or rise based on what I brought to the table.

I took the final turn into the church and muttered under my breath, “Lord I need a vision, a word, or something – anything – to kick-start ministry into action tonight.”

Out of the blue (across the screen of my imagination) I at once saw a quaint, two-story house in the heart of the country. It was impeccable; flower gardens around the sides, beautiful lawns, with a white fence around the property. As I entered through the gate I noticed that it was all for show. The backside of the gate itself was rotten wood, barely held together. As I got onto the porch I saw it, too, was rotted with termites and years of neglect. The backside of the front door was splintered and falling apart as well. The closer I got to the quaint house in the country, the shabbier it became. It was all about “show,” and the deception of curb appeal.

“I get it.” I pocketed the vision in my mind for the ministry session. “You’re telling me there will be someone here tonight who looks great on the outside but is falling apart on the inside.” I mentally scanned the faces of those I knew who would be attending. “I wonder who that would be?”

The Lord's voice was instant and unforgettable. "It's you."

In an instant I was cut to the quick. There in the parking lot, car idling, I was once again reminded that I was not the super saint. Jesus was. And the presumption that it was up to me to bring something fresh and exciting to the table was totally wrong on so many levels.

### **Lord Lift Them Up Where They Belong**

Super saints (those who do everything perfect and are equally gifted to usher in the Second Coming of Christ...) do nothing but rob others of their own God-given ministry. When they back off it gives others the chance rise naturally into something they've always longed to do but have never had the opportunity to do because, in the words I've heard many times from those exploring their place in the church, "They are already doing it so much better than I every could."

When the super saint steps down, it's a win-win situation. They get a long-deserved rest and others rise to the place and find new fulfillment in his or her God-given destiny. True, this is a one man show. But that man is not you.

Jesus was a super saint, yet he resolved to look beyond the tyranny of the urgent, and invite others into the game. Sure, they would never do it as well as he could, but he seemed okay with that. Besides, he had bigger fish to fry. He was heading to the Cross and securing our salvation.

To some of us working in large churches, or who have been in the ministry rat-wheel for as long as we can remember, this is a freeing word! Guess what? He doesn't expect you to do it all. It's okay to rely on others, even if they get it "wrong." It not only teaches us humility but reveals his wondrous glory of the Body in action. With more people reflecting the multi-faceted radiance of the Savior, the world will see more of a wholistic witness of who he is.

### **Take Away**

In this chapter we've looked at the bottles of our rockets. True impact of the Lord's investment in us comes from a combination of his giftedness and the way we do being human.

I've spoken about keeping the priority of being about the Father's business only, even if you know you can do it better – or perhaps more relevant, even though you've been doing it forever and he's calling you into a different season.

We are human and broken. Much of that plays into the way we feel called to do church. It's good to pull back and consider why we do what we do? Is it out of guilt, convenience, skill, or giftedness. These are reflections only you can consider. At the end of the day, it's about calling. *Are you in his particular calling for your life, at this time and at this place?* If so, press in, invest, train others, grab it by the tassels. If not, gracefully pull away, knowing that God will fill the gap through another.

## 5

### THE BLUE ROOM

In the last chapter we talked about the backside of the coin – the pitfalls and red flags of stepping into the purposes of God through our giftedness. Perhaps more than anything else, the bottles which give us trajectory and stability – our motives and management of energy – will have more of a lasting impact on others than anything else we do. When people see God in us, they need to see health in us as well.

Who wants to join up with someone wired on Red Bull, dark bags under their eyes because they've been so busy doing ministry, and not time to spend with you because their schedule won't allow it?

I'm reminded of a humorous limerick:

*Mary had a little lamb  
Her life was rich and deep  
She got saved and joined the church  
And died for lack of sleep!*

When a person is moving in the pace of the Lord, operating in those gifts that God has given, there is a wonderful witness that emerges – almost like a fragrance. I'm reminded here of Judith MacNutt, who ministers powerfully, naturally, and in no rush whatsoever. Yet her gracefulness shakes the foundations of hell.



People often look at people like her and wonder, “How did she get like that? She’s so mature, so in tune with God’s Spirit.”

She got there through years of discerning. She may have read books, went to conferences, and invested in her walk with the Lord. Most likely, however, she merely listened – *listened* to the Spirit in her heart. One day she stepped out. She may have blown it here and there, but she did it again and again and God saw the purity of her heart. He essentially said, “Judith, you have been faithful in little things, I am going to make you faithful in bigger things.”

In this bit we’ll take a look on how one can discover one’s giftedness. (Once that is realized, faith begins. ) I’d also like to speak to those who – at one time in their life – were prolific in his or her gifts, but no longer swim in those streams (for whatever the reason). If that is you, we’ll talk about how to get back right back where you started from.

### **Hand in Glove**

As alluded to previously, we all have [potentially] all the gifts of the Spirit. Reasons for this were discussed. However, for the Lord to invite you into an area of giftedness which is unfamiliar to you, it is rare and usually only occurs when no one else is on hand to do the job. Each one of us has our own unique gift mix – a wondrous dynamic conglomeration integrating personality, temperament, experience, etc. with the Spirit’s infilling to present that all perfect you to the world as you share his love naturally and joyfully in the anointing he’s given.

That's our sweet spot, the place we need to stay. I wonder what the place would look like if everybody simply stayed in their sweet spot? Perhaps that's a bit of the reason why the Lord anoints us when we are in that groove, and lessens the anointing when we are not. In that anointing is his invitation, his call to press deeper into the area of our specialty.

### **I Am Who You Say I Am**

If God only calls us into things that lie in the general area of our giftedness, how can we discern our general area of our giftedness? In short, how can we know our spiritual gifts?

There are numerous online spiritual gift inventories. Some are extremely complex and break everything down in to categories and subcategories. Some inventories ignore the weird gifts and major on the normal gifts. Other are basic and, rather than define what is what for you, reveal the general trajectory of gift, mission, and call. You can find them all online.

Over the years I have developed a couple of flagpoles that additionally help people in this process, which I've shared below. As you read through them, I recommend being outright honest with your reflections, perhaps even pausing devotionally in asking God to highlight that which is true. Conversely, if the love isn't flowing, have the grace not to force it. This is all about grace.

### **We Have All Been Here Before, We Have All Been Here Before**

Pause for a moment and recall a time in your life when you were particularly struck with the Presence of God.

Get back to that.

I don't mean necessarily geographically, but spiritually. Think of that time, place, season in your life where you were most struck with the electric experience of your heavenly Father, that place where you first captured the joy of your salvation.

*Where were you? Who were you with? What were you doing? Were you praying? Were you witnessing? Were you on the mission field, behind an instrument, receiving prayer, taking Communion?*

Make intentional decisions to get back to that, that thing that so captured your heart back then. Find a place like that in your present day life and do that. And see what happens.

A friend of mine was filled with the Holy Spirit and converted while taking Communion one day. Now he is a lay eucharistic minister in church. He gives the Eucharist to people each Sunday and loves it. It brings a real authentic joy to his heart. Why? Because he got right back where he started from. He is ministering out of the same "place" that God met him.

A bit of warning here: While it's important to get back to that place, do not try to replicate or recreate it for the sake of reliving some precious memory of the past. Here I'm reminded of "steeple chasers" that spend their entire life seeking to recreate the buzz of their first transfiguratory event. Problem there is that you're dangerously close to idolatry and that's bad.

It's not quite an "if you build it they will come," thing, but it does demand a demeanor (sometimes geographical, but that's rare) which aligns your heart with that first significant date, the moment of your first love.

### **What's That Buzz, Tell Me What's A-Happening?**

As you consider the endless list of gifts from Scripture (which I see as incomplete, something we'll touch on later), or as you reflect upon the multitude of activities you've engaged in within and without the church, ask yourself, "What gifts create a real buzz in my soul? Which gifts do I dream about doing? What things – when I see others doing them – do I find myself thinking, 'I would love to be able to do that?'" When you've identified that buzzy-inner resonance place, dare to ask God if you could do that, too.

Buy books about it, sign up for seminars about it, fly across the country if you have to. You might know someone who's doing it. Ask them if you can be their shadow for a season. Learn all you can about it. Become accountable with someone who is doing it.

Contrary to popular belief, God is not a celestial killjoy. He actually has been known to give someone the desire of their heart. It is appropriate to desire certain gifts.<sup>21</sup> There is a good case that God actually implants your desires to accordance with the gifts he has given you. Thus, a person who longs to teach may actually have a desire to teach. These desires lie deep within who we are and God delights in giving us the desires of our hearts.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:31.

<sup>22</sup> See Psalm 20:4 and Psalm 37:4.

### **Prune for Fruit**

Take a good look at the fruit that is being generated by the activities you are currently engaged with. What is growing? What is dying? Do things that install growth. Prune the rest.

### **Everywhere I Go**

Gifts are in no way restricted to church on Sunday. While the Bible says they are given in part to equip the saints for ministry and to heal and bless and so on, the fullness of his Spirit given at Pentecost was by-and-large for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Mission, by definition, happens outside the walls of the church.

On the playground, at work, behind a cash register, or under a chassis. God is there, outside the Sunday box.

I know of a woman who has the gift of compassion. Compassion is the heart of God, and Jesus ministered all the time from his heart of compassion. What does this woman do in real life? She is a social worker. A perfect fit, hand in glove.

Another friend works in the oil business. He has the gift of evangelism. He doesn't stand at the water cooler and pass out Bibles. But in every conversation he meet others with the willingness to share Christ, with or without words.

These are situations where one's spiritual gift(s) leaks through the [secular] vocation of the individual. I have often preached that God's heart is much bigger out there (pointing out the stained-glass windows) than in here (pointing to the congregation).

We get it backwards. We think the gifts are for us, for the redeemed. When others get saved, we think, then they, too, can get in on the good stuff. But that's in direct contradiction to Scripture. The Spirit reaches the outsider through gifted people like us and they hear/experience God's love not when they come into our buildings, but right where they are. We are a sad place if all we have from God is incestially passed around to church members without showering the world with his love.

### **Do You Hear What I Hear? Do You See What I See?**

Listen to people. It doesn't matter if they are Christians or not. If what they see is your true self doing it – or even heading in the direction of that which you're called to do – they will see it and call it out.

One Sunday I showed up in the pulpit in a very casual, relaxed, almost whimsical state of being. I shared Christ, how wonderful he is, joked around a bit, did a little transparent sharing, and invited God to minister to the congregation afterwards. No big deal. It all seemed very natural to me.

After the service a, older woman approached me. "Bill?"

"Yes, Arden?"

She gazed up to me with blue twinkling and piercing eyes. "You are doing exactly what you should be."

I hadn't thought of it as that before. I thought it would have to be a lot harder.

Point is: listen and believe what others' are seeing in you. This is where humility comes in.

## Reflections

Reflect: What do people see in you? When have they encouraged you? When have they discouraged you? People often see our potential, or God's stirring in us, more than we can.

Shortly after I had "crossed-over" and surrendered to Christ, I was speaking quite emphatically to one of my roommates on the sofa, sharing with her how I came to believe in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. The whole time I was speaking she just stared at me like I was from another planet. She, herself, was *not* a believer, and a dabbler in Buddhism. At the end of my testimony I slumped back on the sofa.

"So, what do you think?"

She paused, then said, "You're good. Bill, you ought to be a pastor. I've got to go to work." And she pick up her purse and headed out the door.

At the time, that was the last thing I wanted to hear. I mean, I thought, "A 'pastor?' What does that have anything to do with becoming a Christian?"

Additionally, and over the span of the net 10 years, I had no less than three priests or pastors pull me aside and pretty much tell me the same thing. Believing that was God's direction for me was difficult, as in those days I had real trust issues with other people (healed during this process). It was a real growing curve. As I look back on that, however, the big "aha" was my one roommate who saw the thing before it ever happened. Even though she was not a confessing believer in Christ, God used her to guide me into who I am today – a priest and pastor.

## Intentional Alignment

Earlier I suggested the falling of the Spirit at Pentecost was for the continuation of the ministry of Jesus, which has happened – and is happening. Additionally, I mentioned the ministry of Jesus was fueled by a specific anointing and calling he had. This was the overriding unction of Christ.<sup>23</sup> I'll bullet them here:

- ◆ Good news to the poor
- ◆ Liberty to captives
- ◆ Sight to blind
- ◆ Release of oppressed

In other words, this is Jesus' self description of the call of God on his life, and the favored anointing he chose to work within. The above activities would be happening when kingdom life is revealed through him, and they were. These would be the hallmarks of God's love revealed – and they still are.

As Christians – little Christ's filled with the same Spirit and calling as Christ – this describes the gantry, the blast off point, from where all kingdom ministry begins. Fleshing out this stuff takes wisdom and a little reading between the lines, yet these are the hallmarks of who we are and what we are all about, simply by virtue who we are in Christ.

How does this play into discovering my specific place in ministry?

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<sup>23</sup> See Isaiah 61:1ff and Luke 4:18.



I grew up in Cape Canaveral, Florida, and watched countless missiles blasting off the launch pads. Each rocket lifted up from the same place. Some took a slow ascent over the Atlantic, others seemed to fly more southward. The thing they all had in common was – regardless of the trajectory of the flight – they all started from a common launch pad.

Luke 4:18-19 is our common launch pad, if you will. It reads like this:

“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.”

Here is the ground of who we are in the Lord, our common beginning, for all things *ministry*. Just as a ship lost at sea gains direction from the lighthouse, making readjustments to set its course aright, this Scripture does the same for us.

