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Living a Great Miracle - Being Led by God's Spirit

By Jim Franks

By understanding what the Holy Spirit is, we can understand how can miraculously work in our life and produce pleasant fruit that benefits others.



GOD COMMANDS that, in the late spring of every year, a special day be observed (Leviticus 23:15-21). It is commonly called Pentecost, from the Greek *pentekoste*. The Jews refer to it in various ways. One is as *Shavuot*, meaning "Weeks," because the date of its observance is determined by counting a specific number from an earlier religious observance.

Another name given it is *Hag Hakatzir*, the Festival of the Harvest, for it marks the harvesting of the wheat, the last grain harvest of the spring harvest season. And, in that context, it is also called *Yom HaBikkurim*, the Day of the Firstfruits. There is much significance to this festival, which is vitally important for Christians.

When celebrating this festival we know as Pentecost, the descendants of the ancient Israelites are reminded of one of the greatest events in their history—the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. In his book *To Be a Jew*, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin writes: "Shavuot commemorates the awesome event experienced by the children of Israel seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt when they camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula. This event was the Revelation, when God's will was revealed to Israel. It marked the declaration of the Ten Commandments ... While the exact manner of this communication between God and man is not known and was always subject to various opinions by the great thinkers and Sages of Israel, it was an event of awesome proportions and a unique spiritual experience that indelibly stamped the Israelites with their unique character, their faith, and their destiny."

The events leading up to this time—the Exodus of the Israelites from slavery, the death of Egypt's firstborn, the crossing of the Red Sea, the giving of manna from heaven and the giving of the law—were miracles

that had a tremendous impact on the history both of Israel and much of the world. As Christians, we sometimes forget that another great miracle has taken place in all our lives. It is one of the greatest miracles of all time, the coming of God's Holy Spirit.



Celebrating another great miracle

The Feast of Pentecost is a celebration of that event, a reminder to each of us that God works in us through His Spirit. For humans to be changed and led by God's Spirit is one of the greatest miracles of all.

When we study the Day of Pentecost in the Bible, we find the beginnings of this great miracle. In Acts 1:8, we read Christ's instructions to His disciples: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (New American Standard Bible).

This promise from Christ was dramatically fulfilled within a few days of His statement. This occurred on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2. Peter concluded his sermon on that day with these words: "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself" (verses 38, 39, NASB).

After the physical manifestations that are described in the first verses of Acts 2, we find the Holy Spirit descending on a large group of people. Their lives were changed dramatically. They were led by God's Holy Spirit from that time forward.

The book of Acts is replete with the stories of these people's lives and the impact they had on the society of that day. The change was so evident that they were accused of having "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Such was the dramatic, dynamic power of the Holy Spirit.

Being led by the Holy Spirit

When we make reference to someone who is led by the Holy Spirit, as these people were, we must make sure we understand what is being said. This is discussed in detail by the apostle Paul in Romans 8:1-28, where he shows how the Holy Spirit works in the life of a Christian. In verse 14, Paul states: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Here we see that a Christian is defined as one who is led by the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit must be allowed to become the energizing force in our lives to produce the qualities of true Christianity.

We find this same thought in verse 9. Here Paul dogmatically states that if you don't have the Spirit dwelling in you then you do "not belong" to God (NASB).

The implication is that it is through God's Spirit and "Christ in us" (Colossians 1:27) that we actually accomplish what we do as Christians, rather than through our own efforts. The glory and credit must go to God.

However, it isn't enough to simply be *led* by God's Spirit. We must allow God, through His Spirit, to rule over our lives. The Holy Spirit must be allowed to become the energizing force in our lives to produce the qualities of true Christianity. We must ask ourselves if we are truly being led by God's Spirit and if we are allowing it to serve as the guiding force in our lives.

Understanding the Holy Spirit

To grasp how God's Spirit works in our lives, we must understand what God's Spirit is. The Holy Spirit is not an individual person, along with God the Father and Jesus Christ, forming a "Holy Trinity." There simply is not biblical evidence for the Holy Spirit to be thought of as a separate person, apart from the Father and the Son. In Scripture, the Holy Spirit is described as the *power* of God at work in our lives. This divine power of God emanates from the Father, allowing us to be "led by the Spirit of God" (Romans 8:14).

What does God's Holy Spirit do for us as Christians? This question affects the very core of our religious beliefs, because without the power of God's Spirit in our lives we would have no relationship with the Father. It is because this Spirit is dwelling within us that we are the children of God (Romans 8:14-17).

