

Discover Bible Studies

#11: Mysterious Power in My Life

In 1929 Frank Morris boarded a ship bound for Switzerland. He'd looked forward to this voyage for some time. But it turned into a humiliating experience. A steward put in charge of his care locked Frank in his cabin each night. After a quick breakfast Frank could exercise a bit, but felt foolish being led around the deck, like an animal on a leash. Then the steward deposited Frank in a steamer chair. Whenever he met a friendly passenger who invited him for a stroll, the steward objected, saying he had to keep an eye on him.

Frank was an adult, with the normal curiosities and desires of an adult. But he was also blind. The steward assumed he couldn't take care of himself. Frank was treated like a parcel that had to be lugged around.

But in Switzerland Frank's life dramatically changed. While there he learned about dogs which had been trained to guide the blind. Bringing a German shepherd named Buddy back to the United States, Frank started Seeing Eye, now a worldwide organization.

Now, with Buddy at his side, Frank could go anywhere, anytime, with anyone. He felt free at last. During one demonstration to a group of reporters at a busy cross street in New York City, Buddy guided his master expertly from one lane to the other while cars whizzed past. Because he trusted Buddy, Frank made it across with ease. The sighted reporters had a much more difficult time; one actually took a cab to get to the other side.

In the next few pages we're going to learn about the Holy Spirit, a Guide who wants us to place our lives in His hands. All of us are handicapped by the same human nature, the same blindness to what's really most important. Life rushes by us at such a frantic pace that we often find ourselves just coping instead of going anywhere. Still, we're hesitant to trust our lives completely to this Guide. But the discovery that awaits each of us is this: we'll find real freedom and power by depending on the Holy Spirit to guide us through life.

1. CHRIST'S REPRESENTATIVE IN THE WORLD

When Christ was about to ascend into heaven, He promised His disciples a priceless gift:

"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, THE COUNSELOR will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. . . . When he, THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, comes, HE WILL GUIDE YOU into all truth. . . . HE WILL BRING GLORY TO ME by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." -John 16:7, 13, 14. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

In the divine plan, Jesus needed to return to heaven as our representative before God's throne and "appear for us in God's presence" (Hebrews 9:24). While our crucified Lord represents us in heaven, we also have the Holy Spirit as our COUNSELOR and GUIDE right here on earth. He is Jesus' direct representative.

While here Jesus ministered within the confines of a human body, and couldn't be present everywhere. But the Holy Spirit has no such limitations; He can serve as a personal Counsellor and Guide to countless individuals in many places at the same time. Christ meets our needs through the Holy Spirit.

2. WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Most of us can relate to God the Father if we imagine the most caring, nurturing parent we have ever known. And we can picture Jesus the Son, because He lived among us as a person. But the Holy Spirit is harder to picture and relate to. We have no easy human comparisons. The Bible, however, does give us specific information about the Holy Spirit:

A Personality. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as a person, a member of the Godhead, along with God the Father and God the Son:

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER and of the SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT." -Matthew 28:19.

The Spirit has personal characteristics: a mind (Romans 8:27); wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:10); feelings of love toward us (Romans 15:30); feelings of grief when we sin (Ephesians 4:30); the ability to teach us (Nehemiah 9:20); and power to guide us.

Involvement in Creation. The Holy Spirit participated in the forming of our world with the Father and the Son.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. . . . And the SPIRIT OF GOD moved upon the face of the waters." -Genesis 1:1, 2, KJV.

3. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

(1) Changing the human heart. In His encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in changing the human heart:

"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is BORN OF water and THE SPIRIT." -John 3:5.

To be "born of the Spirit" means that the Spirit gives us a new beginning. It's more than a matter of modifying our behaviour a bit. The Spirit changes us from the inside out, fulfilling the promise: "I will give you a new heart" (Ezekiel 36:26).

(2) Making us aware of wrongdoing and giving us a desire for holiness:

"When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, HE WILL CONVICT the world of guilt in regard to SIN and RIGHTEOUSNESS and judgment." -John 16:8.

When you hear the dramatic story of someone turning from an immoral lifestyle to God and becoming a faithful spouse and nurturing parent, remember that every step toward wholeness came as a result of the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

(3) Guiding us in our Christian life. Christ speaks to us directly through the "still small voice" of the Spirit.

"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" -Isaiah 30:21.

Through satellite transmission, our TVs regularly bring images and faces from a continent away into our living room. The Holy Spirit functions a little like God's satellite, bringing the presence of Christ from heaven to earth, making Him close when we need Him most (John 14:15-20).

(4) Aiding our prayer life.

"We do not know what we ought to pray for, BUT THE SPIRIT HIMSELF INTERCEDES FOR US with groans that words cannot express . . . in accordance with God's will." -Romans 8:26, 27.

When we are struggling to find the words, the Spirit is praying in our behalf. When we are so discouraged we can only groan toward God, the Spirit amplifies our faint cry for help into a powerful prayer before the very throne of God where Jesus is now ministering.

(5) Developing Christian qualities and character. The Spirit makes spiritually barren individuals as fertile as a tree bearing all kinds of fruit:

"BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." -Galatians 5:22-23.