If you are fumbling around still seeking that sweet spot in the Lord, might I suggest you realign yourself with the above passage? Read it through again, slowly.

This was the heart and soul of where the Spirit was with Jesus. If that same Spirit is in us (the Spirit of Jesus) – which it is – then you can be assured that some part of your life in Christ will need to reflect that same anointing.

It won't come all at once. But as you simply align some thing – some one thing – with his anointing, things will begin to click. Clarity will reign. It will be then when your trajectory of ministry is grounded in the rock of Christ.

### **Take Away**

Here we've looked at the gift-lists as outlined in Scripture. We've noted that not everyone has the all the gifts, and God is all the bigger for it. We've additionally seen that God is revealed to others through our gifts. Lastly I've shared a few ideas on how to begin discerning what your gift mix could be. As I encouraged earlier, spend some time in silence, reflecting and praying over your history, dreams, and times when you most experience the love of God. When you've found that, sacrifice it all to get back to that place.

In the next chapter we'll take a look at God's prerogative to call out any gift, entirely depending upon what he thinks at given time. The audacity of it all! I guess, as my long time mentor Mike Flynn used to say, "I guess he thinks he's God!"

## 6

### **ALL IN US**

The idea that we carry the potential for all the gifts of the Spirit can be a bit humbling. More than that, when we realize that God has the prerogative to call forth any gift he deems necessary, for any situation, as ever needed, that really can be intimidating. Who wants to step into something they've never done before (especially if it's public). That being said, we shouldn't be surprised if, from time to time, we find ourselves in uncharted territory; we find ourselves being called to step into places that lie outside of our normal MO.

#### **The Sounds of Silence**

In my early twenties I was working on a kibbutz farming cotton. It was a fabulous experience. On Saturdays I attended the *Narkis Baptist Center* where Christians from all around the world gathered to worship the Lord. Those services were instrumental in my over-compassing understanding of the Body of Christ, regardless of denomination.

One Saturday morning the Pastor invited the congregation to share any words, images, visions, and so on that would serve to edify the assembly gathered. "When the Lord prompts you, just stand up, there where you are, and share what you're getting from your seat. Be sure to speak up so everyone can hear you," he said.

At once I had a vivid impression which I knew was from God. Along with that came the fear that he was wanting me to stand up and share the impression with the 250+ other people in the room – something completely out of the question for me. The

whole idea of standing up and saying a “thus saith the Lord,” just sort of freaked me out. Up to that point I had never done anything like that before. “Besides,” I argued to Jesus. “You don't understand, Lord. Prophecy isn't my spiritual gift.”

A long period of silence followed, during which I went through intense internal tension. It seemed like everybody in the room was waiting for me to stand up and share “the word.” I resisted. Still we waited. It was excruciating. I sat there thinking, “Lord, you're just going to have to get somebody else to do this thing because I'm not going to move.” More time passed. Peoples' shoes scuffed on the floor, they sighed, and cleared their thoughts. A rooster crowed. Everybody in the room – even heaven itself – were all waiting for me.

Tick tock, tick tock...

In my mind I saw what was like a Star Wars story. You know like it is in the beginning where the words scroll from large to small to the top of the screen? I knew God wanted me to simply read what I saw. The problem was the words ran out. I couldn't tell what he wanted me say and I needed the full story unless I would stand up and make a total fool of myself.

But he was saying, “This is about faith, Bill. Just stand up, start the thing, and I'll meet you in the moment. You're someone who likes adventure. What gives?”

He had me there. All the same I resisted. “I need to see the whole thing.”

As I struggled in the seat with clinched fingers, I could take it no longer. I had exhausted my resources in resisting the Spirit's prompting through my pounding heart.

"No, nada, not me, absolutely not. This is not my gift."

I suppose God took me at my word. Just then (and much to my relief) the man *next* to me began to squirm around in his seat uneasily. He let out a long sigh and slowly rose to his feet.

"I've never done anything like this in my life," clearing my throat. "Besides, prophecy is not my gift."

And there it went. He began speaking the same impression God gave me to share, but he completed the thing, all of which was followed by a number of "Amens" and Hallelujahs," I might add!

I was unnerved. "Dude - you could have done that!" As the service continued, I slowly realized that God was not mocked, nor was his purposes for that gathering was stunted. He always gets his way. It's just that because of my own refusal to step into the adventure, I lost out on the blessing. Sure God got his word out, and he invited me into the thing, but at the end of the day I lost out on a wonderful opportunity – the opportunity to do something big for God, all because I insisted, "I don't have that particular gift."

So much for human reasoning.

Since then I've come to believe God calls us into situations that warrant actions that we are either "ungifted" or uncomfortable with, or both. We just have to accept it and deal with it. God has the prerogative to use anyway he deems fit because we are, in a crude sense, his investment. He has purchased us, gifted us, and unscripted us for his Mission. As we increasingly surrender to this reality we will have more opportunities to step into the thing, and be all the more encouraged as we see the fruit of the Spirit ripening through the greater surrender.

### **With or Without You**

It's helpful to know the general trajectory of ones giftedness, but to carry a "hold on loosely" mentality about them. The Spirit is Lord over the gifts, not you. When we walk in this understanding it opens a whole new arena of adventure and usability in the world around us. It takes the lid off and creates a life wherein all we have is his, and we live for the diverse ways he will use us for his purposes each and every day.

Bottom line is that God has stuff he needs to do and he gives us the opportunity to be a part of that plan. If we bail (for any reason) he'll move onto someone else. Bailing on the opportunity doesn't mean feeling ill-prepared to step into it – most all Biblical heroes did feel that way – it means a full shut down, an "absolutely not, no thank you please, it only makes me sneeze" heart attitude against anything that invites us to venture out of the box.

So be on the lookout (this redundant but so important): God has the right to call out any gift in us at any time, as he deems needing. If we choose (like I did) to quench the

Spirit's leading,<sup>24</sup> he will be disappointed, but it's not like we'll lose our salvation or anything. We only lose the privilege of being his chosen instrument for such a time as then. Don't think too big of yourself. You will never hold him up. If we say, "No thank you, Lord - not today, I have a headache," he'll just move around the room until He finds someone more willing to engage in the adventure. Maybe you don't think of yourself as someone who could do big things for God. And you are not. Perhaps, better said, you are somebody wherein God can use to do big things for others.

### **Take Away**

So this short chapter's summary comes in the form of a gentle admonishment to maintain a posture of ongoing openness to the Holy Spirit, which ideally should be nurtured and cultivated in the believers heart. The more we are continuously aware, the more we will be consciously invited into adventure with him.

This is one reason Paul writes that we should be *continuously filled* with the Spirit - see the Greek behind Ephesians 5:17-19 – as it opens us up to the gentle ongoing flow of the Father. (Of course, we still have our "will" and "will not" but that's up to us to process that.)

We've also looked at the fact that God has a plan, and we have the opportunity to be a part of that plan – with its manifold blessings – at his invitation. Yet, as the story illustrates, God's plan is God's plan and it will go forth with or without us. It won't hold him up if we refuse to cooperate. Not at all. He will simply move on and we will lose out on the blessing to have been a part of it.

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<sup>24</sup> See 1 Thessalonians 5:18-20.

How about this: Next time you sense the leading of the Spirit in anything – and I mean in *anything* – why not take the risk and step into the thrill of it all? Maybe it will be later today, or in the morning, or even as you grocery shop later in the week – no matter. You game?

*Father, increase my faith to step into your invitation and purposes as you see fit. In Christ I pray. Amen.*



## 7

### MYTHS OF THE SUPER-SAINT

Many gifts of the Holy Spirit are familiar to us. We've seen them around us ever since birth – people administrating, teaching, sharing hospitality, showing compassion, and serving. When choosing a life vocation the ideal is to wind up in a profession that integrates one's gifts with one's work. Even if you are in a vocation where there is seemingly no place to be in your giftedness, look again. As mentioned earlier, gifts leak. Wherever we go, they come with us.

#### **Skilled or Gifted?**

I am under the belief that skills and gifts are two different animals. God can use skills – and anoint them as powerful avenues of blessing. We see this all over the Hebrew Scriptures, especially with those anointed to construct the Tabernacle of Moses. Yet, God can also give gifts to people in areas that they would have never dreamed of having. Take a TV camera man, fill him with the call of God through the Spirit and now you have a mega-Church pastor ministering to thousands each and every Sunday!

Saying that, my experience has been one's skills and gifts within those he's called are "mixed" (not shaken) into a wondrously unique blend, not unlike ingredients in a recipe. Take a dash of natural ability, a zesty personality, a cup of the desires of the heart, and a cup of living water and there you have it!

While many want to believe in and operated the so-called "dynamic" gifts of the Spirit, few of us have seen these gifts in action in ways that are healthy. We've all seen gifts used in abusive or satirical *Saturday Night Live* pieces. There will always be abuses –

along with the slamming of reputations of gifted people – from the media. A *Mad-TV* episode will much more readily take a shot at a faith healer than a person who teaches in a biology class, or works in a food pantry. A bit of that stigma has crept into the church as well. Through it all caution needs to be taken else we toss the baby out with the bath-water!

So let's spend some time taking a close look at the revelatory gifts – specifically how they work. We'll look at a few myths associated with them, those gifted with them, and seek to even them out on an even keel with the other [*normal*] gifts of the Spirit.

### **Spirit in The Sky**

The so-called revelatory gifts are "revelatory" because their operation depends solely on information that is given, or "revealed," by God in order for the gift to work.

Biblical lists of revelatory gifts include: words of knowledge, visions, dreams, prophecy, the interpretation of tongues, wisdom, and discernment of spirits. As Anglicans, we believe that God is in a constant incarnational Presence with his creation (earth, wind, sky, animals, and people) and has the potential to reveal himself pretty much in any way he pleases. But, for our purposes, we're sticking with the Biblical list.

People with a revelatory gift(s) tend to be more intuitive and imaginative, as revelations often stir the heart or quicken the imagination in the individual. Those gifted many times may have complementary, or accompanying, gifts in the areas of healing, miracles, and exorcism. God works through the revelatory gifts in powerful

ways to get under what is seen, to address the heart of the matter – whether it be a nation, a group of people, or an individual.

Let's take a look at two myths commonly generated about the revelatory gifts of the Spirit.

### Myth #1

#### **Here He Comes to Save the Day**

*People with revelatory gifts are superhuman. They have it all together. Rainbows and unicorns follow them wherever they go.*

While I have always believed that God reveals insight, visions, directions, and other supernatural directives to people, many of us have also believed that the people receiving these directives “from God Almighty” were Super Christians, you know people who fast 40 days twice a year, never watch TV, never dance, and avoid brew pubs.

How silly.

Like everything we receive from God, it is grace. Grace happens on the small and the large, the saint and the sinner, the righteous and unrighteous. Even in his distribution of spiritual gifts we are working within the realm unmerited favor. There is nothing we can do to attain, or even deserve, his unspeakable gift (which is why highly gifted people can do equally highly creepy things).

Of course, if we are hell-bent on doing creepy things we will lose the capacity for intimacy with God, the source of our giftedness. That happens from time to time. A person who grieves the Holy Spirit loses their spiritual sensitivity to cooperate with God, and we are warned not to let that happen. Perhaps the saddest witness of the church is when enormously gifted people make poor decisions with their life and – in the so going – continue on in their “anointed ministries,” as if nothing ever happened. The results of this are so damaging. Not only is the witness of Christ tainted, but the person himself (without loving accountability) can be deceived in believing God is still on him and thus carry on ministry as if nothing ever happened, even in spite of the fact that fruit has shriveled and God’s hand is no longer on him.<sup>25</sup>

Even so, the gifts of God remain irrevocable.<sup>26</sup> God waits, he doesn’t retract. He waits for the day when that man or woman who took the fall, with the help of the Spirit, is restored and healed in his grace. When that happens (and it might take a decade to fully get back into the groove) God again releases his favor and the end of the thing may actually be greater than the beginning.

This was Peter’s case and Jesus’ words to Peter were filled with hope, a certain future, and in no way spoke against who he was, nor his God-given potential. Listen to the words of Christ to him, and perhaps to you. “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to have you, to sift you like wheat, but I have pleaded in prayer for you that your faith should not completely fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen and build up the faith of your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32, TLV).

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<sup>25</sup> For a quick study on the admonishment and results of grieving the Spirit see Ephesians 4:25 and 29-31; Judges 16:20b.

<sup>26</sup> See Romans 11:29.

## **All Shook Up, or 'Honey, Isn't that the Dude Who We Saw in Church the Other Day?'**

Even with all that, we still have the propensity to either judge the fallen out of the kingdom or elevate the "unfilled" to the right hand of the Father. For many of us – especially in our ministry platforms with smoke-filled, pyrotechnical, laser-enhanced services, it's easy to see a person who is front stage and center as a superhuman kind of kid.

There he is, eyes shining, face glistening, tossing words of knowledge around with such accuracy that people are shaking and baking under his trembling hands. Here, there, and everywhere through the service this guy can do no wrong. He is immensely and authentically the real deal.

The next day you see this same dude at Target. Your first impulse is to stand in awe of him, perhaps even avoid him because you don't want him to read your mail. As you rub your eyes you see a much different man. There he stands, hunched over the counter at the register, shirt half-way hanging out of his torn blue jeans, patting down his pockets for his reading glasses and fumbling with loose change clanging to the floor and rolling in every conceivable corner of the room aisle – all the while holding up a long line of frustrated shoppers.

