

# **SPIRIT OF HOPE**

A series of message production resources that address Christians and non-Christians alike with the power and truth that God's Holy Spirit gives to people. These resources were created to aid Christian radio producers. We believe they will also be helpful for other people involved in Christian ministry. We have endeavored to emphasize clarity over style. We have limited the use of long sentences, specialized vocabulary, and Western cultural allusions and illustrations. This is the fourth section in the Basic Messages of Hope series, a primer of Christian faith for all peoples.

**by**

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## 1

**The Holy Spirit – Water That Gives Us Life Forever!**

John 4:10-15, 7:37-39

Have you ever been really thirsty? What a relief it is to have a big, cool drink of clean water on a hot day. Here is a true story from the Bible about a special kind of water. The story comes from John's Gospel.

One day Jesus was traveling with his followers. At noon when the sun was very hot, they arrived at a well outside a city in the land of Samaria. Jesus' followers went into town to buy food. Jesus sat by the well, hoping to get water from the deep well somehow. Then a woman appeared from the city to draw water from the well. Jesus asked her, "Will you give me a drink?" Since Jesus' fellow Jews and the woman's fellow Samaritans were enemies, she was surprised that Jesus would speak to her even to ask for water. As they talked, Jesus began to speak to her about something much more important than a drink of water. He told her,

*"You don't know what God wants to give you, and you don't know who is asking you for a drink. If you did, you would ask me for the water that gives life."*

*"Sir," the woman said, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where are you going to get this life-giving water? Our ancestor Jacob dug this well for us, and his family and animals got water from it. Are you greater than Jacob?"*

*Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again. But no one who drinks the water I give will ever be thirsty again. The water I give is like a flowing fountain that gives eternal life."*

*The woman replied, "Sir, please give me a drink of that water! Then I won't get thirsty and have to come to this well again."*

John 4:10-15, CEV

**1. The first thing we discover** as we listen to Jesus' words is that **Jesus offers us all a special gift of water.** The words in the original language are "living water." The people in Jesus' day distinguished *still water*, water that sits in a well, a pool or a container, from '*living*' water, the fresh running water of a river or a fountain.

The Samaritan woman thought that Jesus was offering her fresher water than the water in the well. Her reaction is harsh. She says, in other words, "Sir, just who do you think you are? You can't even draw any water without a bucket. How dare you suggest that you are greater than our great ancestor Jacob who gave us this well! Just where do you think you are going to find this living water?"

But Jesus was not talking about 'living water' from a spring. He was talking about something

much better. He was talking about water that was *living* because it gives *life* to the person who drinks it.

**By offering his special water to this woman, Jesus shows us that he offers it to us all.** The woman at the well was the least likely person to be given a gift of life-giving water from God.

- *First, she was a woman.* In Jesus' day, women were treated as inferior to men. Many men of that day thanked God that they were born as men instead of as women! So it was surprising that Jesus would offer his special water to a woman.
- *Second, this woman was a Samaritan.* As I said, Jews and Samaritans were enemies. Jews had so much disrespect and scorn for the Samaritans that they called them 'dogs.' Jewish people in Jesus' day thought that God rejected anyone who was not Jewish. So Jesus surprised the woman by showing her that God loved her and did not reject her.
- *Third, this woman was immoral.* She had married and divorced five men, and was now living with a man who was not her husband. It was surprising that Jesus would offer life-giving water to such a person. But he did. This means that God forgives sins like hers. She understood that!

If Jesus offers this special water to such an unlikely person, we can be sure that he offers it to each one of us. No matter where we come from, no matter what we are like, no matter how much we have turned away from God, he is there waiting for us. Through Jesus God offers life-giving water to all of us.

**2. The other truth** we discover from Jesus' words **is that the water Jesus offers to us gives us eternal life.** Let me read Jesus' words again:

*Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again. But no one who drinks the water I give will ever be thirsty again. The water I give is like a flowing fountain that gives eternal life."*

*The woman replied, "Sir, please give me a drink of that water! Then I won't get thirsty and have to come to this well again."*

John 4:13-15, CEV

Water gives us life and refreshes us. Water is a wonderful gift from God. But water has two weaknesses. First, water doesn't satisfy us for long. We drink our fill of water, and soon afterward we must drink more. Second, there is another kind of thirst that water can't satisfy. It is a spiritual thirst. Each one of us feels a dryness and an emptiness in our souls. We are dissatisfied with life, and we thirst for something more. Jesus says there is a water that can satisfy this inner thirst. This water keeps us refreshed and satisfied forever. It gives us eternal life.

We don't have to look for this water in a well. Jesus says that when he gives it to us, it will flow *inside* of us! It is like a fountain or a spring that bubbles up inside us and keeps us alive forever.

The woman at the well begged Jesus to give her this life-giving water. Are you like her? Are you longing to receive the satisfying water Jesus gives? Then listen carefully, because **I am going to tell you what this water is and how to get it from Jesus.** I will do this by reading more verses from chapter 7 in John's Gospel. Jesus was at an important religious festival. A large crowd was there. Here is what the Bible says:

*On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted, "If you are thirsty, come to me and drink! Have faith in me, and you will have life-giving water flowing from deep inside you, just as the Scriptures say." Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit, who would be given to everyone that had faith in him. The Spirit had not yet been given to anyone, since Jesus had not yet been given his full glory.*

John 7:37-39, CEV

**3. What is the water?** In these verses John tells us. He explains that when Jesus refers to life-giving water, he is really using a picture to talk about the Holy Spirit. **The Holy Spirit is the life-giving water that Jesus gives to people.** The Spirit gives us eternal life and satisfies the thirsty longing in our souls. The Holy Spirit is God. God comes to live in us by his Spirit and to satisfy the needs we have inside of us. He refreshes our hearts and gives us everlasting life. We feel good and accepted before God. We find joy and a wonderful peace.

**4. But how do we get the Holy Spirit to live in us?** Jesus tells us this. Let me read his words again:

*"If you are thirsty, come to me and drink! **Have faith in me,** and you will have life-giving water flowing from deep inside you". . . . Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit, who would be given to **everyone that had faith in him.***

**Jesus tells us that we receive this refreshing, life-giving water by believing in him.** When we have faith in Jesus he puts his Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit is a special gift from Jesus for everyone who believes in him. He urges us to believe that he is the Son of God. He urges us to trust and follow him. He urges us to believe that he died and came back to life in order to give us eternal life. When we believe these things and follow him, he gives us this life through his Holy Spirit.

Listener, is your heart dry and thirsty? Are you unsatisfied with your life? Would you like to have a satisfying life that lasts forever? I urge you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says, *"If you are thirsty, come to me and drink!"* Trust in Jesus and his promises. Turn to him for eternal life. Follow him and receive the Holy Spirit of God. You will have a new joy and hope.  
*[Prayer for your listeners to have faith in Jesus]*



## 2

**Jesus Promises That God's Spirit Will Come**

Acts 1:3-11, CEV

Today I am going to read to you from the Bible in the book of Acts about the wonderful coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke, who wrote Acts, was a follower of Jesus. He gives us this account of what Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit.

*For forty days after Jesus had suffered and died, he proved in many ways that he had been raised from death. He appeared to his apostles and spoke to them about God's kingdom. While he was still with them, he said: Don't leave Jerusalem yet. Wait here for the Father to give you the Holy Spirit, just as I told you he has promised to do. John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*

*While the apostles were still with Jesus, they asked him, "Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?"*

*Jesus said to them, "You don't need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world."*

*Jesus had said this and while they were watching, he was taken up into a cloud. They could not see him, but as he went up, they kept looking up into the sky.*

*Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes were standing there beside them. They said, "Why are you men from Galilee standing here and looking up into the sky? Jesus has been taken to heaven. But he will come back in the same way that you have seen him go."*

Acts 1:3-11, CEV

Let's look carefully at what Jesus said.

**First, Jesus is speaking to his apostles.** Now that Jesus rose from the dead he no longer calls his followers *disciples* (learners, students). He begins to call them *apostles* (messengers, people sent out to announce an important message). He is preparing them for a new step in their obedience to him. They will proclaim an important message. They surely feel much excitement and anticipation about this new responsibility.

**Second, Jesus speaks to them about the kingdom of God.** The kingdom of God was always the main topic of Jesus' teaching. God's kingdom is his rule in the lives of all people. Through his Spirit, God governs his followers. God's Spirit teaches us how to live. He gives us strength to obey God's commands.

*Jesus has to correct his apostles' misunderstanding about the timing of God's kingdom. The nation of Israel has been ruled by hostile foreign kings who do not worship the true God. The*

people have been waiting for God to fulfill his promise to put a new king over Israel, a king who honors God and who does what is right. "Now," the apostles think, "Jesus is alive again! Now he will become king and remove all evil rulers! He will rule all people and bring peace, justice and holiness to the world." The apostles ask him if now is the time when he will do all this.

His answer surprises them. He says, "*You don't need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world.*" (verses 7-8). In other words, Jesus is saying to them, "The day of God's rule may be soon, or it may be delayed. But that is not important for you to know. There is something more important I need to tell you now. It is about the Holy Spirit."

**Jesus also told them to wait for the Holy Spirit that God the Father was going to give them.** The Holy Spirit cannot be bought with money or earned by being religious or faithful to God. He is a gift from God. There is only one Holy Spirit. Jesus calls him *the* Holy Spirit. We should not confuse him with human spirits, animal spirits, evil spirits or idol spirits. He is God. He is the Spirit of God the Father. The Holy Spirit is one of God's greatest gifts to us for our life now. When a person believes in Jesus, the Holy Spirit of God enters his heart and mind. The Holy Spirit lives in the believer.

**Next, Jesus said God was now fulfilling his ancient promise to send the Holy Spirit.** The ancient prophets spoke this promise long before Jesus. They were sad that people would not obey God. But they rejoiced because God promised to send his Spirit. The Holy Spirit would empower people to obey God fully (Ezekiel 36:25-28). Jesus says that the time has come. God will now pour out his Spirit on people who believe in and follow Jesus.

**Jesus spoke of the *baptism of the Holy Spirit.*** Jesus said, "*John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 1:5, CEV). John the Baptizer was a prophet (a messenger of God) who said that God was going to bring his kingdom very soon. He baptized people (washed them with water in a river) as a sign of religious devotion. The ceremony of washing was for people who said, "I am eager to be a citizen of God's kingdom when it comes!"

Luke reports what Jesus tells his apostles: the time has arrived! God is going to wash people with his own Spirit. The Spirit will make people clean on the inside—he will wash away their evil thoughts, desires, fears, attitudes and guilt. And he is going to start with them: "***you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.***"

Some Christians say that there are people who believe in Jesus but who have not been baptized with the Holy Spirit. They teach that only Christians who are especially dedicated to Jesus receive the Spirit. And when they do, they are able to speak in 'tongues' (other languages). These Christians urge other Christians to seek the gift of speaking in tongues as the sign that

they are baptized by the Holy Spirit.

But that is not what the Bible teaches. The baptism of the Holy Spirit takes place at the moment a person believes in Jesus. God gives *every* believer his Holy Spirit. And not every believer has the ability to speak in tongues. Each of us has different gifts from God. Some speak in tongues. Some are gifted as teachers and preachers. Others are especially gifted at serving and helping others. The Bible does not tell us to seek tongues as a special sign. It promises us that we all have the Holy Spirit in us if we believe in Jesus (Romans 8:9), and tells us each to use the special abilities that God gave us (Ephesians 4:7, 11).

**Next, Jesus tells them about the power of the Spirit.** He says, *“But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power”* (verse 8). The apostles had seen the power of God's Spirit in the ministry of Jesus. The Spirit came on Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3:16). By the Spirit Jesus healed many people and cast out demons. And now Jesus was telling them that the same powerful Spirit would be at work in and through them also. What an encouraging thought! God's power would change their lives. God's Spirit would use them to help others. All thoughts and fears of other spirits would be replaced by God's one Holy Spirit!

**Finally, Jesus tells them what it is that the Spirit will give them power to do.** He says, *“. . . the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world”* (verses 7-8). Before Jesus said this, his apostles had been fearful. They ran away when Jesus' enemies arrested and killed him. But the Spirit would turn these fearful, imperfect men into bold messengers of the good news of Jesus. What a change! And that is what the Spirit did. He made the apostles brave and courageous. They later took the message of Jesus throughout the Roman world. They faced great hardship and opposition as they told people, *“Jesus is alive! He is the Lord of all! Turn to him and discover God's great love for you!”*

Jesus' words surprise his apostles. But they are far more surprised by what he does next! Jesus rises up into the air, into a cloud. And then he is gone. The apostles stand there, confused. They keep looking up, waiting for him to come back!

The apostles were wondering, *“Where did Jesus go?” “Is he coming back?”* Two angels appear as men dressed in bright white clothes. They answer their questions. They tell the apostles, *“Jesus has been taken to heaven. But he will come back in the same way that you have seen him go.”* (verse 11).

### **Conclusion:**

My beloved listeners, Jesus is now in heaven. But he sent his Holy Spirit to live within the

apostles many years ago.

- The Holy Spirit put the message of Jesus on their lips.
- The Spirit gave them energy and boldness to announce this message to the nations.
- The Spirit prompted them to write down their message in the words we find in the New Testament of the Bible.

Today the message of Jesus continues to call out to the nations. The same Holy Spirit still lives and works in the world today.

- He baptizes messengers of the good news of Jesus just as he baptized the apostles of long ago.
- The Spirit gives us boldness and power to speak the truth.
- Just as he inspired the apostles to write the New Testament, so he opens our eyes to understand it.

Jesus may soon fulfill his promise to return to the earth. I urge you to listen carefully to the message that the Spirit spoke through the apostles, the message he still speaks powerfully today. Listen to it, and believe it with all your heart. It is a message of God's love and power that can change your life forever.

## 3

**How Did the Spirit of God Come into the World for Us?**

Acts 2:1-13; 33 CEV

Spirits and people—what—do you believe? What have you been taught? Is God’s Spirit in the world? If so, what does that mean for us? Should we be afraid or glad? The report of the coming of the Holy Spirit of God is surprising and awesome. He came during the Feast of Pentecost, an important religious holiday in Jerusalem, 2,000 years ago. Luke, the doctor who accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys, tells us what happened. Please listen carefully to what Dr. Luke wrote for us and I am sure you will understand who God’s Spirit is and why he came to live in the hearts of believers.

*On the day of Pentecost all the Lord’s followers were together in one place. Suddenly there was a noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty wind! It filled the house where they were meeting. Then they saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there.*

Acts 3:1-3, CEV

So, what do you think of that? Let me explain what Dr. Luke’s report means.

**The most important truth is this: the Holy Spirit of God came to people like us.** God’s great power came to ordinary people. Let’s look at what happened:

**1. The believers prepare to receive him.** *“The apostles often met together and prayed with a single purpose in mind”* (Acts 1:14 CEV). They prayed together with others who followed Jesus, both women and men. What was the purpose of their prayer? To wait for power to be God’s witnesses in the whole world. They prayed together (2:1)! God was preparing them to work together, as a team, in a spirit of unity and single purpose. Religious leaders are often lonely and self-appointed individualists. They try to impress people with their spiritual powers. Not so with Jesus’ followers. They learned the most important lesson of preparing for the coming of God’s Spirit—the lesson of uniting in prayer constantly so that only the purpose of God will be done through them.

