

Empowered

**A Guide to Experiencing
the Power of the Holy Spirit**

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Introduction

An item in *Ripley's Believe It or Not* pictures a plain bar of iron worth \$5. The same iron made into horseshoes is worth \$50. Made into needles, it is worth \$5,000. Made into balance springs for fine Swiss watches, it is worth \$500,000.

The value of our lives is not in our native abilities or earthly possessions, but in the way the Holy Spirit molds and uses us for eternal good. If you're a Christian, you have the Spirit. Here's the question: Does the Spirit have you?

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in you. The same Spirit who threw aside death's door and called the crucified Carpenter to life dwells in you right now. How can you experience his victory over your greatest challenges today?

I have written *Empowered* to give you biblical, practical steps to the abundant life of Christ. We are meant to be "more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). When we live in the power of the Spirit, every day is Easter.

Section one

The relevance of the Holy Spirit

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Day 1

Why focus on the Holy Spirit?

All of God there is, is in this moment. Are you experiencing all of God there is? Are you living in his power over sin and temptation, death and fear? Are you walking daily in his love, joy, and peace? Are you working in the supernatural "gifts of the Spirit"?

How can you know the fullness of your Father's power and purpose for your life?

If you're like me, you grew up in a church where the Holy Spirit wasn't discussed very much. I will always be grateful for my home church's emphasis on evangelism and practical service, priorities that led them to establish the outreach ministry that invited me to worship and led to my salvation.

But we didn't talk about the Spirit's power and work in our lives. The "charismatic controversy" was a major issue in those days, with its emphasis on

"speaking in tongues" and faith healings. Many of us were afraid of the excesses we saw in this tradition.

Unfortunately, if such churches were guilty of an overemphasis on the work of the Spirit, many of us were equally guilty of not focusing upon the Spirit enough. I have observed the same tendency in churches and denominations from those days to these—some seem to focus only on the Spirit, while others seem to ignore him.

Neither is biblical.

Consider Romans 8:11: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." The Holy Spirit "raised Christ Jesus from the dead." That same Holy Spirit will raise you from the dead. And that same Holy Spirit lives in you now (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16) and empowers you to experience the victorious life God intends for you.

The better we know the Holy Spirit, the more we can be empowered by him. Wherever you need the power of God today, the Spirit is the answer to your need.

For prayer: Jesus promised that "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Thank him for his transforming gift, and ask the Holy Spirit to empower you during this study, beginning today.

Day 2

What is a "spiritual awakening"?

More people are coming to Christ today than ever before in Christian history. According to David Barrett's authoritative *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 82,000 conversions occur every day. Other scholars believe the number is much higher. One estimates that a million people a week are converting to Christianity.

More Muslims have come to Christ in the last fifteen years than in the previous fifteen centuries. Many have seen visions and dreams of Jesus, and are responding to him in faith. One-third to one-half of the South Korean population is evangelical. By 2025, one-half of Brazil's population will be evangelical.

When I was in Beijing a few years ago, I was told that 100,000 people come to Christ every day in the People's Republic of China. I have been to Cuba eight times and am constantly amazed by the spiritual movement happening there. Scholars estimate that a million Cubans have come to Christ in the last ten years.

A spiritual "revival" changes people. A spiritual "awakening" changes a culture. And that's what the Holy Spirit is doing around the world today.

Consider two examples from American history.

Before the First Great Awakening of 1732, less than seven percent of colonial Americans went to worship on Sunday. At the height of the awakening, some eighty percent attended worship each week. Historians believe that this spiritual movement did more to create a "United" States than any other factor.

The Fourth Great Awakening (1904–5) began in Wales. Saloons went bankrupt; police formed barbershop quartets to sing in churches, since there was no one to arrest. Coal mines shut down for a time, because the coal miners became Christians, stopped using obscene language, and the mules could no longer understand their commands. This movement spread to America as well. In Atlantic City, New Jersey, a city of 50,000, less than fifty were unconverted. In Portland, Oregon, 200 stores closed every day at noon so employees and customers could attend prayer meetings.

For prayer: When you receive the power of the Spirit, "you will be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Thank God for what his Spirit is doing around the world, and pray that he would use you to advance his awakening in America today.

Day 3

Why do we need spiritual awakening?

Here's the good news: as we have seen, David Barrett documents 82,000 conversions a day around the world. Here's the bad news: of that astounding number, only 6,000 are in Western Europe and North America, combined. The number of Americans who say they have "no religion" has doubled in the last twenty years. The number of atheists and agnostics in our country has quadrupled in that time.

The U.S. leads the industrial world in teenage pregnancy—one in three teenagers becomes pregnant in America, eighty-one percent out of wedlock. Americans spend more on pornography than on professional sports. Same-sex marriage is now the law of the land, with ominous implications for religious liberty.

It's easy to become discouraged, but it's always too soon to give up on God.

Before the Second Great Awakening (1794), John Marshall, Chief Justice of the United States, wrote that the church "was too far gone ever to be redeemed." A poll at Harvard University found not a single believer. Two were found at Princeton. Tom Paine claimed that "Christianity will be forgotten in 30 years."

But he was wrong. In response to a call to prayer, revival broke out on college campuses and hundreds were converted. "Camp meetings" spread across the frontier; eventually more than a thousand were meeting annually. Churches doubled and tripled in membership. One Baptist church in Kentucky with a membership of 170 baptized 421 converts during a single revival meeting.

That same year, William Carey began the modern missions movement. A variety of other missions organizations began as a result of this Awakening. All because a group of Christians joined the Holy Spirit in praying and working for moral and spiritual renewal.

For prayer: The Spirit is calling you be his witness in your Jerusalem. Thank him for this privilege, and pray that he would use your influence today to advance awakening where you live.

Day 4

Why do you need spiritual awakening?

Rodney Smith was born in a tent and raised in a Gypsy camp. He never attended school, not even for a single day. He became a Christian in 1876, and the next year was invited by General William Booth (founder of the Salvation Army) to join him in his evangelistic work.

Known as "Gypsy" Smith, he became one of the most effective evangelists in history. He was based in Great Britain, but made more than forty trips to the US, Australia, South Africa, and other countries. His powerful preaching influenced the lives of millions.

Smith claimed, "There are five Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Christian—but most people never read the first four." He noted, "What makes the difference is not how many times you have

been through the Bible, but how many times and how thoroughly the Bible has been through you."

Human words cannot change human hearts. You and I cannot convict a single person of a single sin, or save a single soul. We cannot do anything that is eternal, spiritual, or God-glorifying. Only the Spirit of God can do the work of God.

Are you seeing souls saved through your life and witness? Lives changed? People drawn closer to your Father? Are you experiencing the love, joy, and peace of the Spirit? Is God doing through you all he can do through a person?

Here's the good news: the same Holy Spirit who empowered Gypsy Smith is ready to empower you. He is the same Holy Spirit who worked through Paul and the other apostles, St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa and Billy Graham.

Think of the most godly person you know. And know that if the Holy Spirit is in control of your life, others will see you the same way.

For prayer: When Jesus said, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you," he used the

second-person plural. "You" means "every believer," including you. Thank God for giving you the power of the Spirit and ask him to do his transforming work in and through your life today.

Section two

**The "filling" of
the Holy Spirit**

*"Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery,
but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).*

Day 5

What is the "filling" of the Spirit?

My wife and I were married in 1980 and purchased our first home a year later. It needed much work, so my granddad came down to help. He lost his farm in the Depression and became a carpenter, and worked until he died at the age of ninety-nine. He built a tool shed for us, installed sheet rock in the garage, redid the kitchen, and generally transformed the house.

I still remember his reaction on his first day with us, when he looked at my tools. I had a wrench, a hammer, and a few screwdrivers to my name. So he took me to a hardware store and bought me a power drill. He had to show me how to use it, change the bits, and so on. I've used it ever since. But one thing he didn't have to explain was the fact that the drill must be plugged in to a power source. Unplugged, it's of little use. There's nothing wrong with it—it just needs power.

So it is with the people of God.

Walking through the book of Acts, we see the power of God at work on every hand. Three thousand are saved at Pentecost; a crippled man is healed; fearful disciples are now preaching boldly to the Sanhedrin; Saul of Tarsus is converted; thousands come to Christ through Paul's ministry. It's miracle upon miracle.

Can God really do today what he did then? Can we have the same power in our lives that they had in theirs? If we can, why don't we see that power more? More miracles, healings, proof of the Spirit at work? Can we truly have this power, or is this just rhetoric?

The answer is found in a simple phrase: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

"Be" is a present-tense imperative in the Greek, a command that applies to every Christian at every moment in our lives. "Filled with" means to be "controlled by" or "under the influence of." "The Spirit" is, of course, the Holy Spirit.

The verse can be translated literally, "Be continually being controlled by the Spirit." This is a decision that leads to an experience. We are "filled" with the Spirit when we are submitted to his control. It's that simple, and that profound.

For prayer: This week we will explore the meaning of being "filled" with the Spirit. We will learn what this experience is and isn't in the life of a believer. Thank God for the power of his Spirit when he "fills" your life. Now ask the Spirit to take control of your life. Submit to him in faith. Believe that he has answered your prayer, and he will.

Day 6

Why does the Spirit "fill" us?

One of the strangest figures in Scripture is the magician called Simon (Acts 8:9–24). He amazed the people of Samaria with his magical tricks. But when Philip preached the gospel, Simon himself was amazed at the signs and great miracles performed by the Holy Spirit.

When Peter and John came to the area and laid their hands on those who then received the Spirit, Simon offered them money with the request, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:19). Peter then rebuked him for his materialistic selfishness.

Years ago, a dear friend taught me four simple words: "It's not about us." God doesn't share his glory. As someone said, if you want to get along with the Lord, stay off his throne. His Spirit works to glorify the Father and lead people to the Son. He "fills" the

people of God so he can use them to advance the Kingdom of God. It's not about us.

However, the paradoxical truth is that the more we are submitted to God's Spirit for God's glory, the more satisfying and significant our lives become. As we will see later in this study, those who are "filled" with the Spirit experience the "fruit of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). We experience the power, purpose, and providential leading of God. We are transformed into the character of Jesus (Romans 8:29) and our lives become all they are meant to be.

The Spirit "fills" us so he can use us. And the more he uses us, the more fulfilled we are.

For prayer: Examine your life purpose today. What is your definition of success? If you are living for God's glory to advance his Kingdom, you can be empowered by his Spirit. If you're living for your glory to advance your agenda, you cannot be empowered by the Spirit. Thank God for his perfect plan for your life, and ask his Spirit to use you to advance his Kingdom.

Day 7

What hinders the "filling" of the Spirit?

When I got my driver's license, my parents gave me a 1967 Mercury Cougar. The car was beautiful on the outside, but we discovered that it wasn't so great on the inside. The engine needed to be overhauled, the transmission slipped out of gear, and the air conditioner didn't work.

The car would sometimes start in the morning, sometimes not. A mechanic showed us why: corrosion had covered the connection between the battery and the electrical cables. When we scraped away the corrosion, the connection was restored. But I needed to clean the cables regularly or the problem would recur.

So it is with Christians seeking to live in the power of the Spirit. We are to be "filled" by the Holy Spirit. He cannot control and use a dirty vessel. He cannot give

his power through a corroded connection. We must be cleansed to be "filled."

Scripture warns us, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19) and "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30). Your last sin quenched and grieved the Spirit, and kept him from "filling" and empowering your life.

Consider this familiar verse: "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). We must confess our sins before God can forgive them.

But when we confess our sins, God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). He then separates our sins from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12), buries them in "the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19), and remembers them no more (Isaiah 43:25).

