

# **The Comforter**

## **Devotional guide about the Holy Spirit**

**Copyright by Alice R. Cullinan, 2013**

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### *A Word from the Author*

Thank you for deciding to use this devotional book to help guide your thoughts as you read God's Word in your time of daily devotion. It is my hope that you will always read the entire Bible passage I have included and ask God to speak a word to your heart from it before you ever read what is shared in this book. And I recommend that you read only one of these devotions a day. In this way, you will keep the Word of God in its prominent place and will use my stories as a supplement to your own thoughts about the passage.

I also recommend that you journal when you read the Bible passage and these stories, especially answering the reflection questions that are included. This will help you see a pattern of truths that God may be speaking to you, which can be of help in the future when you look back at what He has said to you.

I dedicate this book in memory of Miss Berth Smith, servant of the Lord Jesus and missionary in His Kingdom. She taught me much about the Holy Spirit and the need to be a clean vessel in order for Him to indwell us in power.

- Alice Cullinan

### *A Word About this book*

One of the greatest gifts given to believers is God Himself in the power and presence of His Spirit. But all too often, His children are oblivious to His presence and power. It is my prayer that this devotional guide will assist us all in knowing the Holy Spirit more intimately and help us surrender all of ourselves to Him for His empowerment and indwelling. In that way we will experience the abundant life Jesus came to give to us and be empowered as channels of His love and power to others.

## **The Comforter**

**Bible Passage: John 14:15-21**

**Focus: If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever...**

For Christmas one year, a colleague gave me a present purchased in Russia, her home country. It was a colorful figurine that I was admiring when she instructed me to pull it apart. I complied only to discover a smaller replica of the figurine inside. Then she told me to pull that one apart also, and you guessed it. Inside of each of the figurines was a smaller one. I subsequently had 6 identical figurines of various sizes! Gifts within a gift. But had she or someone else not instructed me to look inside the original gift, I probably would not have done so. Such is the case with us and the Holy Spirit, I fear. The Father gave us His Spirit at the request of the Son. But how often do we Christians fail to understand what is really inside of the original gift? My goal in this month's devotions is to help us 'unpack our present,' not just to know what we have received, but to get to know Him on a personal basis. He is God, you know!

The word translated 'comforter' in some versions of the Bible also means the following: counselor, helper, intercessor, advocate, strengthener and standby. I think we are in for a treat this month, don't you?

**Reflection: Have you ever thought about what you received in the gift of the Spirit? Take a few moments just to ponder the different words that are included in the word 'comforter.'**

**Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you so much for asking the Father to send the Spirit to us Your children. You knew how much we would need Him as our constant source of comfort and blessing. May I be a submissive follower today.**

## **Just Like Me**

**Bible Passage: John 14:6-16**

**Focus: And I will ask the Father, and he will give you *another* Counselor to be with you....**

It is fun looking at the pictures that people post on Facebook. It is not hard to learn very quickly who or what is important in someone's life by looking at the pictures they post. I must confess that I just posted another picture of one of my puppies as he lay sleeping with his head on a stuffed puppy!

Some of the pictures I most enjoy viewing are the ones of former students with their children. One former student calls his son 'little me,' and I can see why. He is almost a clone of his dad! And obviously people have told him that frequently!

Although there seems to be confusion about the Holy Spirit in the minds of some, Jesus told us the basics of how to understand Him: "He is just like me. If you want to know what He is like, just study my life." Yes, that profound truth is in our focus verse for today, capsulized in the often overlooked word 'another.' Indeed, the Spirit is 'another, just like Jesus.' And that is something that should bring us great joy today. The Spirit is like Jesus...and He lives in my heart!

But there is more profound truth on the topic, and we will examine some of it this month. Dig deeply into the truths about the Spirit in the passages I share with you. You will be glad you did!

**Reflection: Have you ever focused on the Spirit and what He wants to do in and through your life? Try it this month and your life will never be the same!**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the wonderful gift of the Spirit. Open my eyes to see and my heart to truly understand this great endowment. I want to see. I want to know. I want to live as you would have me live.**

## **What's This For?**

**Bible Passage: John 16:1-11**

**Focus: When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.**

One of my neighbors invited me to a Tupperware party at her house. Although you will not often find me in the kitchen of my house unless it is to feed the puppies, I do like some of their containers. So I went. It was fun and I even won a door prize, which is saying something for someone who never wins anything! It was some kind of orange gadget that I didn't know how to use, so after most of the guests had left, I asked my neighbor about it. With her explanation, it made perfect sense, but I can say it is still in the kitchen drawer quite unused! So, it does me no good. But at least I won something!

Although this unused prize is my possession, I might as well not have it. It is for all practical purposes useless. The problem is with me, not the item. And such it is with believers at times. When we possess the Holy Spirit (because we belong to Jesus), but fail to understand Who or what we have and don't know how to 'tap into Him,' the gift is quite useless. How tragic!

The instructions for Who the Spirit is and why He was given to us, and how to tap into His blessings, are all in the manual! So, let's get to studying! Take your first notes from our focus passage today: He will **convict** us of sin, righteousness and judgment, letting believers and non-believers alike know what God expects, how we should live, and what will happen in the end. Let's go to school and learn from the indwelling teacher.