**2. The sudden, shocking and awesome appearance of the Holy Spirit.** Notice carefully what happened:

- A noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty wind filled the house where the followers of Jesus were praying!
- They saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there.

Wow! God wanted to get their attention. I am sure he did! Does this mean that the Spirit of God comes only in such a shocking way? No. Some people try to make events like this happen, believing that their offerings, prayers, songs, and dancing may bring the Spirit of God to help them. But God's Spirit comes when he chooses, and in ways that he chooses. At this special time the Holy Spirit did come in a spectacular way.

**3. The Holy Spirit took control of the tongues of the believers.** They were "filled with the Spirit of God!" (v. 4). For what reason? To speak other languages. The visitors in the city who spoke many different languages were amazed that these believers started speaking to them in their languages. Jesus' followers were from Palestine. They could not have learned all these languages so well. How could they do it, and why? Did the followers of Jesus expect this to happen? No. The Holy Spirit of God came to "fill" them with a special ability for God's special purpose.

**4. What was the response of all the foreign visitors in Jerusalem? (verses 5-11)**

They were "excited and confused." They asked the obvious question: "What is the meaning of these people suddenly speaking in our languages? We know they haven't studied our languages. What's more, they are adults. Adults don't learn new languages as quickly as this!" The response of listeners was, "The followers of Jesus are drunk!" (v. 13). Were they? No!

**5. The message of Peter explained God's primary purpose for sending the Holy Spirit.**

*"My friends, it is right for me to speak to you about our ancestor David. He died and was buried, and his tomb is still here. But David was a prophet, and he knew that God had made a promise he would not break. He had told David that someone from his own family would someday be king.*

*"David knew this would happen, and so he told us that Christ would be raised to life. He said that God would not leave him in the grave or let his body decay. All of us can tell you that God has raised Jesus to life!*

*"Jesus was taken up to sit at the right side of God, and he was given the Holy Spirit, just as the Father had promised. Jesus is also the one who has given the Spirit to us, and that is what you are now seeing and hearing."*

Acts 2:29-33, CEV

**Conclusion:**

Jesus is no longer on earth. But he sent us the Spirit of God to be with us. The Holy Spirit is God's power in us. He helps us become like Jesus. This is a wonderful truth that all people need to hear. The Holy Spirit helps me tell you the Good News about God's love, Jesus' death, and new life for sinners. This is a message for all peoples in all languages. I am simply doing what Peter did. I am telling you in our language what the Holy Spirit and the Bible say. The Holy Spirit gives us God's truth, light and hope. Open your heart and mind to the Holy Spirit and he will come to you too.

## 4

**Who Is The Holy Spirit?**

Topical message on the Spirit's characteristics

One of the most important lessons in the Bible is its teaching about the Holy Spirit. But who or what is the Holy Spirit? People have many ideas about the Spirit that are very different from what the Bible says. Today look with me at what the Bible tells us about the Holy Spirit.

**First, the Holy Spirit is *spirit*—he does not have a body.**

All people have two different parts, the body (or flesh) and the spirit (or soul). The body is the part that we can see and touch. But the spirit is the inner, invisible part of us. Scientists can study the human body, but they can't find the spirit within us. But we know we have a spirit because we are alive. A body without a spirit is dead (James 2:26). Very often we feel that our spirit is more important, more powerful or more alive than our bodies.

God's Holy Spirit is a spirit who doesn't have or need a body. He is not limited to one place. He can be everywhere. We know the Holy Spirit doesn't have a body because he appeared in different ways to different people. The Spirit appeared to Jesus as a dove (Matthew 3:16). The Spirit appeared to Jesus' followers as tongues of fire (Acts 2:3). Jesus also talks about the Spirit as living water (John 7:38-9) and as wind (John 3:8). So the Spirit of God shows himself in many ways. He is not limited by a body.

Knowing that God is spirit is a great encouragement to us. Once Jesus was speaking with a Samaritan woman (John 4). The Jews and the Samaritans had separate temples. The Jews said that God should be worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem. The Samaritans said he should be worshiped at the temple on Mount Gerizim (4:20), in their territory. Jesus told the woman of a coming day when people would not need to go to temple to worship God. He said, ". . . *the time is coming and is already here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for anyone who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.*" (John 4:23-24, CEV).

In other words, God is not confined by a body to one place at a time. So God doesn't require people to make pilgrimages or worship him in places such as the two temples in Jesus' day. God is spirit and wants people to worship him through his Holy Spirit *wherever they are*. We reach and know God, not through a man-made place of worship. His Spirit meets us and talks to us when we pray and meditate. No matter where we are, no matter what country we live in, we can worship and speak to God directly, "praying in the Spirit."

This was a very new idea in Bible times. There was a great emphasis on temples, shrines and holy places. Even today there are many people who think that we must worship God near certain trees, on certain hills, facing certain cities, or standing in certain buildings. Jesus brings us good

news! God's Spirit makes it possible for us to meet with God everywhere.

**The second biblical truth we find is that the Holy Spirit is powerful.**

We see this over and over again in the Bible. The Lord's Spirit came upon Samson many times and gave him extraordinary strength (Judges 14:6, 14:19, 15:14, etc). The Spirit gave Jesus amazing power to heal sick people and cast out demons. Jesus said, ". . . *when I force out demons by the power of God's Spirit, it proves that God's kingdom has already come to you.*" (Matthew 12:28, CEV). Demons (or evil spirits) may have great and fearful power. But God's Spirit is the greatest spirit of all. No spirit can defeat the power of God himself.

The great power of the Holy Spirit gives us comfort and encouragement, because Jesus gave the Spirit to live in all of his followers. He said to them, ". . . *the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power*" (Acts 1:8). And that's exactly what he did. The Holy Spirit caused the first followers to speak in foreign languages they had never learned. He gave them power to do even greater miracles than Jesus did. He continues to give power to each follower of Jesus. We can stop fearing evil spirits and the devil because the powerful Holy Spirit lives in us. Listen to this marvelous assurance from the Bible: ". . . *the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world*" (1 John 4:4, NLT).

**Third, the Holy Spirit is a living, intelligent Person, not an energy force like fire or electricity.** Some people say that everything on earth has a *spirit*—a life force or energy that lives in them. But the Holy Spirit is not a force like electricity. He is not an 'it.' He is a 'he.' He is a person with intelligence and compassion. In the Bible the Spirit hears and speaks, leads and guides, instructs and prohibits, empowers and helps. He grieves when we do evil (Ephesians 4:30). Jesus said that the Spirit of God is a great Counselor and Comforter (John 14:16-17). He reveals God's thoughts to us (1 Corinthians 2:10-12). The apostle Paul says that the Spirit helps us pray when we don't know how to pray as we should (Romans 8:26).

Knowing that the Spirit is a Person is very reassuring to us today. We are not left alone wondering by ourselves what to do about feelings, inner fears and doubts. Believers in Jesus have this Spirit, someone very powerful living inside of them who listens to their prayers. When we feel alone he is always there with us. We can talk to him, and he teaches us how to pray. He knows our struggles and temptations. He encourages and guides us. He is a person like us, not just a violent wind.

**Fourth, the Holy Spirit is holy.** His primary work is to make us *holy*—to *set us apart* from evil and *make us completely devoted* to God. The Bible says that the 'fruit' or results that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives are these: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:21-22). The Spirit fills our hearts with love (Romans 5:5). By the power of the Holy Spirit we "put to death" the acts of the sinful nature in us. We stop doing evil deeds because he makes us strong enough to resist their appeal (Romans 8:13).

Knowing that the Spirit is so holy may make us feel guilty, worthless and afraid because it means we must let go of the evil in our lives. All of us in one way or another hold on to certain attitudes and actions that displease God. The *Holy* Spirit wants to separate us from those evil desires. The Spirit's holiness encourages us to set high and good goals for ourselves. The Bible teaches us that doing evil brings harm and spiritual death (Romans 6:23). The Holy Spirit wishes to rescue us from harm and death. He wants to lead us away from the attraction of evil by showing us the many benefits of being good and holy. When we listen to God's Holy Spirit in us and obey him, God blesses us with life and peace. The Bible gives us this promise: "If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace" (Romans 6:6, NLT).

**Finally, and most importantly, the Holy Spirit is God.** The Bible says, "The Lord . . . is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Bible says that to tell a lie to the Spirit is to lie to God (Acts 5:3-4). But we all do this. And we know we are wrong. The Spirit judges our hearts. The Bible frequently mentions the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit together, which indicates that they are all equally God [*for example, Matthew 28:19. See the list at the end of this message for many more examples*].

The Holy Spirit is not a different being than God. He is not inferior to God or less than God. He was not created by God. He *is* God. And he lives in everyone who believes in Jesus.

- God the Spirit is with us everywhere.
- God the Spirit is powerful. He protects us.
- God the Spirit is a Person. He comforts and encourages us as a friend.
- God the Spirit is the Holy One. He changes us so that we become more and more like Jesus.

Listener, if you believe in Jesus Christ, God himself will live in you. The Holy Spirit will come and make his home in you. He will be close to you and work in your life. I will now pray that you will discover the wonderful, powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.

[Prayer]

**For Producers:**

Here is a list of Bible passages from the letters of Paul in which he speaks of all three members of the Trinity. These are verses that can help you show others that God is a Trinity and that the Holy Spirit is God. This list is adapted from Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994, pages 841-2. We have printed the verses as they are found in the *New Living Translation*.

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**Romans 5:1-5**

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with **God** because of what **Jesus Christ our Lord** has done for us.<sup>2</sup> Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

<sup>3</sup>We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure.<sup>4</sup> And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation.<sup>5</sup> And this expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us **the Holy Spirit** to fill our hearts with his love.

**Romans 8:3-4**

The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But **God** put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent **his own Son** in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.<sup>4</sup> He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow **the Spirit**.

**Romans 8:15-17**

So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family—calling him "Father, dear **Father**."<sup>16</sup> For his **Holy Spirit** speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God's children.<sup>17</sup> And since we are his children, we will share his treasures—for everything God gives to **his Son, Christ**, is ours, too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

**1 Corinthians 6:11**

There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. You have been made right with **God** because of what **the Lord Jesus Christ** and **the Spirit of our God** have done for you.

**2 Corinthians 1:21-22**

<sup>21</sup>It is **God** who gives us, along with you, the ability to stand firm for **Christ**. He has commissioned us,<sup>22</sup> and he has identified us as his own by placing **the Holy Spirit** in our hearts as the first installment of everything he will give us.

**2 Corinthians 3:1-4:6**

<sup>4</sup>We are confident of all this because of our great trust in **God** through **Christ**.<sup>5</sup> It is not that we think we

can do anything of lasting value by ourselves. Our only power and success come from God. <sup>6</sup>He is the one who has enabled us to represent his new covenant. This is a covenant, not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old way ends in death; in the new way, **the Holy Spirit** gives life.

### Galatians 3:1-5

Oh, foolish Galatians! What magician has cast an evil spell on you? For you used to see the meaning of **Jesus Christ's** death as clearly as though I had shown you a signboard with a picture of Christ dying on the cross. <sup>2</sup>Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive **the Holy Spirit** by keeping the law? Of course not, for the Holy Spirit came upon you only after you believed the message you heard about Christ. <sup>3</sup>Have you lost your senses? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? <sup>4</sup>You have suffered so much for the Good News. Surely it was not in vain, was it? Are you now going to just throw it all away?

<sup>5</sup>I ask you again, does **God** give you **the Holy Spirit** and work miracles among you because you obey the law of Moses? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about **Christ**.

### Galatians 4:4-6

But when the right time came, **God** sent **his Son**, born of a woman, subject to the law. <sup>5</sup>God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. <sup>6</sup>And because you Gentiles have become his children, God has sent **the Spirit of his Son** into your hearts, and now you can call **God your dear Father**.

### Ephesians 1:3-14

How we praise **God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ. <sup>4</sup>Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. <sup>5</sup>His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.

<sup>6</sup>So we praise God for the wonderful kindness he has poured out on us because we belong to his dearly loved Son. <sup>7</sup>He is so rich in kindness that he purchased our freedom through the blood of his Son, and our sins are forgiven. <sup>8</sup>He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. <sup>9</sup>God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure. <sup>10</sup>And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. <sup>11</sup>Furthermore, because of Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us from the beginning, and all things happen just as he decided long ago. <sup>12</sup>God's purpose was that we who were the first to trust in Christ should praise our glorious God. <sup>13</sup>And now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you **the Holy Spirit**, whom he promised long ago. <sup>14</sup>The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. This is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God.

### Ephesians 2:18

Now all of us, both Jews and Gentiles, may come to **the Father** through the same **Holy Spirit** because of what **Christ** has done for us.

**Ephesians 2:20-22**

We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is **Christ Jesus** himself. <sup>21</sup>We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. <sup>22</sup>Through him you Gentiles are also joined together as part of this dwelling where **God** lives by **his Spirit**.

**Philippians 3:3**

For we who worship **God** in **the Spirit** are the only ones who are truly circumcised. We put no confidence in human effort. Instead, we boast about what **Christ Jesus** has done for us.

**1 Thessalonians 1:4-5**

We know that **God** loves you, dear brothers and sisters, and that he chose you to be his own people. <sup>5</sup>For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for **the Holy Spirit** gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message. <sup>6</sup>So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and **the Lord**.

**2 Thessalonians 2:13**

As for us, we always thank **God** for you, dear brothers and sisters loved by **the Lord**. We are thankful that God chose you to be among the first to experience salvation, a salvation that came through **the Spirit** who makes you holy and by your belief in the truth.

**Titus 3:4-7**

But then **God our Savior** showed us his kindness and love. <sup>5</sup>He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through **the Holy Spirit**. <sup>6</sup>He generously poured out the Spirit upon us because of what **Jesus Christ our Savior** did.

See also:

The article, "The Holy Spirit" in *The Learning Bible*, page 1987.

The dictionary entry, "Spirit, Holy Spirit" in *The New Bible Dictionary*.

## 5

**The Holy Spirit Gives God's Wisdom to Us**

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Wouldn't it be nice to know the thoughts that God is thinking? Once in a while we hear people make comments like, "When I get to heaven I am going to ask God why he did that," or, "I wonder what God was thinking when he made my life this way?"