It is important that we understand what it means to be "led by the Spirit." God's Spirit doesn't drive, drag or push us around; it *leads* us. It will not prevent us from sinning, nor will it force us to do what is right. It leads us, and we must be willing to follow.

God's Spirit at work

Exactly how does God's Spirit lead us? Let's consider a few ways.

The Holy Spirit keeps us in contact with God's mind. God's Spirit works with our mind. The apostle John describes it this way: "Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit [which] He has given us" (1 John 3:24). Through the Holy Spirit, which is given to us, we can be influenced by God for the good. This is in contrast to the situation in the world around us and our own human nature.

The Holy Spirit provides a deeper understanding of God's Word and His will for humanity. As 1 Corinthians 2:9-11 tells us: "But as it is written, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.* For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (emphasis added throughout).

The Feast of Pentecost is a reminder to each of us that God works in us through His Spirit.

Without that Spirit, a person cannot understand God's divinely expressed Word and will, "for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (verse 14).

God's help in overcoming

The Holy Spirit makes overcoming possible. There is nothing too difficult for us with the power of God working in our lives. Romans 8:26 tells us that God's Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. Paul, the writer of the letter to the Romans, speaking for all of us said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

There is nothing too difficult for us with the power of God working in our lives. Jesus Christ promises Christians, "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27). The Christian life is to be one of overcoming. We must not believe that God wants us to remain just as we are whenever we are called. Instead, we must "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Christianity is a lifetime of overcoming and growing.

The Holy Spirit convicts our conscience and helps us see sin as it really is. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, which would be given to His followers after His death, Jesus Christ said it would "convict the world of sin . . ." (John 16:8). God's Spirit within us, working with our conscience, helps us to recognize and avoid sin. The guilt that we feel is real, prompted by recognition of sins.

Hebrews 9:14 tells us that Jesus Christ's sacrifice "cleanse[s] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God," meaning that we have forgiveness from God, and, through repentance, we no longer need feel guilt for our sins. Christ's sacrifice washes away the sin in our lives, but we must still come to understand sin and how it affects us. Repentance must precede the forgiveness that God promises to each one of us, and repentance means change and effort to avoid sin.

Fruit of God's Spirit

The Holy Spirit produces godly fruit in our lives. Just as an apple tree produces apples, God's Spirit produces a particular type of fruit in the life of a Christian. Galatians 5:22, 23 lists the fruit that should be evident in the lives of those who are led by God's Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Each aspect of this fruit is worthy of a detailed study in itself, coupled with a self-analysis to see to what degree it is are manifest in your life.



The Holy Spirit comforts and encourages us. Jesus Christ promised to send His followers "another comforter" (John 14:16, KJV). True comfort and reassurance come from the Spirit of God dwelling in us. We need not be unduly worried about the future or what may happen to us. God's Spirit gives us the assurance that whatever happens will be for the good "to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

This provides an outlook on life that is quite rare in our world today. It is certainly possible for a Christian to become discouraged, but it is through the Holy Spirit that we can begin to look upon life differently. As noted above, peace is one aspect of the fruit of God's Spirit in the life of a Christian.

Annual reminder of miracles

The gift of God's Holy Spirit should make us exceedingly thankful. Just as we must recognize the great power of God to perform miracles in the days of the ancient Israelites, so we must not forget the power of God to work miracles in our lives.

The Feast of Pentecost is an annual reminder that God is still a miracle-working God. Whenever an individual is granted God's Holy Spirit, he becomes a walking miracle. One of the greatest miracles of all time is going on in our very midst. That miracle is for a human being to be led by God's Holy Spirit!

"Please Lord, Save Me From Your Followers"

By Lorelei Nettles

Have you ever wondered what kind of bumper stickers YOUR example may inspire?



AS I WAS CARRYING MY LAUNDRY from the Laundromat a couple weeks ago I saw a few bumper stickers on the car next to mine.

I love to read bumper stickers. They are a window into the mind of the owner of the vehicle. Whether they are expressing humor, travel, love, anger or hate, they tell a little story about what that person is like or what he or she has experienced.

One bumper sticker on that car intrigued me: "Please Lord, save me from your followers!" That's quite a statement to have plastered across your bumper. It made me wonder about that person and what happened to bring on these feelings. Did this person not even believe in God or, worse yet, had the person turned away from God?

My first feeling was of sadness and then pity. I wanted to tear the sticker off and replace it with something pleasant and uplifting. I wanted to reach out and touch the person so he or she wouldn't feel such anger. Of course this was ridiculous as it seemed to me that the person would never accept such a message. Yet it seems the person had already been influenced by what others had said or done. Obviously he or she had felt threatened or offended by those whose bumper sticker may have read "Follow the Lord."

