

## The Empowerment of the Holy Spirit

by Harrison Conley

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I feel like God has put me in this place to challenge us, to challenge the way that we think, to challenge the way that we live, to challenge the way even that we respond to God. And with that in mind this morning, if it's alright with you, I want to challenge us once again. Because there's something that I see in the Scripture that applies to each and every one of us, yet it's something that we don't see often manifested or on display in the life of believers, and that's the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

I've been thinking a lot recently, which can sometimes be a very dangerous game, but I've been thinking a lot recently. And I just wonder that if the Holy Spirit were to withdraw Himself from the Church, if the Holy Spirit were to withdraw Himself from the Church across America, I wonder if 95% of what we do would just keep going on and if anybody would know the difference. Now, in comparison to that, I've also been thinking about the early Church, the Church that we read about in the book of Acts. Had the Holy Spirit withdrawn Himself from them, 95% of what they did would've stopped, and everybody would've known the difference.

Do you see the two pictures there? Do you see the two pictures there? Okay. Cool. I just wanted to make sure that we were all still together.

And this morning, I want to talk to you about one of the major issues that I see missing in Christendom today. Now the Church of today is great at building systems and building structures. The Church of today is great at putting on programs and developing skill sets, all of which are very important, but it seems like there's one major thing that's missing, and that's the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

If you're taking notes this morning, that's what I want to entitle this sermon, "The Empowerment of the Holy Spirit." You're going to help me preach this morning. Right!?! I'm not in here by myself. Okay. Good. I just needed to double-check.

Right now, we're in the midst of a 12-week summer series called "Empowered." And what we're doing is we're going through the book of Acts as well through some of the Pauline epistles. And we're putting the early Church, the New Testament Church, under the microscope. And in particular, we're studying and we're highlighting the work and the movement of the Holy Spirit as it pertains to His involvement through the Church.

And I know you know this, but that term "Church" that we see in the New Testament, it's not just a reference to a physical structure. It's not four walls and a steeple. And it certainly includes that idea, but the word "Church" in the Greek, in the original language which the New Testament was written, is the word "Ecclesia," and it literally means the called-out ones.

And you don't have to read the Scriptures very long before you realize that's actually a really good name for believers, Ecclesia: the called-out ones. Because for those of us that have called Jesus, Lord, we've been called out of darkness, and we've been brought into the light. Right!?!

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We've been called out of the kingdom of this world, and we've been placed into the kingdom of God.

And this conversion from one kingdom to another kingdom, this calling out if you will, it had nothing to do with us. Our conversion is purely an act of the grace of God. And we access it through faith. It's not of works. We don't earn it. We certainly couldn't achieve it. It's not something we pay for. No, it's a gift. And it was paid for through the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus. And for each of us that have now put our faith in Jesus, we get filled with His Holy Spirit. Salvation gets applied to our lives, and we become His Church. We become His Ecclesia, the called-out ones.

And let me just say this from the beginning, the Church; and you and me as individuals, the Church meaning you and me collectively as a group of Jesus followers, the Church will never be all that it was intended to be without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

One of my favorite Christian authors is a man named Andrew Murray. He lived in the 1800s, and he wrote a multiplicity of books on prayer and on personal devotion. Some of his books have really challenged me. He's got this great combination. He confirms, and he also convicts, and it's sort of a really good combination.

But he had this to say, and I want to just quote him. He's talking about the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. They're going to throw it on the screen so you can read it with me, but Andrew Murray said this, "Men (and women) ought to seek with their whole hearts to be filled with the Spirit of God. Without being filled with the Spirit, it is utterly impossible that an individual Christian or a church can ever live or work as God desires." We must have the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

And as we look to the Scriptures, as we look to the example that's set by the New Testament Church, we see without a doubt that these early believers they understood and they operated in complete, total dependence upon the Holy Spirit. They depended upon His guidance. They depended upon His power.

Someone goes, "What does that mean? What does that look like?" Well, if you read through the book of Acts, what you will find is that through the work and through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, these early believers, they were empowered to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to raise the dead, to boldly preach the gospel with many signs and wonders accompanying their preaching. That's what it looks like in the early Church to be empowered.

So, let me ask you a question. Let me go back to that statement I made earlier. This is the challenge I want to bring to us this morning. In our 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christianity, why don't we regularly see the type of things that we read about in the book of Acts? Have the gifts stopped? Were the miracles and the supernatural just for back then? No. The answer to that is an emphatic no. And I'm going to tell you why in just a minute. But I do realize that Cottonwood is made up of a diverse group of people.

And perhaps some of you grew up in a doctrine or in a denominational background. And you were taught from a young age that the Holy Spirit and His gifts were relegated to a past age, that the gifts have stopped, that they're not in operation anymore.

