

**Living an Incredible Life:
God's Incredible Gift – the Holy Spirit
Acts 2:1-21 & Galatians 5:22-26
May 11, 2008**

In his book *Letters to My Children*, author and professor Daniel Taylor answers questions asked by his four children. One of the letters responds to a question by his young son Matthew who asked, “Why is church so boring?” Dr. Taylor responded:

That's a very good question. I wish I had a very good answer. Part of it is that God knows we can't take very much of him. It's like when you hold Fluffs, our hamster. If you squeezed very hard, Fluffs would be on his way to hamster heaven. You have to hold him gently, talk to him quietly. Well, God has to be sort of like that with us.

Truthfully, though, the biggest reason might be that we don't want very much of God. We want God to stay in his cage like Fluffs does. We are afraid of losing control of our own lives. We just want him to help us a little here, and forgive us a little there, and let us handle the rest. And so we try to make church a safe place where we can get a little bit of God but not too much.

We don't like surprises, not even from God, so we make our churches places where surprises aren't likely to happen. We ask God to come, but only if he will be polite. And therefore, little kids and adult kids often fall asleep- even if they keep their eyes open.

Pentecost Sunday gives us a description of a very un-Fluffs-like God. God didn't come in Fluffiness and cuddliness, but with power and life and wildness. In the New Testament, living in the power of the Holy Spirit was just normal Christian spirituality. Let me give you two examples:

1. 1 Thessalonians 1:5 – “our Gospel came to you not in word only, but also with power (and) with the Holy Spirit”
2. 2 Corinthians 2:4 – “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.”

“A demonstration of the power of the Spirit.” What does that mean? What would that look like? These two passages contain two different but complimentary ways we experience the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. The first passage – the story of the first Pentecost Sunday = Loud Power -> big, dramatic, supernatural, extraordinary – special times & moments.
2. 2nd reading (Galatians 5) = Quiet Power -> small, normal, natural, ordinary – daily & hourly moments

1. Acts Chapter 2 – LOUD POWER

Acts 2:1. Feast of Pentecost celebrated this week by followers of Jesus all over the world – It marks the birth of the church. After Christmas & Easter, it used to be the biggest celebration on the Church Calendar. The term – Pentecost – means

fiftieth. It derives from one of the biggest feast days on the Jewish calendar. Which took place 50 days after Passover (Exodus 23:16 & Leviticus 23:15-21). Now in the time Acts 2 was written, it was still a big holiday – sort of like our Thanksgiving when people return home – only at Pentecost, they would return to Jerusalem. So as streets & homes clogged with pilgrims & travelers, the early church experienced a demonstration of the power of the Spirit.

Three supernatural phenomena:

1. Rush of wind – Acts 2:2
2. Tongues of fire – Acts 2:3
3. Speaking different languages – Acts 2:4

Big, loud extraordinary. But each supernatural sign purposeful. Deeply rooted in Old Testament and each pointed to Jesus. (Sometimes people claim to experience power of the Holy Spirit – utterly random, no point. Like the woman who felt moved by the Holy Spirit to turn cartwheels in the aisle of the church during a worship service. What was the point?) Each sign rooted in God's larger story and pointed to Jesus. For instance:

1. Rush of Wind – Old Testament prophet Ezekiel has a vision – “a valley of dry bones.” The Lord asks, “can these bones live?” “Only you know Lord.” The spirit of God comes ... (see Ezekiel 37:5ff.), Picture of new life out of deadness. Maybe you, your life ... our institutions, our communities
2. Tongues of fire – in the Old Testament, when the fire of God descended it symbolized the holiness of God's power & God's judgment on our sin. When it came it burnt up everything in its path. Now the fire of God – the holiness of God – descends on a group of people & they aren't consumed. It rests. Imagine that. How? Jesus.
3. Speaking in tongues – here it is known languages – everyone could hear the message of Jesus in their own language. Back up to Genesis 11 – Tower of Babel – peoples of the earth confused, divided, scattered due to different languages. Humanity fragmented into tribes & ethnic groups – hating & killing each other. Now at Pentecost – a miracle, demonstration of power of the Spirit – supernatural, extraordinary.

Extraordinary demonstration of Spirit – points us deeper into Jesus (see John 14:26).

And this wasn't just a nice idea or a safe intellectual theory. Personal dimension. Historical teaching on Pentecost -> personal encounter with Pentecostal power. That's what we find in the life of Peter.

Near the end of all Gospel stories Peter's life collapses – not who he thought he was. He things he's tough, macho, invincible. But now look at him in v14 – he's got real power. Redeemed by Jesus. Forgiven. Called. Filled with the Spirit. Personal Pentecost. Bold. Courageous. Full.

