
BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT AND SPEAKING IN TONGUES

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This is an edited article from an audio teaching—it explores the questions many believers have about the nature and evidence about “being filled with the Spirit.”

God, by His Spirit, wants to capacitate us to do things that we otherwise could not do on our own. The Holy Spirit causes us to be born again, born of the Spirit, so that we are alive unto God, through Jesus Christ. That same Spirit glorifies and brings praise to Jesus, and He performs miracles to confirm the message of the Good News. The Holy Spirit works the metamorphosis and the transformation in our lives so that we end up being very different than we would have been living life on our own.

I received a phone call the other evening from a pioneer Pastor who wanted advice about a family situation he was dealing with. He said to me, *“I don’t even know where to start helping these people.”* I gently asked him what he felt that the Holy Spirit was saying to him? What did he sense Jesus, by the Spirit, was whispering to his heart? He acknowledged that he hadn’t really asked the Lord for any revelation about the family. He hadn’t even thought about doing that—he was just hoping to get some quick, *“Here’s-what-to-do counsel”* that would work for the situation he was in.

It wasn’t like he was trying to cheat or anything like that. My pastor friend found himself in a situation for which he had no answers, so he turned to someone with more experience for those answers. He was so concerned about helping people that he got stuck on the surface level, looking for advice/counsel to solve the kind of family mess he was dealing with in his church. My response was to tell him to go deeper, and ask the Spirit of God what He is saying. *“We see in a mirror dimly”* (1 Corinthians 13:12) and what the Lords says to us will always be more to the point than what we see on the natural surface of things.

The sad reality is that so many believers in Jesus Christ, who have been given the wonderful privilege of the Holy Spirit resident within them, don’t always make use of their Spirit-given power

to see into the realm of the invisible—to know things, and to say and do things that result in great life happening in other people. The assignment we have as believers in the Lord is to partner with the Holy Spirit in seeing more of the kingdom of God happen in the lives of other people around us.

I'm not bringing up this story as a criticism of that pastor. It could just as easily have been a story about myself—getting so involved in doing one thing after another, that rather than asking the Lord, “*What are You saying?*” I jump in too quickly to start doing what I know to do. This is what ends up frustrating so many of us as believers. In the flesh, (even sincere, well-meaning flesh) we try to do things that ultimately won't accomplish meaningful change because they are not initiated or activated by the power of the Holy Spirit. We fail to make use of the fullness of the Spirit in our lives, and we end up ministering out of the limited resources of our natural beings.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?

How does that fullness offer us powerful and practical help in doing the very work and living the very lives that Jesus wants for us?

To begin with, it is very important to understand that *everyone* who has received Jesus Christ as their Savior has received the Spirit of God. As we are told in *Ephesians*:

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.” ~Ephesians 1:13-14

One of the tragic mistakes made by “*classical Pentecostals*,” was a belief that unless you had been filled with the Spirit, and unless you spoke in tongues, you have not received the Holy Spirit. That simply is not biblically true. When we receive Jesus as our Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in our spirit. As you're talking to your friends and your neighbors you may encounter people who have been horribly wounded by well-meaning, but mistaken people who have said to them that unless they speak in tongues, they have not received the Spirit of God.

The Apostle Paul further encourages us with the reality of God's Spirit dwelling in us as believers: “*Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba Father’*” (*Galatians 4:6*)! We have received Jesus Christ as our Savior—we are related to God and He has placed His Spirit into our hearts. The most profound thing that the Holy Spirit will ever cause us to say is the simple expression, “*Jesus is Lord*” (*1 Corinthians 12:3*). And, as surely as there's not necessarily any emotional attachments or bizarre behavioral accoutrements that go along with that simple statement, “*Jesus is Lord*,” in exactly the same way, there doesn't necessarily need to be some

kind of emotional or physically goes-on when a person is saying other things that they are prompted to say by the power of the Spirit.

Notice the other thing recorded in Scripture that the Spirit teaches us to say: “Daddy God; Daddy God.” The Holy Spirit teaches any person to say two things: “Jesus is Lord” and “Daddy God.” When the Spirit speaks to us and through us, He’s crying out, “Daddy God,” and declaring the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is the message of the Spirit and the tone of His communication to the world through us.

