

Tell me about the Holy Spirit

How to be filled with love, joy, peace and power,
and extend the Kingdom of God.

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Introduction

“Oh, Arnold, what shall we do?”

It was 3 a.m. on August 19th, 1969, and my wife Ann couldn't sleep. We were both in the kitchen, looking for something to eat, and having no idea where we could turn to for help. My first appointment as a Methodist minister on probation was proving desperately tough, and coping with our first baby was stretching Ann's patience and strength to breaking point. She couldn't sleep properly, she felt tired all the time, and all her love for life had disappeared. Her strong faith in God was fast evaporating.

The previous day I had told a fellow minister that I was praying for the Holy Spirit, because there was none of the fruit of the Spirit such as love, joy and peace in my life. He told me something of his own experience of the Spirit, and he also said that when people are in a state of depression, evil spirits can sometimes take hold of them so that the depression becomes spiritual as well physical.

We came out of the kitchen.

“Let's read something from the Bible,” I suggested.

We sat down together on the old settee which the church had provided along with the rest of our furniture, and I turned to the book of Psalms. I began to read from the first one I found:

*Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all
your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the
pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with
good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's...*

Psalm 103:1-5

It is hard to explain, but it was as though God was speaking to us personally. Somewhat awestruck, we returned to our separate bedrooms. (Earlier in the night, when Ann was tossing and turning, I had moved into the spare bedroom to get some sleep myself.) In my heart there was a wonderful sense of reassurance and gratitude to God for the amazing way that he had encouraged us through the words of the Psalm.

But gradually my worries and fears returned. I thought not just about my churches, but other churches; then people not in any church, and then people in the factories where I had worked. And it seemed to me that everybody I thought of was fast bound by dark powers of evil. It seemed almost impossible that I would ever find rest in the company of people who had been set free from sin and were rejoicing in the life of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And suddenly it occurred to me that a sense of despair like this always came to me at the same time as it came to Ann, as if Satan suddenly remembered us and set one of his servants on both of us at once. I wasn't sure that I even believed in evil spirits, but this thought was so strong that I decided to do what our minister friend had recommended in the afternoon. I spoke aloud some Bible verses that seemed relevant: *'Perfect love casts out fear'*, *'Now is the prince of this world cast out'*, and two others. And then I said, with as much authority as I could muster, "In the name of Jesus, I command you to depart!" I sensed that Jesus's name was quite sufficient to dispatch any evil spirits in terror. And as soon as I had said those words, I thought I heard Ann crying.

I lifted my head from the pillow to hear her more clearly. I realized she was speaking to someone, or even that several people were speaking. I thought God must be casting an evil spirit out of her. Moments later she came into my room, and I switched the light on. She looked very shaken. "What has happened to me?" she asked.

“It’s all right,” I said reassuringly. “I think an evil spirit has come out of you.”

“Oh no, it wasn’t anything nasty,” she replied. “It was wonderful! I came back to bed and read two pages of the book I’m reading. Then I lay down, and I thought of the lovely words God had spoken to us. Suddenly my mind seemed to be full of light. I began to thank him, but it was in some other language. I spoke quietly at first under the bedclothes because I didn’t want you to hear me, but then I sat up and spoke more loudly. I could have gone on longer, but I thought I’d better come and tell you what was happening.”

If anyone had ever looked agog, it was I at that moment. “You must have been speaking in tongues then!” was my astonished reply.

Neither of us had ever heard of anyone speaking in tongues outside the New Testament, so this was gobsmacking news, or it would have been if the word had been in current use back then. Someone actually speaking in tongues as the first disciples did on the day of Pentecost was a total miracle!

Later that morning I heard my once depressed wife singing the most beautiful song I had ever heard, with both words and music given by the Holy Spirit. She discovered she could praise God in tongues whenever she wanted to, and within a few days she was receiving incredibly beautiful words of prophecy from the Lord. The Lord had answered my prayers for the Holy Spirit, but he had got the wrong person!