For prayer: Are you willing to be cleansed from everything which hinders the Holy Spirit in your life? Then take a moment for a moral inventory. Ask the Lord to bring to your mind anything in your life that is hindering his Spirit. Write on a sheet of paper

anything that comes to your thoughts. Confess these sins specifically to your Father with a repentant heart, and thank him for his cleansing.

Day 8

How can we be "filled" with the Spirit?

All that God has ever done, he can do today. Jesus is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The secret is to be empowered by the same Spirit who has empowered God's people from the beginning of time. How can you be "filled" with the Spirit today and every day?

Today's reading is the most important essay in this entire guide. Here we discover the simple, practical, life-transforming steps to experiencing the power of God.

One: Receive the Holy Spirit in salvation. If you have asked Jesus to forgive your sins and be your Lord, you are now the child of God and the Spirit of God lives in you (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16). You don't need to repeat this step. You have eternal life, today and forever (John 3:16). If you're

not sure you have made Christ your Lord, please settle this decision today. I invite you to go to <https://www.denisonforum.org/faith-questions/jesus/why-jesus/>, where you'll learn why and how to experience salvation in Christ.

Two: Admit that you need to be controlled by the Spirit. God cannot do for us what we try to do for ourselves. Tell the Father that you need his Spirit's power in your life today.

Three: Confess your sins to God (see Day 7 reading), asking God to forgive you, cleanse you, and prepare you to be controlled by his Spirit.

Four: Ask the Spirit to take control of your life. Submit to him your thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. Pray through your day, surrendering your plans, challenges, and opportunities to him. Begin the day by yielding it to the Spirit of God.

Five: Practice the presence of Jesus. As you face challenges today, pray about them. As you experience blessings and opportunities, thank God for them. When you are tempted, ask God for his power. If you fall to temptation, ask God to forgive you, restore you, and empower you with his Spirit again. Stay "plugged in" to the Holy Spirit.

These steps form a spiritual discipline that is absolutely vital to victorious Christian living. Make them part of your life, beginning every morning of every day. And you will experience the fullness of God, every day.

For prayer: Thank God for the "filling" of his Spirit and take each of these steps with him, right now.

Day 9

What happens when we are "filled" with the Spirit? (part one)

One of my most memorable experiences in Israel occurred one morning in the Upper Room. This is a stone structure built in the twelfth century by Crusaders as part of the Church of St. Mary of Zion. It stands near the site where Jesus and his disciples had their Last Supper together, and where the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost.

Our group was gathered in the room for Bible study and worship. We closed by singing "Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me." Another group in the room joined us, singing in their language. Another joined in, singing in a third language. It felt like the first Pentecost, where the disciples shared the gospel in all the languages of the peoples gathered that day (Acts 2:1-12).

From then to today, the Holy Spirit uses God's people to share God's word with our fallen world. Across Acts, we see his empowering ministry on display:

- He "filled" Peter as he preached to the elders and rulers of the nation (Acts 4:8).
- He "filled" all the first believers, so that they "continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).
- He convicted Ananias and Sapphira of their sin (Acts 5:3).
- He witnessed to the Sanhedrin through the apostles (Acts 5:32).
- He empowered the first deacons, and specifically Stephen (Acts 6:3, 10; 7:55).
- He directed Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:29) and led him away after the man came to faith (Acts 8:39).
- He empowered Paul for his life and ministry (Acts 9:17; 13:4, 9).
- He encouraged the entire church as they grew across the region (Acts 9:31).
- He directed Peter to go to Cornelius (Acts 10:19; cf. 11:12).
- He called Paul and Barnabas to their missionary work (Acts 13:2), led Paul to Europe and the West (Acts 16:6), and empowered his team throughout their ministry.

When we are "filled" with the Spirit, we are empowered to serve our Lord in ways that advance his Kingdom. Here's what doesn't happen when we are so "filled":

- No emotional response is promised. Nowhere does the Bible say how it feels to be "filled" with the Spirit.
- No particular gifts are promised. As we will see later in our study, we each have spiritual gifts. But none of them proves that we are Christians or that we are "filled."
- No particular ministry is promised. The Spirit "fills" us so he can use us. His purposes for our lives are as unique as we are.

Here's the common denominator: When we are "filled" by the Spirit, we are used by the Spirit. Are you available to him right now?

For prayer: Thank God for the power and direction available to you through the Holy Spirit. Now tell the Spirit that you want him to use your life in any way he wishes. Whatever it takes, whatever the cost, wherever he leads. And know that the will of God never leads where the grace of God cannot sustain.

Day 10

What happens when we are "filled" with the Spirit? (part two)

Avery Willis was a career missionary, groundbreaking theologian, and an acquaintance of mine. In his classic book, *The Biblical Basis of Missions*, he describes his own experience with the "filling" of the Holy Spirit. I'd like you to read his account today, as it may help to make the "filling" more real and practical to you.

While I was a freshman in college, the Holy Spirit created in my heart an overwhelming desire to bear witness to Christ. In the months that followed, his presence overcame my natural shyness and thrust me out several times each week onto the streets and into bars to witness. However, I was not successful in leading people to Christ. I memorized Scriptures, studied soul-winning books, and prayed. But something was missing.

One day I received in the mail a booklet that told of the experiences of D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, and others whose ministries had been transformed when they experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit.

*I had a burning desire to be used of God, but I could not find anyone who could tell me how to be filled. Finally, a friend loaned me the book *The Holy Spirit: Who He Is and What He Does* by R. A. Torrey.*

For the first time, I realized that the Holy Spirit is a person who possesses us, instead of a power or an influence that we possess. Torrey showed that the Holy Spirit, who lives within us, wants to fill us for service. By the next evening I had finished the book and was ready to follow its instructions on being filled with the Spirit. I confessed all my sins, presented myself fully to God, and asked in faith for the Holy Spirit to fill me. As I confessed my sins, I realized how much the Holy Spirit had loved me and had been grieved by my ignoring him. Then I presented my body, will, emotions, intellect, and spirit to be used by God in any way. The most difficult part was accepting by faith the filling of the Holy Spirit without any outward sign or manifestation. I told God, "I will accept the fact that I am filled with the Spirit on the basis of faith in the Word, no matter what happens when I witness." There was no great emotional experience, but I had a deep awareness of the love of the Spirit.

The next morning when I went to class, the grass looked greener and the birds sang more sweetly. I was so aware of the Spirit's presence that I wanted to move over on the sidewalk to let him walk beside me. That evening I witnessed to a boy on the street, and he accepted Christ as his Savior. Two nights later two black teenagers accepted Christ, the night after that another man.

I remarked to a friend: "I don't see how this can continue. Every night I go out to witness, someone accepts Christ." That night no one did. I had to come back and ask forgiveness and be filled afresh because I had dared to think that I had won those people to Christ myself. God willingly refilled me with his Spirit when I was willing to confess my sins, present myself, and ask in faith. Once again people began to come to Christ.

In the twenty-five years since that experience, the Holy Spirit has taught me the secret of being filled for each task of service. Thousands of times I have had to ask him to refill me when I have sinned, and he has done so. The filling of the Spirit energizes and empowers different gifts in different persons, but in every case the result brings glory to Christ and attracts others to him.¹

For prayer: Thank God for the "filling" and power of his Spirit in your life today, and ask the Spirit to use you to lead many to Jesus.

Day 11

How can we be "filled" with the Spirit every day?

In 1940, with German bombs raining down on London, Winston Churchill and his Cabinet and staff practically lived in their Cabinet War Rooms. This fortified basement provided the prime minister a bedroom, his cabinet a room for meeting, and a map room for strategy planning. I visit the War Rooms every time I'm in London, and am always impressed by the significance of the events that transpired there.

The White House Situation Room provides the same security to our president and his staff today. In such "war rooms," battles and wars are won or lost.

Christians need a "war room of the soul." We need a place and time where we begin each day with the Holy Spirit. As we have seen, when we trust Christ as our Lord we become the children of God, and never

need to repeat this decision. But we need to surrender each day to God, because that day is all there is. You cannot give God "tomorrow," because it doesn't exist. Each day we need to be "filled" for that day.

This is something like getting married—once you have made a marriage commitment to your spouse, you don't need to repeat your wedding each day. But you do need to recommit yourself to your marriage daily. So with the relationship between the church, the "bride of Christ," and our Lord (Revelation 21:2, 9).

Dwight Moody preached to over one hundred million people in his ministry. He founded what became Moody Bible College and was widely considered one of the godliest men in America. His prayers have been recorded and published; his passion for the lost was legendary. And yet Moody often said of his own soul, "I am a leaky bucket, and I need to be refilled daily." If he needed this, so do I. Do you?

For prayer: Thank God for the daily "filling" of his Spirit. Now commit yourself to a daily appointment with the Holy Spirit. Set aside a time and place where you will meet with him. Make a "war room" for your soul.

Section three

The person of the Holy Spirit

*"The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father
will send in my name, he will teach you all things"
(John 14:26).*

Day 12

The Spirit is a person

My first Bible was a red King James Version New Testament given to me by the Gideons when I was in the fifth grade. When I became a Christian years later, I began reading it at night. So it was that I encountered the phrase, "the Holy Ghost." I had no idea what this meant, but the image was unnerving, to say the least.

I later learned that in the days when the King James Version was translated, "ghost" had the same meaning as "spirit." In the centuries since it has acquired a spectral sense, so that some people think of the Holy Ghost as a kind of "Casper the Friendly God."

Of course, the Holy Spirit is anything but a human, deceased spirit. Nor is he an impersonal neuter or "it." He is not a "presence." The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, and is just as much a person as the Father and the Son.

According to Scripture, the Spirit has knowledge: "The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10–11).

The Spirit has a will and makes decisions: "All these [spiritual gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11).

And the Spirit has emotions: "I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit..." (Romans 15:30). As we will see next Tuesday, the Spirit can be grieved, insulted, and blasphemed.

When you became a Christian, the Spirit took up residence in your life. He has all the distinct personality characteristics of a person. As a result, you can know him as personally as you can know anyone else. Even more so, in fact, since he lives in you. He wants an intimate, passionate relationship with you. Do you want the same with him?

For prayer: Thank God for the fact that the Spirit is a person living in you. What would you like to say to him right now?

Day 13

The Spirit acts as a person

I have in my study a rock, normal and ordinary to anyone else but very special to me. I took it from the valley of Elah, where David killed Goliath. It reminds me daily of the power of God, of what the Lord can do with a single soul fully yielded to his Spirit. There is no Goliath you and I cannot conquer in his power.

Today we'll consider the various acts performed by the Spirit in Scripture. Note how active and powerful the Spirit is. And realize that this same power is resident in your life right now.

- The Holy Spirit searches: "The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10).
- He speaks: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7).
- He cries: "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba!'"

- Father!" (Galatians 4:6).
- He prays: "We do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).
 - He testifies about Jesus: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me" (John 15:26).
 - He teaches: "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).
 - He leads Christians: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).
 - He directs: "They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come down to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (Acts 16:6–7).

Which of his acts do you need him to perform in your life today?

For prayer: Thank God for his Spirit's ability to meet your needs. Ask the Spirit to meet your greatest need today with his power, guidance, or intercession.

Day 14

The Spirit feels as a person

When I was in elementary school, I terrorized every adult unfortunate enough to be my teacher. I melted crayons into the hair of my first-grade teacher. My second-grade teacher broke her paddle on me. In third grade, I used my Cub Scout pocketknife to poke holes in the school water hoses. In fourth grade, I knocked eraser dust into the window air conditioner, blanketing the room. I also locked a girl in the coat closet for lunch. In fifth grade, I perfected the "stink bomb" (using a match inside a plastic ball point pen). In sixth grade, I taught my fellow classmates how to throw our pencils so that they stuck in the ceiling tiles, point first.

