

Hugh Hamilton
Trinity Presbyterian Church, Pensacola, FL
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LIFE IN THE SPIRIT: 3. “Trickle Charge”

John 20:19-23 Acts 2:1-21 Psalm 104:24-34

Hugh displayed atop the pulpit an iPod, a cordless drill a cell phone, flashlight, a battery recharger, a notebook computer, a Dustbuster vacuum, a clock radio, and asked “What do these things have in common?” Yes, they all use batteries, rechargeable batteries. When I asked people this week what items use rechargeable they added, a video camera, a golf cart, solar powered yard lights, smoke detectors, Wii remote controls, a Gameboy electronic game.

All these things when plugged into a electrical socket, receive a trickle charge, a slow steady flow of electricity that recharges the batteries, preparing them for duty whenever needed.

- Some of these things use Nickel-Cadmium (Ni-Cad) batteries that must be fully discharged before recharging or they are prone to "memory effect" – a reduction in the total capacity of the battery. If you never fully expend them they hold less charge, last shorter times and supply less energy.
- Others use Lithium Ion (“Lithium”) batteries do not suffer from "memory effect", so you don't have to fully discharge them before recharging. They retain more energy, last longer, and deliver more energy per charge. They do tend to be more expensive to buy and replace.

What does all this have to do with Life In the Spirit?

- The Holy Spirit keeps us connected to God and empowers us for witness and service.
- Sometimes we expend ourselves in dramatic service – and deplete our resources, so we need to receive a massive full recharge, an overhaul.
- Sometimes our actions and contributions are small efforts, minor draws on our spiritual power – yet the Spirit still works to replenish us and keep us full.
- Sometimes by lack of effort or attention, our spirituality goes flat, nothing gained, nothing loss, and our “memory effect” lowers our capacity to serve.
- The various types of renewal are real, and each is needed at some time or another.

Also, folks differ in their interpretations and expectations of what it means to be “filled with the Spirit,” and they assess your spiritual vitality, your maturity in Christ, by comparison to their own experience and expectations. Some insist that you must have a profound public display of the Holy Spirit for you to be a true, spirit-filled, Christian, while other are suspicious of those very same profound public manifestations of the Spirit.

Garrison Keillor, famous for his “*A Prairie Home Companion*” broadcasts about Lake Wobegone, tells a story about his uncle Louie who had begun speaking in tongues. "The thought of Uncle Louie speaking in tongues was fascinating to me," says Keillor. "Uncle Louie worked at the bank, He spoke to me mostly about thrift and hard work. What tongue would he speak? Spanish? French? Or would it sound like gibberish? Louie said that speaking in tongues was the true sign of the Holy Spirit, and a test of one's spirituality, that those who believed heard and to those who didn't believe it was only gabble." So Keillor wondered, “ What if he stood up and said

'Feemalator, jasperator, hoo haha, wamalana gamanama, zis boom bah!' and everyone else said 'Amen! That's right brother! Praise God!' and I was the only one who said, 'Huh?'"

(Keillor, Garrison. *Lake Wobegone Days*. New York: Viking Press, 1985)

I appreciate Keillor's honesty. I do not speak in Tongues nor tongues of fire flamed over me. I was in High School in the 1970's when the Charismatic movement was active in churches and I had Christian friends who professed to speak in tongues and they told my friends and me that we were second class Christians because we couldn't speak in tongues. In college and in seminary, classmates tried to "save" me and bring me a second baptism of fire, that I might be "born again" and speak in tongues or prophecy – as any full blown Spirit-filled Christian should be able to do! The fact that I did not speak in tongues or show outer manifestations of the Spirit suggested to them that I was inadequate or holding back – so I should fully yield myself to God and seek the Holy Spirit. On several occasions I yielded my heart to God again and asked to speak in tongues or to receive a full blown experience of the Holy Spirit, whatever God willed for me to receive – but the dramatic signs and wonders have not appeared. I visited churches where people were regularly "slain in the Spirit," speak in tongues or heal or prophecy. It was dramatic and somewhat scary, to say the least. I don't question the reality or effectiveness of that form of worship, but I didn't experience their ecstasy. I have Pentecostal minister friends and I thank God that churches of those practices will reach people we never will, just as we will reach people for Christ who choose not to attend churches with those practices.

Their practices are not wrong, nor are ours. Not wrong, just different. Some are Nickel cadmium, some are lithium ion. Each has its proper use. Not wrong, just different.

Tongues and prophecy is not my experience. My experience is more in line with the account in John's gospel than with the Acts 2 Pentecost experience. In John's gospel the gift of the Spirit is a confined, personal, intimate experience with Jesus as he breathes the Holy Spirit on the disciples. This comes in private, not in public, as in Acts 2.

But that creates a problem. Which experience is normative for us? Acts 2 - wild winds, dancing fires, and strange tongues – was real, it was public, its power drew people together into a church community and empowered them for service! But if the Spirit doesn't come upon you like that, in some dramatic, spectacular public manner, if you don't speak in tongues or prophecy, then do you not have the Spirit? Are you not "born again?"