A week before all this happened, two kind friends had let us spend a couple of days in their seaside flat in Sheringham, in order to give us a break and help Ann climb out of her depression. The break had done nothing to help. But two days after the Lord filled her with his Spirit, a lady stopped me in the street.

“I’ve just been talking to your wife,” she said. “My goodness, her holiday’s done her a world of good. She is like a new person!”

Chapter 1: The Spirit leads us to Christ.

The Lord Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all the truth. Therefore, my purpose is to introduce you to the Holy Spirit and his ministry, for once the Spirit has taken up residence he will – in time – teach you everything you need to know about God and how he wants you to live and serve him. You will still need the Bible, and you'll still need to be part of a living church, for these are the chief means the Holy Spirit uses to teach us the truth that brings us to fullness of spiritual life. However, to understand and accept and live by the teachings of the Bible and the church, we all need the help of the Holy Spirit. *“He will guide you into all the truth... He will take what is mine and declare it to you.”* (John 16:13,14)

The Holy Spirit is more than a mysterious power: he is a personal manifestation of the one creator God. Just as the chemical H₂O can appear as solid ice, liquid water or gaseous steam, so God has revealed himself to us as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all apparently very different but all essentially the same unique God. That is why God said in Genesis chapter 1, *“Let us make man in our image.”* The Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, is plural.

This book began life as a message from the end of the earth, for I wrote the first draft in the Chilean city of Punta Arenas, the most southerly mainland city in the world. In Punta Arenas Methodist Church, there was a young lady whose father rarely attended the services. He was rebellious towards God and resentful of any attempt to change his attitude. His daughter Valeria had been almost stone deaf in one ear for many years. One day she was healed by prayer to the Lord Jesus. I know this is true because it was my wife and I who prayed for her. Her father came to church the following Sunday and publicly gave thanks for what God had done for his daughter, by playing three hymns

of praise on his harmonica! Two months later, when Hector himself had to go into hospital for a long-awaited operation in Santiago, he testified about Jesus Christ to every other patient in his ward. Three of them were healed, partly or fully, through his prayers for them, and they gave their lives to Christ! Hector himself never had his operation: a pre-op scan showed that the gallstones that had been blocking him up had disappeared!

In this story we can see how a gift of the Holy Spirit – in this case the gift of healing – brought several people to Christ where previously men's efforts alone had failed.

The first and most important thing that the Holy Spirit wants to do in a person's life is to lead him to Christ. He wants to lead everyone to a place where they recognise their need for Christ's help and are willing to accept it on Christ's terms. That is what Jesus meant when He said of the Spirit, "*He will glorify me.*" (John 16:14) Today he might have said, "He will advertise me."

The ideal advertisement does three things:

- it arrests people's attention, even if they have had no prior interest in the product or service concerned;
- it highlights a need or awakens a desire which it offers to satisfy;
- it convinces them it can meet that need or satisfy that desire better than anything else can – or preferably that it is the only thing that can do this.

The world's greatest need is for the life which only Jesus Christ can give. War, violence, oppression, injustice, robbery, poverty, family breakdown, personal breakdown, disease and death: these are all the consequences of what the Bible calls sin. Sin has affected man's nature in such a way that he can no longer live at peace with God or his fellow man. Furthermore, the Bible makes it absolutely clear that sin is the sole cause of physical death. As I revise this book in 2021, the world is battling

against an invisible enemy in the form of a coronavirus, Covid-19. Thousands of people are dying from it every day. Yet far, far more serious is this other invisible enemy, a spiritual disease which will kill all of us if we do not turn to Jesus to be rescued from it. It is the disease of sin.

A new life, free from sin and its effects, is what God is offering through his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus himself first demonstrated the unique quality of such a life as a man. Then, after his return to Heaven, the Holy Spirit took over the task of advertising it to the world through the lives of his followers.