**Reflection: Will you ask the Spirit to teach you about Himself?**

**Prayer: Spirit of the Living God, teach me about You, the Father and the Son. I want to learn. I want to serve. I want to obey.**

## **Help!**

**Bible Passage: Romans 8:18-27**

**Focus: ...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...he intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.**

Unfortunately I have had more than my fair share of falls. I think the major problem has to do with the differences in age of my mind and my body. My mind walks faster than my body can match! Usually there is someone handy to help me up, but on one occasion recently, I fell on my kitchen floor. Only my puppies were around and although they showered me with kisses, that did not help me get up. I lay there for a while to let things 'settle down', but soon realized that I was not going to be able to stay there and still make it to Sunday School on time. Since I am the teacher and since I was going to have to change clothes due to the cup of tea that now soaked the front of my clothes, I managed to scoot over to a chair and pull myself up. Everything seemed to be working OK, so off to church I went.

What does this illustration have to do with our passage for today, you might wonder? Helpless is not something we like to feel. But there is an important area of helplessness for which the Spirit is well suited and ready to offer help: in the matter of prayer. We may THINK we know how to pray according to God's will, but we really don't. It is best just to admit that to the Spirit and ask for His help! He gets it right every time.

**Reflection: Have you realized that the Spirit is willing and able to help take over your prayer life if you ask Him to do so? Try it. You will be amazed at how many prayers are answered!**

**Prayer: Dear Spirit of God, thank You for this ministry to me. Help me count on You every day and to allow You to do the praying for me and in me.**

## **Party Preparations**

**Bible Passage: I Corinthians 2:6-12**

**Focus: We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.**

One of the wonderful giftings of the Spirit is that of hospitality. It is a joy to be the recipient of such a gift, receiving a spiritual blessing that comes along with whatever way this gift is manifested. Since I do not have this one, it amazes me just how creative people can be who do have it. And they do not mind working hard to make sure that those who come to see them in their homes or enjoy the nice fellowship meal at church are blessed by pretty colors and decorations, napkins that match, etc. They can spend hours on making sure the tables look beautiful, when it never crosses my mind to do this and I wouldn't know how if I tried!

Some do not realize that this activity that they enjoy so much is actually a gifting of the Spirit. It is an endowment, as are other gifts (like teaching and preaching). All are distributed by the Spirit. He has made great preparations for the body of Christ to live and serve in this world and to enjoy life while they do it! Isn't it fun to imagine what it must have been like in heaven when the members of the Trinity were planning how things would work with the humans they were going to create? "No man has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." (vs. 10). But the Spirit wants us to know about the preparations that have been made for us to enjoy life to its fullest! He tells us to 'enjoy the party!' Isn't that a good description of abundant living? Jesus says 'Yes, it is.'

**Reflection: Have you ever considered that life is supposed to be lived as a party...a holy one? Try changing your perspective.**

**Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for all You did that I might live life to its fullest. Help me to realize what great preparations have been made and what provisions are mine.**

## **Who's in There?**

**Bible Passage: I Corinthians 6:11-20**

**Focus: Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.**

Dusty was a Shih Tzu I owned for almost 15 years. He was a loyal companion who brought much happiness into my life. As is true about many pets, they seem to be able to discern your feelings. I can remember on more than one occasion that he seemed to be trying to comfort me when I was upset about something. Although I rarely cry, there were times I did, and he seemed to know I would appreciate having someone close by. He also knew when I was going out (he would glance to see if I had my shoes on) and would position himself near the door so I could give him a treat before I left. The two pets I have now have developed that same practice. (I am sure many pet owners could share their own stories of the 'humanity' of their pets).

One evening when he was sitting close to me on the couch, he looked up and stared into my eyes as if to speak to me. I heard myself saying, "Who are you really? Who is inside of you?" I laughed, of course, because I do not believe in reincarnation! But then I thought of our passage for today. It would do us all well to ask ourselves these questions on a regular basis: "Who am I really...as God's child? And Who is inside of me?" I think we might live our lives more faithfully if we found the right answer to those questions!

**Reflection: How often do you stop and think about the fact that the Spirit indwells you and you belong to Him?**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, May my life be guided today by the keen realization that I am Yours. You want to make the decisions today on what I do, how I act and whom I serve.**



## **Out of Gas**

**Bible Passage: Acts 1:1-9**

**Focus: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**

My puppies and I love to go on a golf cart ride around the neighborhood. They love it so much that they nearly hyperventilate when I simply take the keys from the hook near the door. There have been times in the past when I went without them and they would not speak to me for several hours! The challenge is holding onto them when a neighborhood squirrel runs nearby. Since there are two of them to keep in line while trying to stay on the road, I usually ask someone else to go along with me. But one afternoon, there was no one available and it was too pretty to pass up the chance to go. So, off we went. But in my hurry to enjoy the afternoon, I forgot to check to see if I needed any gas. And, you guessed it, after I rode around a bend on my street (which is a semi-circle) and up a pretty steep hill, I ran out of gas. Using the best reasoning ability I could muster in that situation, I put the cart in neutral and let it coast as far as it would, walking the rest of the way to the house with puppies unhappy about not getting to ride anymore.