Driving people into hiding

I remember when a new church moved into my neighborhood. A few members came by my home to drop off a welcome message card with an invitation to attend their church and a hope that I would be saved. This was a nice gesture. I thought at the time that it was a pleasant way to introduce their church.

Unfortunately it didn't stop there.

A new person or group of people from the church would come to my door every other week saying they were trying to save me and that I should attend their church. While I appreciated how they felt, I began to get irritated at their continuing interruptions into my life and their inability to hear what I told them over and over again: I would not be attending their church because I had my own affiliation and beliefs.

I knew that they felt they were doing good and meant well, but at what cost? My neighbors told me that they hid in their homes and shut off the lights when they saw these churchgoers coming, afraid to deal with more of their questions and their pressure to convert and attend their church.

My neighbors told me that they hid in their homes and shut off the lights when they saw these churchgoers coming.

Is this what the proselytizers wanted? To drive people into hiding in their own homes? Not likely, but they are the people who first came to my mind when I read that bumper sticker. Certainly this is not the only kind of action that can intimidate, but it's one example. Could it be that a similar thing happened to the owner of that car?

Then I asked myself if I was ever guilty of the same kind of offense. Did that bumper sticker apply to me in any way? Was I turning people from God instead of leading them toward Him? While I may not knock on doors to try to save those around me, my conduct and words may insult, scare or pressure others. So I wondered what kind of bumper sticker would I inspire--what might it say about me? Would it say something uplifting? Would it make others smile, cringe, hate or weep? It really made me stop and think.

On the other hand...

Have you ever met people who inspired you to do wonderful things? Are there people you want to emulate because they are full of joy and happiness? Have you come across people who awe you with their generosity and kindness or who are so insightful you want to gobble up all the wisdom they carry within them?

There are people like that in my life. They are the ones I believe would inspire uplifting bumper stickers because of their life-styles, works and words. I long to be like them, to know what they know and to find the joy they carry with them every day. They don't cause me to run inside and shut off my lights. On the contrary, I want them around--I welcome them in.

Let me tell you about one of those people. Her name is Loraine. She is an older woman who lived next door to me. We met informally when she offered me the use of her clothesline. That kind gesture started a friendship between us.

I would often go to her home just to visit or occasionally for dinner. Whenever I came by I would find her studying her Bible or making up something terrific in her kitchen for one function or another. When she wasn't working at her full-time job, she would be at church, a Bible study, helping some of the other older women from her church (mind you, she was in her 70s herself), driving someone here and there or working on a fund-raiser.



She is an inspiration to me. She is always on the go, always there to lend a helping hand or just to talk. If she can't do it for you, she will recommend someone who can. She never pushes

her beliefs on me or anyone.

*No one would feel
the need to be
"saved" from
Lorraine.*

She just goes about her business and allows others to observe. She was good, and by just being around her I was made better. She didn't have to push anything on me. I wanted it. I wanted to find the joy, love and diligence that just seemed to come naturally to her. She is uplifting without even trying to be.

"Please Lord, save me from your followers"? No one would feel the need to be "saved" from Lorraine. In fact, if Lorraine had lived next to the owner of that bumper sticker, the message might have eventually come off. Maybe having a few more Lorraines around could even wipe out the person's bad experiences so far. (As long as other followers didn't continue to insult, scare and offend.)

So think about it. How do you influence people? What kind of bumper sticker would you inspire?

The Holy Spirit: God's Power at Work

By Scott Ashley

Most people don't understand the working of the Holy Spirit. As a result, they don't recognize its power to transform our lives.



AT THIS TIME OF YEAR almost 2,000 years ago, a miraculous, momentous event occurred--the New Testament Church was founded on the Feast of Pentecost. What made this occurrence so astounding--and Acts 2 records that the circumstances of that day were truly dramatic--was the giving of God's Spirit to the followers of Jesus Christ as He had promised (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:4-5, 8).

What is this Holy Spirit that came on Christ's followers that day? Why did these things happen? What should we learn from those strange occurrences?

To understand the events, we must first understand what the Holy Spirit is and what it is not. To grasp that, we must understand what the Holy Spirit *does*.

What, then, does the Bible teach about the Holy Spirit?

Concepts of 'spirit'

We must first consider the word *spirit* as it is used in the Bible. Just what is spirit, and what does that word mean?

