

*Read also 2 Kings 2:1, 5-14*

How is the Holy Spirit present in believers' lives? On a scale of 1-10, how much do you experience the Holy Spirit?

A professor shares this story in a seminary class. He had graduated with a Master's of Divinity and was on staff at the seminary, wondering what his future might hold. One night he was awakened and saw Jesus standing at the foot of his bed. Jesus said, "John<sup>1</sup>, I want you to be an ecumenist." He replied, "I don't know what that is," and with that, he turned over and went back to sleep. The same thing happened a second, and then a third time. The third time it dawned on him, *if this is Jesus, I better learn what an ecumenist is and follow orders!* Awhile later, he wrote a paper about ecumenism. The paper was circulated in religious circles around the U.S. and ended up at the Vatican. Shortly thereafter he received a call asking him to be a part of Pope John Paul II's ecumenical or interfaith dialogue.

The Holy Spirit accomplishes the will of God in willing people's lives.

A woman received a call that her elderly mother had a sudden severe medical emergency. Her nose was bleeding so profusely that she filled a hand towel with blood, so her neighbors were rushing her to the emergency room. The daughter hung up the phone with great alarm and immediately began praying for her. As she did she felt an intense presence of the Holy Spirit and peace flood over her. Later the neighbor called to say the bleeding suddenly stopped and they didn't even need to go for help. The precise time was when Joanne prayed.

The Holy Spirit gives you total attention when you need it, when you call out in prayer.

A man was called into his boss's office and told that his work was no longer needed. He was told to clean out his desk; that would be his last day. A coworker saw what was happening to him so she immediately went into the bathroom to pray for him. As clear as could be she heard these words: "Oh, Victor? Don't worry about him. I have a job for him to do." She shared the words with her friend, which gave him considerable comfort. Today he leads a missional church.

Bad events in the hands of the Holy Spirit can be reversed. The Holy Spirit infuses the world with hope for the future.

When Stephen was martyred in Jerusalem, that was certainly a bad event. You might think that people would quit the church, quit sharing their faith and retreat in fear. But in fact the opposite happened. The Holy Spirit moved believers to simply leave Jerusalem and they continued to spread the good news in other places (Acts 8:4). Their testimony was so powerful that many people believed. The Holy Spirit draws people to God like a magnet.

That's what happened in Antioch. This Syrian city was one of the three major cities in the world. Herod paved its main street in marble so this beautiful cosmopolitan city was a center of culture and political power.

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<sup>1</sup>Names have been changed for these illustrations but the stories are true.

So Barnabas went to Antioch to lead the church there, and, remember, Barnabas brought Paul there, too. Let's enter Antioch, and hear what the Bible has to say about the Holy Spirit. READ Acts 13:1-5

Most of the believers who went to other cities shared the gospel with no one but Jews. But in Antioch it was different. There, believers also shared Jesus Christ with the Greeks and the Romans, and they believed. So the congregation was diverse. This passage mentions:

- Barnabas, the Jewish Levite from Cyprus
- Simeon, called Niger, or the black man (he was possibly the man who carried Jesus' cross)
- Lucius, the Greek from Cyrene, North Africa
- Manaen, the Roman, friend of Herod Antipas
- Saul, the Pharisee

Now, this is absolutely unique; Jews and Gentiles from different ethnic groups all worshipping Jesus Christ together. Think what that would be like in Duncanville to bridge the various cultures here. That's what happened in Antioch.

The amazing thing is, the Antioch church forms about the same time that Peter is being sent to the Roman centurion, Cornelius out on the coast in Joppa (Tel Aviv).

It happened at the same time that Philip the deacon went to Samaria and shared the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch.

What is the Holy Spirit doing?

The Spirit in Joppa here - and there in Samaria - and up in Antioch, called all these people from a variety of cultures and nations to believe in Christ (11:21). And, they worshiped all together in one church in this extraordinary, revolutionary unity.

Malcolm Gladwell would describe this as the tipping point. He explains that an idea or a message can suddenly sweep through the world like an epidemic. There are various things that cause that to happen. It can start from a very small place, even one church; but it takes a catalyst, usually a person, to spread it. The Holy Spirit is that catalyst who drew these people from other nations together.

The Holy Spirit is at work in Peter's life in Joppa, in Cornelius' life in Caesarea, in Barnabas' life in Antioch, and now with Paul. And with him, it begins to explode and the entire church of the future is born as a church of all nations together.

The Holy Spirit was specifically present in and accomplishing this through each one of them. The Holy Spirit works through each of you too, to spread the light of Christ. Have you experienced the Holy Spirit's power?

During the Reformation in the 1500's the same thing occurred. Luther in Germany began studying the Bible and translated it into German. As he did so, it worked on him; it moved him; it changed him. He discovered grace. That was the Holy Spirit.

John Calvin begins studying the Bible in France, taking it home to Geneva, while Zwingli preaches reform in Zurich. Across the channel, Tyndale translates the Bible into English. All over Europe the Holy Spirit moved people to connect with God through the Bible. The printing press allowed these documents to be spread. The tipping point was the Reformation. The Holy Spirit was the author of this massive church reform.

In the same way the Holy Spirit works today. What do you think the Holy Spirit might want to accomplish through you in Duncanville? Are you open to the adventure?

The Holy Spirit unleashes the power of Jesus Christ in believer's lives so that instead of being defeated by an enemy who wants to martyr good people, we go forth with the joy and hope of salvation. This is God's will; accomplished by the Holy Spirit. When believers live in the Spirit, masses of people come to Christ. This is God's will.

It isn't some kind of church structure that makes it happen; it is an act of God.

We must learn to go with the Holy Spirit, right here and right now because God wants to act. And God acts through you.

The last night Jesus was with the disciples they were scared because He told them he was leaving. But he said, "I'm not going to leave you alone. I'll send you the Holy Spirit to help you" (my paraphrase, Jn 16:7). Jesus explained:

*The Spirit (of truth) will guide you.*

*The Spirit will tell you about the future.*

*The Spirit brings Me glory by telling you my message for you. (13-14).*

I think Jesus is looking for a church that is willing to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

I believe God longs for people who want to hear what Jesus has in mind for them.

Do you want more of the Holy Spirit; more of the presence of Christ in your life?

You heard the story earlier of Elisha asking Elijah if he, too, could have God's Spirit. Elisha wanted the Spirit so badly because he knew there was no way he could be God's man without Holy Spirit power. Only the power of the Spirit can change people's lives. So he asked for it!

Do you have the Holy Spirit in your life? Ask for it! The early believers fasted and prayed and got it! God will answer you too.

Jesus said, "If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Lk 11:13).

The Holy Spirit is a GREAT gift.

The church in Antioch experienced it. I want to know Jesus' vision for me; I want to know the Spirit is present when I need help; I want to know when bad things happen there is hope for the future. So let's ask for the gift! Expect an adventure of a lifetime, and expect it to start right here in our community because that's what the Holy Spirit does.

God moves his children to reach out. The Holy Spirit is on the move. Are you ready for the adventure?

AMEN