

As we move closer to our first Acts 2 Journey Cohort (March 7), I want to take some time to explain why this is such a significant step for our church—for us, for you.

I sometimes wonder, if the early Christians were around today, would they even recognize what we call Christianity?

So much of it is blander, almost totally intellectual in nature, and lacking the Holy Spirit power that the Early Church regularly experienced.

How much do we miss because we don’t expect the Spirit to show up as promised?

Everything we read about the church in the New Testament centered on the power of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts and lives of Christian believers. Sadly, for many of us, this has not been our experience.

I can’t think of anything else that will change your prayer life, your study of God’s Word, and your experience during worship in church more than inviting the Holy Spirit to join you in a new way.

Modern Pentecost has been around for only 120 years. Yet, even the Pentecostal experience recorded in Acts, chapter 2—2,000 years ago—was not the beginning of this movement.

The Hebrew prophet, Ezekiel, spoke for God when he declared to the exiled Israelites, *“I will put My Spirit in you so that you will follow My decrees and be careful to obey My regulations”* (Ezekiel 36:27).

In the next chapter, he reiterated that prediction: *“I will put My Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the Lord has spoken!”* (Ezekiel 37:14).

**Jesus Needed To Be Filled**

The fact is that even Jesus needed to be filled with the Spirit. And when He was, the occasion was highlighted with a booming commendation from God the Father in Heaven…

*Matthew 3:16 (NLT)After His baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and [John] saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on Him. 17And a voice from heaven said, “This is My dearly loved Son, who brings Me great joy.”*

Did you notice what motivated our Father to send the Spirit?

*Matthew 3:17 )AMP) This is My Son, My Beloved, in Whom I delight!*

At this point, Jesus had no followers, no public ministry, and had not performed a single recorded miracle, but God had “set His love” on Him and was pleased with Him.

Just as the prophet Isaiah had said:

*Isaiah 42:1 (NLT)“Look at my servant, whom I strengthen.*

*He is my chosen One, who pleases Me.*

*I have put My Spirit upon Him.*

*He will bring justice to the nations.*

*2He will not shout*

*or raise His voice in public.*

*3He will not crush the weakest reed*

*or put out a flickering candle.*

*He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.*

*4He will not falter or lose heart*

*until justice prevails throughout the earth.*

*Even distant lands beyond the sea will wait for His instruction.”*

So, God put His Spirit on Jesus, and His miraculous ministry began.

Today, you may be that “weakest reed” or “flickering candle” or “one who has been wronged.” Jesus is for you; He’s not against you.

**The Disciples Needed To Be Filled**

But, you see, we have a problem (you and I)…

Even if Jesus washed my past from God’s memory, even if everything I had ever done wrong was forgiven, *what about today?* And what about *tomorrow?* What about when I am tempted again to dishonor God and grieve Jesus who saved me from the consequences I justly deserved?

In other words, where is the power to help me live differently than I did before? If I am going to be a new creation, then how?

As grateful as I am to Jesus for washing my past clean, and as much as I desire to become like Christ in the future, I can tell you there is nothing that resembles Jesus Christ in Will Nelken. There is just no way I can be like Him. A leopard can’t erase his spots. How could I ever change into a godly person and obey God’s commands by my own self-effort?

I thank God, He had a plan that reached *beyond just forgiving* my sin and misdeeds. It was Jesus Himself who confided to His disciples:

*John 16:5 (NLT)“But now I am going away to the One who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. 6Instead, you grieve because of what I’ve told you. 7But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Advocate won’t come. If I do go away, then I will send Him to you.*

*12“There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can’t bear it now. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.*

*Acts 1:6 (NLT)So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking Him, “Lord, has the time come for You to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”*

*7He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. 8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

The development and flow of culture and politics is not for you or me to control; it’s in the sovereign hand of God. You should cast your conscientious vote and act where and when you can, but your task—your divinely empowered mission—is to *“tell people about [Jesus] everywhere”* as He builds His church—to reveal and inspire, but not to conform the culture to Kingdom standards.

How is that going to happen? By the power of the Holy Spirit working through you.

