

Spirit Filled

By David Feddes

The great and central theme of the book of Acts is being filled with the Holy Spirit. In your Bibles, it might say "The Acts of the Apostles," but probably a better title is "The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles." The Holy Spirit is mentioned 57 times in that book of the Bible, and it is a wonderful book that shows us how the Spirit of God works.

In a previous message, we read the story of Peter and John going to the temple. While they're at the temple, they meet a person there who has been crippled for many, many years and who's begging for money. Peter and John say, "We don't have money, but we'll give you what we have. In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk." And he jumps up and starts leaping and praising God.

As other people gather around, they're astonished to see this person who's always been crippled jumping and leaping and praising the Lord. So Peter and John explain to them that it's not their own power that's done it, but the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. As they're preaching to the crowd and telling them to repent and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, some of the leaders come and seize Peter and John, lead them away, jail them for the night, and then call them into questioning the next day. Peter and John tell those leaders, "You killed the Lord of life, but God raised him to life. Salvation is found in no one else, for there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12).

When Peter and John tell these people—right to their faces, the very people who had arranged for the murder of Jesus—that they need Jesus and there's no other way to be saved, they are astonished. They take note that these men have been with Jesus. They seem a lot like Jesus; they have the same kind of boldness that Jesus had. The high priest instructs them no longer to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. They say, "Well, judge for yourselves whether we should listen to you rather than to God. We can't help speaking about the things that we've seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). The religious leaders can't quite decide what to do with the the apostles, so finally they let them go. So that's where we are in Acts chapter 4.

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God:

"Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his Anointed One' (Psalm 2:1-2). Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 4:24-31).

Prayer pattern

I want to first of all begin by noticing how the apostles pray, because we can learn a lot about prayer from this. They've just been threatened, and now they're praying to God. One of the first things to do in prayer is to remember who you're talking to. Sometimes we can get so wrapped up in the problem that we're praying about that we forget about the one we're actually talking to. They begin their prayer by saying, "Sovereign Lord, you created the heavens and the earth." Sometimes when you're facing powerful people who are against you, you might be tempted to look at their power. But the apostles are thinking of the One who made everything. We're talking to the almighty Creator. He's far more powerful than the forces that threaten us.

Then they pray the Bible. That's another good practice in prayer: remember who you're talking to, but also pray the Scriptures. They quoted Psalm 2: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The rulers of the earth gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One" (Psalm 2:1-2). They pray that Scripture, and they say, "Wow, that Scripture is talking about exactly what just happened. Herod and Pontius Pilate and the various leaders—they conspired against Jesus, but they did exactly what you had planned. This didn't catch you by surprise at all, Lord. You predicted it a thousand years ago, and now they did exactly what you said."

Another great guide in prayer is to realize that God is in charge. The things that happen don't catch him by surprise or shock him. These events had been spoken of long ago through David when he wrote Psalm chapter 2. So they remind themselves that they are in God's plan.

Now what do you do when you know that God is in charge, that he has foreseen all of this, that things are happening according to his direction? How do you actually pray? What do you ask for? Notice what they ask for: "Consider their threats." That's all they say. That's all they ask for as far as the enemies go: "Consider their threats, Lord. You take care of the enemies. That's your problem. What we want is for you to give us boldness in testimony and to give us power to do great things. We'll leave the enemies to you, but we need what you want us to have."

When you pray, just hand the enemy over to the Lord. Even pray that God will bring them to repentance. Don't sweat it too hard about what the enemy is up to. Hand the problem over to God, and then say, "Lord, however you choose to deal with the problem, what I want is power from you to be who you want me to be, to do what you want me to do. Give me boldness for testimony. Give me the power that I'm going to need to witness for you."

And what happened after they prayed? "The place where they were meeting was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31). Pentecost, in a sense, was repeated. The pouring of the Holy Spirit on the church in one sense could only happen once as that initial outpouring—that the Holy Spirit was given on Pentecost with the shaking of the place and the mighty rushing wind and the tongues of fire. Yet there's another sense in which Pentecost can be repeated. The place can be shaken again. The prayers

can be answered afresh. The Holy Spirit can fill them again, and they can speak the word of God boldly just as they did on the original Pentecost.