What's with that? Wouldn't you think someone with a direct link you with the Almighty God of the Universe and spoke into the very threads of your spiritual DNA would have known how much money his shopping would cost and would have somehow

supernaturally arranged his cash-flow before he even walked into the department store?

No. Not really, not really at all.

## **Human**

Albeit a mystery, *like God in us*, one's personalty, skills, and even mental state can be in stark contrast with that same person's spiritual gift.

Contrary to popular belief, people who operate in the revelatory gifts do not have a corner on the spiritual market. They are just ordinary people like you and me. Sure, they've been graced with gifts that perhaps seem more extravagant than the others, but they are using their gifts in the same proportion of faith that someone else may have when using their gifts, say the gift of helps, for example.

A friend mine from North Hollywood was a lead singer in a metal band. He came home one day creating his ribs because he had broken a couple at a drum circle earlier that afternoon. When the time was right I got to pray for him. During that prayer God healed his ribs and revealed himself to him in a way that he gave himself to Christ. A month later we were talking on the steps about life, the Faith, and stuff in general.

He said to me, "It must be really easy for you, Bill. I mean, you've been doing this for decades. I'm just a beginner."

I knew what he meant, but he had it wrong. "No, Garrett, let me fill you in. No matter how long you've been doing it, it's always about stepping out in faith. It's never

duplicated. You can't say the same prayer now as you said yesterday with the same outcome. Sure, I may have the experience of watching God move through my hands, but whenever I step into pray for someone, like I did you that day, it's all about faith. I really never know what I'm getting myself into. Many times its a bigger surprise to me than to whom I'm praying with!"

You may be a righteous rocker or a holy roller (thank you Larry Norman), a sage of sages or a new born baby – it makes no matter. The Scripture emphasizes, it is impossible please God without initiating faith. Take a glance at 2 Corinthians 5:7 and Hebrews 11:6 for that. Each ministry situation is different and demands we step into it in proportion to our faith. This has nothing to do with experience, being skilled, or even self-confidence and everything to do with faith (the arena where God's kingdom moves).<sup>27</sup>

That levels the field.

## Myth #2

### **He Sees You When You're Sleeping**

*A person with revelatory gifts can see through the dark chambers of your soul and see everything about you – past, present, and future – all at one mind-blowing single glance.*

There is a sense that to be "read" by revealer is to become stripped, standing naked and trembling like a leaf before the all-knowing one.

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<sup>27</sup> See Romans 12:6.

Only God can do that.

Yet the stigma remains. We could be embarrassed because they know our secret sins. They know about – no, more than that, they are mystically there, united with us and re-experiencing the thing – at high school when you and whats-his-name went skinny-dipping in the 10th grade and locked braces at Walden Pond.

And, then, there was that other thing... They can probably see that, too.

### **I Saw What You Did Last Night**

Another common stigma associated with those with revelatory giftedness makes us equally uncomfortable being in their presence. It sounds something like this, "If this mighty man of God is 100% accurate in addressing 'this particular issue' in my life, then he must know every particular issue in my life."

*Gulp.*

This can be a bit intimidating to even the best of us, yet easy to believe. God shoots for the bulls-eye every time. People gifted in revelation speak with such pinpointed, prophetic, accuracy that it is natural to assume they know all about everything.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

When I minister in the revelatory gifts, for example, it's not like I'm seeing into the life of the victim, performing a Spock-like mind-melding map of the entirety of the spiritual interior of the person – as if I was a mechanic examining the inside of an



engine and then, after seeing all the gunk, determine what's wrong. It's nothing like that at all.<sup>28</sup>

It can be very intimidating. The uncanny prophetic pin-pointedness of the living Word can be so "spot on," so "right," that it often takes the person receiving ministry by surprise. "How could she have known that about me? I've never shared that with anybody!"

It's easy to assume that the prophet knows everything about us – and I mean everything. It makes us want to slide a tails between our legs and move slowly away from the minister.

So not true.

That's simply the nature of the Word of God. It's gets right in there, right between the bone and marrow of the situation. But God is love. He's not out to tear you down, but build you up. He never embarrasses but always encourages.

This how it works for me: I will get a picture of something – one thing – one thing only. Yet that one thing turns out to be so pertinent, with such laser keen accuracy that they feel completely known. They think, "If he is seeing this about me, then he's probably seeing all the other crap, too!" People with revelatory gifts need to assure those we pray for with love and compassion: It's always very limited. It's the only thing we see.

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<sup>28</sup> See Hebrews 4:12.

## **Broad Brushes of Beauty**

There are times I need to really look at the vision for a while and seek to decipher and sort of piece together what it all means before I say anything. Other times, I get something and share what I'm getting and – in the process of speaking what I'm getting – the picture fills in and the interpretation of the revelation sort of forms on my lips as I'm describing it in faith. Either way, sitting under the ministry of a humble prophet should be like sitting at the feet of Jesus. It should be loving, poignant, uplifting, purposeful, and even affirming of his grace in you up to that point.

Once I was praying with a woman whom I didn't know. From the moment I placed my hand on her head I was struck with a picture of the interior of an attic. As I looked around the room I noticed it was perfectly framed with strong lumber – a lot of strong lumber. Some of the beams old, but a good part the framework was new wood. I stood in silence for about 30 seconds, asking God what this meant.

Then I got it. I looked into her eyes and smiled. "My gosh," I said. "God has really done a wonderful work in you, hasn't he?" The woman began to cry tears of gratefulness. "Yes, yes, he has!" It was beautiful.

Now I didn't see the specific beams of wood needing to be replaced, nor did I see the reason they needed to be replaced in the first place. It was broad, beautiful, and affirmed the ongoing work in her heart.

## **Don't Touch That**

God rarely violates the spiritual integrity and preciousness of one of His children, even when it would be easy to do so.

Take the case of the woman caught in adultery. There was no embarrassment, no public condemnation – only forgiveness (and advice not to do it again).<sup>29</sup> Other instances God could have really hammered it in, but he didn't. That's not our God. He was kind, revealing only enough to make the sinner realize his or her and that was it. Jesus was never without grace and always without condemnation.<sup>30</sup> He is always out to heal, encourage, deliver, and bless.

Be at peace, be rest assured. You can trust God in the actions of a person gifted in revelation, especially if he or she is your pastor, or one with whom you are in relationship with. The heart of the Father is not to tear down his children but build us up into the fulness of the stature of his Son. He does all that through revealing compassion through the Holy Spirit.

### **Take Away**

In this chapter we've looked at two myths regarding those who have revelatory gifts and a bit on how the gifts work in a healthy ministry situation.

Revelatory gifts are no greater, or lesser, than any of the other gifts of the Spirit. Indeed, there are no more, or no less, extravagant gifts of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul likens those gifted with various gifts to varying parts of the body, such as eyes and as feet and maintains all are essential.<sup>31</sup> All gifts are equally valid and equally important

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<sup>29</sup> See John 8:3-11.

<sup>30</sup> Other stories include the women of Luke 7:37-50 and John 4:7-26.

<sup>31</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:4.

– as they are all originate from God,<sup>32</sup> for his purposes, and as we've seen are equal in footing, requiring proportional amounts of faith to exercise them.

We're also reminded that enormously gifted people fumble around at cash registers, get people mad, and even struggle with deeply embedded issues. Some have even have their laundry aired on prime time television.

The Apostle Paul puts it all in perspective:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay,  
to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

1 Corinthians 4:7

Next chapter we continue our discussion by talking about the business of discerning what the Lord is doing, or saying, regardless of one's giftedness, or gift mix.

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<sup>32</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:7.

## 8

### HEAVY REVVIES

Straddling the fence between so-called charismatic and non charismatic ways to do life is a real dance. One day I pray the Church will rise to the ecumenical posture wherein all gifts – indeed, the whole of life itself – would be deemed as authentic and acceptable ways to encounter the risen Lord. But we are light years away from that. This high-brow skepticism from both sides of the fence is damaging the witness of Christ to the wider world.

Fran and Frank (not their real names) were prayer warriors in church. They prayed for others regularly, had a growing youth program, and were eye-witnesses to the power of the Spirit pulsating through their hands and changing the life's of others. One day they heard a teaching by a convincing pastor who discarded their entire experience as being "not of God." Subsequently, they left their old church for the new one.

One evening Fran and Frank stopped by my house for (what I thought would be) a nice reunion meal, a time to catch up and share where life had taken us. As the evening wore on it was evident they had another agenda: to tell me I was of the devil.

Sincere? Yes. Deceived? Equally yes.

That was the last time I saw Fran and Frank – as their new church posturing was to avoid fellowship with those who were deceived and lost and heretical.

### **Too Hot, Too Hot Baby**

Part of Fran and Frank's story was that they had been so caught up in the signs and wonders movement – indeed perhaps idolizing it on some level – that they had succumbed to its abuse, an easy pitfall of “walking in the Spirit.” Extending the compassion of God through traditional venues such as hospitality is safe, predictable, and framed within a sense of control. It's easy to see why revelatory gifts can be avoided by one's doctrine, theology, or simply because there is a sense of loss of control.

It's safer to be this way, rather than that way.

There is a piece of Fran and Frank's story that rings true. And we've all seen it. Revelatory gifts have got to be the most misunderstood gifts of the Spirit. They can be misused. They can be manipulative. They can be creepy, unpredictable, abusive, and downright rude. In short, they can ruin a life.

And all this in the Name of Jesus.

In spite of all the pitfalls and dangers, Jesus used them, the apostles used them, and many of the church fathers used them. They've been the centerpiece of every revival in history, and – as I mentioned earlier – a vast majority of the worldwide Body of Christ in our day and age actively engage in the gifts of the Spirit – all of the gifts of the Spirit, including the revelatory/supernatural gifts.

The vast majority of our Church is south of the Equator, in global communities with a worldview of spiritualism build into the very fabric of their culture and/or belief system. Converts to Christianity in South America and Africa, for example, may cross over having had significant exposure to the cults and/or occult pagan practices. These demonic strongholds have the crippling ability to maintain a powerful hold on the person, even through one's conversion. A person wishing to be freed from such evil power needs a manifestation of holy power to intervene in ways that a non-charismatic theology couldn't touch. For them, it's the only way out.

Once I was in route from one Ugandan village to another with a group of seven or eight. There we were walking on a well-trodden trail, a corn field to our left and a small village to our right when, from one of the huts, a man screamed and waving a machete, ran all around the courtyard, sending chills up and down my spine.

Our guide looked back with a smile. "Don't worry about him. He's possessed by a devil."

They understand the realm of the spirit because it's engrained in their culture and, as they've crossed over into the kingdom of God, they have brought that awareness with them. This was the awareness of the culture of Jesus as well.

Life in the Spirit includes the acceptance and operation of the gifts of the Spirit. They continue to be powerful avenues wherein God blesses, heals, equips, and anoints his followers to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. In the days to come we will need to depend heavily on the discernment of the Spirit (as opposed to our own skill, experience, or logic) to navigate an increasingly deceitful society as we near the return of Christ. As the increase of evil escalates, the power of

God needs to be there as well, meeting evil and ungodliness at every step. As in the days of Moses, ungodly “priests” will be doing miracles in the name of the gods and will deceive many. We, like Moses, need to be prepared to raise the standard in both the works and words of the only true God. Our lasting works need to overshadow – even devour – all the futile works of the enemy.<sup>33</sup> This type of discernment and miracles of power can only happen in Christians who have embraced the Spirit of God through the totality of the gifts he provides.

### **A Question of Balance**

The emphasis in the life of Jesus and others on relying on the revelatory avenue of the Father's love to shower the world with the Gospel is not about highlighting a certain category of gifts up and above another. It is essential an argument to restore balance.

Think of it as a dinner plate. Some only eat meat, other only vegetables. A balanced plate includes a presentation of both. The problem isn't so much as to one sort of meal preference (as the Body of Christ has her different functions), it has to do with the attitude behind the plate. The meat eaters refuse to even acknowledge there are vegetable out there, and the vegetarians are content with what they have – and even abhor those who eat meat.

Jesus's life presented the perfect balance. In his mind all avenues were good avenues. He got upset when one faith group excluded the praxis of another faith group.

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<sup>33</sup> See Exodus 7:10-13.



A classic example of this is where he sought to heal the paralytic in Mark, chapter 2. When his Father was saying, "Heal the man and forgive his sins," the religious right was checking and balancing his actions based on the Law. Praise God Jesus went ahead with the agenda of his Father (which infuriated the onlookers to no end because – while the works were all right – the bigger problem was that they were performed on the sabbath.

The fruit? "

Everyone was amazed. They praised God and said, 'We have never seen anything like this!'"

In the next section, let's take some time to rise above the varied theologies, church doctrines, and stables of church tradition and visit a bit on how God communicates to us through the Spirit.

How do these gifts work? How does a prophet know what the Lord is saying in order to share it with others? What about visions, words of knowledge, dreams, or healings? How can one be sure if any one of these is actually valid?

In short, how does God speak?

### **Do You See What I See?**

Let's first frame our discussion with this overriding statement: God speaks in a way that you will uniquely understand.

This is essential to know.

God speaks through anything and everything that draws your attention. You like football? God speaks *football-ese*. Are you an artist? God will speak to you through *art-ese*, too. Do you like to look at the stars, love nature, music, children, banking, electrical engineering? We'll then you qualify.

Welcome aboard.

God is so wanting to have intimacy with you that he will devise a way to get through to you wherever you place your attention. He's just that big. As a friend of mine often says, "Easy-Peasy!"