There are three potential dimensions of the Spirit’s presence and activity in the lives of human beings:

*John 14:15“If you love me, obey my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. 17He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it isn’t looking for Him and doesn’t recognize Him. But you know Him, because He lives with you now and later will be in you.*

The first dimension, “with,” is automatic and universal, because God loves all whom He has created. This is the wooing of the Spirit, drawing and pointing us to Christ.

The second dimension, “in,” is neither automatic nor universal, because it depends on one’s personal choice. But God has said that He will never reject anyone who comes to Him with repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. This describes the “new birth” by the Holy Spirit.

The third dimension was predicted and described here in Acts 1:8: *“upon you.”* This is the empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

**The Early Church was Filled**

And then it came to pass…

*Acts 2:1 (NLT) On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. 2Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. 4And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.*

*Acts 2:4 They were ALL filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.*

Before there was a Western Church and an Eastern Church…

Before there was a need for protestants and reformation…

Before there were denominations…

Before there were evangelicals…

The Early Church was a Pentecostal church.

**We Need to Be Filled**

The apostles gave careful instruction in this regard. Peter launched the movement:

*Acts 2:38Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God.”*

Paul gave instruction for its continuance:

*Ephesians 5:15 (NLT)So be careful how you live. Don’t live like fools, but like those who are wise. 16Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. 17Don’t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. 18Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, 19singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. 20And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This passage is the grand climax of a theological crescendo that Paul has been building, beginning with the general purpose of our salvation:

*Ephesians 3:19 So that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*

Then, he explained who it is that is responsible for filling us—the Agent of this awesome plan:

*Ephesians 4:10[Jesus], the very One who descended, is also the One who ascended above all the heavens, in order to fill all things.*

And he concluded with instruction for our part, our response to God’s great gift:

*Ephesians 5:18 (AMP) Ever be filled and stimulated with the [Holy] Spirit.*

Or, as it’s found in the Complete Jewish Bible:

*Ephesians 5:18 (CJB) Keep on being filled with the Spirit.*

This is an accurate translation of the phrase, based upon the unique verb tense used in the original Greek—a tense indicating an action begun in the past, *yet continuing* through the present time into the future.

God calls us, not to an experience (one-and-done), but to a lifestyle: repeatedly being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We need to be continually being filled.

When you feel dry and disconnected, it is not God who has withdrawn; it is we who wander.

We turn back to the weaker forces of life—self-actualization, self-help, and self-affirmation.

We lean on superstition and religious rituals, instead of on the invisible, yet living God. We give our focus to the elements of the natural world, which are passing away, rather than the eternal things of Christ.

Instead, we should follow the instructions of Paul to the church in Colosse:

*Colossians 3:1 (NLT) Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. 2Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. 3For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.*

What occupies your thoughts?

Do you remember what it was that motivated the Father to send the Spirit in the first place? His own delight with His children!

If we will focus on *what delights Him* today, we will “keep on being filled” with the same Holy Spirit.

According to the Book of Acts, there’s only one valid reason for a Christ-follower to *not* be filled with the Holy Spirit:

*Acts 19:1 (NLT) Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers. 2“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” he asked them.*

*“No,” they replied, “we haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”*

If you’ve never even heard of the Holy Spirit, you get a pass. But otherwise, you’re responsible to the Savior to be continually being filled with His Spirit.

How many Christians suffer from a spiritual life that is dry and mechanical?

How many serve a Jesus, whom they know about from the Bible, but who is not a living reality in their experience?

There is only one thing more powerful than seeing the Spirit work in someone else’s life, and that is seeing Him work in yours.

If you want power, confidence, joy, peace, and more love in your life, ask the Spirit to come to you and do something new *in you*.

I promise you that when He does, your spiritual life will cease to be dry and mechanical. Instead, it will be filled with awe at the power of the Spirit and the wonder of God’s goodness.

I believe it’s time to return to the kind of dependent confidence in God that we see in the New Testament church. How many agree with me?

They believed in Christ’s word, they expected the Spirit to do great things, and He came through as promised. He will do the same for us today.

Let’s call on His name…