Spirit filled: Two main meanings

- Brimming with Jesus' life and likeness
- Burst of power to meet a challenge or do a task

I'd like to zero in on just one phrase for the rest of the message: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." That's a phrase that comes up repeatedly in this great book of Acts, and we want to understand what the Scriptures are talking about and what's going on when people are filled with the Holy Spirit.

If you read the book of Acts, you'll find that there are two main meanings for being Spirit-filled. "Full of the Holy Spirit" is a phrase that's sometimes used, or "filled," but either way, there are two main meanings.

One is describing what people are like, what their life is like. They're brimming with the life of Jesus. They bear Jesus' likeness. They're so full of God's Holy Spirit that people see Jesus in them, and the character of Jesus is shining. The fruit of being like Jesus is evident in their life.

There's also another meaning of being Spirit-filled in the book of Acts, and that is power for a particular purpose. It's not so much the settled life of Jesus shining through them as when they meet a particular challenge or, in a particular situation, the Holy Spirit gives them a burst of power to meet that challenge, to accomplish a very big task that lies before them.

So those are two related but somewhat different meanings of being full of the Holy Spirit. One meaning is brimming over with Jesus' life as a way of life, and the other is special empowerments for particular circumstances.

Let me show you more detail of what I mean now that I've given the overview. On Pentecost, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues" (Acts 2:4). The Holy Spirit was poured out on them. They had the ability to speak in other languages and be heard in those other languages, and great power to speak the gospel.

"Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers and elders...'" That's from chapter 4 that we've just been looking at. When he's called on the carpet, he's filled with the Holy Spirit, and he's able to speak to them very boldly.

Here at the end of the chapter: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31). In a pressure situation, faced by opposition, the Holy Spirit makes them supernaturally bold. They're not scared. They're not mealy-mouthed. They are confident and clear.

Then you get to chapter 6. Some problems have arisen in the distribution of food and other goods to some widows. The apostles say, "That's a real problem. It needs a good solution, and we're

not the solution. We need to devote ourselves to the Word of God and to prayer." That's what apostles and pastors and preachers need to devote themselves to: to the Word of God and to prayer. That doesn't mean the other things don't matter. So they say, "You've got to choose some people to take care of that and oversee it. And it's important enough that you want them to be the right kind of people."

So they said, "Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom." They chose seven men, and the first one they chose was "Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:3, 5). Stephen is full of wisdom, he's full of faith. That's the kind of person that God has made him. He's got a ton of faith. He's very wise. They can see that this is a man who's got the Spirit of wisdom, who's got the Spirit of faith and of power and of a sound mind. This characterizes him. That's what I mean when I say that "Spirit filled" can mean having a settled character in which the life of Jesus shines.

Later Acts speaks says, "Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose... but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke" (6:8-10). "Full of grace and power"--that's another way of describing somebody full of the Holy Spirit: That's who he is and what he's like. He's also got great power for action here: "they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke (Acts 6:10).

Jesus had promised that he would give that kind of power, especially when they were facing challenges and trials. He said, "Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11). So when they oppose Stephen, it's not just him speaking—it's the Holy Spirit speaking. And people can't refute him or undo what he says.

Then Stephen is seized by his opponents. He gives a speech, a message to them about Jesus Christ and their need to repent. They don't like it, so they decide to kill him. While they're getting ready to kill him, "Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (Acts 7:55-56).

Now, before this Stephen has constantly been full of the Holy Spirit in his character, but now when it says "full of the Holy Spirit," it means something fresh comes upon him. He's about to die, and he sees heaven open, and God gives him words to describe what he's seeing. So he has a special empowerment for that moment. In that moment, he even prays, "Lord, receive my spirit" and "Don't hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:59-60). Where have you heard that before? Those are almost the exact words that Jesus Christ prayed on the cross. The Spirit of Jesus is giving Stephen what he needs as he's laying down his life for the Lord.

