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5. Be Filled with the Spirit

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5. Be Filled with the Spirit

This Bible study lesson is based on Chapter 6 of *The Abiding Room*, a book by Kevin Seacat.

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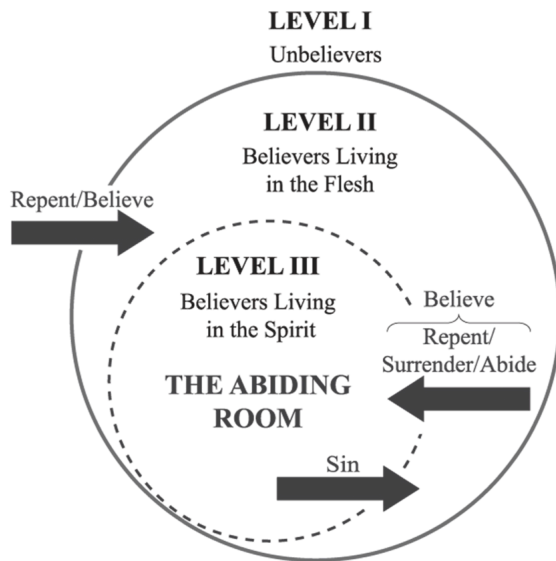
“Be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18 NIV).

As we learned, the arrival of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers changed everything. As a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit indwells you. That is, He lives inside you. Your loving heavenly Father has placed His Spirit in you to accompany you everywhere, guiding you and empowering you to live a life pleasing to Him.

The distinguishing characteristic of you as a follower of Jesus is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It’s not a question of if you have the Holy Spirit—all followers of Jesus do. It’s also not a question of how much of the Holy Spirit you have—all followers of Jesus have the entire person of the Holy Spirit. The real question is how much of you does the Holy Spirit have? Are you filled with the Spirit?

In the book of Acts, believers in the early church are consistently described as being “filled with the Spirit.” In letters to the early churches, Paul instructs them to live Spirit-filled lives by using terms such as “walk in the Spirit,” “led by the Spirit,” “live by the Spirit,” “keep in step with the Spirit,” and “be filled with the Spirit.” Each of these terms instructs believers to operate by the power of the Holy Spirit, not the flesh. Each phrase has a similar meaning and intent—the Holy Spirit (and not your flesh) is leading you.

We’ve seen the Bible clearly illustrates The 3 Levels of Life. When you’re filled with the Spirit, you’re in the Abiding Room, where you’re living a Level III life, as the next diagram reminds us:



God's Temple

In the Old Testament, God's Spirit lived among His people in a tabernacle, or temple. Today that temple is no longer a man-made structure. Now the new temple housing God's Holy Spirit is you!

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV).

Every follower of Jesus is the temple of God and indwelt with the person of the Holy Spirit. It's God's desire that you, your body, and your life put His glory on display. This is accomplished when you are filled with His Spirit.

You never have to be concerned the Holy Spirit might leave you. He has made you His permanent home. It is true that when you sin, because God is holy, the Holy Spirit is grieved ("And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30 NIV)) and His power quenched ("Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19 NIV)). Nevertheless, because God is love, His Spirit will not depart. You were saved once and forever because God is love, but you are constantly being refined because He is holy.

Be Filled with the Spirit

What does it mean to “be filled with the Spirit”?

1. **“Be filled” is a command.** You are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. But while you are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, you are never commanded to be indwelt with the Spirit. When used in reference to the Holy Spirit, the words “filled” and “indwelt” are not synonymous. That’s because all believers are permanently indwelt with the Spirit at salvation, but are not permanently filled with the Spirit. The question is not whether you’re indwelt with the Holy Spirit, but whether you’re filled with the Holy Spirit at any given moment.
2. **The filling is an ongoing process.** “Be filled” actually means “be, being, continuously filled.” It is not a one-time event, but rather an ongoing, moment-by-moment experience throughout our lives. The filling of the Holy Spirit enables our obedience to God’s commands. And as we will see again later, as we continue to be obedient to what the Spirit prompts us to do, we continue to be filled with the Spirit. Continued obedience maintains the continuous filling. We’re indwelt by the Holy Spirit once at salvation, but we need to be filled with the Spirit continually.
3. **Being filled with the Spirit brings an experiential understanding of the phrase itself.** Jesus told the disciples they would receive the Holy Spirit, but they had to experience it to understand it. In fact, the book of Acts is one surprising life lesson after another to the early church of what the abiding, Spirit-filled life entails.

Many in the early church had never seen Jesus face-to-face, and they didn’t have the Bible to read, but their Spirit-filled lives were writing it! They had received minimal teaching about the Holy Spirit coming to indwell them, but the new believers knew without a doubt they were filled with Him. Each account of the Spirit’s work in the early church told in the book of Acts serves as a reminder that a personal experience of the Holy Spirit is the best teacher about the Holy Spirit.

God desires for you to experience Him personally, not just academically or intellectually. While we now have the Bible to guide us and explain the role of the Holy Spirit, there’s still no substitute for personally experiencing the Spirit to give us a fuller understanding of the biblical instructions themselves. The more you’re obedient to biblical instructions, the more you’ll experience the Holy Spirit in your life. That will, in turn, give you greater insight into the instructions’ meaning. Obedience keeps us “stirred up!”