And if that's you, maybe you're going, "Well, what do you have to say on the subject?" Let me start by saying this. I'm never going to speak ill of a church that preaches Jesus. I'm never going

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to speak ill of a church that makes much of Jesus, that puts Him at the forefront. Because listen, Jesus is the message. And anybody or any church that's going to preach Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life, I'm going to find common ground with them, and we're going to be friends.

Having said that, to teach and to believe that the gifts and the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit were only for a bygone era, to me, that seems like an incomplete reading and teaching of the Scriptures. On top of that, never forget Jesus. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.

But as you look at the narrative of Scripture, you can't help but see a pattern emerge. And this pattern is that the Holy Spirit is active from the book of Genesis all the way to the end in the book of Revelation. That includes us. Because, as believers, we're also a part of this narrative of Scripture. We're living in the latter days. We're living in the end-times, times that were prophesied about in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. We're the ones waiting imminently for the return of Christ. And as such, we, too, should expect to see the movement and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Now, as I read the Scriptures, I can't help but notice. But we, as followers of Jesus, as the Ecclesia, one of the major defining marks of our lives should be that empowerment from the Holy Spirit.

Let me show you what I mean. If you got your Bible, let's go to the beginning, Genesis 1. Genesis 1. Let me show you this pattern of the Holy Spirit in action. Genesis 1:1. You're going to be very familiar with this, but it says,

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.

And then catch this.

<sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of God was hovering . . .

That word literally means "moving." The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

Now here's what I want you to catch. This is the very first mention of the Holy Spirit in all of Scripture. And it reveals to us that He's in motion, that the Holy Spirit is moving. And what we will see from the very beginning to the very end of the Bible is that the Holy Spirit is always in divine movement. And when He moves, creative power and divine power gets released.

So here in the book of Genesis, the Holy Spirit, He's hovering. He's moving over the face of the water. And what happens? Creative divine power gets released, and He takes what is chaotic and He brings order to it.

And throughout the entirety of Scripture, you will find over and over again that when the Holy Spirit is present and begins to move, His power gets released, situations begin to change, things get restored, individuals are divinely empowered, and the supernatural takes place.

Think about all the examples we see of this in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit is not just a New Testament thing or idea. And by the way, the Holy Spirit is not just an idea. Period. The Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead. He's the third part of the Godhead. He's not the stepchild of the Godhead. He's just as much God as the Father is God. He's just as much God as the Son is

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God. But think about His movement throughout the Old Testament. We see Him time after time, come upon common people, people like you and people like me. And as the Holy Spirit came upon them, they were empowered to accomplish uncommon things and supernatural feats.

Think about all the times He's mentioned in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit is never silent. He's always moving. He's speaking. He's enabling. He's strengthening. He's releasing the creative power of God upon individuals in their situations.

Think about people like Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Samson, Deborah, Esther. Think about David, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel. All of these people were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Then we move into the New Testament. We look at the Gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and we see the movement of the Holy Spirit upon the life of Jesus.

Think about how the story starts. The angel Gabriel shows up to this young teenage girl named Mary. Remember what he said to her? He goes, "Hey, Mary, you found favor with God, and you're going to conceive and bring forth a Son, and His name's going to be Jesus." She's like, "Oh, okay. How?" She goes, "I'm still a virgin." Luke 1:35, this is what the angel responds.

<sup>35</sup> "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.

So I want you to see this picture. The angel tells Mary the Holy Spirit's going to move upon her, and as a result of His movement, the power of God is going to come upon her, and she would supernaturally conceive Jesus in her womb. So Jesus isn't even born yet, and we already see the involvement of the Holy Spirit upon His life.

Fast forward 30 years in the future, Jesus is about to start His earthly ministry, and we see Him being baptized by John the baptizer in the river Jordan. The Scripture says this in Luke 3, that as Jesus comes up out of the waters of baptism, what happens? The Holy Spirit descends, moves like a dove. And what's the result of this Holy Spirit movement? Jesus gets supernaturally empowered by the Spirit.

In the next verse, right after we see Jesus being baptized, we find it in Luke 4:1. It says this,

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit (*being filled with the Holy Spirit*), returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Now, drop down to verse 18; we drop down a little further. We get a greater description of what this empowerment of the Holy Spirit looked like upon Jesus' life. Jesus says this (Luke 4:18),

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; <sup>19</sup> To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

So here is what I want you to see this morning. Jesus didn't step into His earthly ministry until He was empowered by the Spirit. And if Jesus needed the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to accomplish His purpose here on the earth, how in the world do we think that we can go about

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our days living lives that matter, trying to fulfill our calling, trying to fulfill our purpose, absent from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit?