The Bible says that God's thoughts are far above our thoughts [Isaiah 55:8-9, Romans 12:33-34]. We cannot understand everything God does and decides. But the Bible also tells us that there is a way that we can grow in our knowledge of God's thoughts. There is someone who makes God's thoughts and plans known to us. He is the Holy Spirit. Listen to the Bible's words about the Holy Spirit, from **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**, CEV. Speaking about the wisdom of the apostles' teachings, the Apostle Paul says this:

*We [apostles] do use wisdom when speaking to people who are mature in their faith. But it isn't the wisdom of this world or of its rulers, who will soon disappear. We speak of God's hidden and mysterious wisdom that God decided to use for our glory long before the world began. The rulers of this world didn't know anything about this wisdom. If they had known about it, they would not have nailed the glorious Lord to a cross. But it is just as the Scriptures say,*

*"What God has planned for people who love him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds!"*

*God's Spirit has shown you everything. His Spirit finds out everything, even what is deep in the mind of God. You are the only one who knows what is in your own mind, and God's Spirit is the only one who knows what is in God's mind. But God has given us his Spirit. That's why we don't think the same way that the people of this world think. That's also why we can recognize the blessings that God has given us.*

*Every word we speak was taught to us by God's Spirit, not by human wisdom. And this same Spirit helps us teach spiritual things to spiritual people. That's why only someone who has God's Spirit can understand spiritual blessings. Anyone who doesn't have God's Spirit thinks these blessings are foolish. People who are guided by the Spirit can make all kinds of judgments, but they cannot be judged by others. The Scriptures ask,*

*"Has anyone ever known the thoughts of the Lord or given him advice?"  
But we understand what Christ is thinking.*

These verses from the Bible are filled with many important truths. Some are hard to understand at first. So let's look at each one carefully.

**First, these verses tell us that the message of the Apostles is a special wisdom from God.** It is wisdom that you can't find anywhere else in the world. You can't discover this wisdom by thinking, studying books or observing life. You can only get it from God himself.

The Roman people in Jesus' day thought they were wise. They knew how to build good roads and bring political peace to the nations. The Jewish people of Jesus' day also thought they were very wise. They studied the Old Testament books of the Bible. They carefully passed on its wisdom. But the Romans and the Jews did not have this special wisdom from God. Jesus came and taught them God's wisdom. But they did not believe him. They felt threatened by God's wisdom. They preferred their own wisdom. They killed Jesus on a cross so that their wisdom would triumph over God's.

But God had a secret plan that the Romans and Jews of Jesus' day did not know about. God designed his wise plan before he created the world. It was a plan he kept hidden until the time was right.

When Jesus died, God's plan for us came to pass. God's wisdom was victorious! The rulers of the world did not know that they were carrying out God's plan *by killing Jesus*. The death of Jesus was God's way of bringing about forgiveness of sins. Imagine that! By opposing Jesus the rulers of the world actually brought about what God wanted from the beginning. They brought about their own defeat. That is why Paul said, "*The rulers of this world didn't know anything about this wisdom. If they had known about it, they would not have nailed the glorious Lord to a cross*" (verse 8).

After Jesus' victory on the cross God raised him from the dead. Jesus went to heaven to rule along with God. And now Jesus gives his wisdom to everyone who believes in him. What God did not give to the great rulers of Jesus' day he now gives to every person who humbly turns to God in Jesus' name. How does he do this? That is what Paul explains next.

**Paul's second point is that the Holy Spirit makes God's thoughts known to believers.** Ever since Jesus rose to heaven, he sends his Holy Spirit to everyone who believes in him. The Holy Spirit tells believers God's thoughts. He teaches them God's hidden wisdom.

Paul explains the process this way. People can look at a man and see only the outside. They can't read his thoughts. Only the man's spirit knows what he is thinking in his mind. So it is with God. Only God's Spirit knows what God the Father is thinking. So if we want to know God's thoughts, only the Holy Spirit can tell us. He lives inside of us and makes God's hidden wisdom clear to us. Believers in Jesus have special wisdom from God's Spirit. This means they have something other people don't have.

**Paul's third and final point is that believers think very differently from unbelievers.** People

who don't believe in Jesus think that believers are foolish or insane. "If Christians were wise," unbelievers think, "they wouldn't believe in such nonsense." Christian teachings sound like madness to someone who does not have the Spirit of God in him. But people who have the Spirit in them consider the good news of Jesus to be life-giving wisdom from God. They understand special truths that others don't understand. They make wise decisions based on the superior wisdom they have from God. They may appear foolish to the people around them, but in truth the Holy Spirit makes them wise.

This is true of every believer in Jesus Christ. The hidden wisdom of God is not a secret gift that only the smartest or most spiritual Christians receive. The Holy Spirit lives in *every* believer and freely gives God's wisdom to *all* of them. This is what Jesus promised when he said,

*"I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. The Spirit will show you what is true. The people of this world cannot accept the Spirit, because they don't see or know him. But you know the Spirit, who is with you and will keep on living in you."*

John 14:16-17, CEV

Listener, if you are not yet a follower of Jesus, I urge you to seek this hidden wisdom from God. Turn to Jesus in trust and humility. Confess your sins to him and he will forgive you. Ask him to give you his Holy Spirit. Then the Spirit who knows the mind of God the Father will teach you God's thoughts and ways!

Listener, if you are a believer already, I urge you to live wisely. Put to good use the wisdom you have from God's Spirit. Remember that God demands more from those to whom he gives more. You have great wisdom from God. Use it well! And teach others to be wise, too. Tell them the message of Jesus, so that they can believe it. Then they will know God's thoughts and enjoy God's Spirit, too.

[Conclude with prayer]



**6****The Holy Spirit Fills Believers with Joy**

Luke 10:21; Acts 13:52; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:18

Have you ever asked yourself the question, “What do I want more than anything else?” I am sure many of you would answer, “I want to be happy. I want joy.” So, I ask you: “Are you happy today? A little, or a lot?” We all need more joy and happiness. I will explain to you how the Holy Spirit of God fills believers with true joy.

What is your religion like? Do the ceremonies, feast days and beliefs make you happy or afraid, or both? What is your church like? Some Christians always seem to be very sad and guilty. They do not show much joy or enthusiasm for their faith. In this message I want to explain how God and Jesus intend to bring real joy into our lives.

But, what do I mean by joy? We have two words in English that are quite *similar*—*joy* and *happiness*. I think of joy as a deep, pleasing emotion. Happiness is not so deep and lasting. It is like the sudden laugh and shout of a child who is cheerful for a moment, then crying again! Joy is a lasting happiness. Joy stays with us even in our moments of grief, sorrow and fear.

**1. Joy and the Religion of the Bible**

One repeated, consistent mark of religion in both the Old and New Testaments is joy. It is an ongoing attitude and not simply an emotion. It is based on God himself and comes from him (Psalm 16:11, Romans 15:13). A believer’s life on earth is “filled with an inexpressible (can’t be fully explained) and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8). And the Bible promises great joy in heaven, a place of song, praise and joy (Revelation 19:7).

**Jesus and Joy**

When the angel appeared to the shepherds at the time of Jesus’ birth, he announced, “I bring you good news of *great joy* that will be for all people” (Luke 2:10). That is why Christians sing at Christmas time! Jesus brought joy to a world that was full of sorrow.

Jesus himself was “full of joy through the Holy Spirit” when he saw how the dangerous power of demons was being destroyed as people believed in him and were saved (Luke 10:21). Has your name been written in the book of heaven? No evil power can take that joy from you. Believe in Jesus today and you will be full of joy.

Much later Jesus explained how the Holy Spirit would come to believers so that no one could take away their joy (John 16:22). Does the thought of spirits make you feel uneasy and afraid? If so, I invite you to think about the Holy Spirit of God who comes into our hearts to give us a greater joy than we can even think about. I want that kind of joy, don’t you? Jesus came to bring light and joy into a world filled with sadness, sin and many fears.

I recall a much loved hymn, “I sing because I’m happy. I sing because I’m free. For his eye (God’s eye) is on the sparrow (a very small bird), and I know he watches me!”

## **2. The Holy Spirit and Our Joy**

Life is not all joy even though we wish it was. But God knows this and gives us the Holy Spirit so we may have true joy even when we are hurting! Let’s look at three verses of the Bible that will help us understand this.

### **A. Circumstances**

Ordinarily we think that joy comes because of what happens to us. We think, “If I am not sick or poor or rejected I will be happy.” But the Bible does not promise us perfect health, riches or freedom from criticism and rejection. We all get hurt for numerous reasons. Sometimes we are hurt because we believe in Jesus. Once Paul and Barnabas were teaching about Jesus in a city where Jews and non-Jews gathered in a big crowd. The Jews were upset. “When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying” (Acts 13:45). Many people believed throughout the whole region, but some high-class Jews and leading men of the city made trouble and kicked Paul and Barnabas out of the city. But guess what happened? “. . . the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (v. 52). Even in tough times, when we are shocked, the Holy Spirit will fill us with his special joy. The joy he gives us does not depend on what we see. This joy remains even when what happens around us is disappointing and difficult.

### **B. The “Fruit” of the Holy Spirit**

There are nine fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22. The first is love. That is not surprising. But right behind it in second place is JOY! Joy is a product of the Spirit’s presence and power in the lives of believers. Joy keeps us going when we are surrounded with challenges and threats. Joy in our hearts reminds us that God is not dead or powerless even when we feel weak and discouraged. I have felt the joy of the Holy Spirit in my heart. I do every day. It keeps me going. It keeps me smiling even when I am sad. What about you, do you need or want the gift of joy?

### **C. You Can Be Filled with Joy**

Paul wrote, “Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you” (Ephesians 5:18 NLT). Most people drink because it makes them feel good. They are trying to find joy through the effects of alcohol. For a short period they may party and have fun, but the end result for many people is self-destruction. So, what is better? The Holy Spirit! He fills the empty heart with joy. He helps believers enjoy each other. He fills them with joy as they pray and worship together. No one can take this joy from them.

## **3. How to Get and Keep the Joy of the Holy Spirit**

Have you ever tried to get happy? Most of us have, and we have been disappointed. The result of our striving did not give us true joy. *Joy is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit.* This is the good news. God wants to give us full joy. He is a loving Father and wants us to have true happiness. The religion of the Bible stresses the seriousness of our sins and guilt, but the goal of God is to forgive us and fill us with his Spirit of joy. This joy is the gift of God. You cannot buy it in a bottle! You cannot find it at a party. You cannot get it from someone else. You can't make yourself happy. But if you believe in Jesus, you will soon understand what I mean. You will receive this gift of surprising and wonderful joy.

Recently I watched a television program where the host talked with Joni Erickson Tada. She broke her neck in a swimming accident when she was a very young woman. She was paralyzed badly and has only recovered partially. The joy of a healthy body was taken from her. She cannot use her hands and legs. She must be fed and helped in all the common activities of daily life. But she is full of joy! She is now about age 50. She has learned to paint pictures by controlling the paint brush with her mouth. Full of joy and enthusiasm for Jesus and others, she has encouraged handicapped people around the world to make the most of their lives. She has traveled to foreign countries to deliver wheelchairs to people who cannot walk. So many people were impressed by her interview on a major TV program that the station replayed the whole one-hour program two days later! She has joy in spite of pain, huge limitations, fear of illness and death. Why? Because she has allowed the Holy Spirit to fill her with joy even though life is very hard for her. Her testimony was the most dramatic and powerful testimony I have ever heard in my whole life! She gave me great joy.

### **Real Happiness Is a Choice**

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of all believers. And he did that. He sent that Holy Spirit to make our joy complete. Paul wrote about the great joy he had even when he was in prison and suffering unfairly from unbelievers who opposed him. He was the great encourager. He always told believers to “rejoice always” (Philippians 4:4). This was his way of telling them, “Joy is a choice. You can grumble and complain, and that will make you unhappy. And you will make others unhappy too! So, believe and rejoice. You will find great joy in God through the Holy Spirit.”

### **Ask for Joy and You Will Have It**

Jesus taught his followers about the Holy Spirit. He told them about the hardships and loneliness they would feel after he left them. But he said, “I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy . . . Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete” (John 16:22,24).

### **Invitation**

This message is an offer of God's joy to you. Is your religion unsatisfying? Are you sad in your heart? Do you want real, lasting joy? God promises complete joy to us through his Holy Spirit.

Believe in Jesus today and you will receive the wonderful joy of the Holy Spirit who will help you survive even the toughest moments.

[Conclude with an appropriate prayer.]

Study *resource*: see the article on this “Joy” in the *New Bible Dictionary*.

## 7

**How Can the Holy Spirit Help Me Fight Doubt, Fear and Sadness?**

Topical message with biblical references in message.

**The world can be a very frightening place.** We try to avoid the pain that comes from life, others and ourselves.

- Pain and suffering occur often. We struggle to survive and to provide for our families. Sometimes success comes easily to us. But usually life gives us frequent difficulties and tests.
- Pain can come from others. Enemies try to harm us. Even friends and family members can hurt us by their words and actions.
- Pain can come from ourselves. We make mistakes and have to live with the consequences. Or we hurt people whom we love. We damage the delicate bonds of love in our lives.

When life seems too threatening, many of us want to retreat to a place that is safe.

**Negative, bad feelings come over us:**

- Doubt: We lose faith that life is good. Or we lose faith in ourselves. God seems far away.
- Fear: We try to escape whatever is threatening us. We hide. We are too afraid to do the things we need to do.
- Sadness: sometimes sadness overwhelms us. We do not feel like doing anything except cry or sleep. Our souls seem dead. Our spirits seem tired and lifeless.

**The Bible says it's okay to feel doubt, fear and sadness.** Many of the Psalms in the Bible are prayers of people who are sad, fearful and filled with doubt. Listen to this one:

*How much longer, LORD, will you forget about me?  
Will it be forever? How long will you hide?  
How long must I be confused and miserable all day?  
How long will my enemies keep beating me down?*

*Please listen, Lord God, and answer my prayers.  
Make my eyes sparkle again, or else I will fall into the sleep of death.  
My enemies will say, "Now we've won!"*

Psalm 13:1-4, CEV

There are times when we need to cry. There are times when we need to be awakened to action by fear. There are times when we need to face the doubts that we feel. **But it's not okay when these bad emotions rob us of our trust in God. It's not okay when these feelings take away our hope and defeat us.**

**The Bible gives us words of hope!** The Bible says God wants to help us respond wisely to our bad feelings. God gives his Holy Spirit to everyone who believes in his Son, Jesus Christ. The Spirit comes and lives in our hearts. He helps us when we are faced with doubt, fear and sadness. **What does the Holy Spirit do for us when we struggle with these feelings?**

**1. The Holy Spirit gives us COMFORT (encouragement). He is God working in us NOW.** Jesus called the Holy Spirit our great Comforter or Helper (John 14:16, 14:26). The Greek word refers to someone who comes alongside a person to give them strength and help. Comforting is the Holy Spirit's job! When we are hurting he is always there with us.

One of the many ways the Holy Spirit gives us comfort and strength is to pray for us and with us. He helps our prayers. The Bible tells us to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" when we face difficulties (Ephesians 6:18). What does it mean to "pray in the Spirit"? The Bible tells us.

*In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words. All of our thoughts are known to God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people.*

Romans 8:26-27, CEV

Sometimes we wish we had a friend to be by our side to help us through difficult times. The Spirit is a friend who is *always* near to us. He knows what is in our hearts. He makes our needs known to God the Father in ways that we can't. He prays for us when we don't know what to say to God. He helps us in our weakest moments.