Having the fruit of the Spirit demonstrates that we are grafted into the true vine, Jesus (John 15:5). Jesus can actually live His abundant life through us by the power of the Spirit.

(6) Preparing us as witnesses. Jesus promises:

"YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER when the HOLY SPIRIT comes on you; and you will be MY WITNESSES . . . to the ends of the earth." -Acts 1:8.

All who are willing can be made witnesses by the Spirit. We may not have all the answers, but the Spirit can give us a story to tell that moves hearts and minds. The apostles had trouble communicating before Pentecost, but after the Spirit came they

proclaimed Christ with such power that they "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6, KJV).

4. THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Scripture makes a distinction between God's gift of the Holy Spirit to every believer for victorious Christian living, and the various gifts of the Spirit provided to believers for effective ministry in different ways.

"When he [Christ] ascended on high, he led captives in his train and GAVE GIFTS to men.' . . . It was he who gave SOME to be APOSTLES, some to be PROPHETS, some to be EVANGELISTS, and some to be PASTORS and TEACHERS, to prepare God's people for works of service." Ephesians 4:8, 11-12.

Each Christian does not receive all the gifts, some may receive more gifts than others; the Spirit "gives them to each one, just as he determines" (1 Corinthians 12:11). The Spirit equips each believer for his or her special role in God's plan. God knows when and where to provide the gifts that will best bless His people and His church.

Another list of spiritual gifts found in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 includes wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, speaking in different kinds of tongues [languages, margin], and the interpretation of languages (verses 8-10).

Paul urges us to "eagerly desire the greater gifts," then adds, "and now I will show you the most excellent way." (1 Corinthians 12:31). The love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) that follows this verse emphasizes that "the most excellent way" is the way of love. And love is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Our concern should be to seek the fruit of the Spirit and then let the Spirit distribute His gifts to us as "he determines" (1 Corinthians 12:11).

5. THE FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT AT PENTECOST

On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out in unlimited measure, fulfilling Jesus' promise:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth." -Acts 1:8.

At Pentecost the Spirit enabled the apostles to communicate the gospel clearly in the languages of people "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:3-6).

Some Bible students compare the coming of the Spirit to the falling of the early autumn and the late spring rains of Palestine (Joel 2:23). The Spirit falling at Pentecost was like the "early rain" of autumn which caused the seeds to sprout and provided vital nourishment for the Christian church in its infancy.

6. THE LATTER RAIN OF THE SPIRIT

Bible prophecy tells of a day coming when the Spirit of God will be poured out like a shower on the church, energizing the church's members as witnesses (Joel 2:28, 29). Centuries have now passed and the story of salvation has spread over a large part of the earth. It's now time for the "latter rain" to ripen the grain, making it ready to harvest.

As history moves to a climax just before Christ's second coming, God will prepare every sincere believer for heaven through a great outpouring of His Spirit. Are you now experiencing the "early rain" that is preparing the church for the "latter rain" of the Spirit? Are you living a Spirit-filled life? As you are empowered by the Spirit, will you let God use you to communicate the news of His incredible love and soon return?

7. CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit moved those who heard the gospel to cry out, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

"Peter replied, 'REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.'" -Acts 2:38.

Repentance-turning away from a sinful way of life and turning to Christ-is a condition for receiving the gift of the Spirit. To have the Spirit poured out on us, we must first repent and commit our lives to Christ. Jesus also emphasized the willingness to follow Him and obey Him as a condition for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-17).

8. THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

Before leaving the world, Jesus instructed His followers:

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the GIFT my Father promised . . . For John BAPTIZED WITH WATER, but in a few days you will be BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT." -Acts 1:4, 5.

Over and over Scripture indicates that the Christian is to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 4:31; 6:3, 6:5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9, 13:52; 19:6). The Holy Spirit makes the life of a Christian fulfilling and beautiful because a Spirit-filled life achieves Christ's ideal for us.

While describing the Spirit-filled Christian life, Paul offered this prayer for every believer:

"I pray that out of his glorious riches HE MAY STRENGTHEN YOU WITH POWER THROUGH HIS SPIRIT IN YOUR INNER BEING, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. . . . Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or

imagine, ACCORDING TO HIS POWER THAT IS AT WORK WITHIN US." -Ephesians 3:16, 17, 20.

Like Frank Morris with his faithful guide dog Buddy, we can, with the Holy Spirit guide inside us, do immeasurably more than we could before. With new desires and new abilities we are enabled to move forward confidently instead of just trying to cope with life's problems.

This Spirit-filled experience is renewed each day through prayer and Bible study. Prayer keeps us in close contact with Christ, and studying the Word of God keeps us focused on His resources. They break down any barrier between us and Christ that might prevent Him from pouring out His priceless Gift of the Spirit. This is how we grow and replace bad habits and attitudes with healthy qualities.

Romans 8 gives an exciting description of the Spirit-filled life. Read it when you can, and note how many times Paul points to the "Spirit" as the power behind the Christian life.

Have you made the wonderful discovery of the Spirit-filled life? Are you conscious of the presence of the Spirit in your life? Are you experiencing His life-giving power? Open up your life to the greatest power in the universe.

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