How did my parents respond to my frequent acts of delinquency? When I brought home another bad conduct report, I was sometimes spanked or banished to my room. At other times, various privileges were revoked.

The disciplinary method that worked most effectively was the simplest: my father told me he was disappointed in me. When I saw the sincerity and hurt in his eyes, I was hurt as well. And I never attempted that particular indiscretion again. If we understood how deeply our sins hurt the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, I think we would respond in the same way.

The Holy Spirit works to "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). But when we do not respond to his conviction, he is grieved and angered by our disobedience.

Sin grieves the Holy Spirit: When the people of Israel rejected God's word and will, "they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit" (Isaiah 63:10). Paul warns us, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

Furthermore, sin stirs anger in the Spirit: "How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and *has outraged the Spirit of grace?*" (Hebrews 10:29, italics added).

Worst of all, those who blaspheme the Spirit cannot be forgiven: "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven

people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 11:31–32).

Here Jesus refers to the "unpardonable sin." This sin is unforgivable because it rejects God's forgiveness. The Spirit convicts us of sin (Acts 2:36–37) as part of his work in leading us to salvation. When we refuse to repent of the sins for which we are convicted and turn to Christ for salvation, we cannot be forgiven. It is not that God does not want to forgive us and save us, but that he cannot give what we will not receive.

If you have trusted Christ as your Lord, you cannot commit this sin. However, your other sins can and do grieve and anger the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.

For prayer: Thank God for his forgiving grace. Ask the Spirit to show you anything that grieves him in your life right now. Confess all that comes to your thoughts, with a repentant spirit and grateful heart.

Day 15

The Spirit defeats sin

"Every time we say we believe in the Holy Spirit, we mean we believe that there is a living God able and willing to enter human personality and change it" (John Owen). The Spirit is more active in creating and recreating life than most people know.

He participated in creation from its beginning: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:13).

He imparts life to all humans: "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4). The psalmist prayed, "When you send forth your Spirit, [people] are created" (Psalm 104:30). Then he recreates us with life eternal when

we trust Christ as our Lord. And he empowers us to live in victory as the children of God.

Christians know that Jesus lived a sinless life: "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). But we may not know that his sinless victory was achieved through the power of the Spirit: Jesus "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God" (Hebrews 9:14).

Scripture promises that God will enable us to defeat every temptation we face: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, so that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The Holy Spirit living within you gives you this "way of escape." He is "the power of the Most High" (Luke 1:35). He is more powerful than your most powerful enemy, and can defeat any strategy the enemy attempts against you. But you must turn to him for help. He can lead only those who will follow and help only those who will seek his assistance.

For prayer: Thank God for his power over sin. Now, where are you being tempted or tested today? Name that specific challenge, and ask the Holy Spirit for the power to achieve victory. He may work through others, through circumstances, or directly in your life. Trust him for the help you need.

Day 16

The Spirit leads

The question I am asked more frequently than any other is this: How can I know the will of God for my life?

Let's begin with the fact that God does have a perfect plan for you. He promised the Jewish exiles in Babylon, "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Romans 12:2 calls God's will "good, pleasing, and perfect."

So, how can we know his will? Scripture teaches that God reveals his plans to us "through the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:10). The Holy Spirit led Jesus throughout his earthly ministry (cf. Luke 4:1). He led Peter (Acts 10:19) and Paul (Acts 16:6–7). John was "in the Spirit" when he received the Revelation (Revelation 1:10). He leads all who are the children of God (Romans 8:14).

He leads us rationally, through the Scriptures he inspired (2 Peter 1:21). He leads us practically through circumstances and events. He leads us relationally through other people. And he leads us intuitively as "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit" (Romans 8:16). In these ways, the Spirit "will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).

But know that God's will is more about the present than the future. No one in Scripture received a five-year plan. Today is the only day that exists. God's will is like a flashlight showing the next step you should take. Seek to be in his will today, and you'll be ready to follow his will tomorrow.

The Holy Spirit wants us to know the perfect will of our Father even more than we want to know it. So surrender to his plan, and you will know what you need to know in order to fulfill it. Write God a "blank check" and trust him to fill in the right amount. Submit to him so that he can lead you in his best will for your life. And he will.

Ignatius of Loyola founded the Jesuits, and made this prayer theirs:

*Teach us, Lord, to serve you as you deserve,
To give and not to count the cost,*

*To fight and not to heed the wounds,
To toil and not to seek for rest,
To labor and not to ask any reward,
Save that of knowing that we do your will.*

For prayer: Thank God that he has a plan for your life today. Where do you need to know his will today? Name that challenge or question. Submit to God's will, whatever it is. Ask the Spirit to lead you, and follow his direction, wherever it leads.

Day 17

The Spirit empowers for service

Someone once said of their church: "They have all of God they want. Not all they need, but all they want." We live in a ruggedly self-sufficient, independent culture. Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. Look out for number one. Pull your own strings. Don't depend on people, because they'll let you down. Or so we're told.

Jesus knew better. At his baptism, "the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove" (Luke 3:22). After facing the devil's temptations, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all" (Luke 4:14-15).

Early in his ministry, he returned to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. There he quoted Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has

anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). Then he announced, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21).

Jesus worked his miracles through the power of the Spirit: "It is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons" (Matthew 12:28). He taught in the wisdom of the Spirit (Matthew 12:18–21, quoting Isaiah 11:2–3). He was led by the Spirit (Luke 4:1), and empowered throughout his life and ministry.

Peter summarized our Lord's work this way: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

If Jesus needed the power of the Spirit, don't we?

Now the Spirit stands ready to do through us what he did through the earthly ministry of Jesus (cf. John 14:12–17). But we must repent of self-sufficiency and seek his empowering grace each day.

For prayer: Thank God that he has a Kingdom assignment for you. What is yours? If you're not sure, ask the Spirit to reveal to you his calling for your life. As we learned yesterday, he is ready to lead all who will follow. If you know your call for today, surrender it to the Spirit. Ask him to empower you and use you to advance the Kingdom of God. And go forth in the assurance that he has heard and answered your prayer of commitment to him.

Day 18

The Spirit unifies

One of Aesop's fables tells of a hungry lion that tried to attack a newborn calf. The oxen circled around the vulnerable calf, horns locked together against the lion. So the predator tried a different tack: he whispered a rumor about one of the oxen. As it was repeated and spread around the circle, the oxen began to argue with each other, then to fight one another. And it was an easy matter for the lion to attack the unprotected calf.

Remember that Satan "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). He always works to divide the people of God, knowing that we are far stronger when we are together than when we are apart. That's one reason Jesus prayed for our unity (John 17:23).

The Holy Spirit is working to answer his prayer today.

In Acts 9 we read of the early church: "Walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied" (Acts 9:31). As they obeyed God in the power and fellowship of the Spirit, they grew. Paul prayed, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14). As we share fellowship with him, we are able to be in fellowship with each other.

In recent years we have seen a tremendous unifying of God's people across denominational and socio-economic lines. The spiritual awakening spreading around the world is drawing the church together. The challenges we face are showing us how much we need each other. The Spirit is calling us closer to Jesus. And the closer we come to him, the closer we come to each other.

How unified is your family of faith? Is the enemy sowing seeds of disunity in your fellowship? Is he working to spread slander and gossip? Are you harboring resentment or distrust toward a fellow believer? Jesus taught us to initiate reconciliation with those who sin against us (Matthew 18:15) and with those against whom we have sinned (Matthew 5:23–24).

Cancer always grows. The best time to deal with a malignancy is today. The longer you wait, the worse it will become.

Remember Peter's description of Satan as a "roaring lion." Lions are quiet when they are hunting and stealthy as they sneak up on their prey. They roar only when they are about to attack. Don't be the devil's next victim.

For prayer: Thank God for his work in unifying the body of Christ. Now consider: Is your relationship with a fellow believer strained? Name that person. Ask God for his best in his or her life. Then ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to initiate reconciliation. And pray for the unity of your faith family, to the glory of God.

Section four

**The power of
the Holy Spirit**

"Behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Day 19

The Spirit and fire

The Bible uses at least seven symbols for the Holy Spirit: fire, wind, water, a dove, a seal, a guarantee, and oil. Each tells us something unique and significant about the Spirit of God indwelling believers today.

We begin today with the Spirit and fire. Scripture teaches that God is a "consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29, citing Deuteronomy 4:24). God manifested his presence through fire at the burning bush (Exodus 3:2), and through his Shekinah glory at the tabernacle (Numbers 9:15–16). Fire symbolizes divine judgment (Numbers 11:1) and power (1 Kings 18:38).

John the Baptist predicted that God would baptize his people "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). When the Spirit fulfilled this promise at Pentecost, he came as "divided tongues of fire" when he "filled" the believers present (Acts 2:3–4).

Why is fire such a powerful symbol for the Spirit's work in our lives?

First, the Spirit purifies us through sanctification. Paul stated that "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). As the children of God, we have experienced "sanctification by the Spirit" (2 Thessalonians 2:13; cf. 1 Peter 1:2). When we confess our sins to God, his Spirit purifies us as if we were silver or gold (Proverbs 17:3).

Second, the Spirit creates boldness and passion for Christ in our hearts. After Peter and John were arrested and tried by the Sanhedrin, the church prayed for boldness to stand firm for Christ. Then "the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). As fire burns with intensity, so the Spirit works with intensity in and through us.

Third, the Spirit brings the presence of God in our lives (Romans 8:9). As God used fire to lead his people through the wilderness and assure them of his continued presence (Numbers 9:17–23), so the Spirit's fire in our lives shows his abiding presence (cf. Matthew 28:20).

The same "fire" that led Moses and the children of Israel, that fell at Pentecost and empowered the apostles, now dwells in you.

For prayer: Thank God for his purifying grace. Do you need such purification today? Bold passion? Assurance of God's presence? Pray for what you need, and trust the Spirit's fire to answer.

Day 20

The Spirit and wind

One of the most powerful parables I've heard is called "The old men who know." A village was established in a beautiful valley, where grass and game were plentiful and water was abundant. The town grew and prospered. Over time, a group of young pioneers climbed the nearby mountains and brought back an excited report to the village: On the other side there was even more plentiful grass, game, and water. The people should move there, as they would thrive even more fully.

However, there was in the village a council called "the old men who know." They said, "There can't be anything like that. We've been here all our lives, and this is where we'll stay." So they stayed, until the years passed and the town outgrew its resources and the people began to die.

In desperation, a few hardy souls followed the young pioneers over the nearby mountains, where they found just what they'd been promised—an even broader valley, with even greater resources. So they settled, and grew and prospered.

Years later, a new generation of young pioneers climbed the nearby mountains, and brought back a report that the valley beyond was even broader with greater resources for the village. But the original pioneers had become "the old men who know."

When we think we know all we need to know about God's will and ways, we impede his Spirit's work in our lives. He is always calling us to the next opportunity, the next challenge, the next place of service. Complacency is the enemy of spiritual power.

Jesus taught Nicodemus, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). "Spirit" in both Hebrew and Greek translates the word for "wind." The metaphor is appropriate, for at least four reasons.

First, wind or air is essential for life. So with the life-giving Spirit. **Second**, wind is powerful and

uncontrollable. So with the omnipotent Spirit. **Third**, wind is unformed and invisible to human knowledge. So with the divine Spirit. **Fourth**, wind moves in a variety of ways, from gentle breezes to hurricane gales. So with the multifaceted Spirit.