The Holy Spirit's help makes us strong. He is a strong friend who lives inside us. He helps us face every enemy and difficulty! The Bible says,

*God's Spirit is in you and is more powerful than the one [the devil] that is in the world.*

1 John 4:4, CEV

**2. The Holy Spirit gives us JOY by telling us what God did for us in the PAST.**

God sent us his Holy Spirit in order to cheer us up and put joy in our lives. The Bible says this:

*. . . when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

Galatians 5:22-23, NLT

Did you notice that the second item on that list was joy? Joy is one of the most important qualities the Holy Spirit develops in our lives. God works in our hearts to make us happy! The happiness God's Spirit brings helps us face even the most difficult situations. The Apostle Paul

said this to one of the churches he founded:

*You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message **with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.***

1 Thessalonians 1:6, NIV

The Holy Spirit gave those believers reassurance. That inner joy helped them face extreme suffering and persecution. The joy came from hearing the message, the good news of Jesus. The Holy Spirit tells us about all the many great things God has done for us. God made us. God made the world we live in. God provides for the needs of all of his creatures, including us. God did mighty miracles in Israel. God sent Jesus to teach us. Jesus died for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead.

The Holy Spirit directs our thoughts to these mighty acts of God. And when we think about all God has done for us, our hearts are filled with joy. What else does the Holy Spirit do for us?

### **3. The Holy Spirit gives us HOPE. He reminds us of what God will do for us in the FUTURE.**

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit gives us hope. Here is what it says:

*I pray that God, who gives hope, will bless you with complete happiness and peace because of your faith. And may the power of the Holy Spirit fill you with hope.*

Romans 15:13, CEV

How does the Spirit fill us with hope? By reminding us of what God will do for us in the future. The Bible explains it this way:

*And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. This is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God.*

Ephesians 1:13-14, NLT

When people buy something expensive like a house, they usually can't pay for it all at one time. They pay what is called a 'down payment.' A down payment is the first payment of money, and is usually a large amount of money. By giving the seller a down payment the buyer reassures the seller that he will eventually pay the full price of the house. The down payment is a 'guarantee.'

God puts the Holy Spirit in our lives as a 'down payment' on the blessings he will one day give us in heaven. He is God's guarantee written in our hearts. We see the Spirit's work in our lives, changing us, instructing us, leading us, helping us. This fills us with assurance that in the future God will finish the work he started. In the end God will take us to be with him and will give us a

perfect life that lasts forever.

What an exciting future we have to look forward to! The Spirit reminds us of our future because his work in our lives is a glimpse, a first payment, of the blessings to come.

**Conclusion:**

Do you struggle with ongoing doubts, fears and sadness? The Bible says that these are normal feelings to have when we face tough times. But the Spirit can help you so that you will not be pushed down by these bad feelings. God's Spirit will remind you what God did for you in the past. He will remind you of what God will do for you in the future. And he will be by your side now, helping you to pray and to face life's pain and suffering. In the Bible one church leader tells another,

*I ask you to make full use of the gift that God gave you when I placed my hands on you. Use it well. God's Spirit doesn't make cowards out of us. The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-control.*

2 Timothy 1:6-7, CEV

You can know the comfort joy, and hope that the Holy Spirit offers you today. Pray with me for the Holy Spirit now.

*[Prayer]*

## 8

**What Does it Mean to Be “Filled with the Spirit”?**

Ephesians 5:18, NLT

**Introduction:**

In English we talk a lot about being filled! With food? Yes, but even more importantly we talk about being filled with anger, hate, evil and also with love and goodness! The Bible talks of Satan filling a man’s heart. It also teaches us often about being filled with the Holy Spirit of God. This is a very important topic which all people need to think about.

**1. The filling that hurts us and offends God and all people.**

Paul, in Romans 1:29-32 NIV describes what has happened to people all around the world. They are filled with the wrong emotions that cause them to do very bad things. Listen to Paul’s vivid description of our human condition:

*They have become **filled** with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

Romans 1:29-32, NIV

What a harsh but true and frightening statement about what fills people’s hearts. These bad feelings, thoughts and acts fill peoples’ days with grief, fear, shame and despair. Read the newspapers. Listen to village gossip. Turn on the TV. There it is every day—the world is filled with the wrong stuff. But, Paul has the solution to his long list of the bad things that fill people’s hearts with this verse in **Ephesians 5:18 NLT**:

*But don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.*

**2. What good is it to be filled with the Holy Spirit?**

- When we are filled with the Spirit of God, we do not need a “high” feeling that people get when they drink alcohol. Spirits (alcohol) do not give us God’s power even if it makes us feel good.
- When we are filled with good we cannot be filled with evil at the same time. God’s Holy Spirit fills our minds, hearts and bodies so that evil is kept out. I think you would agree that we all need that kind of filling.
- When we are filled with God’s Spirit we come under his control and direction. The emotions and thoughts that push us to do wrong are shut out by the presence of God’s Spirit in our

hearts. He is holy. This means he separates us from sin to love and serve God.

### 3. Who can be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Every believer in Jesus can be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts teaches us how the Spirit filled the lives of the first believers. They had unusual power to obey God and turn from evil. They were filled with good, not evil. Everyone who saw them was amazed at the change the Spirit of God made in them. Here is one vivid example:

*After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they preached God's message with boldness. All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had. And the apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great favor was upon them all. There was no poverty among them, because people who owned land or houses sold them and brought the money to the apostles to give to others in need.*

Acts 4:31-35, NLT

Can we do anything to be filled with the Spirit? Yes, we can. A literal translation of Paul's Greek words is, "Let yourselves go on being filled with the Holy Spirit." That seems like a strange thing to say. On the one hand it is a *command*. It is something we must do. On the other hand, it is also something *God* does. We must *let him* do it.

When we believe in Jesus, the Spirit comes and makes his home in our hearts. But the Spirit does not force himself constantly on anyone. As we learn about the Spirit we realize that God wants to fill us with a new understanding of life, new goals for living, new attitudes toward others and God, power to do what we may not like to do! We must **submit** to the Holy Spirit. We should ask to be filled again and again so that no evil will fill us up as before!

If we do not obey God, or do not want to, the Holy Spirit cannot fill us. Instead, he is disappointed and waits quietly while he moves in our hearts for us to open up completely and say, "Holy Spirit, fill me! Put the evil out of my mind and my acts. I want to be controlled by God, not by Satan." God's Spirit is waiting to fill the heart and mind of every believer who wants to submit completely to the will and ways of God.

Someone has said that Paul's words "be filled" or "let yourself be filled" are the ultimate or final command for all believers. I agree! If we let the Holy Spirit fill us daily, we will make no big mistakes. We will not fall into terrible sins. We will not dishonor God. We will love God and others.

There is a Christian song called, "Fill my cup, Lord!" That is a request to God. We do not need to beg him. We cannot force him. But we must love him and want him to have more and more control and power in our lives. Christians who are filled with the Spirit are easy to recognize. When they come into a room with us we can feel the joy and presence of God. We see the joy

and hope in their faces and words. We recognize that they are shutting out the bad things that fill so many people's hearts and lives. I think of Dr. Bill Brownson, former Words of Hope radio minister. Bill is full of God. I love to see him because he fills me up! He is full of goodness, joy, hope, faith and blessing.

#### **4. Do you feel empty?**

All of us feel empty frequently because we let sin and evil drain the water from our cup! We feel dried up. Maybe we have neglected to do what God wants. Or we have stayed away from worship with others. Or we have not been reading the Bible regularly.

If you are a believer, you may need to be filled today. And you can be. Ask, and the Holy Spirit will fill you. But, be careful, he does not come just to satisfy you but to fill you so that your life will satisfy God.

And, those of you who are not yet believers, have you been looking for spiritual power? Have you been reaching for God to fill the big empty place in your heart and life? This is the good news—the Holy Spirit is here among us. He is eager to fill your heart. He will fill your every good desire. He will put evil out. And you will have hope and joy that you have never had before. Please pray with me now, all of you, for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit today. God will do it.



## 9

**How Does the Holy Spirit Help Us Stop Sinning?**

Topical message based on Romans 8:1-17

Greed. Lust. Revenge. Laziness. The evil desires in us are very powerful. They are very deadly. They pull us to do foolish, dangerous things. They drag us into sinful actions that displease God and bring guilt and punishment on us. Is your life being destroyed by the power of your desires? The Bible offers hope!

**1. Our Big Need for the Holy Spirit**

Have you ever noticed that when we are told that something is wrong, we want it even more, just because it is forbidden? Rules and laws can't keep us from doing wrong. We know what is right, and we want to do what is right, but the evil desires in us are just too powerful. Religious laws by themselves make us feel guilty. This is because we are powerless to do what we know is right. We can't do what God wants us to do.

Paul wrote about the power of evil desires. He cried out to God in frustration, "*Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?*" (Romans 7:24, NLT). But Paul did not stay miserable. He answers his own question in the next verse: "*Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (Romans 7:25, NLT).

How does Jesus help us overcome our evil desires? By putting his Holy Spirit in our hearts to help us. Paul writes,

*If you belong to Christ Jesus, you won't be punished. The Holy Spirit will give you life that comes from Christ Jesus and will set you free from sin and death. The Law of Moses cannot do this, because our selfish desires make the Law weak.*

Romans 8:1-3a, CEV

The old way of obeying God by trying to follow rules doesn't work. We are too weak and our desires are too powerful. So God has made a new way. The Holy Spirit comes and lives inside of us and helps us be good people. He saves us from the death and punishment that come from following evil desires. Paul shows how people who are ruled by desires are different from people who are ruled by the Spirit of God:

*People who are ruled by their desires think only of themselves. Everyone who is ruled by the Holy Spirit thinks about spiritual things. If our minds are ruled by our desires, we will die. But if our minds are ruled by the Spirit, we will have life and peace. Our desires fight against God, because they do not and cannot obey God's laws. If we follow our desires, we cannot please God.*

*You are no longer ruled by your desires, but by God's Spirit, who lives in you. People who don't have the Spirit of Christ in them don't belong to him. But Christ lives in you.*

*So you are alive because God has accepted you, even though your bodies must die because of your sins. Yet God raised Jesus to life! God's Spirit now lives in you, and he will raise you to life by his Spirit.*

Romans 8:5-11, CEV

People who follow their evil desires are hostile to God. They are unable to please God. God punishes them, and their way of life brings death. As we saw, this is also true of people who try to follow God only by obeying rules. They are too weak to obey the rules.

But people who believe in Jesus have a different way of obeying God. We have the Holy Spirit living in us. The Spirit teaches us right from wrong, but he also does more. The Spirit gives us the power to do right and avoid wrong! By his help we have life, not death. When our bodies die, our spirits will live on. And our bodies will later be raised to new life, too.

## **2. The Holy Spirit's Purpose and Power:**

Maybe you wonder what the Holy Spirit does to help people who believe in Jesus. Let me describe how he will help you:

### **A. The Holy Spirit helps us understand God's words.**

*“. . . no one alone can understand any of the prophecies in the Scriptures. The prophets did not think these things up on their own, but they were guided by the Spirit of God.”*  
2 Peter 1:20-21, CEV

He is a teacher who interprets and explains God's commands to us. As we study God's words, the Spirit opens our minds to their meaning. Where do we learn and study God's words? You are doing that now as you listen to Words of Hope. But more importantly believers gather each week to worship God and hear his Word explained. The Holy Spirit uses the teaching of the Bible to instruct and change our hearts.

### **B. The Holy Spirit reminds us of God's words when we forget.**

*“But the Holy Spirit will come and help you, because the Father will send the Spirit to take my place. The Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of what I said while I was with you.”*

John 14:26, CEV

When we are tempted to do something wrong, he speaks to our hearts: “No! Don't do that! That is wrong!” When we fail to do what is right, he reminds us that we ought to do it. When we are sad or confused, he reminds us of God's special care for us. He quiets our troubled hearts by assuring us that we are God's very own children.

### **C. The Holy Spirit helps us say “No” to our evil desires.**

*“. . . you will live, if by the help of God's Spirit you say ‘No’ to your desires.”*

Romans 8:13, CEV

By ourselves we do not have the strength. But we can always pray for help and he will answer us. He will show us a way of escape. Or he will make the temptation go away. Or he will strengthen us enough to say no.

**D. The Holy Spirit gives us the strength to do what we need to do.**

*“God is wonderful and glorious. I pray that his Spirit will make you become strong followers.”*

Ephesians 3:16, CEV

When we feel overwhelmed by God’s requirements, we should always pray. The powerful Holy Spirit gives us the courage and strength we need to think and do what is right.

**E. The Holy Spirit makes us members of the church.**

*“Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves, and others are free. But God’s Spirit baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ. Now we each drink from that same Spirit.”*

1 Corinthians 12:13, CEV

The Holy Spirit has brought us together as a family of God. We are brothers and sisters. Believers in Jesus help each other and pray for each other. The Holy Spirit guides us to do this for each other.

**3. How Can We Keep On Getting the Holy Spirit’s Help?**

The Holy Spirit is a very powerful gift God has given us. But he does not work in our lives if we are careless and lazy. We will not benefit from his power if we do not do what he says.

*My dear friends, we must not live to satisfy our desires. If you do, you will die. But you will live, if by the help of God’s Spirit you say “No” to your desires. Only those people who are led by God’s Spirit are his children.*

Romans 8:12-14, CEV

*You cannot fool God, so don’t make a fool of yourself! You will harvest what you plant. If you follow your selfish desires, you will harvest destruction, but if you follow the Spirit, you will harvest eternal life.*

Galatians 6:7-8, CEV

There are **important steps** we need to take so that we can enjoy all the help that the Holy Spirit intends to give us.

**A. First, it is very important for us to study God’s Word, the Bible.** The Spirit uses the words of the Bible to teach us. How will he teach us about what God has said if we do not take time to read or listen to it? How will he make us understand it if we do not meditate on it and think carefully about what it says? How can he remind us of words we have never heard?

Listen to what the Apostle Peter wrote:

*“All of this makes us even more certain that what the prophets said is true. So you should pay close attention to their message, as you would to a lamp shining in some dark place. You must keep on paying attention until daylight comes and the morning star rises in your hearts. But you need to realize that no one alone can understand any of the prophecies in the Scriptures. The prophets did not think these things up on their own, but they were guided by the Spirit of God.”*

2 Peter 1:21, CEV

**B. It is also very important for us to pray constantly for the Spirit’s help.** The Bible says that many times we don’t receive help from God because we don’t ask for it. (“ . . . the reason you don’t have what you want is that you don’t ask God for it.” James 4:2). God wants us to look to him for strength and help. He doesn’t want us to try to do everything in our own power. God is a generous, loving God. We do not need to be ashamed to ask him for wisdom, help and strength. He loves to give generously to everyone who asks him. (“If any of you need wisdom, you should ask God, and it will be given to you. God is generous and won’t correct you for asking” [James 1:5, CEV]).