There is no seminary to attend, no conference to travel to, no books to master. You already have the stuff to make it work: the Spirit of God living in your being. He's been living there for a long time. After all that time, just be assured he knows how to get his Word through you to others.

I like to say he speaks to us in *Billon-ese*, *Bruceon-ese*, and *Donna-ese*. What every your name is and whoever you are, that is the language he will speak.

Hear the words for the Talmud:

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond

the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Deuteronomy 30:11-13

With that in mind, let's take a deeper look at the many ways he speaks through us to those he loves. But remember, it's all about faith. This is a two way street. God reveals, we step into it through faith. Why? Because without faith (an intentional stepping into the thing), it is impossible to please God.<sup>34</sup> God mixes it up so that we are always working in the realm of faith. Faith is where he lives. It's where heaven is revealed.

### **Crazy Little Thing Called Love**

Above all, LOVE for others lies at the heart of all God is doing. The accolades of our redemption are for a much greater purpose than you, and your healing, your restoration, your joy, your whatever. It is about taking what you've been given and getting it out to others.

That's how it happened to you, isn't it?

Hearing God isn't rocket surgery. We are designed for this stuff. Intimidating? Yes. Risky? You bet! Yet this is the ministry of Jesus. The Spirit is given to continue his ministry. Let's take a deeper look at how his ministry looks through you and me.

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<sup>34</sup> See Hebrews 11:6.

## Words

Once I was leading a Saturday morning workshop on words of knowledge. We practiced it by sitting in silence and then writing down a phrase, vision or memory that God was revealing. After all the papers were collected I read through them (anonymously) to see how accurate we were.

"A person with a back ache..."

"A wonder bread truck..."

"The verse, "I will never leave or forsake you..."

Things were going along pretty good until I got to the next one. (I almost didn't read it because I thought it was a joke.)

"Eddie Haskell."

A woman from the back of the room gasped. Her father had been admitted to the hospital and was in dire need of prayer. When he was in high school he was constantly teased because he looked like a character in *Leave it to Beaver*, Eddie Haskell.

Takeaway: Nothing is out of bounds. Everything is viable. This is the beauty of our God. His passion for the world is such is that he will succumb to anything – any method, approach, experience, or apologetic, no matter how insignificant or random – in order to reach his beloved.

Can God speak through TV shows, memories, or even song lyrics? You bet (as long as we don't write them off as being too secular or non-Christian).

### **You Had Me When You Said Hello**

Sometimes words of knowledge are given, not so much for the "word" itself, but to single out a person for ministry for a deeper cause. In other words, just because a person responds to a particular word, that doesn't necessarily guarantee that's was God's intent behind that particular word. The word itself may have only been a hook to nab the person's attention, to get them in the ring. At the end of the day the real reason the word may be much deeper than anyone could have imagined.

Once Sunday morning when I was serving in a church in Boulder, Colorado, during the Prayers of the People, I had a vision of an old man's left foot. I know it was a man's left foot because of the layout of his toes and it just looked too ugly to be a woman's foot.

I checked with the priest Just before the closing song I asked if anyone had a left foot. Well, every most every man has a left foot! After a humorous (and humiliating moment) I recalled the vision in my mind and saw that it was an old and ugly foot. "Perhaps someone over 70 years old," I added. After church and older man came hobbling to the railing. He was someone I would have never expected to have hands laid on him. "How can we pray for you?"

"My foot. It's got arthritis. Hurts me all the time."

We began to pray. Nothing happened. We prayed more - still nothing. In fact, it seemed the more we prayed for his foot, the less of the God was in the place! It got to the point where we all knew nothing was happening so I broke the silence. "I don't think anything is happening here. Is there anything else we could pray for? At once he became very still and began to cry. "My wife," he sobbed. "I need to tell her something."

"Well, let's pray for that."

"No, you don't understand," he interrupted. "She's dead."

I spent a few moments in stunned silence. How was this going to happen? This is what I said. "You can't talk to your wife, but Jesus can. Let's ask him to tell her what you need to say." As we prayed there was an immediate sense of God's presence - along with tears; lots of tears. I encouraged him to tell Jesus everything he had wished he had told his wife - some twenty years before - which he did. To make a long footnote short, we then prayed for his foot and he was healed.

A few weeks later I saw him at a church dinner. "Hey Bill, check this out!" I looked to see him hopping up and down on the left foot. In fact, he hopped right out of the room!

### *Physical Pain*

People hear God's "voice" through physical pain in their body. Sounds weird, but it's true. It's almost as if God allows them to feel what the ailing person is going through as a form of prayer, or intercession.

This happened to me once. I was speaking on the subject of healing at an ALPHA course in Switzerland, Florida. As I was driving to the church I was asking the Lord how he would like to minister that evening and felt an intense sharp pain in my lower gut, like a needle inserted through my stomach.

“Ouch! What the...”

After second thought, I reasoned it could be a word of knowledge for someone I would later pray for in the group. Later that evening I began the ministry session by saying, “I believe the Lord would like to minister to a person having trouble with a gallbladder.”

(Transparent confession here: I didn’t know where a gallbladder was at the time, but it just sort of seemed like that’s where a gallbladder should be. Since then I’ve learned the gallbladder is on the other side of my body, not where the pain was. But since the word “gallbladder” was the first thing that came to my mind, that’s what I voiced at the meeting. Even in that, God used what little faith I had.)

A slight stirring happened at the back of room and, within a few minutes, I found myself praying for a woman who came forward (at the urging of her husband) who told me she didn’t believe in “this stuff” but was slated to have gallbladder surgery later that week so, “what the heck.” I was encouraged and mentioned that may not be for her healing – only that God singled her out for prayer of any nature.

We prayed, she left, and I went home.

A few weeks later I saw this woman at a party. I was a bit sheepish because I wasn't sure if the prayer worked. Later she circled around to me and I learned she had been completely healed. (She also mentioned she still didn't really believe in healing, but couldn't argue with the medical results.) That healing happened all because God gave me a pain in the place where I thought a gallbladder should be.

### *The Mind*

In the song, *What's the Ugliest Part of Your Body*, Frank Zappa sings,

What's the ugliest part of your body (Banana na na na)  
What's the ugliest part of your body  
Some say you nose  
Som say your toes  
But I think it's your mind, your mind  
I think it's your mind

I'll give him that. But even the mind can be redeemed for God's love to pour forth. Scripture's say we have the mind of Christ.<sup>35</sup> The mind is perhaps the most common way God shares his will for us and others, and gives revelatory insight.

Visions, for example, appear through one's imagination, like dreams. Some refuse to trust their own imaginations – and rightfully so. The canvass of our imaginations can swing either way. That being said, the drive-in movie theater of our imaginations can be powerful ways God speaks.

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<sup>35</sup> See 1 Corinthians 2:16.



My experience is that visions are given in part – as opposed to getting the whole thing at once. This is God’s wisdom because it keeps us moving in faith. Besides as a father delights in watching his child yearning to understand and then “aha-ing” into a deeper understanding, deep calls to deep. There is so many good things about pressing in and discovering exactly what the Lord is saying. “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, to search out a matter is the glory of Kings” (Proverbs 25:2).

This partial revelation is deliberate and we get to participate in the Father’s delight by getting what it means. I describe this active role as *puzzling* – not in the confusing aspect of it, but in the way that it comes together. Each piece of the puzzle creates joy as the true picture emerges.

A number of years ago a good friend and drummer in the praise band showed up at my office unannounced. He barged into my office, plopped into the chair, and loosened his tie.

“Dude, I just lost my job.”

He was distraught. He had two high school-aged kids, a home with a pool, with a strong work ethic and personal integrity. He was looking at me for comfort, for a word, for an answer. I felt the weight of my response was bigger than me and was admittedly out of my league.

After about 20 minutes I had nothing to say.

“Let’s pray and see what God is doing,” I suggested.

As we sat before the Lord in silence, scanning my imagination for anything being revealed, I saw Tarzan swinging through the trees in a very misty tropical rainforest. He swooped in from the right on a vine. As I watched, he released himself from the old vine and, after flying through midair, landed upon a new vine on a vine that was so thick, so large – as thick as a telephone pole – that he had embrace it with both hands. As I watched, I became fearful the new vine was too big and he would lose his grip.

*Lord, what am I to do with this vision?*

Then I got it. I shared with him the vision of Tarzan, leaving one vine for another, and that I believed he was going to land in a much better place – so much better that it would take him just about everything he had to hold on.

“It’s like you are Tarzan,” I smiled. “Flying through the air like an ape-man.”

My friend was stunned. God had spoken clearly and in a way that only he could have done.

“You’re not going to believe this,” he said.

“What’s that, Chip?”

“When I was a little boy my grandpa had a nickname for me. Do you know what it was? *Tarzan!*”

I was floored. Joy broke out in the room and he left encouraged that God wasn’t going to leave him hanging. Shortly thereafter he landed smack-dab into the biggest “vine” ever, overseeing multiple people in his profession, with a great pay raise, and has won numerous awards for his productivity in his Houston office.

This is a poignant example of how the Spirit's revelation is splashed across our imagination. We see something, watch it, pray into it, do some detective work, and share it.

Usually in the sharing of the thing, clarification happens – but not always. Sometimes nothing seems to strike home. I tend to write it off as “not of the Lord,” or that the fruit is not ready to be picked just yet (meaning either the Lord is seeding the heart of the other person, the faith of the person isn't capable of grasping it, or that the person knows exactly that the vision means and is rebelling against it for whatever the reason. But, as I mentioned earlier, our job is to deliver the mail – humbly, we may be wrong – not to read it.

I can almost sense the reader at this point cringing. *This stuff is so dang subjective!*

It's true. And to be sure, not everything that flies into our imagination is of the Lord. (I often have some pretty offensive things rising up in me as I pray for others.) We need to test the spirits. If what we see doesn't fall within the trajectory of Scripture, it's at once dismissed. If the thing doesn't carry the revealed character of the Father, or the full salvific work of the Son (i.e. *soló*), it needs to be dismissed.<sup>36</sup> This, to be sure, is a mystery: Christ in us. Believe me, you will get it wrong, yet God has chosen to work in this stew of flesh and Spirit and we just need to go with it.

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<sup>36</sup> See 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and Galations 5:22-23.

There are absolutely no limits on how revelatory nudges from the Spirit can happen. Words of knowledge can flow from Scripture verses that we have memorized, song lyrics, newspaper headlines, memories of pain or victory, a word phrase, or even words superimposed on a persons' forehead. Many have heard about the time when John Wimber was in an airplane when he looked across the aisle to see a man with the word "adulatory" across his forehead. He writes, "Somewhat nervously, I leaned across the aisle and asked, 'Does the name Jane [not her real name] mean anything to you?'"

The stranger freaked. They went up to the lounge of the 747 and the Spirit used this revelation in leading this person to Christ. Not only that, when they returned to their seats, the man confessed the affair to his wife and she, too came to the Lord!<sup>37</sup>

#### *Emotional Feelings and Past Memories.*

Avenues of emotion and memory can be powerful ways wherein God can use you to bless others.

For example, if you are praying with a person and a certain memory emerges from out of the blue, I wouldn't be too hesitant to discount that, as It very well may be a word of knowledge for that other person.

Memories of the past – in particular, healing of memories from the past – are a powerful link of ministry to those you pray for. God will often have you praying for someone who themselves are trudging through the same stuff that you yourself

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<sup>37</sup> Read the full story in Chapter 3 of Wimber's book, *Power Evangelism*.

trudged through. Here you are on the other side of the thing praying for someone in the midst of the thing. Who else better to pray?

### **That Smell**

There is a fragrance (for lack of a better word) that is recognizable in others. Many times it is the fragrance of familiarity. When this happens, leverage it. You may be praying for someone and you intuitively know what she's going through because you can smell what was once on you, on her.

When we are healed of trauma, delivered from spirits, or redeemed from addiction we still remember the thing – yet by God's grace, the sting of the event has been nailed to the cross. Yet the fact that you have walked in those shoes sensitizes you to those who are currently walking in those shoes and gives you all the more authority to initiate and declare what God is doing in their life.

This is a known entry point for those of us sharing prayer, or revelations, with others. People have called me out on stuff and I've wondered, how in the heck did they know that. Chances are, they themselves were once where I was and they could smell it on me. They used their experience of God's redemption as a leverage point to pinpoint prayer in my heart of hearts.

### **Fool On The Hill**

The writer of Proverbs is insistent:

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom:  
and with all thy getting get understanding.

(Proverbs 4:7.)

I once heard the story of a lay eucharistic minister going down the line, giving communion, when suddenly she was struck with a vision of a little girl being molested when she was a child. She stared down at this now middle-aged woman, holding the communion up with both hands and bringing it to her lips. She continued administering wine to the rest of the church, went back to her chair, and prayed. "Lord, I need your wisdom here. What am I to do with this vision?"

She heard God's wisdom over the matter. After the service go up to her and ask if you can pray with her. As you pray, pray into her childhood." So that's what she did. After the service she approached the young woman and asked, "Do you mind if I pray for you?"

"Sure."

The woman agreed and it was then, as the prayers drifted into childhood and embraced with the arms of the Father poured out in the Holy Spirit, when she received a deep healing of the abuse she had suffered so many years before. In fact, it was only within the context of prayer that the woman even remembered those events. As many of us do when jarred by abuse, we gloss it over, trying to forget the thing. This prayer minister did it right. She knew she was dealing with a precious soul – a person for whom Jesus died. She wasn't out to offend or embarrass. She knew God had revealed it for a reason and asked for wisdom in the precise way he would have her deal with the revelation granted.