The experience I just related was not so earth-shaking. But it is extremely problematic when we as Christians no longer have the empowerment of the Spirit to do the work God has called us to do: reach the world for Christ. We act as if we are out of gas, coasting along looking for 'gas,' while the world awaits the liberating news we have.

**Reflection: Have you stopped to check how much 'gas' you have in your own life? We don't ever have to run dry!**

## **Fill 'er Up**

**Bible Passage: Ephesians 5:1-21**

**Focus: ...be filled with the Spirit.**

Since I live in North Carolina, a state with one of the highest gasoline tax rates, whenever I can, I wait to fill up my car when making a trip to South Carolina. Although it is still painful and expensive these days to fill up the gas tank, it should not be painful for us believers to keep our spiritual 'tanks' filled with God's Spirit! In fact, Ephesians makes it clear that it is essential if we want to live an obedient Christian life. Most of us would agree that it would be nice to comply with Paul's command, but few of us know what to do about our emptiness. Our passage for today gives some helpful guidance: (1) act like God in all you do; (2) live a love-filled life; (3) get the impurities out of your life; live a holy life; (4) Find out what pleases the Lord and do it; (5) Watch what comes out of your mouth; (6) Don't even mention what the disobedient do and certainly don't imitate their behavior; (7) Don't waste time, use it wisely; (8) Find out what the Lord's will is for you and do it.

These are just a few things that will get you started on the right path. Remember that the Holy Spirit is Holy...so get unholiness out of your mind and life and off your lips!

**Reflection: As you read the instructions in Ephesians, how are you doing? Where do you need to ask for forgiveness? Where do you need a 'spiritual make-over' so you will be a fit vessel for the Spirit to fill?**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, I realize that I have let You down in many ways. I have not lived a life that the Spirit can freely indwell. Forgive and cleanse me, I pray, and enable me to submit my mind and body to You to indwell and use in any way You desire.**

## **Filters**

**Bible Passage: Romans 15:1-13**

**Focus: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Spirit.**

Recently I learned that it is good not to watch TV or use a computer or IPAD an hour before you go to bed unless you have on filtering glasses. Although I do not believe everything I hear or read, the information came from a reputable source, so I went to the Internet and ordered some filtering glasses. They are orange and make everything I look at a different color! It is amusing to see how many of the colors on TV are changed when I watch through these glasses. There are a lot of green shirts, etc., along with green skies, since the orange glasses change the blues into greens. I walked outside one night shortly after I had purchased them, taking the puppies out for their last trip before bedtime. I forgot I had the glasses on and could not understand why the moon was a different color! I am glad I had not been watching any news reports about end of the world predictions!

Unfortunately all of us have on filters of one kind or another. Two of them are called optimism and pessimism, and we interpret our circumstances through whichever filter we are wearing. Whether we are filled with hope or with discouragement often is determined by the 'filters' through which we are viewing life. Our passage today reminds us of the importance of being filled with God's Spirit, so that we can overflow with hope, not despair.

**Reflection: Have you thought about whether you are a pessimist or an optimist, whether you look at life with hope or with discouragement? Listen to your own self-talk sometime, and you may discover what color your glasses are!**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, Fill me with Your love and peace today so that my life will be filled with the hope the Spirit wants to give me.**

## **Loud Whispers**

**Bible Passage: I Corinthians 2: 1-13**

**Focus: My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.**

Unfortunately, Colorado has had a number of tragedies in recent years. Most of us remember the horrible tragedy at the movie theater when a crazed gunman suddenly appeared during the opening showing of a new Batman movie. And there was the Columbine high school shooting with a killing spree in a local church. The power of evil leaves an indelible print on one's mind. But so does the power of good. When I think of Colorado, I remember the trip I took to Colorado Springs to attend a worship festival. It was an amazing experience that I will always cherish. But one thing in particular stands out above the other good memories. In the afternoons, there was a teaching session. Although I do not remember the person's name, what I do remember is he had to speak to us in a whisper. He had lost his voice several years prior to that engagement and he shared how the Lord has spoken to him through this 'bad experience.' What impressed me and made a lasting impression on me was the power that was coming out of his mouth even though you had to strain to hear his whispers. Truly, God's Spirit was speaking loudly through him even though his own speaking voice was not working at all! It definitely was a 'demonstration of the Spirit's power.' And the experience reminded me of the importance of allowing the Spirit to do the work when we speak or teach God's word!

**Reflection: Do you realize that when a song or a sermon touches you, it is more than likely the Spirit who is doing that?**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, I want You to speak through me so that the power may flow into the lives of others and make a real difference!**

## **Power in Prayer**

**Bible Passage: James 5: 13-20**

**Focus: The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**

Have you ever heard or said this: “She has a direct line to God.” Or how about this one: “Would you pray for me. I know God hears your prayers.” Or this one: “He is a prayer warrior for sure.” Question: shouldn’t this be said about all believers? It should, but of course, it is not always true about us. Why is this? Does God have favorites? This is not true, of course, that God has favorites, but it does seem that some Christians have a more powerful prayer life than others. If this is true, why? I think the answers to our questions are given in our passage today, at least they introduce the topic rather effectively. Consider these reasons why some have a powerful prayer life: (1) they are living the kind of life that honors God. See verses 1-12 of chapter 5; (2) they actually pray and don’t just think about problems; (3) they are praisers as well as pray-ers; (4) they exercise faith as they pray; (5) they understand the importance of confession and cleansing of sin; (6) they themselves live a righteous life.