**C. And, it is very important to be ready to obey what the Spirit tells us.** Many times we will not want to do what he says. We will think his instructions are too hard. We will think that the directions he gives us are not the best way. The powerful evil desires in us don’t just disappear when we become believers. But we must trust the Holy Spirit and do what he tells us to do.

The Bible says, “Don’t make God’s Spirit sad. The Spirit makes you sure that someday you will be free from your sins” (Ephesians 4:30, CEV). The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit becomes sad when we disregard his instruction.

The Bible also says, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NRSV). It pictures the Holy Spirit’s power as a fire inside of us. His fire gives us heat, light and energy. If we disobey him, we pour water on his powerful fire and so keep his fire from giving power to our lives.

When we study God’s Word, pray for God’s help at all times, and do what the Holy Spirit tells us, we become ready to receive his powerful help. He tells us what is right and gives us the

strength to do it. He is far more powerful than the evil desires that try to harm us. And by his power we can enjoy a powerful new life that will never end!



**10****The Holy Spirit Gives Us a New Kind of Life**

Galatians 5:13-26

In recent messages we have been studying the Holy Spirit of God. We said that the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and lives there when we believe in Jesus. He satisfies the thirst of our souls and gives us life that lasts forever. He frees us from the power of evil spirits and helps us live in ways that please God.

Now I want to ask you the important question, **What changes does the Holy Spirit make in a believer's life?** What kind of behavior does the Spirit produce in a believer when he comes to live in him or her?

The Apostle Paul answers this question for us in a letter he wrote to the church in Galatia. This letter is found in the Bible. We will read some verses from this letter [Galatians 5:13-26, CEV] and explain each verse. Paul begins by saying, "*My friends, you were chosen to be free*" (verse 13a, CEV).

**Freedom** is the main theme of Paul's letter. Before Jesus came, all people who wanted to be followers of the true God had to become Jewish and adopt Jewish laws, culture and traditions. There were special rules about food, special rules about cleanliness, special rules about who you could talk with. (And every boy had to have the foreskin removed from his sexual organ by a procedure called circumcision). Not many people wanted to follow all of these special rules in order for God to accept them. They had their own cultures and traditions that they loved. They did not want to abandon their people and become members of another society. **Wasn't there a way to worship God without becoming Jewish?**

**Paul says Yes! Jesus has given them freedom.** They can follow God and not change their language and all their customs. They no longer had to follow the laws of Israel or become Jews for God to accept them.

But some of the new believers celebrated their freedom by doing evil. They acted like children who are disobedient when their parents are not watching. They thought their freedom from the *law* meant they could be *lawless*, and do whatever they wanted. They followed their evil desires and fought with each other. So Paul continues:

*Don't use your freedom as an excuse to do anything you want. Use it as an opportunity to serve each other with love. All that the Law says can be summed up in the command to love others as much as you love yourself. But if you keep attacking each other like wild animals, you had better watch out or you will destroy yourselves.*

Verses 13b-15, CEV

Paul explains that as believers in Jesus we are free from the rules of the law. But we are **not** free from the moral demands of the law. The purpose of the law was to guide us to have a deep love for God and for one another. So we should use our freedom from the law to “serve each other in love” instead of attacking each other and criticizing each other. Paul goes on to say,

*If you are guided by the Spirit, you won't obey your selfish desires. The Spirit and your desires are enemies of each other. They are always fighting each other [so that you are not to do whatever you want\*]. But if you obey the Spirit, the Law of Moses has no control over you.*

Verses 16-18, CEV [\*The words in brackets are from the TNIV Bible. This translation more closely captures Paul's thought here.]

What this means is we must choose between two very different ways of living. One is the life that is guided by the Spirit. The other is life that is controlled by our selfish desires. These two styles of life are opposed to each other. We can't live however we want. We must either serve selfish desires or serve the Holy Spirit.

What does a life guided by selfish desires look like? Paul gives us a vivid description. He lists 15 different characteristics of the sinful, selfish life:

*People's desires make them give in to immoral ways, filthy thoughts, and shameful deeds. They worship idols, practice witchcraft, hate others, and are hard to get along with. People become jealous, angry, and selfish. They not only argue and cause trouble, but they are envious. They get drunk, carry on at wild parties, and do other evil things as well. I told you before, and I am telling you again: No one who does these things will share in the blessings of God's kingdom.*

Verses 19-21, CEV

Paul's readers were viciously attacking each other and fighting. Many of the evil practices that Paul lists have to do with anger and conflict: hatred, jealousy, being difficult to 'get along with' [*to be neighbors with*], anger, selfishness, arguing, causing trouble, envy.

Paul's readers were also engaging in other practices that God hates: false religion (idol worship, witchcraft) and uncontrolled desires (sexually immoral ways, shameful deeds, getting drunk, carrying on at wild parties).

The Spirit can set us free from all these bad actions. The Spirit gives us power to stop our

fighting. He frees us from false religions. He gives us power to control our powerful, often wrong desires. Now listen to the Bible's description of a life guided by the Spirit of God. Here it is:

*God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. There is no law against behaving in any of these ways.*

Verses 22-23, CEV

The Holy Spirit produces virtues in us that bring healing to the conflicts and quarrels in our lives:

- *Love* – a commitment to serve and care for each other
- *Joy* – a happiness we can share together
- *Peace* – the end of fighting
- *Patience* – slowness to become angry
- *Kindness* – eagerness to do things to help others
- *Goodness* – the desire to do what is right and good
- *Faithfulness* – the determination to be loyal and reliable to God and others
- *Gentleness* – responses that are soft and not harsh
- *Self-control* – an ability to resist all bad actions and our desire for revenge

If you are having difficulty in your relationships with people, think of what the Holy Spirit can do for you! If your town or village is having harsh conflicts, imagine the peace that the Holy Spirit can bring there!

Paul says that the love, joy, peace and other virtues that the Spirit produces in us are consistent with the original purpose God had for the laws of Israel. There is no law in the Old Testament against these virtues. The Holy Spirit gives us freedom from the cultural traditions of the Jewish law. But he does this so that we will love each other. And our love for each other fulfills the law. Paul ends this part of his letter by re-stating what he said:

*Because we belong to Christ Jesus, we have killed our selfish feelings and desires. God's Spirit has given us life, and so we should follow the Spirit. But don't be conceited or make others jealous by claiming to be better than they are.*

Verses 24-26, CEV

The choice is ours.

- We know that following our selfish desires brings us great pain and sadness. It destroys our relationships with our friends, families and God.
- But we know that “God’s Spirit has given us life” and freedom. He produces love, joy, peace, patience, and many other good acts in us. He heals and restores our relationships with each other and God.

So the choice is obvious! I hope you will believe in Jesus and follow the Spirit who is so kind and generous. And I pray that he will richly bless your life and relationships. [Prayer]

## 11

**The Holy Spirit Calls Us to Work Together in the Church**

1 Corinthians 12:12-22, CEV

A very important part of the teaching about the Holy Spirit is what the Bible says about churches. Churches are groups of believers whom God's Spirit brings together to love and serve him. They are like families. All believers are God's children. They are brothers and sisters to each other, and try to treat each other with brotherly love and kindness. Each church group (called a 'congregation') is just one expression of the one Church, the glorious collection of all believers from east to west, from the past to the future, on earth and in heaven.

The picture that the Bible uses most about the church is the picture of a body. Jesus is the 'head' of the church, and the church is connected to him like a body is connected to a head. Each believer is like a hand, a foot, an eye or an ear on the body. The Bible says:

*The body of Christ has many different parts, just as any other body does. Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves, and others are free. But God's Spirit baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ. Now we each drink from that same Spirit.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, CEV

**1. This is a very beautiful message from God. These verses tell us that the Holy Spirit brings believers together to unite as a group.**

- **Believers come from different nations and races.** In Bible times Jewish and non-Jewish races were divided. They were unfriendly toward each other and suspicious of one another. Today many races and peoples are divided. When will the people of the world stop hating each other? *But the Spirit can bring them together and make them one.*
- **Believers have different statuses in society.** In Bible times the big difference was between slaves and free people. Today people are divided between rich and poor, between city dwellers and people from the small villages and farms, and between people of different social classes. How sad it is when citizens of a nation or tribe show disdain for each other. *But the Spirit can bring them together and make them one.*
- **Believers are unique people.** Each person is very different from others. Think of how many conflicts you have because other people, both men and women, are quite different from you. *But the Spirit brings us together and makes us one. The church is a body that overcomes human conflicts and unites people of all kinds through faith and love.*

## 2. The people the Spirit brings together feel their unity and rejoice together.

The verses above mention baptism and the Lord's Supper. New believers become part of the church by being 'baptized,' or washed with water. Baptism is a joyful ceremony to celebrate the wonderful way God washes our sins away. Together believers also celebrate the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a ceremonial meal of bread and wine (or grape juice). The bread and wine represent Jesus' body and blood. The Supper feeds our faith because it reminds us that Jesus died for us.

The verses we just read tell us that the Holy Spirit is the one who baptizes us and makes us part of the church. It says, "*God's Spirit baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ*" (verse 13a). And they tell us that God's Spirit is the one who feeds us when we celebrate the Lord's Supper together. It says, "*we each drink from that same Spirit*" (verse 13b). The Spirit has made us one! That is worth celebrating! In baptism and the Lord's Supper believers give thanks that God has brought us together in a united body of believers.

**3. The Bible also tells us that each believer is very important.** No believer of Jesus should feel inferior to another because he or she is different from others. The church needs people of every kind in order to do all of God's work successfully. Here is what the Bible goes on to say:

*Our bodies don't have just one part. They have many parts. Suppose a foot says, "I'm not a hand, and so I'm not part of the body." Wouldn't the foot still belong to the body? Or suppose an ear says, "I'm not an eye, and so I'm not part of the body." Wouldn't the ear still belong to the body?*

1 Corinthians 12:14-16, CEV

As it is with our bodies, so it is with the body of Christ, the church. Our feet and our ears are just as important as our hands and our eyes. So every believer is equally important to God. You are important! No matter what color your skin is, no matter what race or social class you come from, no matter what kind of person you are, you belong to the body of Christ. The church 'body' would be incomplete without you. The Bible reminds us that bodies would be useless if every part were the same. Think how strange and weak we would be if we all were eyes or feet! First Corinthians goes on to say,

*If our bodies were only an eye, we couldn't hear a thing. And if they were only an ear, we couldn't smell a thing. But God has put all parts of our body together in the way that he decided is best.*

*A body isn't really a body, unless there is more than one part. It takes many parts to make a single body. That's why the eyes cannot say they don't need the hands. That's also why the head cannot say it doesn't need the feet. In fact, we cannot get along*

*without the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest.*

1 Corinthians 12:17-22, CEV

No Christian should ever say to another Christian, “You are unimportant” or “I don’t need you.” These are wrong and cruel words. They hurt the person who hears them. But they also hurt the one who speaks them because every believer is needed for Christ’s body to be complete. A body without feet wouldn’t be able to walk. So the other body parts would go nowhere. Churches will also be crippled if they leave anyone out. Groups of believers will be weak if they fail to see how each person makes a vital contribution to the total work of the body (1 Corinthians 1:5-7 NIV).

**Conclusion:**

Jesus and the Holy Spirit have created a new group of people to bring all people together. In the church, people who are very different from each other make peace with God and with each other. Like the parts of a body, we work together, walking in obedience to the commands of our ‘head,’ Jesus Christ. When we join the church, each of us should discover how we are to do God’s work together. God’s peace begins to restore our broken relationships. And as believers work together, the ‘body’ of Jesus begins to walk and speak and carry out its mission—to take the peace of Jesus Christ to people suffering from conflicts and war.

[Prayer]



## 12

**What Is Your 'Spiritual Gift'?**

(Topical message with verses in the message)

People around the world long for power to change things. They wish they had the power to make the world a better place. They wish they could make a beneficial difference in other peoples' lives.

The Bible tells us that God offers us power. God's Holy Spirit is a Spirit of power. He gives "gifts" of power to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. Each believer has at least one special ability, called a 'spiritual gift,' from the Spirit. This gift gives the believer power to serve God and help other people in special ways. Some have gifts for speaking the message of truth from God powerfully. Others have gifts for serving people in exceptional ways.

**The Bible urges believers to seek spiritual gifts and use them well.** Listen to these words from the Bible:

*God chose some people to be apostles and prophets and teachers for the church. But he also chose some to work miracles or heal the sick or help others or be leaders or speak different kinds of languages. Not everyone is an apostle. Not everyone is a prophet. Not everyone is a teacher. Not everyone can work miracles. Not everyone can heal the sick. Not everyone can speak different kinds of languages. Not everyone can tell what these languages mean. **I want you to desire the best gifts.***

1 Corinthians 12:28-31, CEV

*Use **the gift** you were given when the prophets spoke and the group of church leaders blessed you by placing their hands on you.*

1 Timothy 4:14, CEV

*I ask you to **make full use of the gift that God gave you** when I placed my hands on you. **Use it well.** God's Spirit doesn't make cowards out of us. The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-control.*

2 Timothy 1:6-7, CEV

**1. These Bible verses assume we know our gifts. How can we know what gift or gifts God has given us?** We find out by helping people, by serving the church, by trying out different tasks and ministries. Here are some practical suggestions for you:

- Pray. Ask God to show you what gift or gifts you have.

- Ask yourself what you enjoy doing. What activities have you enjoyed doing? What forms of service do you find more appealing?
- Think about what you do well. What activities do you find easier than others? For what have people complimented you?
- Ask others what they think you do well. Family members, friends and other fellow believers often see things about us that we can't see. They may agree that God has made you an effective giver or server or leader even when you don't notice it about yourself.
- Get involved in a wide variety of tasks (ministries). Don't just try things you are comfortable with. Try new things! Ask your church leaders to allow you to be involved in a variety of tasks. As you try these different tasks, you will begin to see which gifts the Spirit gave you.
- Be persistent. Don't give up too easily if your first attempts at testing your gifts are not successful. Remember that the devil will want to discourage you from doing good.
- Keep an open mind. That is, be willing to listen to what God is telling you. As you try out various forms of serving God, you may be very surprised by what you find. Ministries which you thought you would be good at might not be the best ones for you. In the same way, ministries that you thought you would not enjoy or be good at may turn out to be ministries for which you have gifts of the Spirit.

**2. The Bible verses we read a moment ago urge us to use our gifts faithfully.** If we have the gift of giving, we should be generous. If we have the gift of leading, we should use it to be a blessing to others. Whatever gift God has given us, we should use for him. Jesus said, *“Much is required from those to whom much is given, and much more is required from those to whom much more is given”* (Luke 12:48, NLT).

In the final judgment God will examine our lives based on how we used the many gifts he gives us. How well did we use our time? How well did we use our money and possessions? How well did we take care of the people he put into our lives? These are questions of great concern for each one of us. He will also judge us on how well we use the spiritual gifts and abilities he gave us. If we have the gift of teaching, he will examine how much we used it to faithfully instruct the church. If we have the gift of giving, he will judge us by how much we gave. If we have the gift of showing mercy, he will decide if we have been especially merciful to people.