So in Stephen, you see both of those aspects of being full of the Holy Spirit. He's the kind of person who's brimming with the life of Jesus, and then when he gets into these difficult, even deadly, situations, he gets special empowerments from the Holy Spirit to do and say what the occasion demands, including laying down his life.

If you think receiving the Holy Spirit's power is only about working great miracles, keep in mind that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and power—and was crucified. Keep in mind that Stephen had great power for miracles and mighty speech—and was murdered. So divine power does not always rescue us or give us an end-around to avoid suffering for the gospel.

Here are some more Spirit-filled people and situations in the book of Acts: "They sent Barnabas to Antioch... He encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:24). That's the first meaning of being full of the Holy Spirit: the goodness of the Holy Spirit, the faith that the Holy Spirit gives in Jesus, are evident in Barnabas's character and behavior.

In fact, Barnabas is very much like the Holy Spirit. His name, Barnabas, means "son of encouragement." His real name is Joseph. So he's literally Joe Encouragement. Now, what is the title for the Holy Spirit that Jesus uses? "The Paraclete," which means "the Encourager." The name "Barnabas" is a different language than Greek, but it means "the Encourager." Either way, the Holy Spirit is the Encourager, and here's a guy whose nickname is "the Encourager"—a man full of the Holy Spirit.

Barnabas sees what's going on in Antioch—these are people who are non-Jewish. This was a new thing: non-Jewish people coming to the Lord. So the church in Jerusalem know who to send—they send Mr. Encouragement. And he sees evidence of the grace of God in them, and he's rejoicing. He encourages them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. That's what happens when a Spirit-filled person is set loose on the world. When you have the Encourager in you, you become a paraclete, an encourager to others, because the Paraclete is in you and working through you.

Saul of Tarsus has that famous moment when he is on his way to kill Christians, but Jesus appears to him on the road to Damascus. He sees this blinding light and can no longer see, but he hears the voice of Christ. Christ says, "Why are you persecuting me?" Saul, of course, is changed. Saul realizes that he's been fighting against Christ, when Christ is in fact risen and reigning.

The next thing that happens is that God sends him a man named Ananias to pray over him. He comes and says, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Saul has seen Jesus, the risen Christ, but now he needs something else: he needs the filling of the Holy Spirit. He needs the life of Christ in him to take over his life. Because he's going to become an apostle, he needs that mighty power of the Holy Spirit to carry out what Jesus has assigned him to do. So he needs the life, and he needs the power. He needs to be Spirit-filled.

One of the things that happens when you're filled with the Holy Spirit is you can be mighty bold—sometimes with the enemies of the gospel. Paul is speaking to a politician, a ruler in Cyprus named Sergius Paulus. He's very interested in the faith and is considering the faith, but there's another guy there named Elymas (or Bar-Jesus), and he's trying to talk Sergius Paulus out of believing. "Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, 'You're a child of

the devil," and the man is struck blind for a while (Acts 13:9-11). Sergius Paulus says, "I think that's a good clue—I'm going to become a Christian." Facing opposition, sometimes you need's courage from the Spirit to face martyrdom, and sometimes the Holy Spirit just gives the power to say, "You son of the devil, you can't see anymore."

At the end of Acts 13, the disciples have been getting persecuted and hunted. How do they respond to that? It says, "The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52). Again, that special endowment of the Holy Spirit in a tough situation—instead of getting discouraged or downcast, the Encourager comes on them afresh, and they're filled with the Holy Spirit. He gives them joy even though people are against them.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, says, "Don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). You need another power in your life, but don't let it be the power of alcohol and drugs. Let it be the power of God. Let it be the Holy Spirit that's filling you constantly and influencing you and changing who you are and making you different. Getting drunk and having the Holy Spirit are utterly different, but they have one thing in common: they change you. In one sense, you're still you—but you're not. Drunkenness changes you for the worse; the Spirit changes you for the better. It's still you, but it's a transformed you in a wonderful way.