Do you want to know what the secret to Jesus' love and compassion for people was? The empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Do you want to know what the secret of Jesus' ability to lead and disciple people was? The empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Do you want to know the secret of Jesus' ability to heal and deliver people? The empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Yet I'm over here trying to be the man God's called me to be, trying to be a godly husband, a godly father, trying to be a good pastor that leads people well. And if I'm honest, how often do I try and do that in and of my own ability, in and of my own strength, in and of my own intellect? And what I find out is that when I try that, I always come up short.

If Jesus needed the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, how much more do I need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit? I need. We need. We need the anointing of the Holy Spirit. And listen, this empowerment doesn't come as a one-off prayer. Like a prayer we pray after we get saved. We're like, "Oh, God, anoint me." No, it doesn't work like that. This is a daily need. This is a daily desire. We need the power. We need the anointing of the Holy Spirit today. We need it tomorrow. We need it the day after that.

And hear me; what I'm about to say is going to challenge you. It is about to rub some of you the wrong way. But some of you are trying to live and operate off of the grace, and the anointing God gave you ten years ago. And you look at your life, and you're like, "Man, I don't get it. I don't understand why this isn't working. I don't understand why I keep falling prey to familiar sins. I don't understand why I'm not living in victory. I don't understand why my prayers aren't being answered." You're like, "Man, I just don't get it. I'm not growing in my relationship with God. I feel like I'm just going through the motions. I feel like I'm stuck in cement. The things that used to stir my heart, they don't stir my heart anymore. I've grown complacent. I have no motivation to make a difference in the sphere of the influence that God has entrusted to me. And certainly, as I look at my life, I'm not seeing the miraculous." Somebody goes, "Well, why is that happening?" Because you can't live off an old anointing. You need a fresh wind. You need a fresh power. You need a fresh supply.

This is why Paul would instruct the Ephesian Church in Ephesians 5. He would say, "Be ye filled with the Spirit."

You like that? Old King James, "Be ye filled."

Now in context, when Paul says that, he's not talking about the salvation experience. Listen, when each and every one of us says yes to Jesus, He becomes Lord and Savior. The Bible says He fills us with His Holy Spirit. That's not what Paul's talking about here. He's talking about post-salvation. He's talking about an experience that comes, an empowerment that comes on a heart that's hungry for more of God. How do I know that? It is because when he says be filled with the Spirit, that word "filled" in the original language it's in the infinitive form. It means to be filled and get filled again, and again, and again, and again.

Now you've probably heard me use this language before, but you and me, at our best, we're just leaky vessels. And the truth is, if we're going to be successful in accomplishing the purpose for which God has put us on the planet, we have to sit under the fountain. That fountain is Christ. We regularly need to be filled to overflowing by the power of His Holy Spirit. And I'm telling you that if we will seek that, if we will desire after that, if we will pursue that, He will fill us. He will

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anoint us. He will empower us. But hear me, Church. Here's the thing—you have to want it. You have to desire it. You have to be desperate for it.

And I know we're in church, and the easy thing to do is go, "Amen, preacher. I want that. Yes. I need the anointing. Yes. I want to be empowered by the Holy Spirit." But can I be real honest? The proof's in the pudding. And the truth is we can sit in church, and we can be challenged and inspired. We can know the right things. We can say the right things, but then we can go home into our personal relationship with Jesus and do absolutely nothing about it. And we're content to just stand pat and leave the desperation for somebody else.

Church, I pray that it would not be so with us. I pray that we'd be people known by a holy desperation. I pray that the Holy Spirit would impart to each of us a holy discontentment with the thought of staying spiritually stagnant being repulsive to us. I want us to move and to breathe and desire to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, to see His power on display in our lives. And I know this to be true, that God will meet each of us at the level of our desire. He will meet each of us at the level of our desperation.

The Bible says this; that if you will seek after God and seek Him with your whole heart, not a portion of your heart, not when it's convenient. If you will seek Him with all of your heart, desperation, desire, if you will seek after Him, He'll be found by you.

Now, when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit, when it comes to the empowerment of the Spirit, the same principle, it holds true. This is why Paul would write in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, those great chapters that talk about spiritual gifts; he would say over and over within those chapters the starting place to see the gifts in operation is desire.

He says to desire the best gift, earnestly desire the gifts, desire to prophesy, earnestly desire the anointing and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Now, this is something we certainly see on display in the lives of the early Church. We see it. We know that everything that they did, they did through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. That's why the book in the Bible that's dedicated to the New Testament Church is called the book of Acts. Because it's the acts of the apostles, the acts of believers through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We need this, guys.

Do you remember the great commission? Jesus is about to ascend into heaven, and He goes, and He says something to His disciples. He says something to us. He says while you're on the planet, here's your work: the commission, co-mission. You're on a mission together. I want to read it to you. Mark 16:15, Jesus says this to His disciples,

<sup>15</sup> "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. <sup>16</sup> He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

<sup>17</sup> And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

"These signs will follow." Now, that's an intriguing expression in the original language. Now that word "signs" it's actually the word where we derive our English word "signature." And the word picture that Jesus is using here is essentially saying that as we as disciples go out on mission preaching the gospel, that God's signature should be upon our ministry. That the supernatural



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signs, the supernatural signature of God, is what Jesus' promise would accompany the preaching of the Word, that it would be God's official declaration that we are sent by Him and that the message we bring is true. His signature; these signs will follow.