This is normal – see verses 15-21. The phrase “pour out” -> and then see v21. For everyone. No limitations – too young, old, man, woman, sinful, past too broken, too stuck.

How? Open life to a miracle. Holy Spirit fill cracks, empty places, broken places. Valley of dry bones. You ask for it. You ask like a desperate, thirsty man in the desert.

2. Galatians 5 – Quiet Power

Then there’s the quiet power of the Holy Spirit – shows up every day – normal, unspectacular, but just as powerful and we need the quiet power of The Spirit just as much as the Loud Power.

Galatians 5 describes that quiet power in our lives:

- V 18 – “led by the Spirit”
- V25 – “walk in the Spirit”

Both in the “present continuous” = you’re doing it but keep doing it now and always, make it your daily, hourly practice to be led by the Spirit and to walk in the Spirit in the ordinary, unspectacular events of your everyday life.

- Led by the Spirit = passive, word for the wind driving a ship, you let the Spirit guide you
- Walk in the Spirit = active, you do something, you stand up and walk, purposeful like walking, you put one step in front of another

How do we do both of these? How are we led and how do we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit? Notice what happens when we experience a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit – it produces the fruit of the Spirit. Notice Galatians 5:22-23 →

- Love – Do you need a demonstration of the power of the Spirit? Ask for help to love someone that you find unlovable or at least difficult to love. Fill in the blank: “I have a difficult time loving _____, so Holy Spirit, pour out your Pentecostal power on me.”
- Joy – “Living God, pour out your Holy Spirit on me so I can have real joy in difficult circumstances.” Notice James 1:2. Do you want power? Now that is real power.
- Patience = longsuffering – How do you display patience when you’re ready to scream or get even at someone? That is real Pentecostal power.
- Kindness – watch this scene from the movie “Bella”. It looks so simple, so ordinary, doesn’t it. But it takes supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.
- Gentleness – what does gentleness look like? Here’s a picture in the next verses – see Galatians 6:1-2. You see the sin of another human being – maybe its your friend, or spouse, or child, or parent, or boss, or small group member. What do you do? Ignore it? Gossip about them? Hold them in contempt and disgust? What would a demonstration of the power of the Spirit look like here? It would look like Galatians 6:1-2. Explain...

How do we get in touch with the Power of the Holy Spirit? Or maybe we should say, How does the Holy Spirit get in touch with us? I want a personal Pentecost – not just an facts about the Holy Spirit. How do we experience a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit on a regular basis? I know of one way: we ask for it. We expect it. We live in light of the reality of the Holy Spirit.

How? Here's something very interesting: the Greek word *dunamis* occurs 41x in the New Testament. It refers to the power of God – we get our word dynamite from *dunamis*. Jesus lived by the *dunamis* of the Holy Spirit. He was able to battle Satan and temptation through the *dunamis* of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 4:14). Jesus healed people through the *dunamis* of the Holy Spirit (Luke 5:17). We all want the dynamite of God appearing in our lives. Sounds good – so how do we get it? In the New Testament the word *dunamis* (power) is often associated with *astheneia* or weakness. It means illness or powerlessness. At one point the Apostle Paul even boasted about his weakness because it helped him encounter the *dunamis* of God.

Weakness- power. Power-weakness. According to the Bible our weaknesses are like the cracks in an ordinary clay pot – they are cracks alright, they show the ordinariness of the pot, but they also allow the glory and beauty of the contents in the pot to shine through. We are the cracked pot. Jesus is the glorious contents within us. He shines through our cracks; his power comes through our powerlessness.

We tend to hide our weaknesses. We are ashamed, perhaps even horrified. But at the places where you are the most weak, God's glory shines through.

So the Spirit shows up, demonstrating the power of God in big ways and in small ways. We can't have one without the other. Some people are afraid of the big ways ... others ignore the quiet power. We need both. Daniel Taylor finished his letter to his son Matthew with these words:

And yet, at the very same time, church is a wonderful place. God has chosen it, sorriness and all, to be the place where he will meet his people, the place from which he will send his people to all parts of the world to preach the good news about him. For two thousand years, and for two thousand years before that, God has said, "If you love me, gather together and I will come among you and I will fill you with power. I will be your God and you will be my people." And the church has always been sort of a comical place where we never get it exactly right for long. And yet all of our weakness, timidity and love of ruts does not lessen the centrality of the church or God's ability to use it to do what he wants done in the world – which is plenty.

It's too bad that church often seems boring; it shouldn't be that way. But don't give up. God has promised to be there, and he's kept his promise for thousands of years. If you look you will find him there, and then you'll understand what church is all about.