So those are the two main meanings of "Spirit filled": (1) brimming with Jesus' life and with his likeness, and (2) having bursts of power to meet a challenge or to do a task.

Now, the important thing for us is not just to do a quick overview of some texts in Acts about being filled with the Holy Spirit and say, "Yeah, check, I saw the PowerPoint, got that marked down." The question is now: do I live the Spirit-filled life? Have I been filled with the Holy Spirit in both senses?

Am I someone who is filled to overflowing, brimming with the life and reality of Jesus Christ? Am I becoming more like him because something that's not just me is going on inside? Because if you're a Christian at all, then you have the Holy Spirit. But is that Spirit filling you to overflowing and transforming you?

And are you counting on the Holy Spirit when you are called by God to do hard things? Are you going to accept the call to attempt hard things—things that are harder than you can handle, but not harder than he can handle? Because it's in those situations that the burst of power from the Holy Spirit comes to meet the challenge, to carry out the task that God gives you.

Spirit filled: FAQ

- Who has been baptized with the Spirit?
- Is a two-stage experience the norm?
- Do tongues always go with fullness?
- Are there fresh fillings after conversion?
- Is filling sudden and spectacular?
- Can events like in Acts still happen?

Let's think about some frequently asked questions (FAQ) about being Spirit-filled. This can sometimes be a difficult topic, sometimes controversial, with different views among Christians. So let's think about some of the questions that arise.

Who has been baptized with the Holy Spirit?

Sometimes the Bible uses the term "baptized with the Holy Spirit." Sometimes it uses the term "filled with the Holy Spirit," and they don't always mean exactly the same thing. Being baptized with the Holy Spirit simply means that you have received the Holy Spirit from the Lord Jesus Christ. Who has been baptized with the Holy Spirit? Anybody who's been given faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—to trust him as your Savior, to surrender to him as your Lord. This cannot happen without the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. The Bible says that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8), and it is by faith in Jesus that the baptism of the Holy Spirit comes.

I think it's a misunderstanding to say that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a totally separate thing from being converted to faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "You have all been baptized into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). We should not make distinctions among Christians and say, "Well, these are the carnal Christians who have not yet received any baptism in the Holy Spirit, and those are the spiritual Christians who've received that baptism of the Spirit." Everybody who trusts in Jesus Christ as Savior and surrenders to him as Lord has been baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Is a two-stage experience the norm?

This question is closely related to the first. Some Christians think that a two-stage experience is the norm. First you put your faith in Christ, and then later on comes a second blessing, an endowment of the Holy Spirit that raises your whole life to a different level of power, of joy, of love, of energy in the Holy Spirit.

One reason for thinking this way might be their own experience. They came to know the Lord Jesus, they walked with him for a while, and then something else happened—and whoa! They believe that the Holy Spirit came on them in a way that he never had before. So they see their own life as a two-stage experience—of faith first, and then later on, of tremendous empowerment and closeness to God.

When that's been your own experience, you might see it in the book of Acts as well. You say, "The apostles and other disciples started out following Jesus for several years and getting to know him better and learning to do things on his behalf and to spread the gospel. Then comes Pentecost—and boom! The wind comes, the fire comes, the Holy Spirit comes. One day, three thousand converted. Peter is like he's never been before." You read later on in Acts of a couple of occasions where people hear the gospel and believe, but then Peter and John come and they receive the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. Acts has a number of examples of people who first come to faith and then later on have a tremendous empowerment of the Holy Spirit. So, if you read the book of Acts and you see some two-stage examples, and you look at your own experience and see two stages, you say, "Two stages: that's the way God normally works."

I'm not saying there are never two major stages. But I am saying it's not the norm. I'll explain why. It's not the norm in the book of Acts. The book of Acts, when it tells us about Pentecost, is describing one of the great events in redemption history, at a great turning point in history, when the Holy Spirit is first poured out by Jesus on the church. That happens in Acts 2. When Gentiles in Samaria and then later on elsewhere come to the Lord, that's a one-time thing in a sense—a great turning point where the Jews are welcomed with great signs from the Holy Spirit, and then Gentiles are brought in with great signs from the Holy Spirit. We shouldn't take some of those rather unique events and say that is the norm for all Christians for all time: to first hear about Jesus and believe in him, and then later on have a second stage, a second blessing.