Another word, that word "follow" in the original language, it paints a little bit of a different picture than what we see in English. To follow somebody in English, you're behind them, but the word "follow" in the Greek, it literally means to tirelessly accompany someone, to be at their side, to be glued or joined at the hip.

Think about that little boy that, for Christmas, gets a puppy. And they have that instant bond. And everywhere the boy goes, the dog goes. They're side by side. They're joined at the hip. They're of one mind. They think together. They run together. They act together. They're joined. That dog follows at his side.

This is the picture that Jesus is painting for His disciples. That as we're on mission, signs and wonders would continually be at our side, continually be in step with us when the gospel is preached. Now that's a beautiful promise. But, all in all, it seems like a pretty tall order from Jesus. It's a big deal to be a witness for the gospel around the world. It seems like it's more than any one disciple or any group of disciples could do together.

That's why Jesus would go on to tell this same group in Acts 1 that, hey guys, before you go out on this mission, there's a key ingredient that you need first. Look what Jesus tells them in Acts 1:4,

<sup>4</sup> And being assembled together with them, He (*Jesus*) commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father,

To wait. What are we waiting for, Jesus? You're waiting for this key ingredient

<sup>4</sup> "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; <sup>5</sup> for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Drop down to verse 8. Here's why you got to wait for the Spirit,

<sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power . . .

That's that English word where we get "dynamite." The Greek word "dunamis."

<sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

So Jesus says, "Hey guys, I need you to go in the earth and be My witness. I need you to go into the earth and preach the gospel. And as you preach, I promise you that signs and wonders are going to faithfully accompany the preaching of the gospel." But He says, "Hey guys, before you go, you've got to wait. You've got to wait for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit."

We see in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost this is the fulfillment of that promise. As the disciples are gathered there in the upper room, the Bible says the Holy Spirit begins to move. The Holy Spirit comes in like a rushing wind. And when the power of the Spirit moved through the room, it filled these disciples. They were set ablaze with the fire of God, and they were then empowered

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to go into the world, just like Jesus commanded them to do. And it's through the Spirit's empowerment inside of these same disciples that they turned the world upside down.

Listen, we will never accomplish what God has called us to accomplish until we are empowered by that same Spirit.

And I wish we had time to go line-by-line through the book of Acts. Perhaps that'll be a different sermon series for a different day, but this is why as you read through this book, you see the supernatural regularly manifested in the New Testament Church. Because although they were ordinary people, they lived lives empowered by the Spirit, and signs and wonders became the rule and not the exception.

You just do a quick flyover in the book of Acts, immediately, you start seeing the results of a life that's empowered by the Holy Spirit. You see things happen like supernatural healing. You see supernatural guidance and wisdom given through vision and prophecy. You see angelic intervention. You see the supernatural power over demonic forces. You see the dead being raised back to life. You see supernatural miracles of provision. You see supernatural boldness accompanying preaching. You see supernatural generosity get released through the Church. You see supernatural joy and favor. There's a supernatural unity that takes place amongst believers. And that's just to name a couple of things right off the surface.

And if I'm honest, I look at that list, and I go, "Man, where are these things in the Church of America today?" I mean, we see them occasionally, but they seem to be the exception and not the rule. And I know that the gifts haven't ceased. I know that the Holy Spirit still empowers believers. He still empowers the Church today. So I have to ask, where's the disconnect? Maybe if we want to see more of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation, then maybe, just maybe, our lives need to look a little bit more like those early Church believers.

Again, here's the big idea. Here's the challenge. I don't know about you, but I genuinely want to see the Holy Spirit move like He did in the book of Acts. I want to see revival break out in the church. I want to see revival break out in our city. I want to see revival break out in our nation. Look, we won't reach the next generation, we won't reach our teenagers and our kids without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We need the supernatural. We need signs and wonders. Hear me; stale religion is not going to get the job done. We need the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

Even for me personally, I want the supernatural to be a regular part of my life. I don't want it to be just the exception. I want it to be the norm. I desire this. Yet I have to go, "Hey, does my life mirror the early Church?"

The early believers; they set a model for us as to what this looks like. But if we don't have the same values, if we don't have the same priorities, if we don't employ the same practices and habits of life, how in the world can we expect to see the same type of things happen here in our church and in our lives? I got to ask this, does this make sense? Are you seeing what I'm trying to put in front of you?

