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4. The Power of the Holy Spirit

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4. The Power of the Holy Spirit

This Bible study lesson is based on Chapter 5 of *The Abiding Room*, a book by Kevin Seacat.

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You may have read the story of Pentecost described in Acts 2 many times. For most followers of Jesus, much like Easter, we never tire of hearing about the miraculous, world-changing day of Pentecost that took place over 2,000 years ago. Everything was made new that day when the Holy Spirit was given by God to live in the hearts of each person who repented and put their faith in Jesus. On that day, the Church was born.

Let's look briefly at the days leading up to Pentecost. After Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected from the dead, He appeared to the disciples and many others on earth for forty days. He walked, talked, and ate with them, leaving no doubt that He'd overcome death and was alive and living among them physically.

But His followers didn't know what to expect when Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem and said: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8 NIV). Nevertheless, you can only imagine the sense of wonder and excitement they experienced when they heard Jesus' promise. Then miraculously, He flew up into the clouds and out of sight.

But unlike the discouragement they faced after Jesus' death on the cross, this time they stayed together, obediently waiting on the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit. This time when Jesus departed, His followers' waiting was completely different. The first time Jesus departed, He was dead (John 19:33 NIV). This time, He was alive (John 20:14-18 NIV). The first time He departed, it looked as if death had won over Him (Luke 23:46 NIV). This time, everybody knew He had won over death (Luke 24:33-48 NIV). The first time He departed, it appeared Satan had won (Luke 22:53 NIV). This time, it was obvious Satan had lost (1 John 3:8 NIV). The first time He departed, He was placed in a tomb (Mark 15:46 NIV). This time, God the Father placed Him on the throne (Hebrews 10:12 NIV).

Therefore, knowing something special was on the horizon, Jesus' followers behaved in a completely different manner. Instead of being hopeless (John 20:11-13 NIV), this time His followers were hopeful (John 20:19-20 NIV). Instead of hiding because of their fear of others (John 20:19 NIV), this time they sang praises because of their great hope in God (Luke 24:53 NIV). Instead of scattering (John 20:10 NIV), this time they stayed together and prayed, waiting for the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14 NIV). They were not disappointed! Ten days later, as thousands gathered at the large Jewish festival called Pentecost, God sent His Holy Spirit, and the world and eternity were changed forever.

Pentecost

Here's a portion of the account of the day of Pentecost: "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4 NIV).

Then Peter, filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, preached what was essentially the first sermon of the new church, concluding: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing ... Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:32-36 NIV).

The account goes on to say: "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.' And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.' So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:37-41 NIV).

At Pentecost over 2,000 years ago, God sent His Holy Spirit into His followers' hearts in a one-time, dramatic display no one could miss, and that event has been recounted endlessly! While the filling of the Spirit isn't as dramatic today, the same power is nevertheless real, available, and just as life-changing.

The Great Provision of the Holy Spirit

Shortly before He ascended into heaven, Jesus gave His disciples two important messages. First, He gave them (and us) their marching orders on what they were to do after His departure in what has come to be known as the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

Then, just a little later, Jesus told them how they were to carry it out. He instructed them to wait in the city of Jerusalem until they had received the person and the power of the Holy Spirit. "And 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 NIV). "But 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 NIV).

We'll call the gift of the Holy Spirit indwelling us the Great Provision. The Great Commission of Jesus had to wait on the Great Provision of the Holy Spirit. God gave the Great Provision of the Holy Spirit who lives in the heart of every follower of Jesus to carry out the Great Commission that is a command to every follower of Jesus. God's plan is to use people as His witnesses throughout the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Great Provision of the Holy Spirit enables the Great Commission of Jesus.

This was true with the birth of the church at Pentecost and has continued to be true throughout history right up to today. We are able to carry out the Great Commission because we are not doing the witnessing and teaching. Rather, it's the Holy Spirit living in and through us. What God commands, He empowers through the Great Provision of the person and power of the Holy Spirit.

Dynamic Power

The Greek word *dunamis*, (pronounced doo-nam-is), means power. This is the word Jesus used when He told of the power of the Holy Spirit. It's the same word from which we get our English word *dynamite*.

As a follower of Jesus, you have inside you the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit. But that power needs to be triggered by a spark. The spark that sets off the explosion of the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit within you is faith. Without faith, your power is dormant—almost as if it doesn't exist. As seen in the chocolate milk video on abidingroom.com, followers of Jesus in whom the power lies dormant have lives that look pretty much the same as the lives of unbelievers; that is, until the spark of faith ignites the power of the Holy Spirit and unleashes the potential God has planned for them.

Obedience Keeps the Power Flowing

After that spark has been ignited and you are living empowered by the Holy Spirit, you continue to stay empowered by obedience. Obedience maintains your living in the Spirit. Disobedience, on the other hand, causes what the Bible calls “quenching the Spirit.” “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19 NIV).

Just as we can choose to live by the Spirit and not sin, we can choose instead to live by our no-good flesh and sin. When we sin, we quench the power of the Holy Spirit. Because God is love, no sin can expel the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit. But when we choose to sin, we extinguish the Holy Spirit's full power in our lives.