This should not frighten you. It should make you joyful! God has given you a special ability. Remember what the verse said? *“God has . . . given each of us different gifts to use”* (verse 6, CEV). He made you special. His Holy Spirit has given you a very special gift. You have a unique contribution to make in this world. It is a role that no one else can play. No one can do what you can do in quite the same way. Rejoice in the abilities God gives you. Use them in ways that make him happy.

**3. If each of us has unique gifts from God, then we all need each other. This is another important point that follows from what our Bible verses say about spiritual gifts.** Each believer is important. Other people need us to use our gifts to help them. And we need to turn to others and let them help us. When all believers cooperate with each other and work together, then all the gifts and abilities that the Holy Spirit gave Jesus' followers will work in unity, and the church will grow strong. Believers will meet peoples' needs. They will demonstrate God's love to the world. And people will respond in praise to God.

**Conclusion:**

I encourage each of you to turn to our generous gift-giving God. He pours out his Holy Spirit on everyone who believes in Jesus. And the Spirit pours out special gifts and abilities on each believer. May you discover the goodness of God. May you discover the gifts that God gave you. And may you become a beautiful gift to someone else today, by using your gifts to bless them and help them.



## 13

### The Holy Spirit Puts Words on Our Lips

1 Peter 4:10-11, Ephesians 4:11-13

In our study of what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit, we have seen that the Holy Spirit places each believer into the church. He makes each follower of Jesus a member of the worldwide family of God. We have also seen that the Holy Spirit urges believers to serve and help each other. The church is like a body, in which every body part is important, and all the parts work together in harmony.

#### 1. Spiritual Gifts

The Bible tells us that God has given special gifts to each believer by his Holy Spirit. The Bible calls them “spiritual gifts.” They are powers or abilities to do the things which God wants. Each believer has at least one of these abilities. Spiritual gifts help believers teach and serve each other with love.

The Bible says this about **spiritual gifts**:

*Each of you has been blessed with one of God’s many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gift well. If you have the gift of speaking, preach God’s message. If you have the gift of helping others, do it with the strength that God supplies. Everything should be done in a way that will bring honor to God because of Jesus Christ, who is glorious and powerful forever. Amen.*

1 Peter 4:10-11, CEV

The Bible has four lists of these spiritual gifts. [*Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, and Ephesians 4:11*]. The gifts mentioned by these lists aren’t the only gifts that the Spirit gives believers. These lists give us a good idea of the kinds of spiritual gifts that we find in believers in the church.

#### 2. Two Kinds of Gifts

We can see *two very different kinds of gifts* in these lists.

- Some gifts are for speaking and understanding. Some believers have an extraordinary ability to understand and explain God’s truth to others.
- Some gifts are for helping and serving others. Believers who have these gifts have extraordinary abilities to minister to the needs of people.

### 3. The Gifts of Speaking (communication)

First we will talk about the gifts of speaking. In later messages we will talk about the gifts of helping and serving.

Here is what the Word of God says:

*Christ chose some of us to be apostles, prophets, missionaries,<sup>1</sup> pastors, and teachers, so that his people would learn to serve and his body would grow strong. This will continue until we are united by our faith and by our understanding of the Son of God. Then we will be mature, just as Christ is, and we will be completely like him.*

Ephesians 4:11-13, CEV

#### A. What Are the Gifts?

**The first thing we notice** about these verses from the Bible is that there are a number of different gifts that involve speaking:

- The **apostles** were the original followers of Jesus. Jesus gave them specific orders to tell people about him. He told them to make new followers of Jesus, and gather them into churches, groups of people that worship and serve him. Today there are people who travel to new places to start churches where there are none. We usually do not call them apostles today, but their gift is the gift of apostleship.
- **Prophets** were people who spoke God's words to his followers. The words they spoke were messages God wanted them to tell the people. Their messages contained words of warning to people who did evil. They also spoke words of comfort and hope to people who were sad or suffering. Sometimes God even told them what would happen in the future before it happened.
- **Evangelists** are people who are gifted at sharing the good news of Jesus with unbelievers. They befriend unbelievers, display Jesus' love through their actions, and joyfully urge people to place their faith in Jesus.
- The word '**pastors**' comes from the word for shepherd. Shepherds guide sheep so that they can eat grass, and wild animals will not harm them. Pastors do their work so that God's followers feed on his words and are protected from the temptations of the devil.
- **Teachers** are people who instruct others about the truth. They give people the knowledge and training they need in order to live as faithful, joyful Christians.

The lists of gifts mention other spiritual gifts that have to do with speaking. They mention

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<sup>1</sup>Most English translations use the word 'evangelists.' That is what we will use in the message.

the gift of **encouragement**. To en-courage someone is to give them courage and strength when they are weak. Encouragers say, “God is with you! God will help you in your difficulty. You can do all things because of God’s strength in you!” The lists of gifts also mention **messages of wisdom** and **messages of knowledge**. There are people to whom God gives extraordinary insights. These insights make decisions easier. They make life more productive and enjoyable.

### ***B. What are the Effects of Using the Gifts?***

**The second thing we see** from the Bible passage we read is what happens when people use their gifts of speaking. Their gifts help believers grow in their faith. Let me read the Bible passage again:

*Christ chose some of us to be apostles, prophets, missionaries,<sup>2</sup> pastors, and teachers, so that his people would learn to serve and his body would grow strong. This will continue until we are united by our faith and by our understanding of the Son of God. Then we will be mature, just as Christ is, and we will be completely like him.*

Ephesians 4:11-13, CEV

**1) People with speaking gifts use them to train others for service.** Most people want to do good and help others, but they don’t know how to do it very well. Some are afraid. Others try hard to serve God but need advice and help. Apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors, encouragers—all these people use their speech to equip and train others to serve God and people.

**2) People with speaking gifts help the church, the ‘body of Christ,’ become strong.** The Bible says that the relationship of Jesus and his followers is like the connection between a head and a body. Our heads lead our bodies around. Our eyes and ears show us where to go, and our minds tell our bodies what to do. Jesus is our head. And just as bodies need to become strong, so the church, the body of Jesus, needs to become stronger and stronger. Jesus uses people with gifts of speaking to lead, guide and strengthen his body, the church.

**3) People with speaking gifts help the church become united.** Believers are united by the biblical truths that they believe in. We are united by our faith and our understanding. People announce and explain God’s words so that we will believe together, obey God together, and love one another as Jesus taught us to. Their words bring us closer together.

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<sup>2</sup>*Most English translations use the word ‘evangelists.’ That is what we will use in the message.*

**4) People with speaking gifts help believers become mature and more like Christ.** We watch children grow taller and taller until they become adults. The Bible says that believers and churches are growing, too. We grow more faithful. We grow more loving. We grow more holy. We become more like Jesus. How do we do this? By listening to God's words. And we hear God's words when believers speak and explain them to us using the gifts the Holy Spirit gives them.

Listener, how do you respond when others tell you what the Bible says? Do you resist them? Do you ignore them? I want you to know that God has spoken in the Bible. And he still speaks today. He uses people to announce and explain the Bible. He uses people to help others know how to follow him. Do not take their words lightly! Test their words. See if their message is from God. And if it is, then obey it with gladness and dedication. The Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen you.

Listener, has God given you a message to speak? Has he given you a gift for speaking? Then speak boldly! Say what God tells you to say, and only what God tells you to say. You have an important message that all people need to hear. May you take "words of hope" to someone today.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what your gifts are. He will give you the courage, strength and ability to do what he wants. You have at least one gift! It is God's gift to you through the Holy Spirit. You will find great joy and satisfaction when you discover and use your gift(s).

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**Special note to producers:**

The descriptions of the speaking gifts in this message are brief. You may wish to expand on these descriptions for the benefit of your listeners. We encourage you to consult the articles on 'Apostle,' 'Prophecy, Prophets,' 'Spiritual Gifts' and 'Evangelist' in the *New Bible Dictionary* for more information. See also the mini-article, 'Spiritual Gifts' on page 2127 of the *Learning Bible*.

## 14

**Who Is Telling the Truth?**

Topical message with Bible references in the message

In Bible times God sent his messengers (called ‘prophets’), to announce his messages to the people of Israel. But the Bible tells us there were false prophets, too. False prophets were people who claimed to speak for God but were lying. The people of Israel faced the problem of deciding who truly spoke for God. **How could they tell a true prophet from a false prophet?**

**We have the same problem today.** Many people in our day claim to speak for God, gods or spirits. They claim that their words are inspired by a supernatural power. But their words do not agree with each other or with the Bible. How can we tell who is telling us the truth?

The Bible gives us a few guidelines to help us know who really speaks for God. Let’s look at these guidelines today.

**1. First, genuine religious leaders are called and sent by God.**

*Every high priest is appointed to help others by offering gifts and sacrifices to God because of their sins. A high priest has weaknesses of his own, and he feels sorry for foolish and sinful people. That is why he must offer sacrifices for his own sins and for the sins of others. But no one can have the honor of being a high priest simply by wanting to be one. Only God can choose a priest, and God is the one who chose Aaron.*

Hebrews 5:1-4, CEV

Messengers of God do not seek positions of honor and glory for themselves. God calls them and sends them to speak.

Many religious leaders in the Bible did not want to be sent by God! Moses and Jeremiah resisted God’s call at first. This is because God often gives religious leaders an unpleasant message to take to people:

*The LORD has sent prophets to you time after time, but you refused to listen. They told you that the LORD had said:*

*“Change your ways! If you stop doing evil, I will let you stay forever in this land that I gave your ancestors. I don’t want to harm you. So don’t make me angry by worshiping*

*idols and other gods.”*

Jeremiah 25:4-6, CEV

True messengers of God speak, even when people will oppose their message, because God *commands* them to speak. Religious leaders are compelled by God to say what they say. So when we listen to religious leaders today, we need to ask ourselves:

- Does this person speak out of sincere passion and conviction, or out of self-seeking greed?
- Is this person hesitant to confront people with bad news or unpopular messages from God? Does he only say what people want to hear?
- Does it seem that this person is only looking for money, honor, fame or power?

True religious leaders are guided by the call of God. Their motivation comes from outside themselves. They act out of interest for God’s will to be done, not out of self-interest.

## **2. Another biblical truth about genuine religious leaders is that they speak God’s words.**

This is what God said long ago when he said he would send prophets to the people of Israel:

*So when I want to speak to them, I will choose one of them to be a prophet like you. I will give my message to that prophet, who will tell the people exactly what I have said.*

Deuteronomy 18:18, CEV

But here is what God says in the Bible about false prophets:

*Don’t listen to the lies  
of these false prophets,  
you people of Judah!  
The message they preach  
is something they imagined;  
it did not come from me,  
the LORD All-Powerful.*

Jeremiah 23:16, CEV

The false prophets proclaimed the ideas that were in their heads. They gave people their own personal opinions. But a true messenger of God is just that—a *messenger*, a person who speaks

the words of the One who sent him.

As we listen to religious leaders, we need to ask ourselves,

- Where does this person get his message?
- Does he say, “This is what I think” or “This is what the experts say” or does he say, “This is what God says”?
- Is his message consistent with God’s Word, the Bible? God is the same yesterday, today and forever. God never contradicts himself. His truth remains the same. So if what a leader says does not agree with what the Bible clearly says, then it can’t be from God.

A true messenger of God will be faithful to the message God gave him. He will be faithful to the Word of God.

**3. Third, when genuine religious leaders speak, their words come true.** Listen to God’s words:

*You may be asking yourselves, “How can we tell if a prophet’s message really comes from the LORD?” You will know, because if the LORD says something will happen, it will happen. And if it doesn’t, you will know that the prophet was falsely claiming to speak for the LORD. Don’t be afraid of any prophet whose message doesn’t come from the LORD.*

Deuteronomy 18:21-22, CEV

Sometimes God gave prophets messages about what would happen in the future. They told in advance if another nation would attack and whether Israel’s army would win or lose a battle. The Bible warns us not to listen to religious leaders if their predictions do not come true. But sometimes false prophets gave accurate predictions about the future. If someone’s words come true, is there another way to be sure that the prophet’s message is honest? Yes, there is.

**4. Genuine religious leaders faithfully follow the God of the Bible and urge others to do so.**

Listen to these words of warning from the Bible:

*Someday a prophet may come along who is able to perform miracles or tell what will happen in the future. Then the prophet may say, “Let’s start worshipping some new gods—some gods that we know nothing about.” If the prophet says this, don’t listen! The LORD your God will be watching to find out whether or not you love him with all your heart and soul. You must be completely faithful to the LORD.*

Deuteronomy 13:1-4, CEV

We are naturally quite impressed when someone predicts the future and his prediction is

fulfilled. But the Bible urges us never to allow a religious leader to tempt us away from God and the Bible, even if what he predicts comes true.

The devil uses false prophets to lead people into false religion and evil practices. Here is what the Bible says about them:

*I did not send these prophets  
or speak to them,  
but they ran to find you  
and to preach their message.  
If they had been in a meeting  
of my council in heaven,  
they would have told  
you people of Judah  
to give up your sins  
and come back to me.*

Jeremiah 23:21-22, CEV

Authentic (genuine, true) religious leaders speak by both their words and their example. We can tell who they are because they follow God faithfully and urge other people to do the same. They don't encourage people to worship idols or live in ways that displease God.

**5. Finally, genuine religious leaders are filled with the Holy Spirit of God.** Listen to the prophet Micah describe his call to be a prophet:

*But the LORD has filled me  
with power and his Spirit.  
I have been given the courage  
to speak about justice  
and to tell you people of Israel  
that you have sinned.*

Micah 3:8, CEV

As we listen to religious leaders we will be able to sense that God's Spirit is working in their lives and giving boldness and power to their message. We must always study God's Word, attend worship, pray and talk with other Christians. This will keep us from deceiving ourselves and believing things that are wrong.

**Conclusion:**

Listeners, you must each judge in your hearts who is telling the truth. The Bible gives us these sure guidelines. A person who speaks for God is called and sent by God and speaks God's message faithfully. His words come true and he does not lead people away from God. He follows God faithfully by living a righteous life, and he is filled with God's Holy Spirit.

The Bible urges us to carefully judge the message religious leaders speak to us. It says,

*Dear friends, don't believe everyone who claims to have the Spirit of God. Test them all to find out if they really do come from God. Many false prophets have already gone out into the world, and you can know which ones come from God.*

1 John 4:1-2, CEV

Use these guidelines to test what you hear. Test the words I speak to you on the radio. May the Holy Spirit guide you always to honest, passionate, Spirit-filled leaders who will fill your thoughts with God's words from the Bible and never lead you away from God.

[Prayer]



## 15

### Power from the Spirit to Speak in Other Languages

1 Corinthians 14

We have been considering the special abilities that the Holy Spirit of God gives to followers of Jesus. In a previous message we saw that God guides all of his followers to maturity and service by giving some of them special ‘speaking gifts.’ These are special abilities which the Holy Spirit gives them to announce and explain his words.