The gift of wisdom fits hand-in-glove with the revelatory gifts. Lack of asking for it is a huge player in spiritual abuse. Just because a person "gets a vision" doesn't mean it's an automatic shoe-in. It could go any number of directions, all of which demand the ongoing discernment and reliance upon the Spirit.

### *Physical Changes*

Anyone involved in the healing ministry for any length of time knows that, depending upon what the Lord is up to, the physical temperatures of the place where you lay your hands may vacillate from hot to cold. I talk more about this in other writings. For now it's good to say, just pay attention to it. If the pain moves around, follow it. If it turns suddenly cold in the mention of a spirit, take note of it.

### *Teamwork*

Even the best of us needs help from another to hear God. That's okay. That's how he's wired us. As we've seen, gone are the days where one super-Christian knows it all. God likes it when a couple of people get together and decipher what God is up to. Even in ministry situations, I find it helpful to check in with the person being prayed for as well. They may know, more than any of us season prayer ministers, what's going on inside them. In the old days, people refrained from speaking with one another in the context of prayer. Today we are realizing that the ministry of God (sharing and receiving) is a team effort and, rightly so, as we are members of the same Body.

Recently, a woman and I were praying with someone else. As we sat in silence I had the unusual vision of the exoskeleton of an insect. In the vision, it had discarded its "shell" and crawling away. Its shell, left behind, was beige in color and transparent, left hollow on a gravel mound. At the same time, my prayer partner was seeing a picture of a person dancing, twirling around in circles with fancy-free delight. We

apparently received the visions at about the same time because we literally interrupted each other when sharing what we were getting from the Lord! After listening to us share the things we were seeing, the person we were praying with interpreted the bug and the dancer as both sides of the same reality.

She broke into joy. "That's exactly what the Lord is doing in my life!"

Unbeknown to us, she had recently made a definite decision to leave a significant part of her past behind and, in her newfound joy and freedom, was now dancing for the Jesus.

Who knew that?

Our visions – though radically different from the other – affirmed what was going on in this woman's life and would have gone unnoticed if the freedom to share and speak during the prayers was absent. Sometimes it takes more than one person to decipher what the Lord is doing – and don't you love that?

### **Faith and Compassion**

As Larry Norman sang, "Without love you ain't nothin'... without love you ain't nothin' without love."

Faith and compassion are doorways to revelation – your love for others and his love for others through you. This is the soil of revelation. Many works of Christ happened



because he loved them, they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he had compassion upon them.<sup>38</sup>

Faith is an additional additive of the soil. Mike Flynn, a major mentor in my life said something which I believe he received from his mentor, John Wimber. Faith is spelled R-I-S-K. In this line of work, faith is something you intentionally step into with all humility. He also told me once, "Always place yourself in situations where you'll be in big trouble if God doesn't bail you out!" While certainly not true in all situations, it is in this arena – a place where we are totally dependent upon God – that God meets us.

Even the most gifted people operate on faith. To be sure, different people have different levels of faith. One person could never have the faith to raise the dead, but you'll always see them praying at *Outback Steakhouse*. No matter, a person raising the dead is operating in the same proportionate "challenging vacuum of faith" as the person saying grace. Same faith, same challenges – along with the same nervousness associated with stepping out for God.

We all have different levels of faith. When doing ministry, we're not called to be as faithful as this person or the person next to us. We're called only to be faithful to the faith we've been given.<sup>39</sup> Sure, the pros may make it look easy but don't be fooled, they are trucking along, riding the highways of faith, just like the rest of us.

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<sup>38</sup> See Matthew 9:36.

<sup>39</sup> See Romans 12:6.

## **Take Away**

So, in summary, in this gutsy chapter, we've seen the way God speaks to a person is as varied and as magnificent as the Person we serve. Our minds, emotions, and bodies are all fair game, fair avenues wherein the Spirit can reveal the will of the Father in order to evangelize and equip the followers of Jesus.

The first take-a-way here is to know that God is always working, always speaking, always up to something. And he uses it all to get it out into the mainstream through – of all people – us.

Our second take-a-way is that compassion is the platform of all ministry. When we dial into the compassion of Christ and his heart for what he's doing in any given situation we have arrived. After that it's all up to him.

## 10

### CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED TONGUES

You knew it would happen. You really can't talk about the weird gifts of the Spirit without at least scraping the surface of this gift. And now here we are: the gift of tongues.

I wouldn't necessarily agree that tongues is a revelatory gift, any more than teaching, or preaching. But it is something out of the box that is given for believer's' edification and mission – and it does seem to open the speaker's spirit to receiving revelation – so we may as well give it a shot.

Paul wrote the Corinthians and thanked God that he spoke in tongues more than anyone else in their church,<sup>40</sup> which indicates not only its authenticity, it's experience in the church, but its viable place in the life of a follower of Jesus as well. (Indeed, Paul also believed and taught that a person speaking in their prayer language builds themselves up, becomes stronger, spiritually attuned, and self-edified.<sup>41</sup>)

We see two at least two categories of tongues in the Bible: tongues of *men* (human languages such as Pidgin, Croatian, Inuktitut, English, Arabic, and so on) and tongues of *heaven* (or angels – beautiful celestial languages for which we'll discover fully when we arrive). Both these categories are mentioned in the Bible.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See 1 Corinthians 14:18.

<sup>41</sup> See 1 Corinthians 14:4.

<sup>42</sup> See 1 Corinthians 13:1.

Historically, the gift of tongues was a by-product of the fulfilled promise of Pentecost. This manifestation of the Spirit happened numerous times after the preaching of the Word and the laying of hands in the early church.<sup>43</sup> These tongues of *men* were known languages reflecting the languages of the people gathered in Israel for the feast. There were Jews there from practically every country in the world at this major feast. When the Spirit fell and they heard the disciples, they couldn't believe their ears!

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ... We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

Acts 2: 6-8 and 11b

At first glance one might think this experience was sort of a haphazard goose-bumpy thrill ride that spontaneously happened for the personal thrill of it all. Nothing could be further than the truth. Everything Jesus does is done with forethought and intent, with a view of the future in his site. Jesus knows who will be with him eternally, so he regulates all mission towards that goal.

Mission? Exactly!

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<sup>43</sup> See Acts 10:45-46 and Acts 19:5-6.

The falling of the Spirit at Pentecost was for the speeding of the Gospel, and a direct fulfillment of Isaiah 11:9.

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge  
of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

What do you think all those people did when they were struck with the wonders of Christ, preached in their one languages – when they were struck to the core and 3,000 of them were baptized as a response to Gods grace?

They went home. And when they went home, they continued the sharing of the Good News to their family, friends, and fellow countrymen, all over the world. This is real strategic forethought. From Jerusalem they went home, home to Africa, Asia, up to Greece. They may have even reached Ireland, too.

Hundreds of years after Pentecost, when the Roman church sent missionaries to Ireland and thereabouts, they found that Christ had already been preached there. They found churches already growing, and systems of theology, ecclesiology, and practice up and flourishing (known as Celtic Christianity).

How did the work get there ahead of the organized “church?” Some say Roman soldiers in Jerusalem at the time Pentecost, saw the event, were filled with the Spirit, and brought it with them anywhere they were transferred – north, south, east or west.

### **Some Kind of Zombie**

Let's get back to the subject at hand. We need to normalize this gift. We've all seen it's abuses. Some may be able to get their brains around the other weird gifts, yet tongues are shrouded with mystery and misunderstanding.

Just to clear the air: A person exercising the gift of tongues doesn't go into a zombie-like trance with white foam oozing out from the sides of their mouth anymore than a bilingual person does when speaking in their second language.

The language of the Spirit is... well, a *language*. And, just like any other language, it comes with its own vocabulary, dialect, expressions, grammar, in-fluctuation, syllables, and so on. A person with the gift of tongues can speak, pray, or even sing their gift almost anywhere they please – at church, in the car, at the gym, or even at work.

I once knew a world famous ophthalmologist, Lawton Smith, who used to sing in tongues under his breath as he made his way down the halls from one patient to the next. He'd have his penlight, peeking this way and that way into retinas and pupils, all the time singing in tongues under his breath. One day someone one asked him about that.

"Gee, that's an interesting song. Where did it come from?"

"Just a little song my Father taught me," he answered, returning the penlight to his pocket and writing a script.

Other with the gift of tongues are more reserved. I've met others, too, who have the ability to sing, pray, and speak in their prayer language to themselves – like a person would talk to themselves through the day. (I guess you could call this the gift of

*minds!*) Others dream in tongues. Others don't even have the gift of tongues, but have an understanding of what is being said anyway.

Either way, our point here is this: all gifts (weird or otherwise) are used solely at the initiation of the user. God honors us. He doesn't shake and bake us into trance-hood, but invites us into his activity. A person doing any sort of ministry has full cognitive ability and has all valves running perhaps more than any other time of the day.<sup>44</sup>

### **War – What is It Good For?**

There is more controversy over this one gift than any others. Why is that? Why is it that the devil has thrown up smoke screens and mirrors around this thing so that it makes the average person throw up their hands and walk away from it all?

Because it has perks – perks of the kingdom. Satan hates anything that fast-tracks us into the presence of God.

The perks of this gift range all over the place – from interior healing to spiritual warfare. Here are a few that are more tangible to consider.

### **I Feel It in My Fingers, I Feel It In My Toes**

Scripture says a person who has the gift of tongues *builds himself up* in the faith.<sup>45</sup>

This means the God's strength is magnified, lifted up, or emboldened, and encouraged in the heart of a person when they pray in tongues – perhaps something akin to taking a spiritual vitamin, like a "Gos-pill!"

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<sup>44</sup> See 1 Corinthians 14:32-33.

<sup>45</sup> See 1 Corinthians 14:4.

### **Blind Faith**

In addition, tongues can be useful in situations when you're unclear exactly how to pray in any given situation, or when your spiritual gas tank is running on empty. This can be especially useful when passing the scene of an accident on the freeway, or pulling over for an ambulance racing to the hospital.

### **I Can See Clearly Now**

Additionally, I have personally noticed that my spiritual discernment seems to sharpen after I have spent time praying in “the Spirit.” I get a real sense of what God is doing around me,<sup>46</sup> which is especially helpful before I lead worship, preach, or pray for others.

### **Feels Like the First Time**

The first time I prayed in tongues it happened in a far-a-way field near the college I was attending and under the cloak of darkness... I didn't actually believe in the gift of tongues. They were controversial, strange, and just plain dumb, as far as I could see. I mean, why would I need have another tongue. Isn't one enough?

But, if tongues were real, I wanted them. I wanted everything God had for me, don't we all? The Bible mentions numerous times all we have to do is ask and he gives – everything from specific gifts of the Spirit to the Holy Spirit himself.

Follow the way of love and eagerly *desire* gifts of the Spirit,

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<sup>46</sup> See Romans 8:26-27.



especially prophecy.<sup>47</sup>

...How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"<sup>48</sup>

It became increasingly clear, all I had to do was ask.

### **Take Your Protein Pill And Put Your Helmet On**

As mentioned earlier, I had had substantial Bible teaching telling me that the gifts of the Spirit had died out when the Bible had been written. So, by asking God for the gift of tongues, I was fearful that I would be opening myself up to the demonic and wind up receiving a fight from the un-holy spirit instead of the most Holy Spirit. It was all a bit too spooky for me. I didn't want to be associated with snake-handling, either.

That aside, I snuck out into a barren field and waited for the full moon to appear behind a wispy cloud. The time was now. I prayed. "God, you say the Spirit will lead us into all truth... I'm going to try this. But, if it's not your will, I pray you will shut my mouth. Guide my tongue because here I go." Then I started talking in make-believe, just making strange sounds with my voice to get the thing started. Many believe it comes upon you and you do nothing, but the majority of us actually have to step out and activate our voices.

Within a milli-second two distinct things happened. First, my mind was barraged with all manner of thoughts of personal condemnation, telling me I sounded like a full-

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47 1 Corinthians 14:1

48 Luke 11:15

fledged idiot – and that I was a “lousy, illogical witness for the cause of Christ.”<sup>49</sup> Yet, within a milli-second of that first milli-second, the Spirit of God got a hold of my tongue and I took off – speaking in a new, heavenly language! Just like that I experienced an immediate sense of the presence of God and a corresponding surge of joy that blew my socks off. God’s presence became so intense that I had actually had to ease back on it. I had never had such an intense physiological experience with the Lord before then.

I rose from the field, took a deep breath and felt fantastic – like when I first received the Lord. I gazed across the starry sky and smile. “Wow. I guess these things *are* still around!”

Later, as I reflected on the initial feelings of self-condemnation, it dawned on me those voices telling me I was an idiot were not of the Lord, but what I later was spiritual warfare. The devil’s MO is rob, pervert, and destroy all good things of God. When Jesus was born he sought to kill him by murdering all the babies under two years old through Herod. Before he willingly went to the cross to fulfill the Father’s will, he barraged his mind with doubt and fear. From beginning to end the devil was on Jesus’ case because he had everything to loose. Why would it be any different for us, little Christ’s? The devil was throwing up all he had to get me to stop, but at the end of the day, God won.

### **Have You Forgotten Who You Are? Did You Forget Whose Trip You're On?**

After an experience like that one would think I'd become fluent in the language and used it every day. But that wasn't the case. In fact, in the years to follow I rarely revisited the gift and pretty much forgot all about it. And within a short period of time, I essentially talked myself out of the gift of tongues altogether, completely ignoring that experience in the field that night.