James tells us that Elijah was a powerful man of prayer, but he was just like us. He got tired and he got depressed. He was discouraged and afraid when threatened. In other words, we don’t have to be super-human to be super-pray-ers . And don’t forget Who it is within us praying through us anyway!

**Reflection: How is your prayer life? Want to be a super pray-er? You can be. Just follow the instructions and submit to the Spirit.**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, open my eyes to see what a powerhouse the Holy Spirit is within me. Help me to stay out of His way so He can pray His prayers through me. I watch to see what He will do!**

## **The Job Description**

**Bible Passage: John 16:5-16**

**Focus: “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.**

It was my first job interview after completing the master’s degree at seminary. I had waited for six long months for an opening to occur. During that excruciating time of waiting, the Lord taught me much and even made me willing to do what I said I would never do: take a multiple-position church job. But after waiting for so many months, I was desperate and wound up taking a position as Minister of Music, Education, Children and Youth! How is that for impossible? And the church did not have a job description. I had to create one after I had been there about a year! Yes, I took a job not really knowing what was expected of me. I learned a great deal, to say the least. As the years passed (4 in all), I learned what to expect and what I could and could not do. And one of the things that I began to understand was the value of a job description, although it is an impossible task to spell out all of the details in a ministry position.

Have you ever stopped to realize that Jesus gave us the ‘job description’ of the Spirit? It is quite an impressive one, by the way, one that He does quite well but one that will take the rest of our lives to even begin to fathom. A few of the items are included in John 16: (1) convicting the world of sin; (2) guiding us into all truth; (3) revealing the future to us; (4) bringing glory to Jesus. And that is just a tiny look at the ‘duties.’ Spend the rest of your life learning the others!

**Reflection: Have you ever considered that it is the role of the Spirit to take care of you? Thank Him for that today!**

**Prayer: Dear Spirit of God, Thank You for being willing to work in my life to make me into the image of Jesus. I will be receptive to You today and listen to what You want to teach me.**

## **Constant Companion**

**Bible Passage: John 14:14-21**

**Focus: “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth...he lives with you and will be in you.**

Although my two little pups are not related, they are real buddies. I would have to say they are ‘constant companions.’ But one is the leader and the other the follower. The larger one, a female, is indeed ‘queen of the house,’ and her little buddy, a much smaller male usually lets her have her way. He may lose his temper occasionally at some of her antics, but where she goes, so does he. If we try to take her to the vet without him, we create a major crisis in the house. So, we take him, too. And they both must be where I am, even if I go into the bathroom! (In the midst of writing this devotion, she – Little Bear – has already reminded me that she would like to have her evening treat, even though it is an hour before it is due.) And the little guy – Teddy – is lying here beside me, upside-down, letting her do the ‘talking’ about the evening treat!

One of the ‘names’ of the Counselor Jesus said He would send us is ‘stand-by,’ or what I would describe as a ‘constant companion.’ He is also our comforter, helper, intercessor, advocate and strengthener. And Jesus said this ‘heavenly companion’ would always be with us, in fact INSIDE of us. How great is that!

**Reflection: Do you realize what a wonderful gift the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God is to believers? Take a moment and thank Jesus for the Spirit!**

**Prayer: Dear Jesus, Thank you so much for sending the Spirit to dwell within Your children. And thank You, Spirit, for being willing to come and stay and work with us. Help us be aware and pliable and obedient.**

## **The Drum Beat**

**Bible Passage: Galatians 5:24-26**

**Focus: Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.**

While organizing some files on my computer recently, I ran across some old pictures of my family and me. Among the pictures was one of me in my high school band uniform with clarinet in hand. Although the uniform I was wearing at the time the picture was taken was much too large, I remember the band director being very strict that we learn how to march in precision and perfect formation. I was thankful that I had taken piano lessons with a woman who was meticulous in teaching me how to follow the beat of a metronome, so it was not difficult for me to march in step with the beat of the drums during our field exercises. I had to laugh, however, as I remembered some of my classmates who were ‘born without this innate rhythm,’ as my father would often say when he noticed them marching in perfect ‘out-of-rhythm’ step! Once I tried to walk against the beat or out of step with it and drove myself crazy trying to do it! I guess my piano teacher brainwashed me too much. And I even have difficulty ignoring the steady rhythm of the car windshield wipers.

Paul tells us in our passage today how important it is to learn how to keep in step with the Spirit. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we were so in tune with Him that we could not walk out of step with Him without it causing us great discomfort? That should be our goal today, to walk in step with Him – and that means stopping or going according to His direction!