Four words--two Hebrew and two Greek--are translated "spirit" in the Bible. Of these four, two are used only twice: the Hebrew word *neshamah*, which means "breath," and the Greek word *phantasma*, which means "phantom" or "apparition." The other two words are the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma*, each used several hundred times. Understanding these words is crucial to understanding the Holy Spirit.

Ruach means "breath, air; strength; wind; breeze; spirit; courage; temper; Spirit" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1985, p. 240). Of the 378 times it is used in the King James Version, it is translated "Spirit" or "spirit" 272 times, "wind" 92 times, "breath" 27 times and in other ways 27 times. *Ruach* is used similarly in most other Bible versions.

We must first consider the word spirit as it is used in the Bible. Just what is spirit, and what does that word mean?

The concepts of "wind," "breath" and "spirit" were all related in biblical thought and language. We see these intertwined in the use of *ruach* in Ezekiel 37, which describes a great multitude of people being resurrected and restored to physical life to understand God's truth. In this fascinating account, what is even more extraordinary is the way *ruach* expresses the connection of these ideas. To illustrate, *ruach* is inserted wherever it appears in this passage.

"The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit [*ruach*] of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones . . . He said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: 'Surely I will cause breath [*ruach*] to enter into you, and you shall live' . . .

"So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath [*ruach*] in them. Also He said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath [*ruach*], prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath [*ruach*], "Thus says the Lord God: 'Come from the four winds [*ruach*], O breath [*ruach*], and breathe on these slain, that they may live.' " So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath [*ruach*] came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

"Then He said to me, . . . "Prophesy and say to them, . . . 'I will put My Spirit [*ruach*] in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,' says the Lord" (Ezekiel 37:1, 4-5, 7-11, 14).

Here we see *ruach* translated three ways in one chapter: Spirit (referring to God's Spirit), breath and wind.

'Spirit' in Greek

What is the meaning of *pneuma*? This word "primarily denotes 'the wind' (akin to *pneo*, 'to breathe, blow'); also 'breath'; then, especially 'the spirit,' which, like the wind, is invisible, immaterial and powerful" (ibid., p. 593). It is used 385 times in the King James Version and is usually translated "Spirit" or "spirit."

Look at *pneuma*. We can see that Greek root in several modern English words such as *pneumonia*, which is an acute infection of the human respiratory system; *pneumatic*, referring to something powered by air pressure; and the science of *pneumatics*, which studies the properties of air and other gases. All of these have to do with air, breathing, wind or being

powered by air. When you breathe, what is your body doing? It is creating wind going into and out of the body; breathing is simply creating wind on a small scale.

Pneuma is the equivalent of the Hebrew *ruach*. In Luke 4:18, where Christ read from Isaiah 61:1, the account substitutes *pneuma* for the Hebrew *ruach* in referring to "the Spirit [*ruach/pneuma*] of the Lord." The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (known commonly as the Old Testament) prepared in the third and second century B.C. and used in the time of the early Church, translated *ruach* as *pneuma* (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, 1992, p. 1185).

What did Jesus Christ say about this Spirit? What would it do or give to those who received it?

Connected concepts

We see the same connection between spirit, breath and wind continued in the New Testament. Although the Greek (unlike the Hebrew) has a different word for wind (*anemos*), *pneuma* and its related verb *pneo* are translated "breath" (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 11:11), "wind" (John 3:8; Acts 27:40) and "blow" (Luke 12:55).

Jesus Christ made this connection Himself. Without the understanding of this background, details of the incident in which Jesus appeared to His followers after His resurrection are puzzling. After Jesus showed them the wounds in His hands and side, verifying that He had indeed been raised from the dead, John records that Jesus said: "'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, *He breathed on them*, and said to them, '*Receive the Holy Spirit [pneuma]*'" (John 20:21-22).

Earlier He had told them He would send them a "helper" and a "comforter," the Holy Spirit. Here He repeats that promise. He also demonstrates *the nature of the Spirit* that He would send: It would be *like a breath, like a wind*, something they couldn't see, but they would be influenced by its power.

And this is indeed what happened.

Dramatic evidence of God's Spirit

In Acts 2 we read of the fulfillment of the promise that the Holy Spirit would come to them. "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came *a sound* from heaven, *as of a rushing mighty wind*, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit* and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

The *sound* that accompanied the giving of the Holy Spirit was that of *a rushing, mighty wind*--not the sound of a trumpet or a shout, sounds used elsewhere in the Bible in describing miraculous events (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The sound was of *wind*, again demonstrating the connection between wind and spirit.