In a previous lesson, we saw that our sin grieves the person of the Holy Spirit. Now we see that our sin also quenches the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we trust God and are obedient to do what He's instructing us to do, He will send His Helper to come alongside us. Not only do we get to see Him work in our lives, but other people—many of them who aren't following the Lord—will also get to see Him at work in undeniable ways.

Empowered Living

What does a Spirit-empowered life look like? Let's look at four purposes of the power of the Holy Spirit in your life:

1. Power for daily living
2. Power to keep God's commands
3. Power over sin
4. Power to share your faith

Power for Daily Living

Through the Holy Spirit, God has given you the ability to handle life's difficulties in a godly manner. When you harness the power of the Holy Spirit, you have the power to control your tongue. You have the power to control your anger. You have the self-control to resist temptation. You are able to be gentle when others are harsh to you. You can be kind when others mistreat you. You can be patient toward others. The Holy Spirit gives you the power to genuinely love disagreeable, nasty people. You are even able to laugh when your spouse bumps you and your coffee spills all over your head!

The Bible confirms that when you live by the power of the Holy Spirit, you have capabilities you wouldn't otherwise have. "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7 NIV).

And in John 15, Jesus says it is impossible to live the Christian life apart from Him. That means it is also impossible to live it apart from the empowerment of the Helper, the Holy Spirit. While you can trust the Holy Spirit to empower you for daily living, there is no evidence in the Bible that says when you are living by the Spirit, your life will be one continuous string of phenomenal, emotional experiences.

These experiences are wonderful when they occur, but they are the exception, not the norm. Life in the Spirit doesn't mean freedom from problems, it means power to live with them in a new way. Thankfully, the power of the Holy Spirit is available to you every minute of every day!

By accessing the power of the Holy Spirit within you, you can live through difficult circumstances and handle tough problems with tranquility. Because you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, each one of the fruit of the Spirit is available to you throughout your day. It's a matter of choosing to live each moment by the Spirit and not the flesh. With practice, over time, these choices become a normal part of your new way of living. Day by day, as you live by the power of the Holy Spirit, God is continually developing greater Christlike character in you.

Power to Keep God's Commands

Jesus told the disciples that when the Holy Spirit came to live within them, they would receive power (Luke 24:49 NIV; Acts 1:8 NIV). This includes the power to obey biblical commands. When you are filled with and led by the person of the Holy Spirit, He empowers you to carry out the commands found in the Bible.

Only by the power of the Holy Spirit are we able to be obedient to biblical instruction, such as for all of us to honor our mothers and fathers (“Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12 NIV)), for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church (“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25 NIV)), and for fathers to not exasperate their children (“Fathers, do not exasperate your children” (Ephesians 6:4 NIV)).

We're able to live out what is referred to as the Golden Rule—to do to others as you would have them do to you (“Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12 NIV)). The Holy Spirit gives you the power to obey challenging commands such as love others as Christ has loved you (“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34 NIV)), forgive as God has forgiven you (“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13 NIV)), and love your enemies (“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44 NIV)).

When you see that challenging list, does it make you feel as if you need some help with those commands? I certainly do! But thankfully, when we are filled, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, He enables us to live them out. God never commands anything He doesn't enable through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Power Over Sin

“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:2-4 NIV).

Using only the words shown in bold above, let's piece together God's Word, assuring you that you have power over sin: "The Spirit of life has set you free ... from the law of sin ... in order that the righteous requirement ... might be fulfilled in us, who walk ... according to the Spirit." Part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Self-control gives you the ability to not sin. You now have the power to do the right thing and not the wrong thing.

Any persistent sin that seems to have control over you absolutely does not! You were given power over that sin when you were given the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of appropriating the power you have already been given. "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:11-14 NIV).

When you became a believer in Jesus, you became a new creation. You received new desires to do good and to please God. Along with these new desires, God also gave you the Holy Spirit who enables you to live a righteous life. The Holy Spirit gives you both the will and the power to not sin. The minority of Christians who live most of each day in the power of the Holy Spirit know the refreshing reality of seeing sin that used to rule their lives now be overcome by living by the Spirit. And that is exactly what God desires for you and why He has given you the Holy Spirit to enable you to live out the life He has planned for you!

Power to Share Your Faith

In spite of the many missteps the disciples made during the three years they had been with Him, Jesus told them that through the power of the Holy Spirit they would become effective witnesses for His name not only locally but throughout the world. "But 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 NIV).

You have received the same Holy Spirit the disciples received. God didn't give you the Holy Spirit so you can use Him for your purposes; He gave you the Holy Spirit so He can empower you for His purposes. Just like the disciples, you can't do this by

your own strategy or ingenuity. But as you let the Holy Spirit guide and empower your words and actions, you can be an effective witness for Jesus too.

Power for Everything You Need

We have just seen that God has made some remarkable promises to you in the Bible. By faith in Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, you can experience the life God has planned for you. The apostle Peter sums it up by reminding us God has graciously given you power for everything you need to live a godly life. “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3 NIV).

ABIDING TRUTH: As a follower of Jesus, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He gives you the power to carry out God’s commands and live a life of freedom from sin.

Reflection Question

How can you explain to a new believer how the power of the Holy Spirit works?
What are some of the questions you still have about this?

Write down your answer to the box below (“Your Response or Question”) and send it to us. It will appear in Messages.