If the Spirit is at work in your life, you'll be a "young pioneer," no matter how old you are.

For prayer: Thank God for the power of his Spirit. Ask the Spirit if you are hindering his work in and through your life through complacency or self-reliance. Choose to depend fully and boldly on the Spirit's power and leading today.

Day 21

The Spirit and water

Of the three great Jewish holidays—Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles—the third was the most joyous. During the first century, Jews from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem for the week-long celebration.

Each morning of the week, priests took water from the Pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher to the temple. Their procession was led by the high priest himself. When they entered the temple area through the Water Gate, the shofar was blown and psalms of praise were recited in gratitude for the harvest just completed (Psalm 118). The priests offered prayers for rain as well, since their cisterns had started to become dry by this time of year.

On the seventh day, this celebration was repeated seven times. Crowds thronged the area for the great observance. The people were following the

same tradition in John 7 when Jesus did something astounding: "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive" (John 7:37–39).

The water with which the people celebrated would soon evaporate, but the "water" he offered would not. Their water came from the Pool of Siloam, but his "water" would come from within them. Their water would leave them thirsty, but his "water" would fill their souls.

The metaphor of the Spirit as water helps us in three ways. **First**, it shows that the Spirit's power does not depend on human resources. No matter how weak you may be, he is strong. **Second**, the Spirit's supply of "water" is unlimited. You cannot exhaust his resources or his patience with you. **Third**, the Spirit's "water" is available whenever you need it. As Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."

Why do you need the "water" of the Spirit today?

For prayer: Thank God for his unlimited Spirit in your life. Name your deepest need, and ask the Spirit to meet it with his grace and power.

Day 22

The Spirit as a dove

I learned recently about some phobias I might have. If I'm afraid of anything new, I have neophobia. If I'm afraid of being in church, I have ecclesiophobia. If you have this phobia, you might also have melophobia, the fear of music, or homilophobia, the fear of sermons. Here's my favorite new phobia: hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia, the fear of long words.

I wonder if some Christians have pneumatophobia, the fear of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps today's essay will help.

Luke's account of our Lord's public ministry begins: "When all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying . . ." (Luke 3:21). Jesus did not need to be baptized as a symbol of his repentance from sin, since he was sinless (Hebrews 4:15). Rather, he submitted to John's baptism to affirm

its message and ministry, to identify with the people who were coming to God in repentance, and to begin his own ministry in a public way.

This remarkable event continued: "The heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove" (vs. 21–22). The Greek could be translated to mean that the Spirit appeared as a dove, but the more likely translation is that he descended as a dove descends.

Why would the Spirit be connected to a dove?

First, the Spirit participated in creation: "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2) as a bird hovers over her nest. **Second**, he works to bring peace, as the dove symbolized peace after the Flood (Genesis 8:10). **Third**, he is sinless and sanctifies those who yield to his power so that we might be "innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

Our existence, peace, and purity are all results of the Spirit's work in our world and lives. We need not fear this One who "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). He wants only the best for you. And since he lives in you, he can mold you into the character of Christ (Romans 8:29) and lead you in your Father's "good and acceptable and perfect" will (Romans 12:2).

Rather than fear the Spirit, we should fear living apart from his power and grace today.

For prayer: Thank God for the gracious gift of his Spirit. Then ask the Spirit to sanctify you so that you are "innocent as doves" today.

Day 23

The Spirit as a seal

The royal seal of King Hezekiah was discovered recently in a trash heap beside the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It is one of the most significant archaeological artifacts of recent years. The seal was used by one of Judea's greatest rulers to authenticate papyrus documents 2,700 years ago. When wax was placed on a document and this clay emblem was impressed on the wax, the resulting "seal" marked the manuscript as belonging to the king.

In the same way, Scripture teaches that "when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, [you] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13). Paul therefore admonishes us, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

What does it mean to be "sealed" by the Holy Spirit?

First, you are secure in your salvation. A king's seal carried his authority. When Daniel was condemned to the lions' den, King Darius placed his seal on the stone used to cover the entrance to the den (Daniel 6:17). The authorities placed Pilate's seal on the stone covering Jesus' tomb (Matthew 27:62–66). The seal of King Ahab guaranteed that letters sent in his name were truly from him (1 Kings 21:8). In the same way, the Spirit's manifestation in your life is God's "seal" showing others that you belong to him.

Second, you belong to God. Jeremiah attests that when he bought a piece of land, "I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnessed, and weighed the money on scales" (Jeremiah 32:10). The Spirit's "seal" is proof that you belong to God.

Third, you have God's authority to fulfill your Kingdom assignment. When Esther asked King Ahasuerus to help her save the Jewish nation, the king gave her permission to write the necessary edict "in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring, for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked" (Esther 8:8). In the same way, the Spirit's "seal" is God's decree that you have his authority to accomplish his calling on your life and ministry.

For prayer: Thank God for “sealing” you with his Spirit, thereby securing your salvation as his child with his authority. Pray that your life might show others the authenticity of your relationship with him today.

Day 24

The Spirit as God's guarantee

In my dealings with religious skeptics, I have found suffering to be the single greatest objection to belief in an all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful God.

Atheist Sam Harris says that the existence of a single suffering child anywhere in the universe calls into question the existence of a loving God. Atheist Christopher Hitchens lost his mother to suicide when he was a young man and never forgave God.

My father was a Sunday school teacher before he fought in World War II and struggled with his faith for the rest of his life. He could not reconcile the suffering he witnessed with belief in a God of power and love.

Philip Yancey wrote a bestseller titled, *Disappointment with God*. Any of us could have written that book.

Where has God disappointed you lately? Here's the good news: despite all appearances, your suffering will

be redeemed and your faith rewarded. One day all it costs you to follow Jesus will be repaid, and more.

How do I know? Because I believe the Holy Spirit's guarantee.

Yesterday we learned that the Holy Spirit is God's "seal" on believers. Today we learn that the Spirit is also his "guarantee" of our salvation:

- "It is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (2 Corinthians 1:21–22).
- "God has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (2 Corinthians 5:5).
- "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13–14).

"Guarantee" translates *arrabon*, meaning "earnest money" or "first installment." Paul's metaphor comes from legal customs of his day. When an employer contracted an employee, he would often pay an *arrabon* to secure the person's services. At

the conclusion of the work, the remainder of the promised payment would be made.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit in your life is God's *arrabon*, creating a relationship with you that will be culminated when you are with him in glory. At that time, you will receive all that your Father plans for you (John 14:1–3).

Looking to that day, Paul testified: "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). One day you will step from death into life, from time into eternity, from this fallen world into God's perfect paradise. Your sufferings will be redeemed for God's glory and your eternal good.

How can you be sure? The Spirit guarantees it.

For prayer: Thank God for his abundant provision in the Spirit. Now name the challenges that make it hard to believe that God's perfect will is being accomplished in your life. Ask your Father to redeem them. Then ask the Spirit for the confidence to trust his guarantee today.

Day 25

The Spirit as oil

I remember the first time I stood before the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey. The throne was commissioned in 1296 by King Edward I and has been used for British coronations ever since.

One part of this fascinating ceremony involves the Royal Anointing Oil. The Dean of Westminster pours consecrated oil from an eagle-shaped container into a spoon. The Archbishop of Canterbury then uses this oil to anoint the monarch on the hands, head, and heart.

The tradition of using oil to anoint leaders goes back to ancient Egypt. In the Old Testament, oil was used to anoint kings, priests, and prophets for their service. Jesus was similarly anointed by the Spirit for his ministry, a fact he referenced when he cited Isaiah 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" (cf. Luke 4:18).

Peter used such symbolism to describe Jesus' ministry as well: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

Now that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in your life, you have been anointed by his "oil" for service. As we will see tomorrow, you have been given spiritual gifts to enable your Kingdom calling. You are as anointed by the Spirit as any prophet, priest, or king. You don't need a Coronation Chair or archbishop to confer such status, for God the Spirit has empowered you for your life's work.

For prayer: Thank God for the anointing of his Spirit in your life. Ask him to reveal to you his Kingdom assignment for you today, and trust that his Spirit will give you all you need to serve your Lord.

Section five

**The gifts
of the Spirit**

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:4).

Day 26

What are spiritual gifts?

William Borden was heir to the Borden dairy fortune, but he abandoned immeasurable wealth to serve God as a foreign missionary. Tragically, before reaching his destination he contracted meningitis and died. Among his possessions was found this scribbled note summarizing his life's passion: *No reserve, no retreat, no regrets.* His story and motto captured the heart of a generation and galvanized thousands for mission service.

How can our faith be as bold and joyous as his? How can we serve Jesus with such passion today? Spiritual gifts are a crucial, often neglected part of the answer.

God's supreme gift to his people is himself. He gave his Son for us, sending him to die in our place so our sins could be forgiven (John 3:16). He has made us his children by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9), giving us new life in his Spirit (Romans 8:9).

Now his Spirit lives in us (1 Corinthians 3:16) and wants to use us to lead others to follow Jesus. He has given us spiritual gifts as a means to this end. Spiritual gifts are to the church what organs and limbs are to the human body. When we learn about spiritual gifts, we discover the anatomy of the church, the body of Christ.

Every believer has at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11; Ephesians 4:7), given at his or her salvation. No believer has every spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27, 29–30). Our gifts differ from each other (Romans 12:3–6a). We receive our gifts according to God's will, not our own desire or experience (1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:7–8).

Our gifts are God's equipment, provided to help us grow in our faith. While they are often given in accordance with natural talents, gifts always supersede talents. When we identify our God-given gifts and abilities, we know better how to serve our Father. We are empowered by God's Spirit to accomplish God's will for our lives. We live and share the Christian faith with joy.

And at the end of our work on earth we can say, *No reserve, no retreat, no regrets.*

For prayer: Thank God for the spiritual gifts he has chosen for you. Ask him to help you understand and use your gifts most effectively in his service today.

Day 27

What are the various gifts?

The New Testament provides three lists of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4). As we survey them today, we'll begin with four kinds of gifted people, according to Ephesians 4:11.

First come "apostles." Their qualifications (1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 1:22; 14:4,7) are that they saw Jesus, were witness to the resurrected Christ, and were called by him to this function. The word means "delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders." The title came to include more than the original Twelve, as Paul makes clear in greeting Andronicus and Junia who are "outstanding among the apostles" (Romans 16:7). Most theologians see the gift or office of "apostle" as one of introducing Christ and his gospel where it has never been preached and leading churches to do the same.

The **second** office in Ephesians 4:11 is that of "prophet" (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:10). These were

both male and female (cf. Deborah and Miriam in the Old Testament, and Philip's four daughters who prophesied, Acts 21:9). The emphasis of their ministry was on forth-telling more than fore-telling, though God occasionally gave them messages regarding the future as well as the present.

The *third* office in Ephesians 4:11 is that of "evangelists," individuals who founded churches as roving ministers. We are all to do the work of evangelism (2 Timothy 2:5), but some are especially gifted for bringing souls to salvation.