Why does this account describe the *sound* of wind, but not the wind itself? Apparently they *heard* a powerful sound akin to a tornado,



typhoon or hurricane but didn't experience the *force* of the wind; there was no debris flying through the air, no roofs being blown off. Why wasn't there an actual wind? Because the wind needed to make that sound would have been *incredibly destructive*, demolishing buildings and injuring people. God's Spirit isn't destructive. That would have distracted from or overshadowed the positive miracles that took place there that day. Thus there was sound loud enough to be heard throughout Jerusalem (verses 5-6), but not a wind of corresponding force in the house in which they had gathered.

These are some of the concepts involved in the words translated "spirit" in the Bible. They do revolve around wind, breath and spirit, but not around the Holy Spirit as a specific person. This becomes more clear as we examine what this Spirit would do in the lives of those who received it.

What did Jesus Christ say about this Spirit? What would it do or give to those who received it?

In Acts 1 we read of another of Christ's appearances to His followers after His resurrection. A vital question burned in their minds: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (verse 6). Jesus then refocused their thinking from when He would return to the mission He had in store for them: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 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" (verses 7-8). Jesus Christ said His followers would "*receive power*" when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and *directly connected with that power* would be their work of being witnesses of Him, starting in Jerusalem, then spreading throughout Judea and Samaria and ultimately to the end of the earth. The book of Acts records the beginning of that mighty work with Christ's followers receiving the Holy Spirit on the Feast of Pentecost. Then, empowered by that Spirit, they went out proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom.

Christ made it clear that the Holy Spirit is connected with *power*. The Greek word translated "power" is *dunamis*. It is translated "power," "mighty work," "strength," "miracle," "might," "virtue" and "mighty." It is the same Greek root from which we get modern English words like *dynamic*, which means active, forceful and energetic; *dynamo*, which is a device for generating electric power; and *dynamite*, which is an explosive of great power, energy and force. These give us a sense of the power that would result from the Holy Spirit being given to the early Church.

Writing to his fellow minister Timothy, Paul describes the Spirit given to the Church: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God [His Spirit] which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a *spirit of fear*, but of *power [dunamis] and of love and of a sound mind*" (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

God's Spirit is not a spirit of fear or wanting to hide, to pull back, to cower in fear and shame. It is the opposite: a spirit of *power*--of activity, energy, dynamism--and a spirit of deep, godly love and a sound, rational, self-controlled mind.

The Spirit of power at work

That Spirit enables us to be like Jesus Christ, to have the same power available to us that Jesus Christ had in Him. Luke 4:14-15 describes that power at work in His ministry: "Then Jesus returned *in the power [dunamis] of the Spirit* to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all."

In Acts 10:38 Peter sums up Jesus Christ's ministry, showing that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth *with the Holy Spirit and with power*, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for *God was with Him*."

We see here that the Holy Spirit and power are synonymous. That holy power enabled Christ to perform His mighty miracles of doing good and healing during His earthly, physical ministry. The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God's power actively working in His servants.

The power of the Spirit wasn't exclusive to Jesus Christ or the apostles. This power was available to *all* members of the Church, and they were to use it. Paul wrote to the church in Rome: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope *by the power of the Holy Spirit*" (Romans 15:13). He goes on to describe what this power of the Holy Spirit would enable them to do and become: "Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are *full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another*" (verse 14).

It gave them understanding that they had never had - understanding that would be revealed to them supernaturally from God through the power of the Spirit.

Paul said that this same power enabled him to preach the gospel. In verse 19 he writes of the things Christ had accomplished in him "in mighty signs and wonders, *by the power of the Spirit of God*, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."

In 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 Paul writes that his "speech and . . . preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power [*dunamis*], that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power [*dunamis*] of God." Other verses, such as Luke 1:17, 35, Romans 1:4 and 1 Thessalonians 1:5. discuss the connection between the spirit and power.

The Spirit of revelation

God's Spirit provides another kind of power as well. "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us *through His Spirit* . . . No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit [which] is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

Paul tells us here that God's Spirit is the source of divine revelation, the power by which humans can understand and grasp spiritual concepts and principles mentioned in God's Word.

Not everyone can understand these things. There must be a calling involved (John 6:44; 1 Thessalonians 2:12). God must call us and reveal them to us through the Holy Spirit working within our minds to help us understand.

Not only does God's Spirit help us to understand His Word, but it inspired the original writers of the Bible. Referring to the many prophecies recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, the apostle Peter wrote that "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Peter 1:21).