Many Fillings of the Spirit

It's not uncommon for followers of Jesus to incorrectly believe they are always filled with the Spirit. As mentioned earlier, we are always indwelt, but not always filled with the Spirit.

Here's an example of what is implied when Paul says, "Be filled with the Spirit." Let's say you drop your kids off at someone's house. You say to your kids, "Be good." When you say, "Be good," it implies you know they can also choose to be bad. You wouldn't say, "Be good," if they were always good.

Likewise, Paul wouldn't say, "Be filled with the Spirit," if the only option was to be filled with the Spirit. He's talking to followers of Jesus in the church of Ephesus who already have the Holy Spirit, so he isn't imploring unbelievers to be saved. He's instructing the believers to be continuously filled with the Spirit. Therefore, we can conclude followers of Jesus are not always filled with the Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit is permanent and unconditional, but the filling and the fullness of His power are conditional upon our life choices.

Paul wouldn't say, "Be filled with the Spirit," if the only thing we as believers can be is filled with the Spirit. His exhortation to be filled implies followers of Jesus are not always filled with the Holy Spirit. Again, the filling of the Holy Spirit in your life is a continuous process you as a believer need to continually seek. You had one salvation, but you're instructed to seek many, continuous fillings.

As we discussed previously, the words and diagrams we're using to describe our relationship with the Holy Spirit have limitations. Is a person we've described as "filled with the Spirit" absolutely 100 percent filled with the Spirit, but a person who is 99 percent led by the Spirit, not filled with the Spirit? No, it is simply a way to describe whether we're living primarily in the Spirit or the flesh.

Yet, the Bible doesn't mince words by saying, "Be partially filled," or "Be almost filled." It's another statement made in absolutes to emphasize the point that the matter at hand is critical. In situations where we use the phrase "be filled with the Spirit," we might also say, "be continuously, predominantly filled, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit." Don't get tangled up in the semantics of the words, but rather be inspired by their promises for your life!

Importantly, there's no connection between the filling of the Spirit and your biblical head knowledge or the length of time you've been following Jesus. A head full of knowledge isn't the prerequisite for having a humble heart filled with the Spirit. God has no trouble finding and filling your fully surrendered heart!

It is the emptying of the heart of self that cleanses the temple for the filling of the Spirit. The first group of believers who were filled with the Spirit at Pentecost had very little idea of what was about to happen. They were just ordinary people obediently praying while they waited on God for the promised Holy Spirit.

God wants to fill you with His Spirit even more than you want to be filled. He already knows how He is going to use you for His kingdom purposes when you are fully empowered for His glory. If you take care of the preparation, God will take care of the visitation!

Your Life Is Your Ministry

Did you know you have an important ministry right now? You may not have a formal ministry with an official name, but if you're a follower of Jesus, you've already been given a ministry. The world is watching you and the character you display. The most significant ministry anyone can have is to lead a life empowered by the Holy Spirit that is seen by a watching world as they go about their day-to-day activities.

Today, when you walk out the front door and encounter people, make no mistake, you are bearing witness to Jesus. Will your witness be of a person walking in the Spirit or in the flesh? People are watching you and drawing conclusions from your life about who Jesus is. It's not a question of if your life will bear witness as to who Jesus is; the real question is what type of witness you will bear. Will it be your fleshly character or the Christlike character of Jesus?

When you're living out the Spirit-filled life and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, who does that look like? Jesus! The integrity and character of Jesus that was so attractive to you when you first believed becomes noticeable to others because it's actually Jesus they are seeing through your life! Isn't that remarkable?

Jesus promised His disciples the Holy Spirit would speak to them. In John 16:15 He said, "All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he [the Holy Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:15 NIV). That promise is still true today.

Recognizing when it's the Holy Spirit speaking and when it's just our imagination takes a lifetime of practice. We will never fully get it right in this life.

The Blessings of the Spirit-Filled Life

Being filled with the Spirit means you are experiencing the joy of confidently resting in submission to the ongoing direction of the Holy Spirit. When you're filled with the Spirit, you have a greater ability to both know God's will and have the power to carry it out. The commands He's given you are meant to be carried out by the power of the Holy Spirit—not by you living in your own strength.

You can have peace in the midst of turmoil. You can have joy when things go wrong. You can experience inner stability in times of instability. When you are filled, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, you can live in a way that distinguishes you from the world because it is the Holy Spirit, not you, who is at work in and through you.

When you're filled with the Spirit, you will experience the blessings described in the previous lessons on the Holy Spirit:

- You will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, not the flesh.
- You will experience joy and peace in your life.
- You will receive power for daily living—power to keep God's commands, power to not sin, and power to share your faith.

Most importantly, you will bring glory and attention to God! How extraordinary and desirable does that sound?

ABIDING TRUTH: As a follower of Jesus, you are always indwelt with the Spirit. And as you are obedient, you will be filled with the Spirit.

Reflection Question

What would you say to someone who told you they don't think they've ever been filled with the Holy Spirit? How would you help them understand this concept at a deeper level?

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