The *fourth* office in Ephesians 4:11 is the "pastor-teacher" ("pastor" and "teacher" in the Greek syntax are one function). They are responsible for protecting, shepherding, and teaching the people of God. They are to "feed and lead" the church of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament also describes numerous individual gifts. Combining the various lists, we discover these gifts:

Administration: organizing people and ministries effectively

Apostleship: adapting to a different culture to share the gospel or do ministry

Discernment: distinguishing spiritual truth from error or heresy

Evangelism: sharing the gospel effectively and passionately

Exhortation: encouraging others as they follow Jesus

Faith: seeing God's plan and following it with passion

Giving: investing with unusual sacrifice and joy in God's Kingdom

Healing: being used by God to bring physical health in supernatural ways

Intercession: praying with unusual passion and effectiveness

Interpretation of "tongues": being used by God to explain to others the message given by the Spirit through "tongues"

Knowledge: discerning and sharing the deep truths of God's word and will

Leadership: motivating and inspiring others to serve Jesus fully

Mercy: showing God's grace to hurting people with unusual passion

Miracles: being used by God in ministry which transcends natural explanation

Prophecy: preaching the word of God with personal passion and effectiveness

Serving: meeting practical needs with unusual sacrifice and joy

Shepherding: helping others grow spiritually

Speaking in "tongues": using a God-given spiritual language in prayer and worship

Teaching: explaining God's word and truth with unusual effectiveness

Wisdom: relating biblical truth to practical life with great effectiveness

For prayer: Thank the Father for gifting his church in such diverse ways, and for your gifts and place in his Kingdom work. Ask him to help you and the larger body of Christ function in our gifts more effectively and joyfully.

Day 28

What are your gifts?

This reading is one of the most significant in our entire guide. Today you'll take a spiritual gifts inventory which will help you identify the specific gifts the Spirit has chosen for you. This assessment will take a few minutes, but the time invested will bear harvest in your life and ministry for the rest of your life.

I developed the following tool to help Christians identify their spiritual gifts. To use it, read each statement and then rate yourself based on your perception as to how true each statement is about yourself.

5 – Almost always true

4 – Often true

3 – Sometimes true

2 – Seldom true

1 – Almost never true

_____ 1. People often tell me that I am a good organizer of groups and committees.

_____ 2. Traveling and experiencing different cultures excites me.

_____ 3. When I hear a sermon or Bible study, I seem to be able to tell when the speaker is teaching God's word and when he or she may be off track.

_____ 4. I get excited at the prospect of talking to someone about the gospel.

_____ 5. I look for ways to speak a positive word to people, especially when they are lonely or hurting.

_____ 6. I seem to be able to trust God in hard times, even when others struggle with their faith.

_____ 7. I enjoy contributing financially to the needs of others.

_____ 8. I have seen God heal people physically when I pray for them.

_____ 9. When I hear about a need or problem, my first response is usually to pray.

_____ 10. I seem to have a gift for understanding what the Spirit is saying through those who speak in tongues.

_____ 11. I seem to have a gift for understanding what the Bible means by what it says.

_____ 12. I find great joy in helping a group of people define and achieve their goals.

_____ 13. I especially enjoy helping underprivileged people.

_____ 14. God often works supernaturally through my prayers and personal ministry.

_____ 15. I find great joy in proclaiming the word of God in public.

_____ 16. I am happiest when I work behind the scenes.

_____ 17. I have a deep desire to help other people become fully devoted followers of Jesus.

_____ 18. I find great joy in teaching the word of God to others.

_____ 19. In my private prayers I am often led by the Spirit to pray in a language unknown to me.

_____ 20. When I read the Bible, I can usually tell how it relates to our problems today.

_____ 21. When I am part of a disorganized group, I become frustrated and want to help.

_____ 22. I seem to adapt to different languages and environments more easily than other people.

_____ 23. I am very concerned about helping people distinguish spiritual truth from error.

_____ 24. I look for opportunities to share the gospel with people.

_____ 25. I enjoy sending notes and cards to encourage people.

_____ 26. Others seem to be inspired by my strong faith.

_____ 27. I look for ways to invest my resources in the Kingdom of God.

_____ 28. When I hear of a sick person I am especially drawn to pray for that person.

_____ 29. Spending significant time in prayer is a very important part of my ministry.

_____ 30. I am drawn to worship services where tongues are used.

_____ 31. I especially enjoy studying the Bible and discovering its applications to life today.

_____ 32. I become frustrated when a group does not have a clear purpose and strategy.

_____ 33. My heart goes out to people who are suffering, and I want to do all I can to help them.

_____ 34. I am drawn to ministries which enable me to pray for supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

_____ 35. I sense that the Holy Spirit uses me when I communicate his word in public.

_____ 36. I don't seem to get as weary in doing tedious work as others.

_____ 37. I would be willing to invest a significant amount of time in helping a small group of people grow closer to God.

_____ 38. I sense that the Holy Spirit uses me when I teach his word to others.

_____ 39. In public worship, I am often moved to declare a word from God in a language unknown to me or to the congregation.

_____ 40. I seem to have a gift for finding biblical truth which meets the practical needs of others.

_____ 41. I can often see the end from the beginning, and know what steps to take to accomplish a goal.

_____ 42. I get excited at the thought of living in a different culture for the purpose of helping people follow Jesus.

_____ 43. People often ask me to help them when they need to know the right thing to do.

_____ 44. I am willing to take personal risks for the sake of sharing the gospel with others.

_____ 45. I have a strong desire to counsel hurting people.

_____ 46. I can consistently see the purpose of God in the circumstances of my life.

_____ 47. I find great joy in knowing that my financial gifts will help other people follow Jesus.

_____ 48. Other people are often led to ask me to pray for the sick.

_____ 49. I find great joy in spending a significant amount of time in prayer.

_____ 50. When I hear someone speak in tongues, God often reveals their message to me.

_____ 51. Other people often ask me to help them understand the Bible.

_____ 52. When I become involved in a group, its members often ask me to lead.

_____ 53. I enjoy serving in hospitals, shelters, nursing homes, and benevolent ministries.

_____ 54. People tell me that they have seen God act supernaturally in their lives through my ministry.

_____ 55. When I speak in public, I seem to have a gift for connecting God's word to the needs of those who listen to me.

_____ 56. I find joy in helping people meet their practical needs.

_____ 57. When I join a group, I feel responsible for helping the other members grow spiritually.

_____ 58. When I teach God's word, I seem to have a gift for connecting biblical truth to the lives of those who listen to me.

_____ 59. I am drawn to congregations where tongues are welcomed in worship.

_____ 60. In a group setting, others seem to look to me for counsel.

_____ 61. People often ask me to help organize groups and accomplish goals.

_____ 62. I would be willing to make personal sacrifices for the sake of reaching people in different countries.

_____ 63. My impressions of people's character and intentions are usually proven right.

_____ 64. When I share my faith with people, they often seem to respond positively.

_____ 65. People who have come to me for encouragement and comfort often tell me that I have helped them.

_____ 66. When I find myself in difficult circumstances, I welcome them as an opportunity to watch God work.

_____ 67. When I hear about a ministry opportunity, I get excited about the chance to contribute.

_____ 68. Sick people often seek my intercession.

_____ 69. People know of my personal commitment to prayer ministry, and often call on me to pray for them.

_____ 70. Those who speak in tongues often turn to me for their interpretation.

_____ 71. I enjoy writing and sharing the insights I have gained from my personal Bible study.

_____ 72. I seem to have a gift for motivating and guiding groups of people to accomplish their goals.

_____ 73. I am deeply concerned for those who are going through hard times.

_____ 74. When I pray for a supernatural work of God, I can sense that the Spirit is using me.

_____ 75. When I proclaim God's word in public, people tell me that they hear God speak to them through me.

_____ 76. I feel that God wants me to help the church by meeting the practical and physical needs of others.

_____ 77. I am very concerned about the spiritual maturity of those I know.

_____ 78. People tell me that they hear God speak through me when I teach his word.

_____ 79. I find great joy in declaring a revelation from God in an unknown tongue.

_____ 80. When I have a problem, I can usually find the biblical wisdom I need.

_____ 81. I enjoy to opportunities to use my organizational skills for God.

_____ 82. I am drawn to opportunities to serve God in a different culture.

_____ 83. I have learned to trust my intuition in knowing truth from falsehood.

_____ 84. I am able to share my faith very naturally and easily.

_____ 85. I am naturally able to find a way to comfort hurting people.

_____ 86. I am consistently confident that God's purpose will be fulfilled in my life and circumstances.

_____ 87. I am drawn to opportunities where my financial resources can make a difference.

_____ 88. I find special joy in helping those with physical needs.

_____ 89. I am excited about spending time in prayer with other people.

_____ 90. During worship services, I am often asked to explain the meaning of a message delivered in tongues.

_____ 91. I am drawn to ministries which enable me to share biblical truths I have discovered.

_____ 92. When I lead a group, people affirm the effectiveness of my work.

_____ 93. When I am involved in benevolent ministry, people affirm the effectiveness of my work.

_____ 94. I find great joy in glorifying God by praying for a supernatural manifestation of the Spirit.

_____ 95. I am drawn to opportunities to speak God's word in public.

_____ 96. I enjoy serving God by meeting the routine needs of the church and her people.

_____ 97. I am drawn to groups of people whom I can help to grow spiritually.

_____ 98. I enjoy opportunities to teach God's word to others.

_____ 99. People often tell me they hear God speak to them through my use of an unknown tongue.

_____ 100. I am drawn to opportunities to help people solve their problems by discovering the biblical truth they need.

*Turn to the next
page to score.*

Day 29

Serving through your gifts

The three greatest preachers of the last three generations are probably Charles Spurgeon, Dwight Moody, and Billy Graham. What do they have in common?

Here is what Spurgeon said of himself, recorded in the preface to his collected sermons:

Recollect who I am, and what I am—a child, having little education, little learning, ability, or talent . . . Without the Spirit of God I feel I am utterly unable to speak to you. I have not those gifts and talents which qualify me to speak; I need an afflatus from on high; otherwise, I stand like other men, and have naught to say. May that be given me, for without it I am dumb!

And God used him to preach to ten million people across his ministry.

D. L. Moody was the son of an alcoholic who died when Moody was four years old. He completed seven grades of school. He said of himself: "I know that other men can preach better than I can. All I can say is that when I preach, God uses me." And he did—more than a million souls came to Christ through him.

Here is what Billy Graham says of himself:

I have often said that the first thing I am going to do when I get to Heaven is to ask, 'Why me, Lord? Why did You choose a farm boy from North Carolina to preach to so many people, to have such a wonderful team of associates, and to have a part in what You were doing in the latter half of the twentieth century?' I have thought about that question a great deal, but I know also that only God knows the answer.²

And he has preached to more people than anyone in Christian history. Why did God use these men so effectively? Because they served Jesus with humility.

It's been said that you were saved to serve. It is equally true that you were gifted by the Spirit to serve. When you use your gifts to advance yourself, God cannot use or honor them. When you use your gifts to advance the Kingdom, you will find God working through your life in miraculous ways.

Oswald Sanders, in his now-classic *Spiritual Leadership*, claims that "true greatness, true leadership, is found in giving yourself in service to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you."³ Max DePree, the former CEO of Herman Miller and author of bestselling leadership literature, defines leadership this way: "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader."⁴

Now that you know your spiritual gifts, will you use them to serve Christ and his Kingdom?

For prayer: Thank the Holy Spirit for giving you all you need to serve effectively in his global Kingdom advance. Commit yourself to use your gifts for God's glory, always.

Day 30

Changing the culture through your gifts

In 1951, Richard Niebuhr published the best-known classic in the field, a work titled *Christ and Culture*.⁵ It was my textbook in biblical ethics; it is still considered fundamental and foundational to the discipline today. Niebuhr sketches the five ways Christians can relate their faith to their society and culture. Choosing the right approach is vital to using your spiritual gifts effectively today.