In fact, you'll find that there are some situations in the book of Acts where people don't experience first faith in Jesus, then an endowment from the Holy Spirit. They come to faith in Jesus and they're filled with the Holy Spirit at the same time. It's always a hazard to take descriptions from a few incidents in the Bible and turn them into a prescription, or to take your own experience and say, "This ought to be everybody's standard, in exactly the same way that it happened to me."

Do tongues always go with fullness?

Several times in the book of Acts, when people are baptized with the Holy Spirit or filled with the Holy Spirit, they speak in tongues. Some Christians have said that speaking in tongues is the sign of this second blessing of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

But if you read the Bible, even in the book of Acts, not all of them spoke in tongues. If you read the apostle Paul's writings, he says, "I speak in tongues more than all of you" (1 Corinthians 14:18). But does everybody speak in tongues? No. He says God gives different gifts to different people as he decides (1 Corinthians 12:11). Speaking in tongues is not the only gift. It's not the main sign of having received the Holy Spirit. For some situations, it was a sign, but not for all. And it's not the gift that marks everybody who has risen to a high spiritual level.

Are there fresh fillings after conversion?

What I've said thus far may sound comforting to people who don't speak in tongues. It may seem soothing to those who haven't received a second blessing after conversion. They might say, "Whew! I never spoke in tongues, and I never had a second stage happen to me. I wondered if that meant I was missing out on something. But it sounds like I'm okay and don't need such experiences."

But we still need to face the question: are there fresh fillings after conversion? The answer is yes.

So even if you agree with me that two-stage experience is not the norm and that you can be filled with the Spirit without speaking in tongues, this doesn't mean you should say to yourself, "I don't really need to seek any more than I've already got." That is not the conclusion to draw.

I don't believe there's just conversion and then a second blessing that lifts you to the higher level and keeps you there forever. You might have a third and a fourth and a seventeenth blessing!

You might have tremendous steps of growth from the Holy Spirit and greater fullness of the Holy Spirit later on in your life. After a great experience of the Spirit, you may have said, “Oh, now I’ve received the Holy Spirit. I’ve got that fullness.” Yeah, you wish.

In one sense, it’s true. But in another sense, there is so much more of us that the Holy Spirit needs to have. Sometimes we talk about having more of the Holy Spirit. That is one way to describe it—of becoming fuller and fuller of the Holy Spirit. But in one sense, you have the entire Holy Spirit when you have him. But does he have all of you? The fullness of the Spirit is actually filling up more and more elements of your life with himself. And there can be many fresh fillings after conversion.

So, when I answer the first few of these frequently asked questions in the manner that I have, my aim is not to encourage complacency in those who don’t have a very lively experience of the Holy Spirit in their life, or a very strong sense of his presence or his empowerment, who don’t have a sense that there’s anything unusual that God’s doing in them. God does unusual things and makes you more than you were apart from him.

Is filling with the Spirit sudden and spectacular?

Sometimes. Not always.

Sometimes the place is shaken. Sometimes you can sense overwhelmingly that God is there. Lots of people are anointed and empowered afresh with the Holy Spirit, and you know it.

Sometimes, though, the Holy Spirit kind of sneaks up on you and changes this, alters that, strengthens you for this. It might almost be imperceptible to you. Have you ever watched people grow? You won’t see it happen in a moment. I’ve never see someone grow just by sitting down and watching them. Never. But when I meet people that I knew as kids ten years ago, I think, “Something happened to that kid. Wow, did they grow!” You can’t see it happening in the moment, but it’s happening, because there’s life in there, there’s growth in there.

Sometimes the filling of the Spirit is spectacular and sudden—maybe a bit like growth spurts in some kids where you saw them not long ago, and now they’re five inches taller. You know what kids are like during their growth spurt. There are also growth spurts in the Christian life that the Holy Spirit gives us that are very sudden and very noticeable.