Continued understanding through the Spirit

Before His death Jesus told His disciples that this process would continue, that God's Spirit would help them see and understand things they had never seen or understood before. He told them that He would leave, "but the Helper, the Holy Spirit, [which] the Father will send in My name, [it] will *teach you all things*, and *bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you*" (John 14:26).

God's Spirit did exactly what Christ said it would. The disciples grew in spiritual understanding, and with that understanding the four Gospels were written. The disciples did not take copious notes as they followed Jesus, writing down everything He said. Nor did they begin writing immediately; apparently the four Gospels were written during a span from about 20 to 60 years after Christ's death.

Two of the Gospel writers, Mark and Luke, weren't even among the original 12 disciples chosen by Christ. They apparently wrote their accounts based on the eyewitness testimony of the disciples and others who saw the events recorded in the Gospels occur. God's Spirit "brought to remembrance" the things Jesus Christ had said and done, guiding the disciples to later understand their significance and record these things for us.

God's Spirit leads to transformation. Added spiritual understanding, revelation and power lead to something else in the lives of those given God's Spirit: change.

It is evident to the reader of those accounts that the disciples lacked spiritual understanding *while these events were taking place*. It wouldn't have done them any good to write the Gospels then. It wasn't until many years later, after they had received God's Spirit and been converted, that they came to understand the significance of Christ's teachings and wrote down that understanding. Just as God inspired the writers of the "Holy Scriptures" (2 Timothy 3:15-17), so He inspired the apostles, through His Spirit, in their writings.

The example of Peter's powerful sermon in Acts 2 compared with his earlier denial of Christ shows how effectively the Holy Spirit worked in the life of this apostle--not to mention the other disciples who equally lacked conviction and understanding before the coming of God's Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

"Bring to remembrance" also has to do with the work of God's Spirit in the individual; there is still need for its work in our minds. We are exhorted to read and study the Scriptures for knowledge of God's truths and way of life. Then, as we go about our lives, God's Spirit dwelling in us leads and guides us, bringing to remembrance the principles and laws from God's Word we need so we can make right choices.

Growth in understanding over time

Jesus Christ said that the Holy Spirit would "teach [His disciples] all things." That process wasn't instantaneous; it took place over years. Just as we do, they learned as they went, gradually beginning to see and understand things they had never seen before.

But it took time. It was years before they realized that gentiles, too, could be saved and take part in God's Kingdom. Then it took several more years before they understood that gentiles didn't have to be circumcised to be saved. More years passed before they realized that Jesus Christ wasn't going to return in their lifetimes. They never did understand *when* Christ would return--just that He *would* come back, and that they needed to be spiritually ready.

God's Spirit taught them all things. It gave them understanding that they had never had--understanding that would be revealed to them supernaturally from God through the power of the Spirit.

That process continues with us. At conversion, when we receive the Holy Spirit, God doesn't teach us everything at once. We start out on the milk of the word. When we can handle that, we move on to stronger and stronger meat, with progressively more understanding possible through God's Spirit.

God's Spirit leads to change

God's Spirit leads to transformation. Added spiritual understanding, revelation and power lead to something else in the lives of those given God's Spirit: *change*.

Paul graphically describes the lives of those who live apart from God's Spirit: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21, New International Version).

Then Paul contrasts this with another way of life: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (verses 22-23).

What do these words mean? *Love* is concern for the well-being of others. *Joy* is "a feeling or state of great delight or happiness, as caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying . . ." *Peace* is a condition of harmony and tranquility with others, free from anxiety. *Long-suffering* is patience, which means bearing provocation, pain or annoyance without complaint. *Kindness* is showing considerate, benevolent or compassionate behavior toward others. *Goodness* is exhibiting generosity, moral excellence and virtue. *Faithfulness* is to be reliable, loyal, trusted and believed. *Gentleness* is to be kind, polite and courteous. *Self-control* is to stay in charge of one's own thoughts, own actions and feelings.

God's Spirit plays a vital role in our lives. It dwells within Christians, allowing a miraculous transformation to take place.

A great transformation

Paul talks about this transformation in Romans 8, again emphasizing the two ways to live: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, [set their minds on] the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace . . . But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His . . . But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit [which] dwells in you" (verses 5-6, 9, 11).

God's Spirit enables the *ultimate change* to take place: for carnal, selfish humans to become converted in this life and ultimately be transformed into God's very children, changed into immortal, glorified sons of God!

When Life Knocks You Down...Get Up!