One: Christ against culture. This model argues that we must reject the fallen world in every way, that we must have as little engagement with it as possible. We are to have nothing to do with the cultural issues of the day. The Incarnation seems to give the lie to this approach. If the physical world is inherently fallen, how could Jesus have remained sinless while inhabiting flesh?

Two: Christ of culture. This model attempts to integrate the world and the word of God, the culture and the Christian faith. It blurs the distinction between the two, and adopts the prevailing culture as the way to understand the faith. Whatever the culture adopts will be adapted by the faith as well. The Great Commission gives the lie to this approach. Why "go and make disciples of all nations" if the nations do not need to be evangelized and disciplined?

Three: Christ above culture. This approach teaches that we live in two worlds, the spiritual and the secular, and we must give each its due. The one is not the other. However, the great problem with this approach is the sinfulness of humanity. This model does not do enough to transform the culture it seeks to help. It lives in Sunday and Monday without seeking to bring Sunday to Monday.

Four: Christ and culture in paradox. This approach rejects the third by arguing that culture is so inherently sinful as to be beyond saving. Yet it contradicts the first (Christ against culture) by arguing that we must try. We must preach grace to law, the gospel to the lost. We respond to the issues of our culture by preaching the gospel of salvation, for only when souls change can the world change. The

problem with this approach is that it does not speak to issues the Bible itself addresses, such as the treatment of the poor. It is not as holistic as the Scriptures.

Five: Christ transforming culture. This model seeks to bring the biblical worldview to bear on every dimension of society for the purpose of redeeming the culture for the Kingdom. Unlike the first model, it does not ignore the culture; unlike the second, it does not adopt it; unlike the third, it does not separate the two realms; unlike the fourth, it seeks the salvation of souls but also the transformation of society. It works to apply biblical truth to cultural issues for the sake of advancing the Kingdom of God on earth.

For prayer: Thank God for his love for the entire world. Then ask God's Spirit to use your gifts as salt and light (Matthew 5:13–16). And step into your culture with expectancy as the Father answers your prayer for the sake of your culture.

Section six

The fruit of the Spirit

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23).

Day 31

Love

In 1989 I became the pastor of First Baptist Church in Midland, Texas. We fell in love with the people and the community. But the flat West Texas landscape was a change for us. Nearly every tree in the area was planted by someone, including the peach tree in our backyard.

We didn't know we had a peach tree until our first spring, when the tree bore peaches. It's a simple fact: you can tell the tree by its fruit. The same principle is true of Christians—when we manifest the "fruit of the Spirit," others see the Spirit at work in our lives and are drawn to our Lord.

Galatians 5:22–23 is our text for this section of our study. Note that "fruit" is singular—these are nine manifestations of the one "fruit" demonstrating the Spirit at work in our lives. And note that they are the Spirit's "fruit," not ours. We are not called to try

harder to make more fruit. Rather, we are to stay surrendered to the Spirit, so he can produce his fruit in and through us.

We begin today with love. Why is it first on the list?

"Love" translates *agape*, which refers to unconditional acceptance, the commitment to put the other person first regardless of circumstances or challenges. It contrasts in the New Testament with *phileo*, friendship love, and *eros*, erotic or sexual love. To choose *agape* is to love other people regardless of how they treat you. It is to choose others' best, regardless of the cost to you. It is to love them as Jesus loves you.

Those who construct houses in Southern California have discovered that buildings survive earthquakes only when they are bolted several feet down into solid rock. Otherwise, they simply slide off their foundation and collapse. The foundation of our relationship with God and others is love—his for us and ours for them.

For prayer: Thank the Father for loving you unconditionally, and ask the Spirit to manifest such transforming love through you to those you encounter today.

Day 32

Joy

When J. S. Bach returned from a year-long concert tour to discover that his wife and child had died, he wrote in his diary, "Dear Lord, take not my joy from me." Imagine even thinking of joy at such a time. But Bach was right—the joy of the Lord is ours whatever our circumstances hold.

What is "joy"? First, let's note what it's *not*:

- A feeling. Nowhere does the Bible describe what it feels like to have God's joy.
- A circumstance. Joy is not "happiness," which depends on "happenings." You can have joy even in hard times.
- A temporary experience. Joy transcends the moment, the feelings, the circumstances of this day. You can have joy no matter what the past has been or the future holds.

So, what is joy? It's been defined as "a deep state of well-being that transcends circumstances." Romans 14:17 states that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Paul said he was "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10).

How can you have joy? By surrendering to the Holy Spirit. You can know the degree to which he is controlling your life by the degree to which you are experiencing and manifesting his joy.

Then you can "rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). You can sing hymns at midnight in jail (Acts 16:25). You can respond to persecution as did the apostles: "They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41).

When Jesus sent his disciples into ministry, they "returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name'" (Luke 10:17). He responded, "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (v. 20).

For prayer: Thank Jesus for the joy his Spirit gives in every circumstance. Then ask the Spirit to control your life so fully that he can manifest his joy through you today.

Day 33

Peace

A friend sent me these actual newspaper headlines: "Include your children when baking cookies"; "Miners refuse to work after death"; "If strike isn't settled quickly, it may last a while"; "Typhoon rips through cemetery; hundreds dead"; "Kids make nutritious snacks"; and most insightful of all, "War dims hope for peace." It usually does.

Our world needs peace. So do you. So do I.

In Mark 4 we find Jesus in a storm. His disciples were fighting for their lives, but he was asleep. After they exhausted all their efforts, they woke him in fear. He then said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" With this result: "And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm" (v. 39).

Why didn't they wake Jesus earlier? Why don't we?

Some of us don't think we need his help. We think our boat is big enough, the storm small enough, our abilities good enough, our training and experience all that's needed. Like these veteran sailors, we've been through storms on our lake before, and we know how to handle our boats. We like rowing. We don't need help. We want to do this ourselves. We think we can.

But no boat, no ability, no money, no possession, no resource is enough to live at peace without God. That's just how he made the world, and us.

Some of us have given up on peace. We accept storms as a way of life. We've been through so many downpours, so many hurricanes, that we've given up on peace in our hearts or homes. We're accustomed to a life filled with stress and strife, hectic hurry and perennial pressure.

All the while, the Prince of Peace waits to give peace to our hearts and souls, to calm our storms, to bring tranquility to our lives. If we will ask.

And some of us have given up on God. He's been asleep in our boat before. We prayed without answers, or so we think. We grieved without hope, suffered without help, rowed on our own. Or so it seems to us. So let him sleep. All the while, he's waiting for us to turn to him first.

What's your storm named today? Where is your ship battered? How can Jesus bring you peace?

Invite him to captain your boat. Go to him at the first sign of a storm. Settle for nothing less than his peace. Then decide to begin each day's voyage with him at the helm.

The poet learned this profound truth:

*I met God in the morning, when my day was at its best,
And his presence came like sunrise, like a glory to my breast.
All day long his presence lingered—all day long he
stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness o'er sometimes
troubled sea.
Other ships were torn and battered—other ships were
sore distressed,
But the winds that seemed to drive them brought to us a
peace and rest.
So I think I've learned the secret, learned from many a
troubled way:
You must seek God in the morning if you want him
through the day.*

For prayer: Thank Jesus for being present in your storms today. Ask his Spirit to take control of your day and your challenges, and expect his peace.

Day 34

Patience

The National Sales Executives Association has discovered that forty-eight percent of all salespersons make one call, then give up on the prospective buyer. Twenty-five percent quit after the second call; twelve percent call three times, then quit. Ten percent keep calling until they succeed, for eighty percent of all new sales are made after the fifth call to the same prospect.

Success seldom comes quickly with God's people. Abraham was seventy-five when God first promised him offspring (Genesis 12:4,7) and 100 when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5). Moses was a shepherd for forty years and wandered in the wilderness for forty more until coming to the edge of the Promised Land.

If we are to succeed in life and in God's Kingdom, we must have the fruit of the Spirit called patience.

"Patience" translates *makrothumia*, which literally means to be "long- or large-tempered." It can be rendered, "to be longsuffering, patiently enduring under injuries inflicted by others." God displays such patience with us:

- He "is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).
- "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Psalm 103:8). The Old Testament repeats this affirmation four more times.
- "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15–16). God was patient even with Paul, the murderer of his people. He is therefore patient with you, no matter what you've done.

Now he calls us to display his patience with each other. Paul prayed for the Colossians to "be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy"

(Colossians 1:11). If you'll make Paul's intercession yours, the Holy Spirit will answer your prayer today.

For prayer: Thank God for the spiritual gift of patience available to you. Ask the Spirit to manifest this gift wherever you need it most today.

Day 35

Kindness

I remember the day as if it were yesterday. I was pastor of First Baptist Church in Midland, Texas. The title of my sermon that Sunday was, "Is God Fair?" I was prepared to preach a message defending the fairness of God, but one of our Sunday school volunteers saw the title and said, "Aren't you glad he's not?" I had to go back to my office and rewrite the sermon.

If God were fair, every sin you've ever committed would be punished. Every transgression would be public. Every word and thought would be exposed. Aren't you glad God's not fair?

"Kindness" translates *chrestos*, which means "goodness, kindness, generosity toward all people, no matter what they have done to us." God graciously manifests such kindness toward us, despite all our sins.

Scripture teaches that "when the goodness and loving kindness of our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:4–5). God saved us "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

Now our Father calls us to choose kindness with others, no matter what they do to us: "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:17–18).

I once heard Chuck Swindoll tell a group of pastors how to deal with critics and opponents in the church: "Tell God on them." And leave them with him. Lewis Smedes' excellent book, *Forgive and Forget*, explains what forgiveness is and what it is not. Forgiveness is not excusing, or forgetting, or explaining away. To forgive is to pardon—to refuse to punish, even though you could, as a governor pardons a convicted criminal. To release the person from the punishment they deserve.

Let God be the judge, while you offer kindness. If you'll make this choice, the Spirit will give you the kindness you need.

For prayer: Thank God for his undeserved kindness toward you. Now think of a person who has hurt you most deeply, and ask the Spirit to manifest his kindness in your heart for that person. What God has given you, choose to give to others today.

Day 36

Goodness

An elderly rabbi accepted a young, headstrong student. The new pupil constantly challenged his teacher's authority and theology, slandering his character and integrity in the larger community. One day after a particularly unfair attack, the student repented of his ungodly behavior and asked the rabbi's forgiveness.

The wise man quickly granted it, but assigned the student a task in response. He was to fill a bag with feathers, throw them into the wind, then retrieve them. The student returned the next day, frustrated and angry. He had been unable to catch even half of the feathers he had scattered. "So it is with your words," the rabbi replied.

It is impossible to unring a bell. Our words may linger far after our actions are forgotten. And our actions are remembered by those we hurt long after we have forgotten them.

In a fallen world filled with fallen people, "goodness" is essential.

"Goodness" translates the Greek word *agathosune*, which means "goodness in action." Scripture says that our Lord is a "good" Father. Consider Nehemiah 9:35: "Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works." Hundreds of times the Scriptures call God "good."

All through the Bible we find God initiating such goodness toward us:

- "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He took the initiative to find us when we didn't want to be found.
- This was his Son's mission in life: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

God took the initiative in seeking me. When two men knocked on my door in Houston and invited me to ride their bus to church in 1973, I wasn't thinking about church. Or God. Left to myself, I would likely have never taken the initiative to go to a church or

seek out the gospel. God came for me, or I wouldn't be writing these words. If he had not come for you, you probably wouldn't be reading them.

Now God calls us to initiate goodness toward others:

- "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone" (Matthew 18:15).
- "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23–24).

Think of the last sin God forgave in your life. Now think of the person whose sin you need to forgive, and choose to initiate goodness today.