Let me give you three defining traits of the early Church. Three non-negotiable features of lives that are defined by the Holy Spirit's empowerment. We actually see all three of them listed for us in the book of Acts.



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Acts 2:42. It says this, speaking of the early believers,

<sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

So here's the first non-negotiable trait of a life empowered by the Spirit, looking at the example of the New Testament Church. Number one, they were people of the Word. They were people of the Word. I know this is elementary, but maybe that's what we need; to get back to the basics. They were people of the Word. According to the verse we just read, Acts 2:42 says, "They continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and or teaching."

What does that mean, doctrine or teaching? It's talking about the teaching of God's Word. And I love that the verse says they continued steadfastly in it. Modern translation, they were obsessed with the Word of God. They couldn't get enough. They didn't just get it at church. They got it at home. They studied the Word with their spouse, with their kids, with their friends, even with their neighbors, and we're going to get that in just a minute, but I want this to sink in. The early Church was obsessed with the Word of God.

Let me ask you a question. How does your life compare to that? If someone were to look at your life, could they say, "That person; they're obsessed with the Word of God?" Because in my experience, it would seem many of us have so much dust on the cover of our Bibles we could write our name on it.

So again, I have to ask, have we stopped giving proper attention to God's Word? Have we stopped memorizing Scripture? Do we think, "Oh, that's something that kids do in kids' church?" No, it's something that we need to do. Do our lives move so fast? Are we so easily distracted that we've become derelict when it comes to our love and our desire for the Word of God? Do we meditate upon it? Do we think on it? Do we write it out? Do we speak it out?

English theologian and pastor; John Stott, he said this, "We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency, and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior."

And as we look to the example of the New Testament Church, we see with total clarity that they craved; they hungered for the Word of God. What was the result of this? I love this. It's actually the very next verse, Acts 2:43. It says that many signs and wonders were done through the apostles. So catch the picture here. Signs and wonders occurred concurrently with the early believers and their intense desire for the Word of God. And where the Word of God is declared in power, it sets the atmosphere for the miraculous. Why? Because the Word of God, that Bible that you have in your hands—it's living, it's breathing, and it's active. It's not just a book that was written in antiquity. It's not just a history. It's not just a book full of principles and morality. No. Contained within the pages of that Book is the manifold wisdom and power of God. And when the Word of God gets preached, faith begins to rise in human hearts. Why? Because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. And I'm telling you, in the kingdom of God, everything is activated by faith. It's by faith we have salvation. It's by faith we inherit the promise. It's by faith we draw near to God. It's by faith that the promises of God become a reality in our life. It's by faith that we have a bridge that connects us to God's power.

And again, I look to the example of the New Testament believers in the book of Acts and what we see is that in a church setting, the Holy Spirit is most active when the Word of God is being preached.

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Now, I'm grateful for worship, and the Holy Spirit is active upon worship. I'm grateful for being in small groups, and the Holy Spirit is active there. I'm grateful for my own personal time I spend with God. The Holy Spirit is active there. But when you study the book of Acts, and you look particularly in a church setting, the Holy Spirit is most active with signs, wonders, and the supernatural when the Word of God is being preached.

You see supernatural healing take place so much so that the apostles would walk past people, and their shadows would touch those people, and they'd be instantly healed. You see demons get cast out. You see the dead being raised back to life. You see people getting saved and set free from demonic strongholds. People filled with the Spirit, given instantly the gift of tongues, and that's just to name a few.

And on top of that, and history has proven this to be true, that when the Word of God is proclaimed, when it's believed, and when it's applied, it actually has the ability to turn entire civilizations upside down. It eradicates spiritual darkness, ignorance, disease, inequality, poverty, racism. Here's the point. If we want lives empowered by the Holy Spirit, we have to first and foremost be people of the Book.

You are like, "Pastor, I want the Holy Spirit's empowerment." Good. Read your Bible. Memorize the Word of God. Make it a part of your daily life.

Here's the second defining trait that we see in the early Church, and again, it's listed for us. Acts 2:42, "But they were people in community." Acts 2:42,

<sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

What does that mean, fellowship, breaking of bread? It speaks of having a deep, meaningful relationship with other people. Listen, we were put on the planet for the purpose of having a relationship with God and relationship with others. Our job is to reach others for the kingdom, but you have to understand life is more than you. It's more than me.

This is why community is not just important, it's essential. Because the isolated person gets sidetracked from our mission, and more than that, they begin to slip into selfishness. And if you think that this life is about you, two things. Number one, you're doing life wrong. Number two, you're going to end up lonely and immature. It's Christ-centered relationship. It's Christ-centered community that enables us to be strengthened in our relationship with God. It's Christ-centered community that helps us mature into the image into the likeness of Christ, which by the way, that's the goal. Maturity in the Christian life—that is the goal. It's not just to one day make it to heaven. It's to become more and more like Jesus. And it's there in that place of Christian community, where iron sharpens iron, and we get a greater picture and revelation of who Jesus is.