One special speaking gift that the Bible mentions is the gift of speaking in ‘tongues,’ speaking languages one has never learned.

Some believers have this remarkable ability to speak in tongues. They may speak in other human languages. Or they may speak in sounds that only God understands. Sometimes they are overcome with emotion and sounds rush from their mouths uncontrollably. Many believers cannot speak in tongues. Instead, they have other important gifts from God.

The Bible talks at length about speaking in tongues. Paul, a messenger who took the good news of Jesus to the nations and wrote several of the books of the Bible, spoke in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:18). But Paul had many words of caution to say about this gift. People in Paul’s day were amazed by the gift of speaking in tongues. Some of them sought this gift more than any other gift that the Holy Spirit gives. Some of them thought they were better people than those who did not have this ability. Some of them caused disorder and division in the churches with their spectacular gift.

The gift of speaking in tongues and the problems associated with it continue today. So it is important to take a look at what Paul says about this amazing and misunderstood gift.

**1. First, Paul says that speaking in tongues is a form of individual prayer to God.** A person who speaks in tongues speaks to God. His speech builds his own faith, but does nothing to help others grow strong. It is a matter between him and God. And so in a church setting where many people are present, speaking in tongues is not as appropriate as speaking direct, understandable words from God. Paul calls this “prophecy.” Here is what Paul says in the Bible:

*Love should be your guide. Be eager to have the gifts that come from the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy. If you speak languages that others don’t know, God will understand what you are saying, though no one else will know what you mean. You will be talking about mysteries that only the Spirit understands. But when you prophesy, you will be understood, and others will be helped. They will be encouraged and made to feel better.*

*By speaking languages that others don't know, you help only yourself. But by prophesying you help everyone in the church. I am glad for you to speak unknown languages, although I had rather for you to prophesy. In fact, prophesying does much more good than speaking unknown languages, unless someone can help the church by explaining what you mean.*

*That's how it is when you speak unknown languages. If no one can understand what you are talking about, you will only be talking to the wind. There are many different languages in this world, and all of them make sense. But if I don't understand the language that someone is using, we will be like foreigners to each other. If you really want spiritual gifts, choose the ones that will be most helpful to the church.*

1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 9-12, CEV

If God has given you the gift of speaking in a language you have never learned, you should rejoice in this marvelous gift from God. But you should always remember that this gift is to help you in your faith. It is not a gift meant for public worship unless there is someone to whom God has given the ability to interpret what you said for others' sake.

## **2. Next, Paul explains that speaking in tongues is a sign for unbelievers, not for believers.**

He writes,

*Dear brothers and sisters, don't be childish in your understanding of these things. Be innocent as babies when it comes to evil, but be mature and wise in understanding matters of this kind. It is written in the Scriptures,*

*"I will speak to my own people  
through unknown languages  
and through the lips of foreigners.  
But even then, they will not listen to me,"  
says the Lord.*

*So you see that speaking in tongues is a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for the benefit of believers, not unbelievers. Even so, if unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting and hear everyone talking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy. But if all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting, they will be convicted of sin, and they will be condemned by what you say. As they listen, their secret thoughts will be laid bare, and they will fall down on their knees and worship God, declaring, "God is really here among you."*

1 Corinthians 14:20-25, NLT

Paul is saying that speaking in tongues is a sign that strengthens an unbeliever's unbelief. It is not a sign that creates and strengthens the faith of a believer. If an unbeliever sees followers of

Jesus speaking in tongues, he will be less likely to believe. He will think that the believers are out of their minds. But if an unbeliever hears followers of Jesus speaking God's words in direct, plain language, he will be more likely to understand and turn to God in belief. This means that speaking in tongues should be limited in worship services because it may turn away unbelievers.

### 3. Finally, Paul explains that worship services are meant to be orderly.

Here is what Paul writes:

*When you meet, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in an unknown language, while another will interpret what is said. **But everything that is done must be useful to all and build them up in the Lord.** No more than two or three should speak in an unknown language. They must speak one at a time, and someone must be ready to interpret what they are saying. But if no one is present who can interpret, they must be silent in your church meeting and speak in tongues to God privately.*

*Let two or three prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said. But if someone is prophesying and another person receives a revelation from the Lord, the one who is speaking must stop. In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, **so that everyone will learn and be encouraged.** Remember that people who prophesy are in control of their spirit and can wait their turn. **For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the other churches.***

1 Corinthians 14:26-33, NLT

#### What do these words tell us about worship?

- They tell us that worship is supposed to be helpful to everyone present.
- They tell us that many people should be actively involved in worship, not just one or two.
- They tell us that people need to be polite and wait their turn to speak if they are able.
- They tell us that God will give some worshipers direct, sudden, and overpowering messages. They are overcome by a word from God. But God will give others quiet insight that comes from their knowledge and experience of God. People with such knowledge have control of their minds. They should patiently permit people with sudden messages from God to speak first.
- They tell us that the whole church needs to evaluate the truth or falsehood of what a worshiper announces in a worship service.

If there is no order in worship, conflicts will arise. Such unnecessary conflict is a disgrace to God, because God "is not a God of disorder but of peace" (verse 33).

**Conclusion: 14:39-40**

So, is speaking in tongues helpful or harmful?

- Speaking in tongues is a wonderful gift of God that blesses the believer who has that gift. It nourishes his faith as he uses it to pray privately to God.
- Speaking in tongues can be harmful when it is misused. It is not as helpful as direct teaching in understandable words. In worship services it should only be used if there is someone present who can interpret what is said for the whole church. If there is no one to interpret, speaking in tongues can drive away unbelievers and cause disruption in worship.
- With any spiritual gift, there is the danger that it will make us proud and boastful. Some people who speak in tongues wrongly say that all believers should have this ability. They make Christians who don't speak in tongues feel inferior, as if they are less dedicated to God. The right attitude to have is the desire to discover what gift(s) God gave us, and use it joyfully for God's honor and for the benefit of others.

Here is Paul's concluding word on the matter:

*So, dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues. But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.*

1 Corinthians 14:39-40, NLT

**Note to Producers:**

The topic of speaking in tongues divides many Christian groups. In particular, there are two extremes on this topic.

Some Christians claim that after the apostles died, Christians were no longer able to speak in tongues. The only evidence they give from the Bible for this idea is 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, which says that tongues will come to an end. But Paul speaks in this verse about the time of the new heavens and the new earth. After Jesus returns and we are made perfect, we will not need prophecy, tongues or special knowledge from God. And Paul's point is that even then, we will need to love one another. So love outlasts spiritual gifts. This verse does not support the idea that the gift of tongues was a temporary gift meant only for the times of the apostles.

Other Christians go to the other extreme. They say that all Christians are supposed to seek the gift of speaking in tongues. According to them, the ability to speak in tongues is the sign that a person has the Holy Spirit in them. They imply that Christians who do not speak in tongues are not as spiritual or as faithful as those who do.

These Christians base their view on several verses from the book of Acts, which give the impression that there were believers in Jesus who did not yet have the Holy Spirit (especially Acts 8:15-17, 10:44-46, and 19:1-6). These verses suggest to some people that the gift of the

Holy Spirit is a 'second blessing' that must happen after conversion, and that it is always accompanied with speaking in tongues.

But these verses speak of exceptional moments when the Christian message was first preached to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and the Gentiles (Acts 10). And the people mentioned in Acts 19 do not appear to be believers in Jesus until Paul preached to them. We should view these three sections as exceptional workings of the Spirit. We should not think that they describe the usual way that the Spirit works. This was a time of great change. The coming of the Holy Spirit was very new. The apostles were helping all believers to understand and receive the Holy Spirit. They were not establishing a two-step process for receiving the Holy Spirit—believe and later be baptized by the Holy Spirit.

We should beware the danger of making the experiences of first-century believers apply to all believers today. Did Luke expect us to base our beliefs about how the Spirit works today on his report of what the Spirit did in these instances? It does not appear that he did. The larger teaching of the Bible is that all believers have the Holy Spirit living in them, and that speaking in tongues is just one of many gifts that the Spirit gives to some people. We should base our beliefs on the larger teaching of clearer passages of the Bible, rather than make the verses in Acts say more than what Luke (and God) meant them to say.

We are giving you this information so that you are aware of different points of view. But as radio producers you will need to be careful about *whether* you will mention these ideas on the radio and how you will mention them. We suggest that you simply preach God's Word as best you understand it. It is unwise to criticize other Christian groups and teachings directly on the radio. They will hear your message, and if you are unkind, you will cause division rather than heal division. Unbelievers will also hear your message. If you are always talking about opposing Christian views on the radio, they will get confused. And they will conclude that Christians do not agree on the basic message of the Bible. As the saying goes, "Lighting a candle is better than cursing the darkness." You will be most effective if you simply preach God's Word as clearly, as intelligently, and as lovingly as you can.



## 16

### Gifts from God to Help Us Serve Each Other

Romans 12:6-8, CEV

We are studying ‘spiritual gifts.’ They are special abilities that the Holy Spirit of God gives to believers. We have seen that every follower of Jesus has one gift. Each believer uses his or her gift to benefit other people.

We have also seen that there are two kinds of gifts:

- gifts for speaking God’s words to people, and
- gifts that involve serving people.

In our previous messages we looked at the speaking gifts, including the gift of speaking in unknown languages.

**Now let us look at the other gifts the Bible mentions, the serving gifts.** The Bible has this to say:

*God has also given each of us different gifts to use. If we can prophesy, we should do it according to the amount of faith we have. **If we can serve others, we should serve. If we can teach, we should teach. If we can encourage others, we should encourage them. If we can give, we should be generous. If we are leaders, we should do our best. If we are good to others,<sup>3</sup> we should do it cheerfully.***

Romans 12:6-8, CEV

We studied the gifts of prophecy, teaching and encouraging when we looked at the teaching gifts. But we also see from these verses that some believers have the gift of **servicing**. These believers love to help other people. They invest their time and energy in assisting other people with their projects and problems. When a person with the gift of serving sees someone in need, he says, “I would love to help you!” Some of them serve by building and repairing. Some serve by providing meals. Some serve by tutoring students. Some serve by visiting the sick and helping them with their needs. Some serve by cleaning and decorating the church building. People with the gift of serving love to use whatever skills God gave them to be a blessing to others.

Others have the gift of **giving**. They have a special ability to donate their money and possessions

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<sup>3</sup>Other English translations have ‘show mercy.’ That is the usage we follow in the text of the message.

to further the reign of God. They gladly give to provide for the needs of the church. They give sacrificially to the poor and needy. When special needs arise they are the first to offer help. They might not be wealthy. They may be very poor. But they have a strong desire from God to offer what they have in order to do good. They are like Jesus. Jesus fed a large crowd with a few fish and pieces of bread. In the same way, people with the ‘gift of giving’ find ways to do great good even if they only have a little to give. And their faithfulness in giving is an example that inspires others to give, too.

Others have the gift of **leadership**. God uses them to direct and organize the church so that it will function smoothly. They are talented at seeing what the church needs to do and how it needs to do it. They know how to encourage other people to serve God and do good. This is because people recognize their gift of leadership and gladly submit to their authority. True leaders are not bossy or self-serving. They are servants who use their gift of leadership to bless and help others.

Still others have the gift of **showing mercy** to needy people, whoever they are—believers, unbelievers, even strangers and foreigners. Mercy is love that someone shows to undeserving people. Jesus was a ‘friend of sinners.’ He associated with people who had bad reputations.

These serving gifts also include the gift of **healing the sick** and the power to do **miracles**. (1 Corinthians 12:9-10). These are two extraordinary ways of serving people in need.

God expects each and every believer to serve, give, and show mercy. No one may say, “I will not serve others. That is not the ability that the Spirit gave to me,” or “I will not give. Someone else can give.” But **some people are blessed by God in extraordinary ways to serve God and people**. Some find their greatest joy in helping people who are in difficult situations. Others really enjoy being hospitable—they enjoy inviting people to their home. Others are very effective at leading and administration in the church. They use their gift to help the church function more smoothly. Others find it easy to give offerings to the poor and to the church, and they enjoy stimulating others to give.

**But even people with spiritual gifts for serving, giving, leading and showing mercy find these activities difficult at times.** Everyone gets tired at times. Everyone has difficult days. We all feel the pressure of needing to attend to ourselves and our families. When life is busy, we are tempted to ignore the needs of others and think only of ourselves. That is why **the Bible urges us to be diligent and cheerful in the use of our spiritual gifts: *If we can give, we should be generous. If we are leaders, we should do our best. If we are good to others, we should do it cheerfully.*** (verse 8).

The Holy Spirit doesn’t want us to use our spiritual gifts only occasionally or only when we feel like using them. **He gives us our spiritual gifts so that we will use them often, and use them well.** As followers of Jesus, we should try to be more and more like Jesus. He noticed the needs

of people around him and used his powers and abilities to help them. This is true of all Christians. It is especially true of Christians who have gifts for serving, giving, leading and showing mercy. We should be looking for ways to help others. We should visit the places where people are hurting. We should look for opportunities to use our leadership skills to serve others. We should be watching for people who need someone with a merciful spirit to talk to them.

Imagine what the world would be like if more believers would invest their lives in the service of other people! What a world it would be! God would use us to be a blessing to many people.

[Conclude with prayer]

### **A Note to Producers:**

The message above mentions healing the sick and the power to do miracles as two ways the Spirit enables some Christians to serve other people. If you need more information on healing and how God heals today, messages 12, 13 and 14 in the series 'Hope in the Darkness' discuss this topic. Another resource, though quite long, is the article 'Health, Disease and Healing' in the *New Bible Dictionary*.

The view that we take is that God can and does heal people in miraculous ways today. We should pray with a hopeful attitude for sick people. But God does not always heal people. We should not expect God to heal people every time we pray for healing. Sometimes he heals, other times he chooses not to heal.

Be sensitive to ALL the spiritual needs of sick people. God may use illness to punish some people. He may use illness to test others' faith. But we should not assume that if we are sick God is angry with us. That is the mistake Job's friends made. And we should not assume that if God does not answer our prayers for healing, it is because we lack faith. We should simply pray with hope, and let God answer our prayer in the way that he sees is best. Sometimes his answer is 'no.' He does not heal us. But many times his answer is 'yes.' When it is 'yes,' we can give thanks to God for his kindness to us.



## 17

**We Cannot Buy the Holy Spirit**

Acts 8:4-24

How tempting it is to use religion for power or money! Many religious leaders and enthusiasts give in to this temptation. They claim to have great spiritual knowledge and power. They attract people who are desperate and easily deceived. They take improper control over them. They convince people to give them money. They falsely promise them they will heal them and solve their problems.

The Bible has a story of a man named Simon who used religion to gain power over people. The book of Acts tells us what happened when Simon met Peter, the great apostle and follower of Jesus Christ.