For prayer: Thank God for his goodness in forgiving your sins and failures. Now ask the Spirit to give you the fruit of goodness in your life as you choose to forgive others today.

Day 37

Faithfulness

I once read in *Guideposts* magazine a memorable story. The writer told of a beach party she attended in California many years earlier. The barbeque wasn't ready yet, so she decided to go for a swim by herself in the ocean, a dangerous idea. She swam out too far and was suddenly caught in a powerful undertow. Though she swam with all her might, she couldn't free herself. Her arms became lead weights, the salt water stung her lungs, and she knew she would drown.

She cried out in desperation, "God, help me!" Instantly she heard a voice say, "Reach up here." She looked and saw, to her amazement, a smiling young man in a swimsuit standing on a rock, his hand extended to hers. She threw her arm into his hand, and he pulled her from the undertow to safety.

After she caught her breath, the young man pointed to a pylon on the beach at a sharp angle away and

said, "Swim there." She started out and immediately could tell that this was the way around the undertow. She looked back at the smiling young man and waved; he waved back. She swam a little further and looked back again, but he was gone.

Finally she returned to the shore and to the barbeque. One of the guests asked where she had been. "I went for a swim out to the rock," she said. The owner of the beachfront property heard her and asked, "What rock? There's no rock out there." And they turned and looked, and the rock was gone.

The writer, now in her eighties, said that many times over the years she has been caught in the storms of life, but each time she's known there's a smiling man on a rock, with his hand out to hers.

"Faithfulness" translates *pistis*, which means "faith" in relation to God and faithfulness in relation to people. All through Scripture we read that our Father is "faithful." For instance, 1 Thessalonians 5:24 states, "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." 2 Thessalonians 3:3 adds, "The Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one."

Now your Father calls you to be faithful with him and others as he has been faithful with you: "Fear the

Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you" (1 Samuel 12:24). And he will reward your faithfulness in eternity: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21).

Where do you need the faithfulness of God today?
With whom is he calling you to be faithful?

For prayer: Thank God for being so faithful to you all the years of your life. Ask the Spirit to manifest his faithfulness toward your spouse, family, friends, and anyone else who needs you today.

Day 38

Gentleness

Frederick Buechner is one of my favorite writers. Here is his definition of "anger":

Of the Seven Deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.⁶

Today we come to the fruit of the Spirit called "gentleness." This term translates *praus*, one of the truly great words in the Greek language. No one English word adequately describes this one.

Aristotle gave the word its classic definition: the man who is always angry at the right time and never at

the wrong time.⁷ Someone who controls his or her emotions, no matter the circumstances. Plato used it to describe the power to soothe and calm, as an ointment on a wound. Socrates used it for a man who could discuss emotional things without losing his temper.

Our holy King has every right to condemn each of us for our sins. Instead, he is angry at our sins, but forgives us when we confess them (1 John 1:9) and forgets all he forgives (Isaiah 43:25). Now he calls us to manifest such *praus* with each other.

Gentleness is one of the greatest hallmarks of a life led by the Holy Spirit:

- "Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious" (1 Peter 3:4).
- "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1).
- "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness" (2 Timothy 2:24–25).
- We are to defend our faith "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

- "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness" (Ephesians 4:1–2).

When you cannot be forgiving and gentle, know that the Spirit can do what you cannot.

Corrie ten Boom, the famous Holocaust survivor and marvelous Christian, once experienced such a miracle. Here's how she told the story:

It was at a church service in Munich, Germany, that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, my sister's pain-blانched face.

As the church was emptying, he came up to me. "How grateful I am for your message, fraulein. To think that, as you say, [God] has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man;

*was I going to ask for more? "Lord Jesus," I prayed,
"forgive me, and help me to forgive him."*

*I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not.
I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity.
And so again I breathed a silent prayer: "Jesus, I cannot
forgive him. Give me your forgiveness."*

*As I took the man's hand, the most incredible thing
happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through
my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while
into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost
overwhelmed me.*

*And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any
more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges,
but on God's. When God tells us to love our enemies, he
gives, along with the command, the love itself.*

For prayer: Thank God for his gentleness in forgiving your sins. Now ask his Spirit to manifest the fruit of gentleness in your life as you forgive others today.

Day 39

Self-control

Thomas a Kempis prayed, "Cause me to live now as I shall wish I had done when I come to die." Jonathan Edwards resolved "never to do any thing, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour, before I should hear the last trump." G. Campbell Morgan agreed: "Every morning when I awaken I remind myself that I must be ready to meet God today."

We have learned that when the Holy Spirit takes control of our lives, he manifests the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. The last characteristic of his fruit is "self-control." This term translates *ekrates*, someone who controls his or her desires.

The word originally meant to grip something, to control it. Plato and Aristotle used the word for a man who had powerful passions and desires, yet controlled

them. He was always their master, never their servant. The word was typically used with regard to sexual desires, but was also applied to food, love, and ego. Someone who controls his desires, no matter how tempted he or she is, manifests *ekrates*.

Where do you need self-control today? Scripture calls you to choose this character trait:

- "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Proverbs 25:28).
- "Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control" (2 Peter 1:5–6).
- We are to be "hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined" (Titus 1:8).

But know that your Father does not expect you to manifest self-control in your own ability. The Bible assures us that "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7). The Holy Spirit is ready to empower you with the self-control you need, if you will ask him for such grace today.

With his power, you can withstand the strains and challenges of this day and emerge victorious in Christ. Theodore Roosevelt was right:

It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; who does actually try to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.

For prayer: Thank God for the self-control his Spirit has bestowed on your life. Now ask the Spirit to show you where you need this gift, and to manifest its power today.

Section seven

The Spirit and Passion Week

**Note: Many readers choose to use this guide as a resource during the season of Lent culminating with Passion Week. For that reason, our last eight days begin with Palm Sunday and conclude with Easter Sunday.*

If you are using this guide during another season of the year, I believe you will nonetheless discover important principles by studying the Spirit's work during the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry. As he empowered our Savior, so he empowers the "body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27) today: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

Day 40

P A L M S U N D A Y

The Spirit leads us

Bill Hybels is the founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, one of the largest congregations in America. He is also a perceptive interpreter of Scripture and culture. Consider his comments regarding the first Palm Sunday:

Everyone who lined the streets had a different reason for waving those palms. Some were political activists; they'd heard Jesus had supernatural power, and they wanted him to use it to free Israel from Roman rule. Others had loved ones who were sick or dying. They waved branches, hoping for physical healing. Some were onlookers merely looking for something to do, while others were genuine followers who wished Jesus would establish himself as an earthly king.

Jesus was the only one in the parade who knew why he was going to Jerusalem—to die. He had a mission, while everyone else had an agenda.

What was his mission?

Five centuries earlier, the Spirit inspired Zechariah to predict: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). Military conquerors returned from their campaigns on white stallions, but men of peace always rode on a lowly donkey. The Messiah would come in peace, the prophet said.

What would he do when he arrived? "He shall speak peace to the nations" (v. 10) and "set your prisoners free from the waterless pit" (v. 11). The Messiah's mission was revealed by the Holy Spirit centuries before Palm Sunday.

Then the Spirit led Jesus to fulfill the prophet's prediction. As he led our Lord throughout his ministry (Acts 10:38; Luke 4:1), so he led him to enter Jerusalem in a way that set the stage for Holy Week.

Now the same Holy Spirit stands ready to lead you today: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). As a result, those who are the children of God can be led by the Spirit of God.

How does he lead us?

- Through Scripture: God speaks by "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).
- Through prayer: "praying at all times in the Spirit, making supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18; see Jude 20).
- Through worship: we "worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:3).
- Vocationally: "the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2).
- Into specific Kingdom assignments: In leading Philip to minister to the Ethiopian eunuch, "the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot'" (Acts 8:29).
- To particular places: "They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia,

they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'" (Acts 16:6–9).

The Spirit who led Jesus on the first Palm Sunday wants to lead you today. And every day for the rest of your life.

For prayer: Thank Jesus for what he did for you on this day, when he chose to enter the city where he would die for your sins. Then ask the Spirit to lead you into your Kingdom assignment as you share the good news of Jesus' sacrificial love today.

Day 41

The Spirit emboldens us

"God helps those who help themselves" is our culture's credo. More than seventy percent of all Americans are sure it's in the Bible. Actually, this statement first appeared in print in the writing of an Englishman named Algernon Sidney in 1698 and was made famous by Benjamin Franklin.

By contrast, Scripture declares: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). You and I desperately need strength that only the Spirit can supply, a fact illustrated by Jesus' ministry on Monday of Holy Week.

On this day, Jesus drove moneychangers from the temple, enraging the authorities and imperiling himself (Matthew 21:10–17). Then he cursed a fig tree:

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he

went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it (Mark 11:12-14).

Cursing a fig tree for not bearing fruit when "it was not the season for figs" seems strangely unfair until we understand this event as Jesus meant it. Leaves are found on Palestinian figs during the spring, summer, and fall; ripe figs appear from June to November. As this was Passover season in April, the tree had not yet produced its fruit.

Such a fruitless fig tree was a clear symbol of the fruitless nation of Israel: "When I would gather them, declares the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them" (Jeremiah 8:13; cf. Micah 7:1).

The power by which Jesus could confront the most powerful authorities of his nation and perform miraculous acts is the same power now living in you. But God will not do for us what we try to do for ourselves. If we are comfortable and complacent with our spiritual lives, our witness, our ministry, we will not know the power of God's Spirit.

Scripture is clear: "The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power" (1 Corinthians 4:20). Are you walking in the power of the Spirit today?

For prayer: Thank God for the power of his Spirit residing in your life. Then submit to the Spirit and ask him to work in miraculous power through your words and actions today.

Day 42

The Spirit teaches through us

Earlier in Jesus' ministry, the authorities decided that they must deal with him. They sent officers to arrest him, "but no one laid hands on him" (John 7:44). The authorities were outraged and demanded to know why. The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" (v. 46).

We see our Lord's profound wisdom on display during Tuesday of Holy Week.

The day began with Jesus debating the authorities at the temple (Matthew 21:23–27). He taught parables that exposed their hypocrisy (Matthew 21:28—22:14). They tried to trap him by asking if they should pay taxes to Caesar, but he defeated their logic with the famous declaration, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

Then the Sadducees, who did not believe in an afterlife, tried to trick him by asking to whom a woman married seven times would be married in the afterlife (Matthew 22:23–28). Jesus defeated them by using Exodus 3:6 to prove the existence of an afterlife with God. He was so successful that the crowd was "astonished at his teaching" (v. 33).

Next, a Pharisee tried to trap him by asking which of their 613 laws was most important. If Jesus named one, he could be accused of denigrating the rest. He cited the Great Commandments (Matthew 22:37–40), impressing even his theological opponent (Mark 12:32–34a). With this result: "After that no one dared to ask him any more questions" (v. 34b).

How did Jesus speak such profound truth? Isaiah predicted the answer: "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:2).

Now the Spirit is ready to teach us today: "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).

And he is ready to teach others through you. Paul testified, "my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4). The Spirit wants to author that same "demonstration" through you today.

What must we do to be taught by the Spirit? Take these steps, in order:

- Admit that you need his wisdom. He cannot teach those who will not learn.
- Ask him to show you any sin blocking his voice in your life and confess all that comes to your thoughts.
- Agree to follow his will, whatever it is. He reveals his truth to those who will receive and obey it.
- Make time to listen for his voice. He speaks through Scripture, circumstance, people, and your own inner voice.
- Ask the Spirit to teach others what he has taught you. You are not a container of his blessing, but a conduit of his revelation.