About two years later found myself living just outside Jerusalem on a kibbutz in Israel. On a particular Saturday morning the pastor led the congregation into of time of "free-form singing in the Spirit." It was beautiful. You can imagine a multi-national congregation all living praise to the Lord in their native tongues. The entire place turned into a holy place. As the praises increased I was caught up in the vibe. My ears fell upon someone singing magnificent praise to the Lord. I couldn't make out the language, yet I knew it was glorifying God in an almost angelic language. It was so beautiful that I had to open my eyes to see who it was singing these beautiful song and I traced the melody back to me! It was a real hallelujah moment. My eyes swelled with tears and my heart longed for the intimacy of the moment like never before. It was like reuniting with an old friend and I wondered what made me shelf that gift for years.

From that day since I have used this gift almost every day – when praying for others, worshipping, or when simply clearing the pipes in my head before I teach. It's never led me astray and – quit to the contrary – it has blessed others.

### **One Is the Loneliest Number**

While tongues can build up an *individual* in the faith, they can also serve to edify the church and prove to non-believers he is real.<sup>50</sup>

Many understand the Bible to be speaking about at least two types of tongues, the tongues of tongues of *angels*<sup>51</sup> and tongues of *men*, or different languages of the *world*.<sup>52</sup>

### **Just Call Me Angel In the Morning**

There are those that are angelic, other worldly. This is the type I was singing that day in Jerusalem. It is an intimate expression of praise, worship, intercession, and/or prayer, said in faith, mixed with love, and directed to God. The apostle Paul once had a mystical experience where he was caught up into heaven and heard “inexpressible things.” I have no doubt he was privy to worship activities in the angelic realm – including its unique expressions and languages.<sup>53</sup>

These languages are reflections of heaven. In worship, we lift our praises and join with the heavenly creatures worshipping the Almighty. People have thrown tongues under the bus because Paul writes, “But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue”<sup>54</sup> – which is notable. Yet, taking a deeper look, at the whole of Chapter 14 of his first letter to Corinth, he

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50 Perhaps most importantly, non-believers in Jesus. See 1 Corinthians 14:22.

51 1 Corinthians 13:1

52 Acts 2:8

53 2 Corinthians 12:4

54 1 Corinthians 14:9

certainly is not throwing the baby out with the bathwater, only describing a couple of manifestations of the same gift.

When you are in a worship services and folks are singing in tongues, it is this variant of the gift you are hearing. Here there is no expectation that the gift needs to be interpreted – only the bliss of entering the realm of heaven in praise and adoration. With this as the intent of the speaker, one’s speaking is only interpreted by One, the undivided Trinity.

### **He Knows My Name**

A second type of tongues manifests as actual languages of the world – like Spanish, Dutch, Finnish, or Indian. This is what happened at Pentecost. They were unknown to the apostles and women among them, but were understood by all in the general vicinity who could hear what’s being said.<sup>55</sup>

This variant of the gift is meant to speak directly into the heart of the person(s) in the room, serving to proclaim the wonders of God specifically with a razor-keen prophetic edge. When non-believers hear the words of the Lord in their own language, and additionally see that the tongue-talkers aren’t even from their own country, it becomes a tremendous testimony to God.<sup>56</sup>

There is deeply prophetic in nature to this variant. When a foreigner hears the wonders of God, in his or her own language – especially from a lounge-talker who is not a native – it blows the mind and converts the heart.

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<sup>55</sup> See Acts 2:4-11.

<sup>56</sup> See 1 Corinthians 14:21-22.

We've all heard stories of people standing around waiting for a bus when a believer approaches a foreigner and speaks something that only they would understand. I've never seen that personally but I do know of a story that is both encouraging and mind-blowing.

There was a group of men in Miami who regularly met for breakfast at iHop. After breakfast the routine was they all clustered into the back of a van and interceded for the city, mostly praying in tongues. One of the men was frustrated because his gift seemed limited. Whenever he spoke it seemed repetitious – you know, the same pithy phrase being said over and over. Everyone else in the van went on and on in their eloquent prayer languages, which made him feel all the more intimidated.

One day, one of the men brought a friend of his to the group who was visiting from a remote village from India. As usual they paid the check and cluttered into the back of the van and fired up the intercession machine. As this man heard the “pithy” phrase being said over and over from the man who was frustrated in the limited scope of his prayer language, he fell to his knees. He was hearing – in his own language, in his own dialect, and in the linguistically distinctives of his little village back home – God being wondrously adored like non other.

You can imagine how encouraging that was on both levels – not only to the Indian visitor, but also to the man who didn't think his “tongue” was going anywhere.

## **Get On Your Knees And Fight Like a Man**

There is an additional piece of tongues which falls beyond the scope of this discussion, yet warrants mentioning anyway. It has to do with what happened in the spiritual realms – the atmosphere – when a humble believer initiates this gift.

Prayer and intercession is magnified when a person is speaking in his or her prayer language. It may sound like foolishness, but it's not. Aligning one's heart with the flow of the Spirit through prayer is a real threat to our enemy, as it cuts to the quick of his schemes, strategy, and assaults. Satan is unnerved when saints intentionally step into the flow of the Spirit through the tongues of angels. He, too – along with the creatures in heaven – understands what were actually proclaiming. That's why he abhors this gift and throws up so many logical arguments against it.

As a result there is considerable ambivalence to the practice of tongues in churches about its validity, its appropriateness on Sunday mornings, how many tongues should be allowed, who should do it, what happens if it embarrasses visitors, and right on down the line. When church leadership spends too much time figuring out how to manage the thing it, in part, plays right into the devil's icy intent. When he hears God's people adoring their King of Kings and the Lord of Lords in unknown languages – freely lifting our hearts like little children up to our heavenly "*abba*," to him, it's like fingernails across a blackboard. It undermines him, pushes him back in place, and reminds him he is an eternal loser.

It's spiritual warfare, plain and simple.

In times of temptation, pull out your weapon. The devil doesn't hold anything back, why should you?

In times of national upheaval, pull out your weapon. He's right up there, spinning his demons around the government – around men and women just like you and me – who need a clear space to think. Pray for them in tongues.

In times when you simply don't know how to pray for a person or situation – say an ambulance screams by your home, a space shuttle blows up with seven souls aboard, or your church property is being confiscated in a legal matter – pull your weapon out and invoke the clarity of God, his angelic armies, and the will of the Father into the situation at hand. You may not know exactly how you're playing into the thing, but you'll see it one day.

### **It's Driving Me Wild, The Dizzy Spell I'm In**

To be honest, there is a danger with tongues. They can be so engaging and outright sensationalistic that they can draw the users away from their original intent. We can get so caught up in the thrill of it all that we forget the beautiful thing that made us thrilled in the first place.

When I was a teenager I used to surf. I'd wake up in the morning, tuck my board under my arm, head to the beach, hoping to hang-ten on that perfect wave in the endless summer. Yet, there are times when I was distracted. The sound of the rippling water as I paddled out, the reflections of the shimmering sun across the sea, and the playful bottle-nose dolphins frolicking on the horizon settled me into a zen-like vibe where I forgot why I was sitting on my surfboard in the middle of nowhere altogether.



Being in the Spirit with the gifts – especially with tongues – is a bit like that. It is quite the rush, both mentally, spiritually, and physically. With all that it's easy to forget about being barreled in the blue room and float off into never-never land. This was no less true for the good people in the early church.

The Apostle Paul witnessed this first hand and came down hard on the church at Corinth because, every time they gathered, they missed the boat. They did little more than speak in tongues and get loaded on too much communion wine!<sup>57</sup> The concern was that the thing turned inwards and they were no longer engaged in outward ministry but inward spiritual gratification. To the visitor, the church at Corinth came off as a bunch of ba-foons participating in some pagan cult – forgetting their purpose as “church” – and simply getting caught up in the thrill of it all, not unlike me when I was enamored with everything about surfing, except for surfing itself.

### **Step Right Up to the Microphone**

What about the gift of tongues? Is it for you? As I mentioned a few chapters back, the big gift is the Holy Spirit himself. And, as I said, I believe if you have the Holy Spirit then you have the potential for all the gifts of the Spirit - including tongues.

Could you speak in tongues? Most likely.

I believe God would have Christians speaking in tongues much, much more than we're currently doing. Can you imagine that – waiting for a bus somewhere and speaking the marvelous praises of God in the precise language and dialect of the

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<sup>57</sup> See 1 Corinthians 14:23-24 and 1 Corinthians 11:20-22.

Muslim standing there next to you? Or the whole church swept up during a worship song, each praising God in their angelic tongue? The gift of tongues is a powerful form of prayer, intercession, spiritual warfare, and prophecy – and boy, in our day, do we need it.

If the Holy Spirit lives in you – which He does<sup>58</sup> – why not give it a shot? Place this book on the coffee table, sit back right now and ask Him to release the gift of tongues in your life. You don't have to sneak away somewhere under the cloak of darkness like I did. (There was a lot of pride mixed up in that.) You can ask him to release the gift in your heart right here, right where you are now. Or, better yet, get together with another brother or sister in the Lord and do it together. Everyone starts somewhere, and we all need training wheels on before we mount the Harley.

### **Do It**

Give it a moment. God searches the heart. When you feel his peace consider it a green light and simply begin. It may sound like gibberish at first – no, let me correct that... It will sound like gibberish at first – and you will have your sincere doubts. Yet, I assure you, within a milli-second, the Spirit will get a hold of the water of your words and change them into the wine of a holy, heavenly language.

He may not do it right now, anyway – but your prayer will be answered at time you least expect. I once prayed for a woman to receive the gift of tongues and nothing happened (much to her disappointment). So got up, left and drove home.

Somewhere along the way she was sitting at a red light, minding her own business, when she was flooded with a sense of God's presence. She got the feeling that God

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<sup>58</sup> John 7:38-39

was saying, "You can do this right now if you'd like." She opened her mouth, stepped out in faith, and captured it. Right there at the red light, sitting all alone in the car, that's when she received her prayer language!

So you never know how or when, until you respond to the invitation and simply ask.

## 9

### **BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT**

In our final chapter we explore the Church's initial submersion of the Spirit – the initial infilling of God's Kingdom into our hearts<sup>59</sup> – and it's continuing experience today.

#### **Come On People Now, Smile on Your Brother, Everybody Get Together, Try to Love One Another Right Now**

Before we get going, let's get a couple of things straight.

Q. Can a person be an authentic follower of Jesus without ever being having an "infilling" experience with the Spirit?

A. Yes.

Q. Can a person receive forgiveness, be in called to Christ's purposes, grow up to be fruitful believer, and even go to heaven without being having a personal pentecost?

A. Yes. Unequivocally, yes!

Q. Why are there such harsh judgments between people who believe in the experiential element of the Spirit and those who don't?

A. I don't know. You'd think they would just honor each others' place in the Body of Christ...

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<sup>59</sup> Luke 17:21. Translations vary: "within you," or "in your midst." Either way, you are in the thing, or the thing is in you No matter.

## **Freedom**

The freedom of belief on differing issues and the praxis of the Faith across the globe is wondrously amazing to me, wouldn't you say? Within Christendom there are broad swings of the pendulum of praxis – opinions on dancing, secular music, alcohol, Chinese restaurants, etc. – that God seems to step back and even honor, things subject to the individual's, or denominational, personal conviction.

Coming out of a party lifestyle, for example, it became quite clear to me that I needed to stay clear of hard liquor, and I thought that conviction was for all Christians, too. Then I met some brothers who loved blender drinks. At first I was offended – even weary of their eternal judgement at the Great White Throne Judgement Day at the end of the Age.

Since then I've realized there is amazing freedom in Christianity, even down to how the Word is interpreted. I've seen many expressions of the Faith in many countries, places where the culture of the place has ba-fooned me for the Faith of the place. Yet I've come to realize if it's all about Christ crucified and resurrected for the forgiveness of sins, then that is the crux of the matter. Let the other stuff fade away – and certainly don't get caught up in fighting this way or that way about things not pertaining to the Cross. We preach the eternal Gospel. This is our point of unity.

This one theological touchpoint – the infusing and continuous empowerment of the third Person of the Trinity – has polarized people since Pentecost. We have people doing everything from living for that first, second, third, and fourth experience with the Spirit to hard-core dispensationalists who toss off the entire experience as everything from mental illness to Satanic infilling.

So it goes.

(Even the apostle Peter was surprised when the Spirit fell while he was preaching to non-Jews. He had to convince his brothers that it was really true.<sup>60</sup>)

Jesus emphatically says the Spirit is a Person. He has a will and operates in unity with the Father and Son. He is mysterious, unpredictable, and (in my experience) often blows our minds. It is us that needs to be falling into line with his Personhood, not him needing to fall in line with ours.

### **Don't Stop Believing**

Perhaps the clearest example of **not** needing the baptism in the Holy Spirit and still being a bonafide follower of Christ – and involved in ministry all the same – comes from the pages New Testament itself.

The twelve disciples, for example, were totally “hands on” with the ministry of Christ (and this was pre-Pentecost). They performed miracles and even went on mission trips where they cast out demons and healed the sick.<sup>61</sup> They were powerful witnesses of Jesus Christ. And all that before the Spirit fell at Pentecost. Of course, they went on to receive the empowerment of the Spirit (at Jesus’ directive) at Pentecost which radically changed their ministries. Yet, even before then, Christ’s ministry through them had been established.