**Reflection: Whose drumbeat are you following today, the Spirit’s or your own?**

**Prayer: Spirit of God, I will listen for Your direction today, and will follow when and where and how You lead. I am Yours.**



## **Tag Team Wrestlers**

**Bible Passage: Galatians 5:1-16**

**Focus: So, I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other...**

Probably some of the most entertaining forms of wrestling are the tag-team matches on TV. Granted, they are usually pretty ‘corny,’ and I enjoy watching the reaction of the audience as much as anything. I really prefer to watch collegiate wrestling, what I consider the ‘real stuff.’ But the tag-team matches are fun. One of the team members fights for a while and when it seems he is about to be overcome by his opponent, he reaches his hand under the ropes on the ring and touches the outstretched hand of his teammate who quickly comes to his rescue. Although the matches are more entertainment than athletic (although it takes great strength to do some of the things they do to entertain us), there are spiritual truths everywhere. In the Bible, the Christian life is often described as a battle or an athletic contest. There are ‘races to be won,’ ‘wrestling with principalities and powers,’ and ‘pressing on to win the prize.’ But there is also an important truth repeated in the Bible that I fear is overlooked by us. It is shared in our readings for today: there is a wrestling match taking place within us, between our old and new natures. The Spirit is inside of us as our ‘teammate,’ but unless we realize that, we keep fighting the battle in our own strength, and usually we lose! The answer? “Live by the Spirit – be responsive to, guided by and controlled by Him...” and we will be winners every time!

**Reflection: Who is fighting your battles today, you or the Spirit?**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to have enough sense today to let the Spirit fight my battles for me.**

## **Low on Power**

**Bible Passage: Ephesians 6:10-18**

**Focus: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power**

It was early one morning when I let the puppies outside. I heard a loud noise and noticed a flock of buzzards in the trees near my house. They were ugly and noisy and the puppies seemed reluctant to go outside. I was a bit concerned myself since I was not sure if they would attack us. When I saw one fly down to a lower branch and seem to be looking at the smaller of the puppies, I thought it was time to 'launch into protection mode.' I knew I could not shoot them, since that is illegal in my town. I tried hollering at them, and think I heard them chuckling! I remembered that I had a bb-pistol in the closet, so I went to retrieve it, not knowing if it would help or not. I put an unused CO2 cartridge in it, loaded it with bbs and went out on the deck to see if it would shoot far enough to frighten off the birds. Ready, aim, fire....and the bb rolled out of the end of the barrel and onto the deck floor. So much for that terrifying action! The birds laughed and flew away a bit later. I myself have laughed about this many times since.

What was my problem? I had the equipment, but not the power. And much to my dismay, the same is all too often in my spiritual life. I have the Spirit living inside of me, all of the 'equipment' I need to live life to its fullest and to meet all threats. But the power is not there! And my enemy laughs at my feeble efforts.

**Reflection: How are you doing with your spiritual 'equipment' and the power necessary to make sure you experience a life of power?**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, you have given me clear instructions about what I need today to be successful against my enemy. Help me be wise enough to equip myself with all of the armor, and help me rely upon and be submissive to the Spirit, the power source.**

## **Playing Church**

**Bible Passage: Phil. 3:1-11**

**Focus: For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh...**

Our church staff has been sharing their 'faith journey stories' with us in prayer meeting over the past few weeks. It makes me realize that we really need to do more of that. It is a blessing to hear how God has been faithful in leading people to Himself, and how He has ministered to them all along their journey. This past week, the Minister of Youth shared how he and his brother liked to play church when they were children. He mentioned that none of his friends at that time could understand why they enjoyed that activity. I, too, remembered the times I would play church with friends and family. I could not remember, however, if there were those who gave me a hard time about that particular childhood activity. I am curious, however, and may have to ask around to see how many Christians engaged in that activity as children. What I fear today, however, is how proficient we are at playing church as adults! "What does that look like," someone might ask? In a nutshell, I think it can be summarized as 'going through the motions of church activities with our minds and hearts not engaged.' Unfortunately, I think we fail to remember what our focus verse is teaching: that it is indeed the Holy Spirit who helps us worship.

**Reflection: When is the last time you asked the Spirit to help you worship appropriately? Do so every time you come to worship, both privately and in church.**

**Prayer: Dear Spirit of the living God, I need Your help as I attempt to worship. I ask for cleansing from all that would grieve You, and submit my life for You to control.**

## **Stops and Go's**

**Bible Passage: Acts 16:6-10**

**Focus: Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.**

I found someone who was willing to pick up my golf-cart and take it to be serviced. It was too cold to ride in it when he returned it, but the first chance I got, I went out to check it out. I turned on the key and heard a horrible squealing noise, one that I had never heard before, and one I knew should not be happening, especially just after a servicing. I debated whether to call the repair person, so I tried it again. Once again, the squeal hurt my ears. Not to be deterred from my goal of riding, I put my foot on the brake and tried once again. And it purred like it should. I am still not sure what was going on, or if I will have future problems. I am just glad that it is working right now. Something was wrong, and it let me know it!

Don't you wish the voice of the Spirit were that clear to you when something is wrong in your life? Unfortunately, His convictions and leadership are often not easy to detect. He prefers the 'still, small voice' on most occasions. But there are ways that He speaks both to stop us and to compel us to go. Paul was good at understanding the instructions of the Spirit and his writings are one good way to help us become better at it. I will say this: there are times when He definitely is 'squealing loudly' for us not to do something. Let's listen...to the loud and the soft promptings of the Spirit.