For prayer: Thank God for the wisdom of his Spirit available to you. Then ask the Spirit to speak his truth to and through you today.

Day 43

The Spirit prepares us

John R. W. Stott was one of the greatest preachers, pastors, and leaders of this generation. He published more than fifty books and influenced Christianity around the globe. In 2005, *TIME* magazine ranked him among the 100 most influential people in the world.

When Stott died in 2011, Billy Graham said, "The evangelical world has lost one of its greatest spokesmen, and I have lost one of my close personal friends and advisors." When asked the secret to his remarkable relationship with God, Stott explained that he sought to spend an hour a day, a day a week, and a week a year alone with his Lord.

By contrast, novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner wrote of his father's suicide: "'He was a fine swimmer and dancer and was at home everywhere,' I had one of my characters say of him. 'But he had no private home inside of himself, if you understand

me. . . . So when troubles forced him home, there was nowhere to go because he didn't have any home. Or if he ever had had, he'd forgotten his way there."¹⁰

We all need a "private home" where we can be with our Lord. For instance, after a busy season of ministry, Jesus said to his disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." Mark explains: "For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat" (Mark 6:31).

Our Lord often took his own advice, as Luke's Gospel demonstrates:

- Jesus "would withdraw to desolate places and pray" (5:16).
- "In those days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God" (6:12).
- "As he was praying alone, the disciples were with him" (9:18).
- "He took Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray" (9:28).
- "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (22:31–32).
- "Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!'" (23:46).

We can add Wednesday of Holy Week to the list. Jesus did nothing recorded in the Gospels on this day. He and his disciples apparently spent it with his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at their home in Bethany. As God "rested from all his work" on the Sabbath (Genesis 2:3), so Jesus rested and prepared spiritually for the work he would soon do for all of mankind.

His example calls us to solitude with the Spirit today. Here you will experience the promise of God: "In quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). Here you will obey the call of God to "let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20). Paul advises us, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

Take time to make a "Silent Wednesday" for your soul. Make an appointment to be alone with your Lord. Set aside a place where you will be undisturbed. Turn off technology and anything else that might distract you. Read Scripture; pray; sing hymns or choruses to God; listen for his voice.

If Jesus needed silence with the Spirit today, how much more do we?

For prayer: Thank God for making himself available to you in silence, and set aside time today to be alone with the Spirit.

Day 44

M A U N D Y T H U R S D A Y

The Spirit sustains us

An English minister named Robert Robinson was a gifted preacher, poet, and hymn writer. After many years of ministry, he began to drift in his spiritual life. He left his vocation, traveled to France, sank further into sin, and strayed far from Christ.

One night he was riding in a carriage with a Paris socialite who had recently become a believer. She was reading some poetry to him and asked, "And what do you think of this one?"

*Come thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace.
Streams of mercy never failing
Call for hymns of loudest praise.*

When she looked over at him she saw him cry. "What do I think of it?" he asked in a broken voice. "I wrote it; but now I've drifted away from him and can't find my way back."

"But don't you see?" said the woman quietly. "The way back is written right here in the third line of your poem: 'Streams of mercy never ceasing.' Those streams are flowing even here in Paris tonight." Robinson recommitted his life to Christ and regained his fellowship with Jesus.

The same streams of mercy now flow to your soul today.

Thursday in Holy Week is known by a variety of names: Holy Thursday, Covenant Thursday, Great and Holy Thursday, Sheer Thursday, and Thursday of Mysteries. Most of us know it as Maundy Thursday (from the Latin *mandatum*, referring to the new "commandment" Jesus gave us, John 13:34).

On this day Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples. He washed their feet. He withdrew to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he was betrayed by Judas, abandoned by the disciples, and arrested by the authorities. He was tried before Annas, then Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. This was likely the hardest night of his earthly life, as he faced the rejection of his friends and the cruelty of his enemies.

Before he was arrested, Jesus spent an agonizing time in prayer (Matthew 26:36–46). His prayers were so intense that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). He was troubled by the prospect of physical and psychological torture to come, the abandonment of his friends, and the cruelty of his enemies.

Most of all, he was grieved at the prospect of bearing our sins on his sinless soul, so that the Father would turn from him for the only time in all eternity and he would cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

So he prayed three times, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matthew 26:39a). But he then resolved, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (v. 39b). And the Spirit who enabled him to live a sinless life "without blemish" sustained him once more (Hebrews 9:14).

Now that same Spirit sustains us in our challenges and even in our prayers: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). As he enabled Jesus to choose death for our life, to bear our sins and purchase our salvation, so he enables us to live for the One who died for us.

His "streams of mercy never failing" are as close as your next prayer.

For prayer: Thank God for his Son's decision to die for you. Then ask the Spirit to sustain and strengthen you as you serve Jesus sacrificially and gratefully today.

Day 45

G O O D F R I D A Y

The Spirit empowers us

If you have been vaccinated against measles, mumps, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, chickenpox, meningitis, or pneumonia, you have Dr. Maurice Hilleman (1919–2005) to thank. He served as chief of the Department of Virus Diseases at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and later as head of the virus and cell biology research department of Merck & Co. Dr. Hilleman is credited with saving more lives than any other scientist of the twentieth century. And yet he is virtually unknown to the general public, as he refused to name a vaccine or discovery after himself.

Now that you know of Dr. Hilleman's remarkable career, are you grateful for his work?

Consider what Jesus did for you on Good Friday. He had already endured religious trials that were illegal in at least these ways:

- He was arrested without a formal charge.
- He was given no opportunity to prepare a defense.
- They began with a private examination, not the public trial required by law.
- The Sanhedrin was not permitted to initiate charges, only consider them.
- The proceedings were conducted at night, against the law (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:1).
- Witnesses could not be solicited once a trial began.
- Witnesses could not be paid for their testimony.
- The Sanhedrin discovered that their witnesses were false, but did not punish them.
- Jesus was put under oath to condemn himself (Mt. 26:63).
- The witness was condemned only on the basis of his personal testimony.
- No discussion of the blasphemy charge was permitted.
- The Sanhedrin had no authority to pronounce the sentence of death.
- They changed the charge from blasphemy to insurrection once they stood before Pilate.

Then Jesus was paraded to Pilate, to Herod, and back to Pilate. He was scourged, his scalp was lacerated with a crown of thorns, and he was forced to carry his cross to Golgotha. His wrists and feet were nailed to the cross, where he died of blood loss, shock, and suffocation. All for you.

You may know that Mel Gibson, the director and producer of *The Passion of the Christ*, appears in the movie himself. When Jesus' hand is stretched on the cross, a fist holds the spike which is driven into the Savior's flesh. The hand that holds that spike, the hand that crucifies our Lord, is Mel Gibson's. He was asked why he did it that way. His answer: Because I killed him.

I understand and appreciate what he means. But we can't kill God. He chose to die, for you. Before he made you, he knew he would die for you. That's how much he loves you. The passion of the Christ is you.

The Spirit empowered Jesus to endure all of that: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38). He is the same Spirit who is ready to empower you as you face your challenges on this Good Friday.

For prayer: Thank God for sending his Son to die that you might live. Then ask his Spirit to empower you as you deal with the trials of this fallen world and glorify Jesus by your faithful service to his Kingdom.

Day 46

The Spirit comforts us in grief

The desert fathers were a medieval group of men who forsook their homes to live alone in desert solitude. Someone asked one of them why he had made such a drastic change in his life. The monk poured water and some sand into a jar. As he shook the jar, the water became clouded and murky. But as he allowed the jar to rest, the sand settled to the bottom and the water became clear again.

No day in Jesus' ministry was more clouded with grief and uncertainty than Saturday of Holy Week. The Messiah had died, and for his followers, hope died with him. Our only Savior lay in the tomb, apparently defeated by Satan and death. If the divine Son of God could not defeat the tomb, no one could. Grief won and faith lost. Or so it seemed.

But the Holy Spirit was not defeated. The power of God who anointed, led, and enabled Jesus to fulfill

his earthly mission did not die at Calvary. To the contrary, he would soon raise Jesus from his grave and present him to the world as our risen Lord.

In the meanwhile, the Spirit was at work comforting Jesus' followers in their sorrow. He is still the greatest source of hope in all the world:

- "May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Romans 15:13).
- "Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

Now he stands ready to comfort you wherever you need his hope today.

It's been said that grief is the price we pay for love. Psychologist Erich Fromm observed, "To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness."

Put yourself in the place of those who grieved Jesus' death on the Saturday of Holy Week. Name your personal grief, fear, or burden. And know that the

Spirit who gives hope is ready to minister hope to your spirit.

For prayer: Thank God for the hope his Spirit offers, and ask the Spirit to give hope to your spirit, wherever you most need his comfort today.

Day 47

E A S T E R S U N D A Y

The Spirit raises us

Murdo MacDonald was a prisoner of war in Germany and chaplain to American soldiers. After the war was over he told how he learned of the Normandy invasion.

Early on D-Day, he was awakened and told that a Scotsman in the British prisoner-of-war camp wanted to see him. MacDonald ran to the barbed wire that separated the two camps. The Scot, who was in touch with the BBC by underground radio, had often given updates on the war to MacDonald in Gaelic, which the two men understood but the German guards standing beside them did not.

On this early morning, the Scotsman spoke a brief sentence in Gaelic, just a few words which meant, "They have come." MacDonald ran back to the

American camp and spread the news: "They have come...they have come." And everyone knew the Allies had landed at Normandy. The reaction was incredible. Men jumped and shouted, hugged each other, even rolled on the ground. They were still captives, but now they were certain of their deliverance. All because of three words: "They have come."

Twenty centuries ago, the angel announced to Mary Magdalene and to all the world, "He has risen" (Matthew 28:6). All around the world on Easter Sunday, billions of Christians speaking hundreds of languages announce the same news. Many follow the ancient formula: The pastor states, "He is risen!" and the people respond, "He is risen indeed!"

As Jesus rose from his tomb, so you will rise from yours one day. The same Holy Spirit who raised him from the dead will raise you to new life as well: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

Now the Spirit of God is ready to give you resurrection hope and joy today.

The Imitation of Christ is probably the most widely-read book in Christian history next to the Bible. It was written by an unknown monk named Thomas from the town of Kempen, more than five centuries ago. His record of God's word to him brings God's word to us today:

My Son, let not the labours which you have undertaken for My sake break your spirit, nor let troubles too much deject you; but rather let My promise strengthen you, and console you under all circumstances. You will not have long to labour here, and you will not always have to endure grief. Wait a little while, and you will speedily see the end of all your troubles. An hour will come, when all labour and tumult will cease. All that passes away with time is short-lived and of small account.

Whatever you do, do it with your might. Labour faithfully in My vineyard; I will be your reward. Write, read, watch, pray, labour diligently, bear troubles manfully; eternal life is worth all these efforts, and much greater ones. Peace will come in the Lord's good time; then there will be no day nor night, but light perpetual, brightness, infinite, steadfast peace, and secure rest...

Lift up therefore your face towards Heaven. Behold Me, and all My Saints with Me; in this life they had great conflicts, but now they rejoice, now they are comforted, now

they are safe, now they are at rest, and they will live with Me evermore in My Father's kingdom.¹¹

As will we. This is the Easter hope, and the eternal promise, of God.

For prayer: Thank God for the hope of resurrection. Ask his Spirit to endow you with his resurrecting power today. Commit yourself to begin every day by surrendering to the Spirit. And rejoice in the power, presence, and joy of the Spirit living in you.

Because you are the temple of the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, every day is Easter.

Endnotes

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