That's why I prayed at the beginning. Holy Spirit, reveal to us the person of Jesus because if we can see Him, we can be like Him.

We see more of Jesus together than we do alone.

Here's another necessity for being plugged into Christ-centered community is because it makes suffering through trials bearable. And you don't need me to tell you this. Look at the world

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around you. In this life, there will be persecution. There will be suffering. We will go through trials. Sometimes those trials happen to us. Other times we create those trials through our own stubbornness and sin.

And throughout my years pastoring people, leading people, I've seen a pattern emerge that when trials come, those that don't lean into Christian community they fall off the map, but those that do lean into Christian community they last.

I got two friends here in the church. I think about them. At one point in both of their lives, they went through really difficult seasons. One of them lost his wife to cancer. The other one really struggled with addiction and substance abuse. And the thing that both of these guys have in common is that in that season of grief and trial, they both leaned into Christ-centered community. One leaned into the young adult's community. The other leaned into our amazing community called Celebrate Recovery. And as they got in there and as they got open and honest with other believers, as they asked for help, what they saw was not judgment, not condemnation. What they saw was believers rallied around them, encouraged them, prayed for them, checked in with them.

They got embraced. They saw acceptance. Guess what the result of that was? Both of those guys are still in the church, both of those guys still love Jesus, and both of those guys are thriving in life.

On the other hand, I've got another friend. And not that long ago, she lost her dad. And at one point, she was very strongly connected in the church, served in different areas, lots of friends. But when her dad passed, she began to pull away. And I personally reached out to her. I know lots of friends that reached out to her, yet she continued to pull away, and it's incredibly tragic because you look at her life now; she's no longer in church. She's no longer serving Jesus.

Hear me. One of the greatest tactics of the enemy is to be isolated. He wants to isolate the believer because when you get isolated, you become vulnerable to his attacks. But when you are anchored in Christ-centered community, you don't have to go through those things alone. When you're in the midst of community, you have people that walk with you, that pray for you, that lift you up before God, that lift up your weary arms, people that pick you up, push you forward and say, "Hey, we're going to make it together." They give us a greater sense of perspective. They help us put our focus back on Jesus.

And when you look at the example of the New Testament Church being plugged into Christian community, it wasn't optional. It was a necessity. It was essential. Think about the great apostle Paul. He wrote two-thirds of the New Testament, traveling the world, preaching the gospel, encouraging pastors, encouraging churches. You know what Paul always had; he always had companions. He never traveled alone; whether it was Barnabas, John Mark, Luke, Timothy, Silas, Silvanus, Tychicus, Onesimus, he always had people with him.

He was in community; people that would suffer in his pain and, at the same point, rejoice in his joy.

The New Testament writer of Hebrews, who many people actually attribute to the apostle Paul, he felt very strongly on the same topic, and inspired by the Spirit, he would emphatically write to the Church and say this, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. Especially as you see the day of Christ's return approaching." Now that was a true statement then; it's even

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truer now today. We have to be people in community. It was a defining mark of the early Church, and as a result, they were people greatly empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Now I don't know what it is about community. Maybe it's just the fact that God is community in and of Himself. He's three distinct Persons, yet one God, God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And when we embrace community, when we live in community, we're reflecting Him. We're reflecting His nature. We're reflecting His essence.

I mean, even think about the word "community." It's a compound word in the English language. Two words put together. "Comm" coming from the word commune, and then the second word, "unity." Comm or commune meaning to gather together. Unity meaning to share one heart and one mind.

And we know this that when brethren dwell together in unity, God commands a blessing. And it's there in that place of unity that the anointing and the power of the Holy Spirit get compounded and then released into the atmosphere and into the life of the Church.

And then, finally, let's wrap this up.

The third trait of the early church is that they were a people given to prayer. Again, basic, but we got to get back to the basics.

They were people given to prayer. Acts 2:42,

<sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

I believe it was Leonard Ravenhill who said this. The early Church was married to poverty, prisons, and persecution. Yet they were people of prayer. And as a result, they were profuse with the power of the Holy Spirit. Today the Church is married to popularity, prosperity, and personality. We have become a people who neglect prayer, and as a result, we are puny in Holy Spirit power.

Think about the early Church. They didn't have the benefit of technology. They didn't have video on a screen. They didn't have amplified sound through a microphone, yet they shook the world. And hear me, what the Church needs today is not more technology. It doesn't need more organization. It doesn't need more methods.

What the Church needs are men and women whom the Holy Spirit can use, men and women who are given to prayer, who are mighty in prayer. Because the Holy Spirit doesn't anoint or flow through methods or machinery. He anoints, and He flows through men and women of prayer.