**Reflection: How good are you at hearing the leading of the Spirit? Will you read more of the Bible so you can get better?**

**Prayer: Dear Spirit, I am thankful You lead me, and I want to get better at knowing when to go and when to stop. Will You help me with that, please?**

## **The Future**

**Bible Passage: Acts 19:22-31**

**Focus: And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.**

Do you even think much about the future and wonder what it holds for you? It is not good to engage in that kind of thinking very often except for what can help us make appropriate plans and preparations. For the most part, the Lord has closed off the future to us. And that is obviously wise. I really am not fond of what some doctors do – telling their patients that they only have a certain length of time to live. Although there are some reasons why such information can be helpful for the families involved, for some people, the bursting of hope can actually shorten their lives!

There are times, however, when God finds it appropriate to let us peek behind the curtain that separates present from future events, but it is best that the Spirit be the one doing the telling. Jesus Himself said that He would send the Spirit when He left and that one of His jobs would be to ‘tell you what is yet to come.’ (John 16:13). For the most part, God veils the future from us, but when we need to know something, He will tell us. I have also noticed that because He knows the future, I can find peace in doing what He leads me to do, even when it makes no sense to me now!

**Reflection: Are you ever puzzled at why God opens or closes certain doors for you? Do you find yourself afraid when you cannot understand all of the reasons why God allows certain things to happen? Are you able to trust the unknown future to His care?**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, my prayer today is that You help me trust You even when I cannot understand. You are in charge of the present and the future!**

## **Flying High**

**Bible Passage: Romans 8:1-9**

**Focus: ...through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.**

It was back before there was a limit to the number of suitcases you could carry on an airplane without an additional fee. I had never flown before, so I was nervous. I had two very large suitcases since I was going to be away at a camp for the summer. I noticed that others also had large suitcases that airline personnel were loading onto the plane as we walked out to board the small jet. My fears seem to elevate as I saw several very heavy people boarding, also. I wondered how two little engines could hoist a plane loaded with heavy people and lots of luggage! But I proceeded anyway, anxious and prayerful. As we taxied down the runway, picking up more speed but with our wheels still on the ground, I wondered if we would take off before we got to the end of the runway! We did, of course, helped by my prayers! How could tiny engines overcome the law of gravity and enable so much 'weight' to head through the sky to another destination? A greater power took over: the power of aerodynamics. It worked, as long as the 'new power' was in control.

And the same principle works in our walk with God. If the new power within us, the Spirit of God, is allowed to be in control of us, we will soar above the 'downward pull of the old nature' that would keep us grounded. Which power are you allowing to control your life today?

**Reflection: Do you realize that there is Someone within you, the Holy Spirit, who will empower your life as you let Him?**

**Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for giving me the Holy Spirit to live powerfully in me as I allow Him to do so. Today, I rely on Him as my source of power to enable me to live obediently and abundantly.**

## **Thirsty**

**Bible Passage: John 7:37-44**

**Focus: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”**

I remember very little about a long road trip I took many years ago, but one thing stands out vividly. It was before the time of plastic water bottles, so if you did not plan well, when you got thirsty, you had to make a stop. I had driven for many miles along the highway before coming upon a rest stop. I had worked up quite a thirst, so the first thing I did when I stopped was to head for the water fountain which was located right in front of the restroom area. I pressed on the button located on the side of the fountain, but nothing happened. I tried several times and then noticed an inconspicuous sign that read: “out of order.” There were no drink machines anywhere to be found! Unless I wanted to revert to drinking water from a very dirty sink in a very dirty restroom, my thirst would have to wait to be quenched. (I just reached for my water glass that is beside the desk where I am writing this devotion!) My thirst remained and intensified until I found a working water fountain.

Jesus invites the thirsty of spirit to come to Him for a drink of living water. And when we come, He gives us the gift of His Spirit who then becomes the ‘river of living water that flows out from within us’ to quench our thirst and the thirst of all who come to us for help.

**Reflection: Do you realize that is it totally unnecessary for you to remain spiritually thirsty since the Spirit is life-giving water within the hearts of believers? Drink deeply, child of God!**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You so much for the indwelling Spirit! Help me to drink deeply of that life-giving water today and to be a faithful dispenser of that water to others around me who are thirsty for You.**

## **Killing the Weeds**

**Bible Passage: Ephesians 4: 25-32**

**Focus: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

Yesterday I decided it was time to spray weed-killer on weeds and unwanted grass that is growing along the driveway and the puppies' fence. I purchased a small, handheld sprayer at the close of the season last year. It is smaller than the other sprayers I have used, holding about 1/3 a gallon. I removed the sales tag, filled it with water and the spray chemical, built up the pressure by pumping the handle, and pointed it toward the weeds. What happened? The spray shot out sideways onto everything but the weeds at which it was pointed! I let up on the spray button, of course, since I did not want to kill the grass around the targeted weed! I discovered a very small bit of dirt that had accumulated on the tip of the sprayer over the winter. When I removed it, the sprayer then worked as intended.