By Janet Treadway

Life begins with a struggle for some creatures. Be glad you're not a baby giraffe!



DO YOU EVER GET DISCOURAGED with the trials of life? Do you ever feel sometimes that just when you get up from one trial, along comes another to kick you down again? Well be glad you were not born a baby giraffe. The amazing story of the birth of a giraffe brought some lessons home to me.

Did you know a baby giraffe falls 10 feet from its mother's womb and usually lands on its back? Ouch! Within seconds it rolls over and tucks its legs under its body. From this position it considers the world for the first time and shakes off the last vestiges of the birthing fluid from its eyes and ears. Then, as if it is not enough to fall 10 feet when born, the mother giraffe rudely introduces her offspring to the reality of life.

In his book, *A View From the Zoo*, Gary Richmond describes how a newborn giraffe learns its first lesson. The mother giraffe lowers her head long enough to take a quick look. Then she positions herself directly over her calf. She waits for about a minute, and then she does the most unreasonable thing. She swings her long, pendulous leg outward and kicks her baby, so that it is sent sprawling head over heels.

Lions, hyenas and leopards all enjoy eating young giraffes, and they'd get to, if the mother didn't teach her calf to get up quickly and get with it.

When it doesn't get up, the violent process is repeated over and over again. The struggle to rise is monumental. As the baby calf grows tired, the mother kicks it again to stimulate its efforts. Finally, the calf stands for the first time on its wobbly legs.

Then the mother giraffe does a remarkable thing. She kicks it off its feet again. Why? She wants it to remember how it got up. In the wild, baby giraffes must be able to get up as

quickly as possible to stay with the herd, where there is safety. Lions, hyenas and leopards all enjoy eating young giraffes, and they'd get to, if the mother didn't teach her calf to get up quickly and get with it.

So how well do we get back up when life knocks us down, as it does from time to time? We can feel like the baby giraffe, when the trials of life send us for a loop. I think of the many times that I have been knocked down and believed with my whole heart that I could never get up again. "Life is too hard," "I'm tired," I would think, and revert to self-pity, asking, "Why me, God?"

Struggles are good for us

Often what pulls me back up is reading the accounts of great men that God used. Such men as Joseph did not start out as great men. Indeed Joseph was knocked down time and time again by the trials of life.



Remember what Joseph went through? He was almost murdered by his brothers, sold into slavery, wrongly accused and then thrown into prison. But Joseph used his circumstances in prison to be a great example and was able to find favor in the sight of the jail keeper and those around him. He gained respect even in prison! Joseph could have become sour, bitter and filled with anger over the injustices done to him, but instead he turned them around to serve others. Like the baby giraffe, Joseph got back up. And more remarkably, he turned his terrible circumstances around to do good for others.

Joseph grew from the trials, to become a great leader and save a nation from famine. His words to his brothers, after he had become second in command in Egypt, were not words of bitterness, revenge and hate. Instead they were words of appreciation for the trials that he had gone through because he knew that God had used them for his good and for the good of a nation. "But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here," Joseph told his brothers, "for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:6).

Joseph's attitude had completely changed from when he was a young lad. He grew from bragging to his brothers that they would bow down to him, to the point where, years later, he had to leave the room while he wept for his brothers.

Joseph was human, though, just like you and me. In his darkest hours he must have asked God why many times. While in prison Joseph must have wondered what happened to his boyhood dreams. I am sure Joseph must have asked God why He was not helping him and saving him from his terrible trials. As he sat within the dark walls of prison, Joseph must have felt that God was punishing him or that He had abandoned him.

Joseph could have become sour, bitter and filled with anger over the injustices done to him, but instead he turned them around to serve others.

Can you relate to any of these thoughts? Many times we do not feel that the struggles of this life are for our good--especially while going through the trial.

But the fact was God was with Joseph all the time and never left his side. God was the one that showed him favor with the jailer and the men around him! God was the one that gave him wisdom to interpret dreams that led him first to his freedom, then to be a ruler and save a nation.

God in His great wisdom knows that trials will bring forth gold in us. He knows when to act and what to do for our growth.

God wants us to be able to fly

God also knows when not to act. Sometimes He does not respond immediately or help us in the way we'd like because He knows our struggle is necessary for our strength and growth.

Perhaps you've heard the story of a man who found a cocoon of a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared; he sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could, and it could go no farther.

The man decided to help the butterfly, so he took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. But it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings.

The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that at any moment the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time.



Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly.

What the man in his kindness and haste did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were nature's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.