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<sup>60</sup> See Acts 11:15.

<sup>61</sup> See Luke 9:1-2, 10:8, and 10:17.

Similar situations happened throughout the book of Acts. Paul often came across believers who had never received the infilling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>62</sup> They were believers all the same.

It didn't make them second class Christians. All the same when they there was more, they received the Spirit and experienced the same manifestations of the Spirit the original disciples received at the Feast of Pentecost (which would have included the gift of tongues).

Were they believers before they had experienced Pentecost?<sup>63</sup> Were they involved as disciples in the dust of their Rabbi Jesus? Was the Spirit flowing through their hands? If they had died before receiving the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost would they still go to heaven?

Yes, yes, yes, and of course yes!

But there was a "but." The issue of belief wasn't an issue for those early Apostles. The issue was, "do you have everything need to carry out the ministry of the resurrected Christ?" For them, it wasn't an either/or, but a both/and.

### **You Say It's Your Birthday**

"Pentecost" itself is the one of five major Jewish feasts celebrated in the time of Jesus (and in many places today). It celebrates both the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai and the offering of the first fruits of the land to God. The symbolism is rich here

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<sup>62</sup> See Acts 18:14-17 and 19:1-6.

<sup>63</sup>

– as the Hebrew Scriptures prophecy a time when God’s law would be written in human hearts and not on stone<sup>64</sup> – and Spirit is referred to as the first fruit of God’s land to us.<sup>65</sup> Both sides of this coin were essential in the first Christian Pentecost.

The word “*pente*,” itself, means “fifty.” Pentecost, then, took place 50 days after Passover, which is the weekend when Jesus was crucified and resurrected. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit blew through the house where the disciples were praying and landed on no less than 120 of them.<sup>66</sup>

The experience was earth-shaking. There was the sound of rushing wind with something like shekinah fire separating above them and landing on their heads like flaming tongues. In response to the Spirit’s infilling, they all spoke in tongues – languages of the people gathered in Jerusalem for the feast – telling them all about the wonders of Messiah Christ. It must have been awesome – both to receive it and then broadcast it in the exuberance of the day!

This occasion has been long believed to be the birthday of the church, the day when we received the promised Person who would lead us into the continuing ministry of the Son of God.

Happy Birthday!

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64 See Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10, and 10:16.

65 See Romans 8:23.

66 See Acts 2.



Some churches call themselves, “Pentecostal” for just this reason. They believe and practice the gifts of the Spirit experienced at the original Pentecost are just as good for today as they were then. Other church tags include, “Spirit-filled, and “charismatic” – each with their own distinctives. Some think you have to speaking tongues to be filled with the Spirit (we de-bunked that in another chapter), others see themselves simply as walking by faith in the Spirit of God each and every day of their life.

Having said all that, we need to fill in the rest of the picture. While the experience of the Spirit was not – is not – a prerequisite for salvation, or even essential to be a disciple of Christ, it had – and still has – an essential role in the life of the church today.

Our Lord Jesus attested to the importance of Pentecost when he emphatically told his disciples to refrain from ministry and wait in Jerusalem until they had been empowered with the Spirit of God.<sup>67</sup> Jesus knew his disciples. He knew the task he had commissioned them to do. And he knew they wouldn’t be able to pull it off without the tangible anointing of the third Person of the Trinity.

And when that day came (and boy did it come!), they experienced the mighty wind and spent the rest of their life’s ministering in their newfound joy. And aren’t you glad they did?

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<sup>67</sup> See Acts 1:4-5.

The Holy Spirit is a gift for all Christians and the fulfillment of the Lord's promise and provision to pick up where Jesus left off.<sup>68</sup> He is a Gift that Jesus died to give us.<sup>69</sup> I don't know about you, but if there is something that Jesus ascended to give us, I want to be a part of it.

## Place In This World

Just what is the "baptism" in the Holy Spirit? Let's talk about that.

Traditionally, the so-called *baptism of the Spirit* is an additional experience (separate to one's conversion) wherein the full love of the Father is poured into the hearts of the faithful.<sup>70</sup> It is not meant to be a once in a lifetime experience, but the beginning of a lifetime of limitless infilling from the Father's heart to his beloved children. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul tells the followers of Jesus to be continuously filled with the Spirit (the Greek tense behind this phrase). This indicates that being filled with the Spirit is a living reality in the ongoing life of a saint, as anything else we do.

As mentioned, the true purpose behind the original Pentecost was to equip and empower the Church in the wondrous ministry of Jesus. It was a call to *mission*. This is when we received the same anointing Jesus had, described in Luke 4:18-19 where he's quoting the prophet Isaiah and flipping it around to be declaring his call.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and

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<sup>68</sup> See John 14:16-17, 26 and 15:26.

<sup>69</sup> See John 16:7.

<sup>70</sup> See Romans 5:5.

recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

This was the anointing of Christ. And – as we read previously – it is ours as well. Read it again.

If we are extenders of that same kingdom (which we are), then this describes not only the parameter of our call, too. It reinforces the fact that we are in that same groove, that very same anointing as Jesus. We are, then, as parts of his Body,<sup>71</sup> are *Christians* (i.e., little Christs). Our place in our world needs to resemble his place in his world in just about everything we do.

### **You've Got To Make The Journey Out And In**

Traditionally, we view the baptism of the Spirit as the anointing, or provision, that affirms our identity as children of God and empowers us to present a balanced Gospel of Spirit and truth in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The idea of identity is supremely tied to the integration of the Spirit in our lives. Through the Spirit we are adapted as children of God.<sup>72</sup> For those who are uncertain about their relationship with their Heavenly Father, in only takes on *whoosh* of the Breath of God to no longer question whose child he or she is! When the initially fell on Jesus at his baptism, the first words out of the Father's mouth were, "This is my son."<sup>73</sup>

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71 1 Corinthians 12:27.

72 See Romans 8:15.

73 Matthew 3: 16-17

We know of at least one other time when the Father publicly claimed Jesus as his son as well, at his transfiguration.<sup>74</sup> There may have been other times as well when, in the stillness of the hour, the Father assured Jesus of his love and place in his heart. The outpouring of the Father's love to Jesus wasn't just a one time event.

There are two known ways to think about the infilling of the Holy Spirit: Out, or from above, and in, or released from within. Both descriptions are Biblical. We've just seen where the Holy Spirit came down onto the place where the ministry of John the Baptist was happening. He was above him, and spoke from above. Thus, in ministry or times of prayer, one may hear the invitation, "Come, Holy Spirit. Come down and minister to your daughter, we pray."

And he shows up.

Jesus also described the Spirit's Presence as coming up from within us as well. He speaks of our hearts being self-springs of eternity that are released outwards from within.<sup>75</sup> Thus, in ministry or times of prayer, one may hear a similar invitation, "Come, Holy Spirit, be released in the heart of your daughter, we pray."

And he shows up.

Whether "from above" or "from within" we are talking about a full immersion, or total saturation, of the love of God.

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<sup>74</sup> See Mark 9:11.

<sup>75</sup> See John 7:37-39.

Scripture is clear, when a person comes to Christ he or she receives the Holy Spirit. He (the Spirit) is a deposit<sup>76</sup>, and serves as a seal<sup>77</sup>, assuring our adoption into the family of God.<sup>78</sup> It is a guarantee of eternal life for the future and real Comfort for the present. All this happens when a person repents of the old life, turns to Christ. This is when he begins to dwell in the heart of the new believer.<sup>79</sup>

When speaking of the baptism (i.e. saturation, submersion, infilling, drenching, soaking...) of the Spirit we are speaking of an outer experience that very much reflects the existing Presence of the Spirit in our hearts. It's just this time we're surrounded by him and submerged within him.

My brother once gave me a picture of an old wooden canoe carved by Native Americans in the Florida Everglades. In the photo, the canoe itself is filled to the brim with crystal clear water. The canoe itself is additionally submerged in that *same water* as well. The water has not only filled the heart of the canoe, but the canoe itself is underwater, the same water with which it is filled.

This is a great picture of what it means to be baptized in the Spirit. In the experience of being baptized in the Spirit, we are submerged in the same Person that has been dwelling in our hearts since our conversion.

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76 See 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, and Ephesians 1:14.

77 See 2 Corinthians 1:22.

78 See Romans 8:14-16.

79 See 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19.

### **More Love, More Power, More Of You In My Life**

When I was baptized in the Spirit I had already been a Christian for a couple of years, hitchhiking around beach communities and sharing Christ with just about everyone I met. I was so happy to have been born again and rockin' with Jesus on the streets of Cape Canaveral.

Previous to my conversion, I was in some pretty deep "skybala" (gr. for *crap*). You can read a bit about it in *The Watermelon Gospel*. Bottom line is had been engaging in activities that were quite dark and powerful and, although not content in my walk with Christ, I often experienced the devil's residue of my old life in new life. The flashbacks and behaviors were far from what I have been redeemed from. All the same, I could see, if things were to escalate, I could very easily wind up back where I started from.

Like many of us coming out of lives of addiction, brokenness, and just "hard knocks," there were still strong cords of the demonic (as well as emotional immaturity from unhealed wounds) pulling against the life of holiness. These demons were bigger than me and I didn't have the power to break away. I was in a quandary. On one end I knew that Satan had been defeated by the resurrection of Christ and that, in him, there was complete victory from the enemy.<sup>80</sup> Yet, to be honest, I wasn't seeing that victory in my life.

"Where is your power, Lord?" I cried out on the beach one day.

One evening a friend of mine invited me to a gathering of Christians at the Quality Courts Hotel and Conference Center in Cocoa Beach. It was a familiar place to me. As

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<sup>80</sup> See 2 Corinthians 10:4-6, Ephesians 6:11-13, and Colossians 2:15.

a kid I used to watch the astronauts interviewing there after splashing down in the Atlantic

When I arrived, I met up with my friends and walked into the large room where a very cool looking band (long hair, bell bottoms, love beads – you know the look) was leading everyone in worship – which was a new experience for me. The room was filled with so much love that my heart was literally aching. I took a seat.

In the hour that followed my heart cracked and I was released from years of pain and anguish. As the worship intensified (and through the tears) I was humped over in my seat and seeing a vision of an old wooden door, barely open, with white light beaming in from the around the sides and top. It looked like it was about to burst.

That's when I heard the Lord say, "Now, Bill, you know I love you right?"

I nodded. "Right."

"And you know I will never love you any more, or any less than I love you right now, here in this place – you know that, right"

Again, I nodded. "Yes, Lord."

His words were slow and filled with a rich resonating love. "But I have more... Do you want more?"

That was a no brainer.

"Oh, yes Lord... you know I want ---- "

– The door flew open and I was immediately saturated with the all-consuming presence of God's love, through the Holy Spirit. It was an overwhelming life changing moment for me. Within a moment both I experienced the holiness of God up and

against my sinful wretchedness which, as I watched, completely swallowed up my sin and shame AND he exchanged my heart of stone for a heart of flesh.<sup>81</sup>

I cried for a long time that night – tears of gratitude, to be sure. I rose from that place knowing – and *experiencing* the power and fullness of God. It was then when I truly new the meaning of the verse, "Greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world."<sup>82</sup>

After that everything changed. I began to see the revelatory gifts come alive when I shared Jesus. Everything about witnessing, worship, Bible study, personal holiness, including my heart for the lost changed for me that evening.

### **And In The End**

We've seen that a person does not need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit to be a Christian, or even in order to have a solid ministry. Yet, Scripture recognizes the additional experience of a personal Pentecost which cannot be overlooked.<sup>83</sup>

We saw that it is Jesus himself who baptizes with the power/fire of his love. When that happens we are invited into the same anointing to carry out his ministry. When he fills us from above, or releases us from within, a person's orientation on life (her call, gifts, passion, and heart for the things of God) dramatically come to focus and that person's life is, by the grace of God, forever changed.

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<sup>81</sup> See Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:25-27.

<sup>82</sup> See 1 John 4:4.

<sup>83</sup> See Ephesians 5:18. The Greek behind this means to be continuously in the process of being filled with the Spirit.



In this day the powers of darkness are running everywhere. They are powered by an angelic spirit which is foul and disgusting. Satan was defeated at the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ once, and he's hell-bent on it never happening again, though he knows otherwise. By asking for the full infilling of the Spirit we do life as Jesus did life, in truth, authority, and wisdom.

If there really is more, and it's right there, just behind that door, why not ask to receive all he had died to give you? It's already there, just for the asking.

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

Luke 11: 9-13

## 10

### FAQ'S

Here are a few questions I've had through the years. Perhaps you've had them, too.

**Q. You seem to make a distinction between natural skills and spiritual gifts. How I can tell when I'm in my spiritual gift?**

A. Great question. There are many books and resources to discover ones gift, or gift mix, online. Old school folks believe gifts are entirely different from natural skills, others say they are on in the same, and the pendulum swings everywhere in between. I write more about his below. Short answer: When a person is operating in their gift the activity is accompanied by a rich sense of joy, a delight in doing what is almost too good to be true! In other religions there may be a sense of mental-disassociation, a zombie-like awareness, or even a feeling of being taken over when a person is doing significant things for ones "god." Not so with us. Our faith brings to clarity everything, it defines, enlightens, and calls out reality within us. There is nobody so "together" as when he or she is operating in his spiritual gifts. A certain *keenness*, sense of sharpness of mind, comes to play; a confident "knowing what to do and how to do-it-ness" about the activity that is relaxing, peaceful, exciting (not necessarily easy, though) – as if you were doing something you have been created to do. When you are ministering in your giftedness your activities aren't blurred, or ill-defined rather crystallized. Conversely, when a person is doing stuff outside her gifts there will be a general sense of draining, stretching, striving, and exhaustion. Some people have internal resources to compensate (or endure) these activities, others recognize theses effects as God telling them it's simply not their gift, or gift mix. In short, monitor your energy. If it dwindles and becomes chore-like, it may be something to pray about. I'm not saying ministry can't be draining even when a person is in her gift, only that there is disposition of fatigue and "work" when a person has stepped onto someone else's

spiritual turf. Even in the most mundane of professions/vocations find out where the spark is, and follow that.