God has intended that we work correctly, without hindrance. The indwelling Spirit expects holiness, so when there is even a slight bit of disobedience, things do not work as they should! We not only are unable to accomplish our mission, we can be harmful to all around us! It is all too easy to think that the little things in our lives do not really make all that much difference. But they do! If you read carefully the passage for today's readings, you will note some of the things that can quench and grieve the Spirit of God. It is a good place to begin to discover what might be 'clogging up your life!'

**Reflection: Did you read the list of 'water clogging' things mentioned in Ephesians 4?**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, Please show me where I am hindering the flow of Your Spirit in my life.**



## **The Deposit**

**Bible Passage: Ephesians 1:11-14**

**Focus: Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.**

Most of us have been car or house shopping and are familiar with the concept of putting down a deposit as a guarantee that we plan to make the purchase. Only if we fail to follow through on the purchase is our deposit in jeopardy. Only recently have I pondered the impact of the truth in our focal verse for today. God has made an enormous deposit to guarantee His purchase of us! He 'stamped' us as His, and the stamp or seal is the deposit showing that He plans to follow through on His purchase of us! And what is that deposit? His Spirit! If he reneges on His promise to redeem us, the Spirit is forfeited, which of course is impossible and unthinkable. Consequently, this verse is probably one of the most powerful 'assurance' verses the Christian has. Do we have to worry about 'losing our salvation?' Not if we have the deposit!

Many Christians are unsure of their final destination. They fear God might reject them because of sin and disobedience. Of course, we do not lose or keep salvation based on our behavior. We have a relationship with God because we have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. The reason we will never lose this relationship is because we have the guarantee! Obedience is important for fellowship with God, but relationship with Him and assurance of eternal salvation is because of what HE has done. He knows we will never lose that!

**Reflection: Do you realize that your security as a believer is not because of what you do but because of what Jesus did? Enjoy your deposit today! Wear your 'seal' confidently.**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, I am thrilled to be Your child. Help me enjoy You today. And thanks for the 'deposit!'**

## **He is Here**

**Bible Passage: Isaiah 63:7-14**

**Focus: Where is he who set His Holy Spirit among them, who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand...**

Each morning I spend time in worship and prayer before taking time to study God's Word. It is such a joy to have more time to do this since my retirement. The songs help me worship and also remind me of great spiritual truths that bolster my faith. One I played recently is called "He is here." Some of the words are: "He is near us, calling us to trust in Him." What a great reminder for us all! Everyday there are distractions and trials that pull our anchor of faith loose from its moorings. We tend to forget that we are not walking life alone.

A friend emailed me this morning regarding a recent trial of faith and made the comment: "What would we do without the Comforter?" I agree wholeheartedly and often remark that I do not understand how people make it without God's Spirit.

The Spirit has been blessing humans for many years, even before His powerful coming at Pentecost. I hope you read the passage in Isaiah that reveals that precious truth. He is indeed 'among us,' and 'He gives us rest.' One warning the passage contains: 'we are not to grieve Him by our rebellion.'

**Reflection: Ponder the presence and blessing of the Holy Spirit in your own life and spend time thanking Him for all He does for you and means to you. And watch out for rebellion!**

**Prayer: Holy Spirit of God, You are a blessing to me in so many ways. Thank You for indwelling me and empowering me and comforting me. And help me allow You to be a blessing to others today as You control me and use me for the Lord's glory.**

## **Stamped**

**Bible Passage: 2 Corinthians 1:18-22**

**Focus: He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.**

Our county has a fair that is held every fall. It is a big event for young and old alike. Although I usually attend just to see the animals and exhibits, while I am there I do make a point of people-watching. I especially enjoy seeing the joy on the faces of children as they enjoy the rides. I also love to see some guy win a large stuffed animal for his girl friend. It is also intriguing for me to see how many people are willing to spend a lot of money trying to guess which hole the little rat will enter!

Whenever you leave the grounds, they stamp your hand in case you want to come back in later. I have had that experience in many different places: amusement parks, exhibit halls, etc. Some stamps mean you have paid and can come in. Others mean you have paid and you can go out and come back in later. Some stamps you can see while others are invisible until you put your hand under a special light. But there is a common theme: no stamp, no entrance.

Did you ever stop to think that this is also true about entering heaven? No stamp, no entrance. What is the stamp that allows us to go to heaven? It is God's Spirit, the seal of ownership by God. God will look for it when we stop at the gate!

**Reflection: Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Do you know for sure you possess the Holy Spirit? Are you sure you will be allowed to enter heaven when you die?**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, not only do You seal us with the Holy Spirit, you paid the price, too! I gladly accept what You did for me, Jesus, and give my life to You today. I want to walk with You on earth and enjoy You in heaven, too!**

## **Blessings in Insults**

**Bible Passage: I Peter 4:12-19**

**Focus: If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.**

Webster's dictionary defines 'insult' as follows: 'to treat with abuse, insolence, indignity, or contempt, by word or act; to attack.' Most of us would have a hard time seeing any 'blessing' as a victim of that kind of action! But Peter tells us how and why certain kinds of insults can be a blessing to a Christian. What kind of insults is he discussing? If we are insulted or attacked because of our relationship with Christ, then there is a special blessing provided to us by His Spirit: "the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." But what does that mean? The picture he is describing is that of a tent descending from heaven to cover the one who has been attacked or ridiculed. And the reason for the tent is to allow the one inside to recover and collect his/her strength. It reminds me of the first-aid tents set up in places where injuries might occur. It was such a 'station' at the Boston Marathon that was available to help those who were injured in the terrorist bombing that killed and injured so many.