Simon lived in a place called Samaria. **The Samaritans and the people of Israel were longtime enemies.** Jews refused to speak to Samaritans. But Jesus was different. He was a Jewish man yet he spoke to a Samaritan woman. He told stories that encouraged his people to be kind to Samaritans [see the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37]. And Jesus told his followers to take his message of salvation not only to their homeland of Jerusalem and Judea but to “Samaria, and everywhere in the world.” (Acts 1:8, CEV)

Here is what happened when his followers announced the good news of Jesus to their former enemies in Samaria:

*The Lord's followers who had been scattered [by the opposition of unbelievers] went from place to place, telling the good news. Philip went to the city of Samaria and told the people about Christ. They crowded around Philip because they were eager to hear what he was saying and to see him work miracles. Many people with evil spirits were healed, and the spirits went out of them with a shout. A lot of crippled and lame people were also healed. Everyone in that city was very glad because of what was happening.*

*For some time a man named Simon lived in the city of Samaria and amazed the people. He practiced witchcraft and claimed to be somebody great. Everyone, rich and poor, crowded around him. They said, “This man is the power of God called ‘The Great Power.’”*

*For a long time, Simon used witchcraft to amaze the people, and they kept crowding around him. But when they believed what Philip was saying about God's kingdom and*

*about the name of Jesus Christ, they were all baptized. Even Simon believed and was baptized. He stayed close to Philip, because he marveled at all the miracles and wonders.*

Acts 8:4-13, CEV

**The people used to crowd around Simon.** They watched his powerful displays of witchcraft. They were amazed by his abilities. They considered him to be a “Great Power” sent by God.

Then a big change happened. **People weren’t crowding around Simon any longer as before.** They were crowding around Philip. They listened to his message about Jesus. They watched him do miracles, cast out demons and heal people.

Simon used his power to attract attention to himself. He wanted people to love him. He probably gained power and money by his magic tricks. But Philip used the power of God to help people. He freed them from the evil spirits that troubled them deeply. He healed them of the diseases that made them suffer. And he told them “good news”:

- what Jesus said and did,
- how Jesus died to save people from their sins, and
- how God raised Jesus from the dead.

**Everyone believed in Jesus and was *baptized*.** They were washed in water as a sign of the way God changed them. Even Simon believed! But he was really only interested in the miracles Philip was doing.

This is what happened next:

*The apostles in Jerusalem heard that some people in Samaria had accepted God’s message, and they sent Peter and John. When the two apostles arrived, they prayed that the people would be given the Holy Spirit. Before this, the Holy Spirit had not been given to anyone in Samaria, though some of them had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Peter and John then placed their hands on everyone who had faith in the Lord, and they were given the Holy Spirit.*

*Simon noticed that the Spirit was given only when the apostles placed their hands on the people. So he brought money and said to Peter and John, “Let me have this power too! Then anyone I place my hands on will also be given the Holy Spirit.”*

*Peter said to him, “You and your money will both end up in hell if you think you can buy God’s gift! You don’t have any part in this, and God sees that your heart isn’t right. Get rid of these evil thoughts and ask God to forgive you. I can see that you are jealous and*

*bound by your evil ways.”*

*Simon said, “Please pray to the Lord, so that what you said won’t happen to me.”*

*After Peter and John had preached about the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem. On their way they told the good news in many villages of Samaria.*

Acts 8:15-25, CEV

The apostles Peter and John came to Samaria to find out more about the Samaritans’ new faith in Jesus. They were delighted to see that so many people now believed in the name of Jesus. But they also found that God had not given his powerful Holy Spirit to these new believers. They could not speak in foreign languages or do the miracles that the other early Christians did. So Peter and John prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit came to them.

**So the Samaritan believers now had the Holy Spirit in them just as the Jewish believers did.** This was God’s way of showing Peter, John and all of the first leaders of the church that God accepts Samaritans just as he accepts Jews. God is not a Jewish tribal God. He loves Jewish and Samaritan believers equally as members of his family. God gave the Samaritans the Holy Spirit through the apostles Peter and John to bring believers of both races together. They discovered the joy of accepting and respecting each other.

Simon watched with envy as Peter and John prayed and laid their hands on people to give them the Holy Spirit. He remembered when people called him the Great Power of God. Now he knew that the Holy Spirit is the Great Power of God. And he wanted to have the ability to give people that power. He wanted people to crowd around him as they did before. **Simon offered money to the apostles for this power.**

**Peter’s reply was harsh.** “You will go to hell with your money! The Holy Spirit is not for sale! He is a free gift from God! You have no part of this, because your heart is not right before God.” His precise words in the original language are, “You have no part in this word.” In other words, Simon was not a genuine believer. He did not enjoy the blessings of the message of Jesus because his heart was *crooked*—not straight, but bent and twisted. He was more interested in his own power and money than the healing of sick people.

Peter urged Simon to turn away from the evil inside him and pray to God. Simon was full of evil thoughts and bitterness. He was controlled by his selfish desires. Peter says he was a “slave to sin.” God was angry with him, and Simon needed to pray for forgiveness right away!

The Bible says that out of fear Simon begged Peter to pray for him. Simon didn’t want the awful things Peter said to come true. We know from other writers, though, that Simon did not truly

believe in Jesus. Simon later did his magic tricks in other places. He continued using his evil powers to get the attention and money of other people. Simon made a bad decision. He missed the opportunity for God to forgive him and make him a new person.

**What about you, listener?** What do you desire most? Do you desire for God to forgive your sins and change you? Or do you prefer to be noticed and admired by people? Maybe you are attracted to the Christian faith because of miracles and healings. Why? Do you truly want God to make you a better person? Or do you simply wish to have special powers so that you can attract people to follow you and obey you?

The Holy Spirit is not a power that we can buy or sell. God did not send him to earth so that clever people could use him to make money. The Holy Spirit is a Person. He is God. God gives him freely to everyone who believes in Jesus. Don't let anyone try to sell you the Holy Spirit for money! The Holy Spirit came to live in the Samaritan believers when Peter and John prayed for them. The Holy Spirit will live in you if you believe in Jesus and confess your sins to God.

Praise God for his wonderful gift to us! He overthrows greedy and clever people! He gives his powerful Holy Spirit freely to people who humbly call on him in faith. What a great God we have!

*[Prayer for people who are under the control of false religious leaders. Prayer that God will give his Spirit to many people today.]*

## 18

### There Is Something More Important than Power

1 Corinthians 13, CEV

We have been studying the special abilities that the Holy Spirit gives as gifts to everyone who believes in Jesus. It is easy for us to become excited about the power that we receive because of these gifts from the Spirit. We all want to be more powerful. We all would like to accomplish more work in less time with less effort. Then life would be easier for us.

In Bible times the Christian believers in a city named Corinth became very emotional about the gifts they had received from the Holy Spirit. Some said, “Look at me, I can do miracles because of my great faith!” Others said, “Look at me, I can speak in other languages!” Others said, “Look at me, I have special knowledge and teaching abilities!” And still others said, “Look at me, God has made me very successful at giving to people in need. He has made me very talented at serving and giving to others!”

But the Corinthian Christians became proud of their gifts. They fought over which gift was greater. Some thought that everyone ought to have the same gift that they had. Their pride and their fighting hurt the church, each other, and their testimony before unbelievers.

Paul scolded them for their foolish, harmful attitudes. He reminded them that the church is like a body, and each person in the church is like a body part. Like the parts of a body, the members of a church are all important and they use their different gifts to work together for the good of the group. The believers in Corinth were competing with each other rather than cooperating. So the body, the church, was not functioning well.

Then Paul wrote these words: “*And in any event, you should desire the most helpful gifts. First, however, let me tell you about something else that is better than any of them!*” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

**What could possibly be better than the miraculous gifts of power that the Holy Spirit gave the church? The answer is love.** Paul tells us that spiritual gifts are no good to us without love. He describes what a life of love looks like. And he says that there will come a day when people will no longer need spiritual gifts. But love will last forever.

#### **1. First, let’s read what Paul says about the absolute necessity of love:**

Paul says that even if we have the greatest imaginable powers and abilities, they do not help us if we do not love others. Here is what he says:

*What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels?*

*If I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*

*What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge?*

*And what if I had faith that moved mountains?*

*I would be nothing, unless I loved others.*

*What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive?*

*I would gain nothing, unless I loved others.*

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, CEV

**A. Many of the Corinthians were quite proud to speak in foreign languages.** They thought it was the greatest gift of the Spirit and that everyone ought to speak in tongues. Paul devotes much of his letter to them to argue against these false ideas. *And here he says that even if we could speak the language that angels speak, it would mean nothing if we don't love others.* Gongs and cymbals are very loud musical instruments. But they do not play melodies. They only make one noisy sound. In the same way, there are many people who speak, in their own language or in foreign languages, but they are only empty, meaningless noise-makers. They do not communicate love to anyone. They just make a lot of loud noise like the thump of a big drum. The harmony is missing.

**B. Some of the Corinthians were very proud of the great knowledge and wisdom God gave them.** They thought they were better than others because they had knowledge that others didn't have. Some were proud of their ability to do miracles by their faith. Paul tells them that sometimes 'all' is 'nothing.' If we understand 'all' secrets and 'all' knowledge but we don't love others, we are 'nothing.'

**C. Some of the Corinthians were proud of the special gifts of generosity and sacrifice the Spirit of God gave them.** They were able to give generously to others. They had the willingness to die for Jesus if the enemies of Christianity threatened to burn them to death. They were like the heroic men who were thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship an idol (*Daniel 3*). But even great generosity and great courage can be carried out for improper and selfish reasons! Even giving help and risking death for Jesus can be done in a loveless, joyless way. Without love even the noblest acts are nothing. Without love WE are nothing.

## **2. The acts and attitudes of love:**

So what is this thing called 'love' that is so important? Paul goes on to describe love in the next few verses. Let's look at his description line-by-line (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, CEV):

**A. "Love is kind and patient."**

When we are kind we do what is thoughtful and considerate of others. We do things that help them. When we are patient we endure the thoughtless and harmful things people do and say to us. We put up with them when they mistreat us. So love affects how we treat others and how we react to the way they treat us.

***B. “[Love is] never jealous, boastful, proud, or rude.”***

Some of the Corinthians were proud and boasted about the spiritual gifts and abilities they had. Others were jealous. They were competing with each other for what seemed to be the most important gifts. As a result, they all treated each other rudely. But love doesn't act this way. Love is determined to love others for the glory of God and the best results for all members. People who really love don't make comparisons.

***C. “Love isn't selfish or quick tempered.”***

People are selfish when they refuse to use what they have to help others. Selfish people want to withhold what they ought to give. Quick-tempered people give others something they should never give them—angry words and gestures. Love knows what to give to others and what never to give them. *Love helps us to give as Jesus did, generously, kindly, at the right moment.*

***D. “Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil.”***

When husbands and wives argue, they sometimes recite a long list of things that the other has done wrong. “You always do that,” they say, “Remember the time when you...?” But loving people do not focus their attention on negative, evil, harmful things. Loving people look for the good in people. They look for goodness and truth. They celebrate, honor and recognize good and truth whenever and wherever they find them.

***E. “Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting.”***

Love acts like a pillar. Pillars and walls support roofs of buildings. A person who acts in love supports people. And their support isn't a momentary support that quickly disappears. They are loyal. They persevere. In the original language the word ‘always’ appears four times in this verse to emphasize the ongoing nature of love. True love is a lifelong love. A person who truly loves others loves them persistently and never stops loving them. This is true of their love for God, too. They are always ‘hopeful and trusting.’ That is, they always put their faith and hope in God.

**3. Paul concludes his look at love by describing the enduring nature of love.**

Love will last forever, long after spiritual gifts are no longer needed. Here is what Paul writes:

*Love never fails!*

*Everyone who prophesies will stop,  
and unknown languages will no longer be spoken.  
All that we know will be forgotten.  
We don't know everything,  
and our prophecies are not complete.*

*But what is perfect will someday appear,  
and what isn't perfect will then disappear.  
When we were children, we thought and reasoned as children do.  
But when we grew up, we quit our childish ways.  
Now all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror.  
Later we will see him face to face.  
We don't know everything,  
but then we will, just as God completely understands us.*

*For now there are faith, hope, and love.  
But of these three, the greatest is love.*

1 Corinthians 13:8-13, CEV

**Paul is talking about the future, when God sets up his everlasting rule on earth.** What a great difference that will make in our lives!

- **The need to prophesy or speak in foreign languages will end.** Through the prophets God promised that in the end people will have no need of special messengers and teachers from God: *“No longer will they have to teach one another to obey me. I, the LORD, promise that all of them will obey me, ordinary people and rulers alike.”* (Jeremiah 31:34, CEV).
- At that time **we will be mature.** Children set aside their childish ways when they become adults. In the same way we will set aside the immaturity and foolishness that characterizes our lives now. We will begin living as mature people. We will see that much of what we did and said in this life was childish. We will solve problems through love instead of quarreling and complaining.
- On that future day **we will see God face to face!** In this life we see only faint reflections of God. We read his words in the Bible. We see his creative power through the world that he made. We see reflections of his love when someone does something kind for us. But these are brief and faint reflections of God. In this life we strain to see God as if we were straining to see our reflection in a poor-quality mirror. When God comes, we will see him directly. The reflection will be replaced by the real thing! And love is the quality Jesus will be looking for most.
- When God sets up his rule, **our knowledge of him will no longer be faulty and imperfect.**

We will know him just as well as he knows us now.

And so we see that **power and special abilities and gifts are temporary**. We will not always need them. **Of far more lasting value are faith, hope and love.**

- **Faith** is our confident belief that God exists and that what the Bible says about him is true.
- **Hope** is our trust that God's promises about our future will come true. Jesus will come again and will bring about the changes we just looked at a moment ago.
- And **love** is our undying commitment to worship and serve God and care for the people he has put in our lives.

### Why is love the greatest?

- Love is greater than faith because **someday we will no longer need faith**. The invisible God we believed in will then be visible. We will see him with our eyes. Our faith will be replaced by sight.
- Love is greater than hope because **someday we will no longer need hope**. The beautiful future we long for now will appear. As Paul says elsewhere, "if we already have what we hope for, there is no need to keep on hoping." (Romans 8:24, CEV)
- Even faith and hope will one day disappear. **But our need to love God and each other will never go away**. Love is a crucial part of the next world just as much as it is in this world. Since God is love, he will raise all followers of Jesus from the dead to live with him forever. So love will last forever. He will love us forever. We will love him forever. And we will love each other forever. As verse 8 says, "Love never fails!"

Dear listeners, I believe that God's Holy Spirit will give you every spiritual gift and ability you need for this life. I pray he surrounds you with other believers and that together you will use your gifts to serve each other and make a grand difference in our world. I pray that he fills you with great faith so that you will stay faithful to him even when everything around you tells you not to believe what he has told you. I pray that God fills you with a persevering hope for all that he has promised that he will do. But my greatest prayer for you far surpasses all other prayers in importance. I pray that God will increase love in your heart. That is the gift you need most. It makes all of the Spirit's gifts work together in a beautiful harmony of joy, peace and God's blessing.