Then there are the gradual changes that the Spirit is constantly making. And as he’s making those gradual changes, people who see you may begin more and more to look at you the way they looked at Barnabas. They said, “That guy has the Paraclete. That guy is the Encourager.” You look at Stephen, and you say, “He is full of faith. He’s full of the Holy Spirit.” You look at Barnabas, and you say, “He’s a good man.”

Now, do we dare to say that some is “a good man” or “a good woman”? Some of us who have learned a lot about the biblical theology of sin are in the position of constantly saying how sinful we are. When we realize how weak and helpless we are apart from Jesus’ power and the power of the Holy Spirit, we may emphasize how little we can do. But there is another way of looking

at these things—not just what I am apart from the Spirit, but who I am when I’m filled with the Spirit. Nobody could outdo the apostle Paul in describing the seriousness of sin. He describes it in terrible detail in the first part of Romans. But what does he say at the end of Romans? “You yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge, and competent to instruct one another” (Romans 15:14). This is the same guy who, at the beginning of the letter, says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... there is no one righteous, not even one... their mouths are full of poison” (Romans 3:10-13, paraphrased). But later he says, “You yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and able to instruct one another” (Romans 15:14).

Because that is the truth about the Christian. That is the truth about you when you belong to Jesus and the Holy Spirit lives in you. You must not get stuck in Romans 1 to 3. If you’ve been filled with the Holy Spirit, “the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2). “Reckon yourselves dead to sin, alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11). “Full of goodness!” (Romans 15:14)

The apostle John says, “I wouldn’t even need to instruct you, because you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (1 John 2:20-21 paraphrased). To be Spirit-filled is to have the goodness of Jesus in you, the truth of Jesus in you, and to count on that, and not simply to wallow in what you were apart from him.

Jesus said, “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). But it’s equally true that “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). So keep both truths in mind. Never forget what it’s like to be apart from Christ. But also never forget that you’re alive in Christ, and the Holy Spirit lives in you.

Whether that reality sometimes comes on you suddenly and in spectacular ways, or whether the Holy Spirit sneaks up on you and keeps imparting gradual growth, either way it’s the Holy Spirit’s work. Because he is in you, you’re not who you were.

Can events like in Acts still happen?

Sometimes we read Acts as a historical record, and then when we get to the end of Acts 28, we say, “Now the Holy Spirit has done his work. The Holy Spirit has inspired the truth. He’s given us the Scriptures as his final written revelation,” and we almost become Bible deists. Deists are people who believe that a great Power created the universe, got it going, and then let it go because it had everything it needed to keep rolling on its own steam. A Bible deist is one who says, “Now that the Holy Spirit has given the Bible, he’s pretty well done his work, and he doesn’t do the kind of things described in the Bible anymore.” The irony is: he did stuff like that in Bible times, but now that we have the whole Bible, he doesn’t do that anymore.

I think that is to misread the evidence of the Bible, and of history, and maybe even of our own hearts. Because if we don’t see much happening like the Bible in our own lives, it’s kind of comforting to be told, “Don’t expect it. Nothing wrong. Nothing to see here. You shouldn’t expect things in your church to be like they were in the book of Acts. You shouldn’t expect things to happen in your own life like happened to those people. They lived in a different era. They were unusual. They were extraordinary.”

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The great promise of the New Testament is that you're living in a new covenant, in which the Holy Spirit has been given to his people in a way that had not been experienced previously. He's been given for the whole new covenant era to be increasing in his might and his influence in God's people. And if that's not happening, then we have to ask, "Is something amiss in my life or in the life of the church? Am I content to be ordinary?"

In one sense, it's okay to be ordinary. The Lord delights in the ordinary and doing extraordinary things through ordinary people. But is my goal of life to get through it without too much muss or fuss? Without expecting too much? Hopefully have decent relationships, have a little fun and some good food while I'm at it, live to a ripe old age, and then pass into glory? Is that what I expect of the normal Christian life? Or do I expect something divine—something supernatural?