And in the book of Acts, we see a pattern of powerful prayer, and it gets established from the very beginning. Literally, from chapter 1 to chapter 27, you would be really hard-pressed to find one chapter where prayer is not mentioned.

As you look through those chapters multiple times, you'll see prayer mentioned. And for these early believers, when they prayed, things happened. The power of God got released.

Again, the Holy Spirit, He doesn't anoint methods. He anoints people. He anoints people.

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And when these believers prayed, the supernatural got released. We see buildings shake. We see cities change. We see prisons unlocked. We see angels dispatched. We see visions given. We see the dead come back to life. But here's the point. For the early Church, these early believers, prayer wasn't something that they just tried to fit into their schedule. It wasn't a supplement that they added onto their already preexisting spiritual lives. It wasn't something that they just did when they had time for it. No, prayer was a part of who they were. It defined them. Their lives fit around prayer. It was a priority, and it was a necessity for them.

And look, guys, I know we live in a world that moves at a million miles an hour. I know that most days, at least for me, it doesn't seem like there are enough hours in the day. But, Church, I can't help but wonder, have we been doing this thing wrong?

I know for me, if I'm honest, far too often prayer, it ends up being a last resort or something that I just sort of sneak into real quick before a meeting or that I sneak in real quick before I eat a meal. And again, if I'm honest, this is an area of my life that the Holy Spirit has put His finger on. He said, "Hey, look, if you're going to be who I've called you to be, if you're going to partake in what I've called you to partake in, prayer has to be a priority. It can't be an afterthought. It has to be the first thing on your mind."

So for the last year and a half of my life, God's honest truth, for the last year and a half of my life, I've done my very best to make prayer a priority, to be my first thought. I've endeavored to make it a necessity. And as I've done that, I've noticed a couple things. And as you make prayer a necessity in your life, you'll notice a couple things. Here's the first one. When I pray, I'm far more efficient when I go about my day.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, he said this, "I've got so much to do today." How many can relate with that? He said, "I got so much to do today that it will not be accomplished if I don't spend the first three hours in prayer."

Here's the second thing I've noticed. That when I pray, I'm far more patient with people, especially my kids. And God knows I need that.

Here's the third thing I've noticed. That I live with a greater sense of peace, and I'm not easily overwhelmed. Philippians 4:6,

<sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup> and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

And then here's the last one, and this one's twofold. As prayer has become a priority in my life, I find that, number one, I operate in a greater anointing. And then number two, I hear, and I recognize the voice of God much clearer.

Let me explain that. Every month on the first Wednesday, we have a service, and oftentimes we do a worship night. And if you've not joined us, please do. It's been amazing. But the first Wednesday service in June, my role that night was certainly not to lead worship, but I was going to get up and lead in communion. And to be honest, I've led in communion a thousand times, and if I wanted to, I could switch my brain off and come up here and do it from autopilot mode. I know what to say. I know how to say it. But because I've endeavored to make prayer a

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necessity and a priority in my life for a week leading up to that first Wednesday, I said, “Holy Spirit, is there something special You want to do during communion?” And I began to just pray.

I had communion on my mind. And the night before that first Wednesday service, I felt like the Holy Spirit said, “Hey, when you get to the part with the bread about the body of Christ, I want you to stop, I want you to pause, and I want you to talk about healing. And I want you to talk about the promise we have of healing through the stripes that were laid on Jesus’ back.” And then I heard the Holy Spirit say three things to me. He said, “I want you to pray for someone that has a deviated septum.” I’m like, “I don’t even know what that means.” Like, I had to Google it. I’m like, “I hope this is a thing.” So it popped up on Google, and I’m like, “Oh, maybe I am hearing from God here.” But He said, “I want you to pray for someone that has a deviated septum.” He said, “I want you to pray for someone that’s got sleep apnea, and they’ve been having horrible night terrors because of that sleep apnea.” And then I just felt this distinct thing. Holy Spirit said, “I want you to pray for someone that’s deaf in their left ear.”

So the first Wednesday service comes, and I’m on the front row. We’re worshipping God. The presence of God is rich in this place. And I’ve been praying in tongues under my breath the whole service. And my part of the service comes up, and I begin to lead in communion. And we get to the part with the bread, and I said, “Hey, I just want to stop here and talk about the promise we have. There’s a promise in the life to come that we’re going to step into a new body. Get a whole body, a body like unto Christ, impervious to sin and sickness, disease. Thank God for total healing that’s going to come. But it’s also a promise for the here and now that by the stripes of Jesus, we have healing.” And then I said this, “And I feel like there’s somebody here that has a deviated septum. And I just want you to know that Holy Spirit’s moving, and He’s touching you right now.”