Read the Bible carefully and you'll find that not everyone has every spiritual gift, nor do we all have the same spiritual gifts. Not everyone is called to do everything – or to experience the same thing. The "Fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23 is love joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control, the fruit is common to all believers; but the "Gifts of the Spirit" are different: there are 19 gifts listed, and different gifts are given to different people for different usage. Not everyone has all the gifts; nor is an experience of the Spirit the same for all of us.

Just as real, just as significant, just as important as the public, dramatic, ecstatic experiences of the Holy Spirit that some people have are the quiet, personal, intimate experiences of the Spirit that other people have. Just as significant is the steady flow of Holy Spirit into your life.

Both the Acts 2 account and the John 20 account are part of the Bible, and both reveal valid, though different contributions to the faith. So let us not try to prove one right and the other wrong, but rather to accept that both accounts are true and both contribute to our appreciation of the ways God's Holy Spirit comes into our lives. For we experience God differently at different times.

ECSTATIC...DRAMATIC...TRAUMATIC

There are times when God storms us like a fiery presence, like gale force winds, overwhelming us, cleansing us, challenging us.

At a Promise Keepers stadium event in the 1990's, 56,000 men crowded into the Liberty Bowl Stadium in Memphis and the Holy Spirit moved among us, convicting thousands of men of their sins and shortcomings. Even stiff old Presbyterian Elders walked down out on the stadium onto the football field to kneel before God and recommit their lives to Christ. Three of my buddies credit that event with saving their lives and their marriages. Two years later, kneeling on the floor of the St Louis MO coliseum with my four of buddies has forever connected me to them in God's power!

As a boy I attended a Billy Graham crusade and when the Spirit tugged on my heart, with my mother's encouragement I walked forward to commit my life to God.

God speaks in dramatic ways sometimes.

Maybe the drinker who bottoms out,
or the patient facing chemotherapy or surgery,
or the teenager battling suicidal feelings
or the couple whose tensions are calling for change...
maybe the life storms battering them are opening the way for renewal.

Sometimes we can see, feel, know, experience God in the ecstatic ...dramatic...traumatic times we face. Not only mountaintop - but also the depths of the valley experiences of our lives may be the most vital ways God enters our hearts. When we are blown away we're finally ready, open, and willing to let God breathe newness into our lives.

SUBDUED...QUIET...PERSONAL...BREATH

But just as we may know God's spirit coming to us with power and might and drama, we also know God present to us in subdued...quiet...personal...experiences, almost imperceptibly, as unnoticed as breathing itself.

Have you ever been working on a teaching plan or a Bible lesson or list of prospective helpers and it just wouldn't come, wouldn't work right? Then you prayed, "Lord, help me.!" And somehow the answer came, the names flowed, the plans suddenly worked? That's the Holy Spirit at work.

Or maybe the youth group got the best of you, and you wondered if they ever listen to you, ever get anything you are trying to impart to them about life and God and values. You wonder if they ever hear a word you said. Then years later a college student home on vacation remarks to you that she's applying what you taught you taught her back in Sunday School! That's the work of the Spirit.

Or your Circle meeting or Men's group meeting is dragging on and you're thinking more about what you need to get at the grocery store and whether your tires need rotating. You're working down your mental checklist, and suddenly the facilitator says something that gets your attention and you're on a roll, verses that never made sense before suddenly come alive and the answer you've been praying for is clear as a bell, you know your decision and what to do. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

And aren't there a lot of times, quiet personal moments, when God approaches you ever so imperceptibly...

in the beauty of a nature or
in the simple honesty of a child's prayer, or touch or hug,
in the relief that comes when the fever breaks,
in someone's assurance that they forgive you or
in conversation when someone says just the word you've needed to hear?

At such quiet, personal, moments God breathes his spirit into your heart, and you know, in the words of the old song, "It is well with my soul?"

Sometimes God comes into your life like the rush of mighty wind

--and sometimes like the gentle breeze of spring.

Perhaps you feel the stirrings even now?

Some Pentecostals would describe my "walk with the Spirit" as unspectacular. I prefer the word "steady." Slow and steady... like a trickle feed... amassing spiritual energy that I will need.

Sometimes I need a jump-start when my battery is dead.

Sometimes I need a total battery swap out.

Sometimes I need to heed Psalm 46:10, "Be still, cease striving, and know that I am God."

Be still, God tells me, stay connected to me, abide in me and bide your time and let my Spirit flow into you and recharge you, revive you. And when the time to act is right, you'll be ready.

God may change your situation, just as you ask --

-- he may leave your situation as is and change you.

But always God works toward good for those who love and obey him.

You are NOT comfortless, or powerless, or hopeless, without purpose....

A mighty wind has roared, tongues of flame have been kindled,

God's power is flowing, surging, imparting grace and wisdom and courage into our hearts!

The Spirit may come to you now in a rushing, roaring wind.

It may come to you in a still small whisper of a breath, a trickle....

But still it comes!

...still it comes!...

...still it comes!...

...and you may move forward with power, and confidence, abiding in the Holy Spirit! Amen!