**Q. Can natural abilities be the same as spiritual gifts?**

A. Yes. And no. And sometimes. And never. When we come to Christ there is no doubt that God takes our “water” and changes it into “wine” – meaning all we are is crucified and raised to new life in Christ, which bleeds into the professions/vocations we had previously. If you were a teacher before you surrendered your life to Christ, you can still be a teacher afterward, howbeit your teaching will no doubt be reinforced with the added element of joy, authority, and the very fragrance of Christ.<sup>84</sup> In this sense, “wine happens.” There is an interesting body of belief that maintains one’s gift(s) are within us – and have been residing – since conception, actually lying in a dormant state until our hearts are awakened in Christ, essentially saying we all have gifts and we may even be using the gifts (though stunted), even if we don’t believe in Jesus. It is only “in Christ” that our gifts can align with their true purposes and our lives with true intent. For example, people with the “gift of evangelism” may never come to Christ but turn out to be very influential all the same – like Elvis, or Sir Paul. (I’ve heard many times that Elvis was meant to be a “Billy Graham” but never was able to fully surrender his life to Christ. When and if the person becomes a new creation in Christ, their previously stunted gifts become all that God originally intended them to be. Up to that point, one’s gift may enjoyed used, and the person may find some sense of fulfillment therein, but it’s far less than God’s potential. We see the same phenomena with people involved in the occult previous to conversation. They definitely have something supernatural going on, but it operates outside the parameters of that person’s life in Christ. When people like that come to Christ, it is no surprise those

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<sup>84</sup> See 2 Corinthians 2:14.

same gifts carry on in fields of revelation, prophecy, visions, and words of knowledge. As for me, I believe one's skills and natural giftedness become empowered when coming to Christ AND God has the potential to call out any gift he pleases, as he pleases – even if it's something outside of our comfort levels. The Spirit is the charism (*gr. grace*) and all gifts abide in him. If he lives in us, then we have all the gifts.

**Q. Can I use my spiritual gift outside “church”?**

A. Absolutely. A dear friend of mine has the gift of administration, which she uses and is paid hugely for at BP. Others have the gift of service find themselves in the food service profession. Others with gifts of compassion will ideally find themselves in the medical profession. Behind it all – whether within or without the organized church– the function of our gifts is to continue the ministry of Jesus, regardless of where we are.

**Q. Are there lesser and greater gifts?**

A. Nope. Paul is quite emphatic here: there are not first class and second class, or coach and economy coach gifts. All gifts are given by the Holy Spirit with no pecking order, only roles and parameters for use.<sup>85</sup> While some gifts are “in the limelight” above others it has nothing to do with their power, potential, or fruitfulness of the kingdom. Be content where you are. People with gifts of service, hospitality, mercy, intercession, or giving are on equal footing with the prophets and apostles.<sup>86</sup> Some gifts demand a greater accountability before God (like teaching and pastoring), but all are leveled, uniquely essential in the outward flow of the kingdom revealed on earth.

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<sup>85</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:1-6.

<sup>86</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:14-26.

**Q. Sometimes I feel the Lord would have me share a vision, say a prophecy, or deliver a message in tongues in church. My heart pounds, I break out in a sweat, and my hands begin to tremble. What do I do with that?**

A. Take two aspirin and call me in the morning... Seriously – a wonderful question. I believe that God’s desire is to *always* have a prophetic word when followers of Jesus are gathered. Perhaps this is why there is such a push for prophets to arise from among the people.<sup>87</sup> When I am leading a service I often think, *Lord you know we love you. We've been lifting our singing and prayers to you all morning. Is there anything you'd like to share with us?* Oftentimes something bubbles up. My prayer would be that church leaders would increasingly make room for this interplay when church happens. People need to be trained and this all has to be done in order. But this can happen -- and needs to happen – so that visitors can be given direct attention and we can be affirmed as his children. Here we are singing and praising and praying and frothing it up and then he has nothing to share in return. I don’t think so. The stirring in your spirit during times of worship is meant to edify, encourage, affirm, and build up others. You first need to talk to your priest, pastor, elder, shepherd about it. The operation of your gift needs to be done in order, in a way which “fits” the culture of your community and – especially important – with the blessing of your spiritual leadership, in a way that God gets the fame. If the sharing of a revelatory gift at your church would be a bit out of the box, the Lord may grant you and your pastor wisdom in how to get the word out decently and in order.<sup>88</sup> There are *always* avenues wherein a word from God can get into the congregation. It could be couched within the framework of a written prayer to be prayed the following week. It could be posted on

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<sup>87</sup> See Numbers 11:28-29 and 1 Corinthians 14:1-3.

<sup>88</sup> See 1 Corinthians 14:39-40.

the church's website, written into a song, or printed as a drama, a puppet show, or through the mediums of clay and paint. While there may be a certain urgency in getting the word out. I've found that in Christ is "shalom," peace and providential pace. If, for example, he knows that it will take three weeks for the word to surface, he will give his prophet the word three weeks in advance. Then, when the word finally gets into the hearts of the people, it will be right on time - like he planned it from the beginning.

**Q. Is there a "growing curve" with spiritual gifts? Will it get better as I go along?**

Most definitely. If you are in a small group, that is the best place to begin. Like crawling, toddling, walking, and running there is a real progression to one's maturity in his or her spiritual gift. Timing, wisdom, and – above all – **love** are key components in the operation of spiritual gifts. Once the gift is given there's no need to rush it. You will always have it.<sup>89</sup> So go slow. Read about it, practice it in little places. As God sees you are faithful in the little things, he will raise you up to be a greater influence for him.<sup>90</sup> People sometimes have fear in exercising their gifts, especially the revelatory gifts, because Scripture has strong words about being wrong.<sup>91</sup> Back then prophets get into real hot water when their personal desires trumped God's.<sup>92</sup> No one likes to be misrepresented, especially God. Jeremiah 23:25-32 and 29:8 carry severe warnings against the prophets and the accuracy of their words. In short, God doesn't people giving a false representation of who he is, or what he is saying. But that doesn't discount the fact that God wants to have a say. He desires to share his

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<sup>89</sup> See Romans 11:29.

<sup>90</sup> Matthew 25:21 and 23.

<sup>91</sup> See Deuteronomy 13:5.

<sup>92</sup> See Jeremiah 14:14ff.

heart with us. How does one learn to recognize that? By trial and error. Did you know there were actual *schools* for prophets (1 Samuel 19:20, 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7 and 15, and 2 Kings 4:1). These were roving schools where potential prophets could practice, seek, and learn how to hear the Lord's voice under the tutelage of other, more established prophet(s), such as Elijah. What happens in a school? You learn, you fail, you master the material, you work the lessons until you get them right. This indicates certain degrees of accuracy needed to be attained before, following the likes of Jeremiah, Obadiah, Isaiah, etc., going public. I doubt the little prophet-wanna-be's were stoned if they got it wrong every once in a while. Prophets didn't become prophets overnight. They needed to be schooled in order to attain credentials. They most likely started in small groups where it was okay to make a mistake and grew into larger groups where they would rise into larger levels of influence. If their accuracy continued they could one day find themselves prophesying before a king, or even to a nation. Now, once on THAT level – the level wherein one had the "office" of the prophet – THAT's when the responsibility of the prophet was subject to its proportional admonition of accuracy – and even punishment if wrong. Here there were nations involved, God's people were looking to them as leaders and as mouthpieces for God's word. This was the big time.

A big piece in this growing curve is one's *personal character*, his or her discipline to live/walk according to the light he or she has been shown. I touched on this above. There is a real relationship between the mental health of the gifted person and the integrity of his or her corresponding public reflection of the Risen Christ. Many are tremendously gifted but struggle with besetting "intentional" issues which hinders them for greater influence. If a person is living in outright rebellion (for example living in full relationship with someone not their spouse – just one example here) it creates a problem. God has a reputation to keep. If needed, he will wait until that person matures in Grace so that, when his gifts are made public, people will see both an

inner and outer integrity of the minister and can receive the gift, giving full glory to God, with no reservations. This is not to say we need to be completely sinless to minister in holiness. Nothing could be further from the truth. Earlier I shared about a friend of mine with the gift of prophecy who is a porn addict. The difference here is that he is broken up and busted and repentant about it each time he falls. God does use him here and there because of the beauty of his heart.<sup>93</sup> God uses imperfect vessels to do his perfect work. Yet his perfect work arises from humble hearts, broken and fully reliant on his all sufficient grace. People may still fall short of their spiritual convictions. But they get up, receive forgiveness, and get back into God's Life and work. That's the difference, One cannot be in rebellion to the Lord and have a contrite heart. It's the person that intentionally grieves, intentionally sins, intentionally overrides the sweet conviction of the Spirit in their hearts – even to the point of being callused – that will not have an operative place in representing the Father's heart publicly. These folks are dangerous. They are gifted in their hearts yet deceived in the minds. The end game is that they either work on getting themselves aligned with the ideals in the Word, or they will never walk in the potential of God's calling on their life. They, quite simply, cannot be trusted to speak into the souls for which Jesus died to save.<sup>94</sup>

### **Q. Why do people avoid the infilling of the Holy Spirit.**

- A. Fear of loosing control, having an unhealthy allegiance to a faith community, theology, or understanding of the Faith, spiritual resistance from the enemy, an unwillingness to exchange one public identity for another, a prideful heart, a preoccupation with a sin or lifestyle they know they'll need to forsake... you name

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<sup>93</sup> See Psalm 34:18.

<sup>94</sup> See 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1, and Jude 11-13.



it! The hesitations are similar to those when considering repenting from sin and turning to Christ. So many roadblocks suddenly rise up. The devil is behind a lot of that. For some of us, we came running into the arms of the Spirit because of our need. We had been knocked down and kicked around by Satan and knew we needed all he died to give us. Others choose to receive the gift of Go on their own turf, not his. It's hard to understand why a person would seek to avoid receiving the empowerment of the Spirit. We know God is still good, and still faithful, and still wants his best for us. Sounds like a no-brainer to me.

**Q. Where else can I find information on the gifts?**

A. The Internet, gift blogs, Christian book stores, or at by doing a search at CBD (Christian Book Distributors) online. In your research you will find two general schools of thought regarding the gifts of the Spirit. There is a view that the miracles and revelatory gifts ceased when the Bible was written. 1 Corinthians 13:8-9 says:

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease;  
where there are tongues, they will be stilled;  
where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

The interpretation here is that the prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will pass away when the “completeness” comes. That “completeness” is interpreted as being the Word of God. Before the Bible, the argument goes, people needed miracles to speak for God. But now “the perfect” has arrived, God’s word, the Bible. This is a wide-brush summary of this apologetic but you get the picture. The second school, or camp, you’ll discover as you study is the camp represented in this book. It maintains the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit as channelled through all gifts is not essential for the ongoing fleshing out of the kingdom of heaven against the powers of darkness in the world. Jesus’ Promise of the Spirit is to continue his ministry in his absence. His ministry mandated the power of God in the doing of his Father’s business. And so it is for us. The apostle Paul says it best. Here he is – perhaps one of the most learned and respected Rabbi’s of his day – setting his priorities straight and setting a trajectory for all to follow:

When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

1 Corinthians 2:1b-5

**Q. What do I need to believe about the gifts in order to have eternal life?**

A. Nothing. Nothing at all. Eternal life comes when you turn away from your sin, believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, and embrace the Faith with faith. Some like to tag other “essentials” to that – like adopting current moral/lifestyle positions, aligning oneself with certain “christian” political parties, subscribe to theories of

evolution, warring against various cults, and the like. True these things may be important and worthy of reflection, but they have absolutely nothing to do with one's eternal salvation in Jesus Christ. Salvation is one thing – it is by grace you are saved, not by any work of your own<sup>95</sup> – how it's lived out is quite another. When I came to the day of my surrender to Christ I didn't know anything about the gifts, the Spirit, or even what the word "theology" meant. I was just a poor boy from a poor family and was being sucked into the vortex of sin. I knew, that the cords of death had entangled me<sup>96</sup> and I was desperate for a saviour. It had nothing to do with what I believed about this or that and everything to do with coming home to my Father. If you are reading this and haven't done that, *that* is the most important thing. Do that now. After that, everything else will fall into place. You will grow, you will be anchored, and you will be a living example of Christ to those who know you. You will discover the Person of the Holy Spirit and, in time, discover the sweet spot of your giftedness, released like a fountain of living water for the glory of God.<sup>97</sup>

Look around the church or community for a place for what God has given and get busy! We need you in the Body of Christ. We need to see the love of God in your gifts. More importantly, the world needs to see Christ in you, the hope of glory.<sup>98</sup>

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95 Ephesians 2:8-9

96 See Psalm 18.

97 See 1 Corinthians 10:31.

98 See Colossians 1:27.