And then I said, “Hey, there’s somebody here that’s been diagnosed with sleep apnea, and it’s been waking you up in the night. And as a result of all of this, you’ve had the worst night terrors that you’ve ever seen. And I just feel like the Holy Spirit is moving upon you now, and He’s going to touch you.” And this one made me a little nervous. But I said, “Hey, I feel like there’s somebody here that’s deaf in their left ear. And tonight, the Holy Spirit’s going to open your ear.” And I prayed a short, hot prayer, finished doing communion, went down to the front row, and just continued to worship.

Service gets done, and I had multiple people come to me and say, “Hey, hey, you were praying for someone that had sleep apnea. I just got diagnosed with it, and I’ve been having the worst nightmares of my life. And when you prayed . . .” (This is the way they described it). “When you prayed, I felt an electricity go through my body.” And they said, “Pastor, I think God touched me. I think I’m healed.” And I’ve checked in with them since, and they said they’ve slept like babies.

The same night I’m talking to Pastor Tom after service. He goes, “Harrison, you won’t believe this, but I was talking to someone in the service afterward, and they said that they’ve been deaf in their left ear. And they heard you say it, and when you said it, they piqued their attention. And when you prayed, Holy Spirit opened their ear, and now, they can hear.”

About a week later, I’m sitting at my desk, and this email comes through, and it’s from a lady that was watching on live stream. She couldn’t be here in person for the worship night, but she had been watching live stream. And she said, “When you got up, and you prayed for someone with a deviated septum . . .” I said, ‘Oh, thank You, Jesus, You see me. And she was writing just to say that she had been completely healed by the power of the Holy Spirit.



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Now, why am I telling you all of this? I'm telling you this because I want you to see we serve a God who responds to prayer, and He releases His power when we pray in obedience to His Word.

Listen to me; there is no substitute for the anointing of God. It's the anointing that breaks the yoke. There's no substitute for the anointing. But hear this, there's also no shortcut to the anointing. There's no "Oh, God, fill me," and then you go on your way. No. You have to sit in His presence. He doesn't anoint programs. He doesn't anoint methods. He anoints people that will sit in His presence.

The anointing is found, and it's fortified in one place, the place of prayer when prayer becomes a lifestyle, when you have constant prayer at work in your life. Multiple times in the New Testament, we're told to pray without ceasing. To pray continually, to pray when things are good, and to pray when things are bad.

We're instructed to pray as individuals, and we're instructed to pray as a community. We're instructed to pray when we know what to do, and we're instructed to pray when we don't know what to do. We're instructed to pray in our native language, and we're instructed to pray in other tongues. We're instructed to pray for the loss. We're instructed to pray for God's will and His kingdom to be done in the earth. We're instructed to pray for physical provision, for wisdom, for us to be delivered from evil, for us to have strength to forgive those that have persecuted us. We're to pray for spiritual leaders, for government leaders, for all those in authority.

We're to pray that we live peaceable lives. We're to pray for open doors and opportunities for the gospel to go forth. We're to pray for new believers, new contacts that the devil would not take them. We're to pray for healing for the sick, for deliverance for the captive, for deliverance for those that are demonically oppressed. But here's the point, in all things, pray, pray, pray. In the big things, pray. In the small things, pray. In the daily things, pray. It's got to become a lifestyle of ongoing prayer. It's an unfolding experience of the power, the presence of God. We need the anointing.

Let me go back to something I said earlier. Some of us; we're trying to live off an old anointing, but what sustained us back then is not going to enable us to move forward now. Oh God, we need a fresh wind. We need a fresh anointing.

I believe with all of my heart that God is getting ready to pour out His Spirit upon the earth. That just as it was prophesied by the prophet Joel, even as it was repeated by Peter on the day of Pentecost, God is getting ready to pour out His Spirit. I believe we're living in the latter days, time of latter rain. I believe that revival is getting ready to break out. And I believe this, that God wants to anoint you.

Listen to me. Listen to me. He wants to anoint you. He's not going to just leave it to the preachers. He's not just going to leave it to the pastors. He wants to anoint you. He wants to anoint you so you can go into your family and minister to your kids. He wants to anoint you so you can go into your place of work and operation and minister to those that you work with. He wants to anoint you, young person, to go into your school and make a difference for the kingdom of God. He's not just leaving it to those on a stage with a microphone. He wants to anoint you.

And as He anoints each of us, the Ecclesia, as we come together, I believe God wants to do something unique and significant through us.

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Can I speak to Cottonwood for a minute? God wants to do something unique through our church, a unique expression throughout America and throughout the world that's going to come out of our church. But hear me, it will never happen if we're not people of the Word, if we're not people that are plugged into Christ-centered community, if we're not people of prayer. If our lives don't look like the New Testament Church, it's asinine to think that we're just going to move in the flow of the Holy Spirit. We must be people empowered by the Holy Spirit. But again, you have to desire it. You have to be desperate for it. You can't leave the desperation to someone else. This has to be real and personal to you.

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