In the early days of the church, we see the Spirit arresting people's attention by means of miracles, and by visibly demonstrating what Jesus could do for everyone who believed in him.

"[This great salvation] was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit..."

(Hebrews 2:3,4)

The young Christian church grew with phenomenal speed. Only thirty years or so after Christ's death and resurrection in Jerusalem, the historian Tacitus could write of 'an immense multitude' of Christians as far away as Rome. When the comparative speed of travel in those days is taken into account, this was equivalent to the other side of the world today.

It was not that the inhabitants of the Roman Empire found it easy to believe the Christian message. Preaching Christ crucified was 'a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.' (1 Corinthians 1:23) How could Jews believe in a Messiah who got himself killed, when their scriptures had promised he would reign for ever? How could Greeks believe that any god would condescend to get himself born as a human baby in a

cattle shed? How could Romans believe that the son of a Jewish carpenter whom they had sentenced to death was mightier than Caesar?

The Christian message is just as incredible to any natural mind today. We are asking people to believe that:

- the God who made the universe in a manner contrary to almost every scientific belief was somehow born on the earth as a man
- he was the promised Saviour and King of the Jewish race but then deliberately got himself killed
- he miraculously returned to life and disappeared into the sky with a promise to bring all his followers back to life in the same way for ever
- he will return with a host of angels to rule this present earth for a thousand years
- he will then bring back to conscious life everybody else who has ever lived without knowing him or trusting in him, either for everlasting life or for fitting punishment and final death, depending on how they have lived
- and finally that this same Jesus will then reign for ever in a completely new earth which God will make, where those to whom he grants everlasting life will live happily in recreated bodies which will never die again.

It is going to take more than mere words to get anyone today to believe the full gospel as told in the Bible from Genesis chapter 1 to Revelation chapter 22!

The first Christians did have more than mere words to do the job. Jews, Greeks and Romans believed what the first Christians preached because the Holy Spirit supplied visible proof of its truth. As Paul wrote, '*Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*' (1 Thessalonians 1:5) The primary purpose of

the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit is not to bless believers but to convince unbelievers. (Mark 16:15-20; Acts 1:8)

Almost without exception, whenever we read in the New Testament of people being converted to Christ, it is after some demonstration of God's power. (Acts chapters 2 to 5; Acts 8:6,7,12) As an example, let's look at Acts 9:32-35. In Lydda, Peter came across a man named Aeneas who was paralysed and had been bedridden for eight years. *'And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.'* You see the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit's evangelistic method? The entire city of Lydda and even the neighbouring city of Sharon were converted to the Lord through the healing of one man! Lydda and Sharon were probably only what we would call villages; nevertheless, that was a mighty impressive outcome.

However, signs alone do not lead people to believe in Jesus Christ. They are given to confirm that the spoken message of Christ's death and resurrection and his appointment by God as Lord and Saviour is true. *'Jesus Christ heals you,'* Peter said, *'...and they turned to the Lord.'* The purpose of supernatural signs is to confirm what an evangelist says. The evangelist's message should also be supported and confirmed by the life he lives – itself a gift of the Holy Spirit. In effect, the Spirit uses three principal means to convince people of their need of Christ:

- the evangelist's words
- supernatural signs and wonders
- the life of the evangelist and of the church as a whole

Thus, Paul writes:

...how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?

Romans 10:14

(10)

Tell me about the Holy Spirit

...what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit...
Romans 15:18,19

For you remember our labour and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any one of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behaviour... 1 Thessalonians 2:9,10

By these three means the Holy Spirit convinces people that they are separated from God by sin, and that God will judge and condemn them to final death unless they learn to live righteously as he wants them to. Jesus said, "*When [the Spirit] comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement.*" (John 16:8) And when he has done that, the Spirit convinces them that the only way to live righteously is to repent of their sin, to trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour, to obey him as Lord, and to receive the promised help of the Spirit himself.