

Read also Isaiah 63:7-14. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).

*We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. 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 of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. 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. As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece-- throughout both Macedonia and Achaia. (1 Thes. 1:4-7)*

Let's pretend we get a message from God:

*To my dear daughter/son, You have been chosen by me. Thank you for responding to my love, even in hardship. You, your life, and your faith are a gift to the world. I love you, God*

That is essentially the letter we have from God here.

First, God chooses you. This is a basic Christian belief. If we could somehow work our way to God, we would not need God. Think of it in this way. There's a verse that says: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

This is what it means. Imagine:

You are in a boat during a storm. You are being tossed about and you cannot get control of the little boat. Finally you are thrown overboard and after struggling for a while, you sink to the bottom. There is no life left. You died. You cannot somehow lift your hand toward God. You are helpless in yourself, but God, in His mercy, reaches down to you and pulls you out of the water. God saves you.

Romans tells us, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:22-23).

*To my dear daughter/son, You have been chosen by me.*

God initiates. We believe. The Thessalonian church, upon embracing the message, received the Holy Spirit. It brought them great joy. They became an example, a gift, to the world around them.

*To my dear daughter/son, You have been chosen by me. Thank you for responding to my love. You, your life, and your faith are a gift to the world. I love you, God*

The gift of this Spirit of God is given when you are enlivened to the faith. You may be surprised by this, but it goes back to the Old Testament at Mt. Sinai, when Moses received the law. That happened 1,500 years before the date of Pentecost in Acts; the date we celebrate today.

On this date, Jews celebrate a festival called *Shavuot*, Festival of Weeks, or Pentecost, to celebrate the anniversary of God's gift of the law at Mt. Sinai. It comes fifty days after the second night of Passover. God chose these people to be his people.

They did not choose Him; God chose them.

You are special simply because God chose you. Turn to your neighbor and say, "You are special!" Don't let anybody ever tell you differently.

So the festival coincides with the Christian celebration of Pentecost that also happened on that date in Jerusalem, fifty days after Easter, coinciding with Shavuot. Perhaps "Pentecost" owes its name to Jesus' Jewish followers who were there that day.

At Mt. Sinai, God gave the gift of the law. The law was to be obeyed. God's people were to be holy; they were to be priests to the nations. However, from the beginning it was hard! Isaiah tells us, "The people rebelled and grieved the Holy Spirit, even though God hoped they would not." (63:10)

What is a good God to do? This rebellion caused God great suffering. God gave them the law; they just could not keep it.

But God already knew that. God already had a plan. Let's discover it.

When the law was given, there was accompanying lightning, smoke, fire-flashes, supernatural shofar blowing, and earth quaking, and the people of Israel were quite shaken. Can you imagine being there? In like manner during Pentecost, which we celebrate today, Luke describes supernatural manifestations that suddenly surround the disciples. They are very much like the signs experienced at Sinai: violent wind, fire, and mysterious sounds.

The Holy Spirit has arrived!

A Jew would have appreciated the appearance of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost because they knew the similarities of the receiving of the Torah all those years ago. The God who came near on Mt. Sinai has come near.

This time, though, God indwells believers with the Holy Spirit. God lives in his chosen people. They have become the temple of God.

That is your gift from God. It is so valuable that the Thessalonians embraced it in spite of persecution.

*To my dear daughter/son, You have been chosen by me. Thank you for responding to my love, even in hardship. You, your life, and your faith are a gift to the world. I love you, God*

How do you receive the gift? Wholeheartedly believe, despite what all your friends say; no matter what people think of you.

Have you ever received a gift but you didn't recognize what it could do? Once, my dad gave me a gift of a keychain that, when you clapped your hands, would find your keys. But it never worked. One day I lost my keys when my dad was at my apartment. He said, "Use your clapper." I didn't want to tell him it was in the junk drawer because I never read the directions or bought the battery.

Do you ignore the Holy Spirit? Do you think the Holy Spirit is too complicated to understand; and talking about Him a little odd anyway? Who is this Holy Spirit?

One thing we notice in this passage is that when Paul talks about the Holy Spirit, he says "power." The Holy Spirit indwells believers and his presence is powerful.

You might remember this verse from Zechariah to the king of Israel who was trying to rebuild Jerusalem's temple. The work on the temple had stalled out. The people had gotten discouraged and quit. "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty" (Zech 4:6). God said, "It will be completed." And it was.

You can accomplish more than you can ask or think because the Spirit helps you.

Ro 5:5 says God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. People struggle sometimes to feel loved. The Holy Spirit helps you feel God's love.

The Holy Spirit gives you a sense of belonging. Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." (Jn 14:16-18)

Do you need truth? Ask the Advocate. Do you need a place to belong? He abides with and in you. Ask the Lord for more of the Holy Spirit.

Do you feel weak? "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. . . . The Spirit intercedes for [believers] in accordance with God's will." (Ro 8:26-27)

My key chain is activated by a battery and me clapping. What activates the Holy Spirit?

Prayer – very important to call on him, and delight in him

Persistence – have the faith to keep putting your wishes before him, (and I don't mean for a Ford F150), but wish for things like including him in your decisions, or deepening his presence, or open doors for you to serve him

Gratitude – you must be prepared to receive from him and learn to meditate upon his kindness

Desperation for God – pour out your heart for the things of God; wisdom, Scriptural insight, his felt presence in you, your ability to lead those for whom you are responsible

Confidence in his answer – that it will be for your benefit and train you for better things

Jesus said, “If you, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk 11:13)

Do you want to be more joyful about your faith? Do you want to inspire the people around you to try God? Open and activate the gift of the Holy Spirit. You too, can be the church that received the Holy Spirit. You, too, can be an example to other believers.

AMEN