If God allowed us to go through our lives without any obstacles, it would cripple us. Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our lives. If God allowed us to go through our lives without any obstacles, it would cripple us. We would not be as strong as what we could have been. And we could never fly...

Nor could we understand and be able to reach out and help others in their afflictions as Joseph did. The apostle Peter described the value of trials: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7).

So keep getting up when you are knocked down! Keep struggling through the tight, difficult spots! Remember the baby giraffe and butterfly. Their difficulties make them beautiful and

strong. Remember the example of Joseph who did not give up and was used mightily by God. Trust God that He is allowing your trials and struggles for your good and for the good of others.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Memorial Day to Remember

By Jerald Aust

Is the act of dying for one's country the greatest sacrifice a human can make?

EACH YEAR IN LATE MAY, the United States of America observes Memorial Day. It was instituted in 1868 to honor the Civil War dead, but now it commemorates all war dead. Nations often honor their patriots, especially those who gave their lives for their countries.

Is the act of dying for one's country the greatest sacrifice a human can make? And is a national memorial day commemorating the war dead the greatest memorial day humans will experience?



There are many notable war heroes in U.S. history. One such hero was Marine Sergeant Jimmie Howard. In his book *Vietnam* Kent DeLong describes an experience that occurred on June 16, 1966. Sergeant Howard helped save his decimated platoon by engaging in good old fashioned horse laughing. Howard's patrol was given a mission to establish a position on Hill 488, a barren, rocky elevation overlooking the Hiep Duc Valley some 20 mile northwest of Chu Lai.

During that long frightening night, the North Vietnamese besieged the gallant marines relentlessly. Enemy soldiers advanced on them like an army of ants. It looked as if they would all surely die. Staring death in the face, Sergeant Howard continued shouting encouragement to his Marine platoon.

Suddenly, in the darkest of night, there was a lull in the battle. The North Vietnamese began chanting in singsong English: "Marine, you will die. It's all over for you. You will die, Marine." Unexpectedly, Sergeant Howard instructed his men to give the enemy the old horse laugh. With no hope of reinforcements until morning, badly wounded and hopelessly outnumbered, they laughed at their attackers, laughed at their danger, and laughed at their death. They laughed as loud as they could for several minutes. Then there was complete silence from both sides.

Later, captured enemy soldiers admitted that they had been unnerved by the laughter. "How could these Marines laugh at us? What did they know that we didn't?"

Incredibly, 12 wounded Marines survived out of the original 18. All 18 Marines received purple hearts, 13 received Silver Stars, four were awarded the Navy Cross, and in addition, Sergeant Jimmie Howard received the Medal of Honor. His platoon became the most decorated Marines in the 200 years of U.S. military history. These men offered a great sacrifice for their country.

Though such human sacrifice is great, the sacrifices of God's saints, Christ's disciples, are much greater than those made by national heroes. Christ's true disciples honor God based on

His requirements, not their desires. They learn early in their spirit-led lives that they must be living sacrifices for Him (Romans 12:1). This daily process of denying the natural lusts of the flesh, whether in peace or in war, is true sacrifice. Christians replace self-centered thoughts and actions with God's thoughts and commands. This is never an easy task.

By choice, some of God's disciples have suffered martyrdom. They looked for a better resurrection: "And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better (Greek: "greater; nobler) resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35). Even common logic recognizes that Christian martyrdom is the ultimate sacrifice. God remembers those who sacrifice their lives, their thoughts, words, and deeds for Him.

God has perfect memory. He takes no chances to forget those who sacrifice their lives for Him: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on (esteem) His name. 'They shall be Mine,' says the Lord of hosts, 'on the day that I make them My jewels (special treasure). And I will spare them (from tribulation) as a man spares his own son who serves him" (Malachi 3:16-17).

God's book of remembrance is the same as the Book of Life, found in Revelation 20:12. It commemorates those who sacrificed their desires for God's ways (Malachi 3:16) with the gift of everlasting life (Romans 6:23).

All nations acknowledge the sacrifice human beings make for their country. But for those who know the true God, there is a Memorial Day that supersedes all national ones. Better than that of heroic Sergeant Howard, God reassures His disciples that He will not forget their sacrifices. He will remember them at Jesus Christ 's glorious return to this earth. That special day will be a much greater Memorial Day to remember, one in which you can take part! Are you taking the right steps to ensure you will be acknowledged on that greater Memorial Day?

Is the act of dying for one's country the greatest sacrifice a human can make? God remembers those who sacrifice their lives, their thoughts, words, and deeds for Him, in a big way.