Can events like in Acts happen? They have happened again and again throughout history. I don't have time to go into all of the great revivals, but Acts is a book of revival. God has sent tremendous revivals in the history of the church. He has sent times when entire churches were made more alive than they'd ever been, and the fire of the Holy Spirit swept through communities and transformed them.

Revival: Holy Spirit outpoured afresh

- Believers pray eagerly and urgently.
- God manifests his mighty presence.
- Awe, guilt, and dread overwhelm many.
- Jesus is exalted and experienced.
- The Spirit enables bold, strong witness.
- Church grows & society changes—fast!

What happens in revival? In one sense, Pentecost is repeated. The Holy Spirit is outpoured afresh. Revival is often preceded by believers praying—eagerly, earnestly: "Lord, fill us with the Holy Spirit. Lord, give us new life and new power." And God manifests his mighty presence—sometimes to an individual, sometimes to a whole group of people.

Dwight Moody was a shoe salesman who had a somewhat successful Sunday school program. He began praying for more of the Holy Spirit. He said one day that God poured out his love on him in a way so powerful that he had to ask the Lord to stop, or he was afraid he would die. He said, "I went on and I preached pretty much the same sermons as before, but they weren't the same. The impact was no longer the same." Now, suddenly, many people were being swept into the kingdom of God because the Holy Spirit was working in fresh and powerful ways.

In Korea, there was a group of somewhat discouraged missionaries with a handful of people in 1907. They were together one day, and suddenly they had a mighty sense of the presence of God among them. They began to cry and to admit their sins to each other. Church elders and pastors were admitting their sins in front of the congregation, and they couldn't help themselves. The Holy Spirit came on them with such power that they didn't care what anybody thought. That

little group became tens of millions of Christians in Korea. That doesn't happen just by ordinary processes. That happens when the Holy Spirit brings revival.

In East Africa, in Kenya, one of the missionaries describes what happened during the Kenyan revival. She says, "We were in that place, and suddenly it was like there was a sound of a hurricane. The place we were meeting in was shaken, and everybody knew that God was there." They started weeping and crying, and they had this awe and guilt. Dread was overwhelming them. Then a tremendous joy came upon them. These are not things that happen only in the book of Acts.

As I've said before, not everything is sudden and spectacular, but sometimes it is. That's what we call revival. Revival is what happens when God moves in sudden and swift ways, and Jesus Christ is exalted and he is experienced. You know he's there. Lots of people at the same time know he's there.

When that happens, as in Acts chapter 4, the witness becomes bold and strong, because suddenly the reality of God is so present and real to you that what other people might think of you doesn't matter. Whether you're confessing your sins or whether you're witnessing, you're not as easily embarrassed as you were, because you have a sense that God is there.

When revival happens, the church grows. Society changes. The Welsh revival began in the early 1900s, and they had a funny little problem: the donkeys in the mines didn't know what to do anymore because the miners had stopped cussing. The donkeys formerly took their cues from the cussing miners telling them what to do. The power of the Holy Spirit changed the way people operated in an entire society, or village, or country. This is what happens in revival.

I mention these things not because revival is the constant state of the church—sad to say, it's not. But reading the book of Acts, I want you to think again about what it means to be Spirit-filled, and ask: am I content with my life the way it is? Do I have as much of the life and reality of Jesus already as I desire to have? Am I doing the things for God that I was meant to do? And do I have the power from God to do them? Ask yourself these questions, and then seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Seeking fullness

- **Honor** the Holy Spirit living in you.
- **Repent** of anything that grieves or quenches the Spirit.
- **Surrender** your entire self and all your goals to Jesus' reign.
- **Pray** that God will flood you with the Spirit's life and power.

Realize that if you belong to Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit already in you. Honor him; don't ignore him. Don't proceed as though there is nobody else there. If you live with a constant awareness: God is in me, God is at work in me, the Holy Spirit of the living God is watching every show I watch, involved in everything I do—what you watch and what you do will change.