Most of us will most likely never face persecution on the level that Christians in Peter's day experienced. But persecution for our faith can come in subtle ways. I can remember struggling with the desire to be accepted as an academician in the field of religion while committed to staying true to my personal walk with Jesus. Persecution from colleagues in the form of ridicule is very disturbing! Being spiritual and academic seem to be conflicting attributes to some

**Reflection: Have you ever been on the receiving end of some kind of ridicule or insult? Did you discover the blessing inside the 'tent?'**

**Prayer: Dear Father, I welcome the 'first-aid' tent when I have suffered some ridicule or insult. I will recover and be strong.**

## **Strange Leading**

**Bible Passage: Matthew 4:1-11**

**Focus: Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.**

Sometimes when I am driving and busily talking with one of my friends, I will make a wrong turn or miss a turn I should have taken. One of my friends has a question for me when that happens: "Where are you going?" That is her kind way of letting me know something is wrong! I laugh, of course, and make the course adjustment to get back on track. But once I said, "Just hang on and you'll see." Because she trusted me, she waited and rode along patiently, even though the way and destination were both unknown to her.

In today's passage, there is some 'strange leading' going on. The Spirit has come upon Jesus at His baptism, but now He is leading Jesus into the desert wilderness to be tempted by the devil! I would most certainly have questioned that and probably would have commented like my friend does: "Where are you going?" I am sure you have wondered the same thing: why does the Spirit sometimes lead us into unpleasant circumstances or places we do not wish to go? Once Mary and Martha asked Jesus why He did not come and heal their brother Lazarus. His answer is the one He will give us when we wonder about His leadership: "Didn't I tell you if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

Even when we do not understand where the Spirit is leading us or why He allows painful things to come, because we trust Him, we can go on the ride, assured that He knows what He is doing!

**Reflection: Are you in some kind of desert place or trial today where you need to wait patiently and trust the Spirit?**

**Prayer: Spirit of the Living God, I do trust You and will continue to be faithful even when I do not understand. Help me to be faithful to You no matter what.**

## **Power Explosion**

**Bible Passage: Zech. 4:1-10**

**Focus: “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”**

What comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘power?’ Many things come flooding into my mind: tornadoes like the one that hit Oklahoma recently; the bomb explosion at the Boston marathon; feared nuclear bombs in the wrong hands, etc. But think of some ‘power filled’ situations that you might first overlook. How about the power of love to heal a broken heart? Or the power of the tongue to hurt, the power of little termites to destroy a house, or the power of one foolish mistake to destroy a marriage? There is the power of a kind word to motivate. There are many powerful things in this world that are a constant reminder of our personal weaknesses along with much potential for good. And deeply rooted in each of us is the desire to be powerful, gods, if you please. One way it surfaces in our lives is our attempt to control circumstances, people, and at times even God. Listen to your own prayers sometime and consider that many of them are an attempt to control!

One of the most important things God wants us to learn is what He said to Zerubbabel, the one He would use to rebuild His temple: “it won’t be done by your strength; it will be done because I have the power to do it.” (My translation)

**Reflection: What are you trying to control in your own life that you need to surrender to God to do? Where do you doubt His power and try to fix things yourself?**

**Prayer: Dear Lord, Help me remember to rely upon Your power today and not my own. Help me to realize that You are fully capable of managing my life and all that concerns me. I make a decision to trust You and Your power today.**

## **Slow Leak**

**Bible Passage: Acts 6:1-7**

**Focus: Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.**

Some of you may be old enough to remember owning a car that did not have air-conditioning in it. It was not fun at all in the heat of summer, especially. When I was 16, my father decided to take the family on a summer vacation, driving from Kentucky to California, through the Mohave Desert, in a non-air-conditioned vehicle. I still get hot just thinking about it! So, a few years ago when I began having problems with the air-conditioning in my car, I hurried to the mechanic and pleaded for immediate mercy. He found that the problem was the lack of Freon, so he put some in it. But a few days later, I was in the same dilemma: no cool air in the car. When I returned to his shop, he informed me that there was a tiny leak in a hose that had allowed the Freon to slowly escape. This time the repair was successful.

Just a tiny leak, but in my opinion: disastrous results. The air-conditioner could not provide what I needed because it could not hold what it needed to enable it to work correctly. A profound truth on the spiritual level: God wants to fill us with His Spirit so we work correctly and can be the blessing He wants us to be to others. But we often have a slow leak of some kind, even just a tiny place of disobedience that causes a leak of power. Go to the 'mechanic' today in prayer and let Him find the problem and provide the solution. You and others around you will be blessed!

**Reflection: Are you willing to let the Spirit search your life to see what there are 'leaks?' Don't overlook even the tiny things.**

**Prayer: Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the right way. I want to be filled with Your Spirit.**

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