

By My Spirit



*“But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,
you will receive power to testify about me with great effect.”*

ACTS 1:8

The events of the past week had left the disciples reeling. Their Master had entered Jerusalem thronged by a crowd shouting, “Hosanna!” Less than a week later, another crowd shouted, “Crucify him.” He left Jerusalem carrying a cross.

Then the impossible happened. Jesus rose from the dead! They saw him, touched him, broke bread with him. He was alive! And he had commissioned them to “go and make disciples in all the nations” (Matt. 28:19).

The power of the Resurrection and its call to commit ourselves to the living Christ has not diminished in 2,000 years. One Easter, after an intense struggle, I surrendered my life to the Lord and took the plunge into the baptismal waters. Each year since, Easter has been a special time of renewing my commitment to share the Good News that Jesus is alive. He is “the Way—yes, and the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6).

But what happens to my commitment and enthusiasm—and yours, too, perhaps—during the times between our mountaintop experiences? How do we rekindle our resolve to go into the world through our writing when it seems like everything we write is being

rejected? Where do we find the determination and strength to persevere—to keep writing, keep submitting, and keep believing our words will one day get into print?

Jesus knew his disciples well. He knew they were just ordinary men who would need extraordinary power for the task before them. It wasn't going to be easy to reach a world. Although many would believe and be saved, countless others would be threatened and infuriated by the message of the Cross. In their own strength, the disciples could not hope to endure the persecution that awaited them.

Even after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples had plenty of questions and doubts—the same as us. I suspect some must have felt panicky when Jesus ascended into heaven. Now what? How could they do what he called them to do without him beside them?

“But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to testify about me with great effect,” Jesus promised (Acts 1:8). The message to us is clear. If the men and women who walked and talked with Jesus needed the Holy Spirit, how much more do we need him today!

We need him to sanctify us—to make us holy and acceptable vessels through which Jesus Christ can work (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11). Often uncertain of the direction we should go, we need his guidance (Gal. 5:16). In the face of disappointment and discouragement, and some days maybe even despair, we need his comfort (John 14:16) and the gift of hope (Rom. 15:13).

Challenged by conflicting theologies and the subtlety of humanistic ideas, we are dependent on him to reveal God's truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). We must first be taught if we are to teach others. We are dependent on the Spirit to bring to our attention the lessons we have learned and to show us how to effectively share them with our readers (John 14:26). We need “the Holy Spirit's words to explain the Holy Spirit's facts” (1 Cor. 2:13). We need the “thoughts and mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16) to write with sensitivity and understanding. And, tempted to preach, we need to be reminded that he alone convicts people of their sin and offers them the hope of God's redemption (John 16:8).

Standing in need of all the above and more, the question becomes, “Do we wait long enough to receive everything God wants to give us?” The disciples waited in prayer in the Upper Room for

several days after Jesus' ascension. To be honest, I find it difficult to wait even for several minutes.

Far too often, my writing time is prefaced by only a quick token prayer. I ask for the Lord's help and his Spirit's anointing, but I fail to wait for him to fill me. I fail to heed the literal translation of Ephesians 5:18 to "keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit." Even though it's evident that I "leak"—that I need repeated fillings of the Spirit's power—I don't sit still long enough for him to pour himself into me.

If we truly want God's power to infuse our writing and every aspect of our lives, we must learn to wait quietly in his presence. *The Message* says, "Hold your minds in a state of undistracted attention" (2 Pet. 3:1). But I have a hard time being quiet! I'm almost always on the go, always rushing. Even when I do sit still, my mind isn't still. Yet I know I cannot sidestep the importance of first being filled if I hope to write anything that will have a lasting impact. I need his anointing so that every word, every sentence, is written with "the strength and energy that God supplies, so that God will be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 4:11).

The ways each of us experience the power of the Holy Spirit will be unique, just as the gifts he gives us will be different. "There are many ways in which God works in our lives," Paul wrote the Corinthians, "but it is the same God who does the work in and through all of us who are his" (1 Cor. 12:6). We don't need to compare ourselves with anyone else or covet anyone else's gift because "Christ has given each of us special abilities—whatever he wants us to have out of his rich storehouse of gifts" (Eph. 4:7).

God longs for us to come into his presence, to open and to use the gifts he gives us. By his Spirit we, too, can be his witnesses—in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).



RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL TO WRITE

Study the following passages. Beside each reference, note what the Holy Spirit is promising to do in your life. Then ask yourself if you are experiencing this aspect of being filled with the Spirit.

John 14:15-16:

John 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13-14:

Romans 15:13:

Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11:

1 Corinthians 2:4, 10-16:

Galatians 5:16:

Galatians 5:22-23:

I DON'T UNDERSTAND

Lord, I don't understand
how your Spirit can dwell within me.

I don't understand
how he can change and sanctify me.

But I do understand
why I need

all you have for me.

Thank you for meeting me
at my point of weakness,
for filling me with your power
to be all you call me to be.