Repent of anything that grieves the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is grieved by sin. He's grieved by grudges and unforgiveness. He's grieved by bickering. So repent of anything that you know of already in your life that the Holy Spirit brings to your mind, and turn away from it. There are things that quench the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can be quenched by not believing that he's going to do unusual things, by not believing that you're ever going to be much different than you are, that life is always going to be stuck in pretty much the same rut as it is now. You can quench the Spirit by having no expectancy. Seek more. Don't quench.

Surrender your whole self and all your goals to the reign of Jesus Christ. That's the purpose of the Spirit—to lift your eyes to Jesus, and then to enlist you in Jesus' mission: to make you like him, and then to give you his gifts and his power to accomplish what Jesus wants you to accomplish.

So when you're thinking about your career or your work life or the way you spend your time, ask yourself: What does God want me to do? What is he calling me to do? He's not calling everybody to be a missionary or an apostle. He is calling some. He has a call on your life—you can be assured of that. Find out more and more what it is. If you don't know the call on your whole life, what's his call for me this week? Start with this week. Look for the opportunities. Then ask, what are the bigger opportunities? What are the bigger paths that God wants for my life?

Don't just say, "Well, I hope to marry happily, live a pleasant life, not have too much trouble, go to church, do some good things, and then pass into glory." There is more to having the Spirit-filled life than that.

Then pray. Jesus says that if you ask your Father in heaven for bread, he's not going to give you a rock. If you ask for the Holy Spirit, he's not going to turn you down. Our Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11:11-13).

What happened when the apostles and those persecuted believers prayed? The place was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly (Acts 4:31). Pray the Bible. At one point, James says, "You have not because you ask not" (James 4:2).

As I mentioned, one way to quench the Spirit is not to expect very much—and not expecting, therefore not to seek or to ask, and therefore not to receive or find. So let's pray right now.

Prayer

Father, fill us as you are pleased to fill us, that your life will be our life, and that we will be more and more fully yours. We pray that Jesus may take shape and be formed in us, and we pray that more and more we will be like him.

We pray too, Lord, that you will help us in our witness, that you will give us the boldness we need to make a difference in this world. We live in an increasingly twisted and depraved age, and it seems nothing less than a mighty wind of revival will do.

We don't know all of your plans, Father, but we pray that your plans for us may be fulfilled, that we will not quench or grieve your Spirit. And we pray, Lord Jesus, that in our community you will empower this church to be more the church you want us to be—not just to settle for small things, but to seek and to expect more from you.

We pray for our nation and for the nations of the world, and ask that you will bring new, fresh Pentecost revival. We thank you for what you have done in many nations that were far from you, and we hold before you our own nation, which is sinking further and further into darkness and rebellion. We ask for the great winds of revival. We ask, Lord, for the filling of your Spirit and nothing less. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Spirit Filled
By David Feddes
Slide Contents

Spirit filled: Two main meanings

- Brimming with Jesus' life and likeness
- Burst of power to meet a challenge or do a task

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. (2:4)

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders..." (4:8)

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (4:31)

Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom... They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. (6:3, 5)

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose... but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. (6:8-10)

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (7:55-56)

They sent Barnabas to Antioch... He encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:24)

Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 9:17)

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him, and said, "You are a child of the devil." (13:9-10)

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (13:52)

Be filled with the Spirit. (Eph 5:18)

Spirit filled: Two main meanings

- Brimming with Jesus' life and likeness
- Burst of power to meet a challenge or do a task

Spirit filled: FAQ

- Who has been baptized with the Spirit?
- Is a two-stage experience the norm?
- Do tongues always go with fullness?
- Are there fresh fillings after conversion?
- Is filling sudden and spectacular?
- Can events like in Acts still happen?

Revival: Holy Spirit outpoured afresh

- Believers pray eagerly and urgently.
- God manifests his mighty presence.
- Awe, guilt, and dread overwhelm many.
- Jesus is exalted and experienced.
- The Spirit enables bold, strong witness.
- Church grows & society changes—fast!

Seeking fullness

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