THE SPIRIT SECURES OUR FUTURE

Not only does the Holy Spirit come into our heart and teach us to say, “Daddy God,” and “Jesus is Lord,” but the Spirit acts as a seal to secure us for our God-intended future. In the time when the New Testament was written, a seal would be affixed to a door or an entrance to keep out unwanted intruders. The seal would protect that house against anything that would come against it. So, this pledge, this seal, that we have been given, is the power of the Holy Spirit. I love the way it describes that the Spirit is the “pledge of our inheritance, with the view to the redemption of God’s own possession [us]” (*Ephesians 1:14*). We should never forget that one of the works of the Spirit in our life is to keep us looking forward to more of what God has in store for us.

Through the years, I have prayed with hundreds of believers to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. I have discovered that there is so much confusion and uncertainty about what it means to be filled with the Spirit, and how that fullness is first received. All sorts of silly things are spoken and done by people who want to share their experience with others. Those who want to be baptized in the Spirit, and the people praying for them to receive that fullness can become frustrated if it doesn’t happen. I would like to offer you the kind of instruction or counsel that I would normally give to somebody who said, “Pastor, could you pray for me? I’d like to be filled with the Spirit. I’d like to speak in tongues.” Here is what I would say to them:

- You have already **received** the Holy Spirit if you know Jesus as your Savior.
- There is a difference between receiving the Holy Spirit and being “baptized” or “being filled” with the Holy Spirit.

There are certain segments of Jesus’ Church (we generally call them Evangelicals) who believe that at the same moment when a person receives Jesus as their Savior, they not only receive the Spirit, but they are also filled or baptized in the Spirit. They make no distinction between those two occurrences. What I want to show you from Scripture is that a person who has received Jesus has received the Holy Spirit, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they’ve been filled or baptized with the Spirit.

On two separate occasions Jesus made direct reference to His disciples being directly and personally impacted by the Spirit. The earliest of these was on the night of His resurrection when He appeared to the disciples who had shut themselves up in a room because they were afraid of what might happen to them at the hands of the leaders who had crucified Jesus. The first thing that Jesus said to them was, *“Peace be with you.”* Then He showed them His hands and side so they could really believe. The disciples rejoiced when they realized it was truly Jesus in their midst.

“So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with 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.’” ~John 20:21-22

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had explained to His disciples that it was to their advantage that He “go away,” because if He didn’t go away, then the Holy Spirit wouldn’t come to them (John 16:7). Since even He could only be at one place at one time, it would be far more advantageous for the disciples to have the ever-present attendance of the Spirit in their lives. Jesus knew that they were going to be scattered out into the world as *His witnesses*. The Spirit would teach and remind them of the very truths Jesus Himself would normally have taught them.

But that gift of the Holy Spirit would not be given until Jesus was “glorified.” On that first evening after He was glorified, Jesus said, *“Receive the Holy Spirit”* (John 20:22). Jesus marked the end of His earthly life and ministry, and He would soon ascend back to the Father. So, He breathed upon them (remember the word for spirit is *breath*) and it was at that point when the disciples received the Holy Spirit.

The next occasion when Jesus spoke directly to His disciples about the Spirit doing a particular work in their lives comes at the end of His time on earth. He promised something would be happening to the disciples in the future. Remember, He promised this to His disciples who had already received the Holy Spirit:

“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” ~Luke 24:49

His promise was fulfilled in Acts, chapters 1 and 2, when the apostles and all the brethren were gathered together on several occasions:

“Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” ~Acts 1:4-5

I will tell you this from my own experience (and I have seen this happen to person after person), when I was baptized in the Holy Spirit, I received “*attentiveness*” or “*ears to hear*” and I began for the first time in my life to have distinct experiences of hearing the Lord. Feeling led by Him—not just in some general kind of well-I-want-to-do-God’s-will-for-my-life, but by very particular promptings—began an ease with which I was able to communicate with the Lord, and this was something wonderful, compared to what it was before. It was just easier; it was just better. I could hear God more than I had before.

I’d been reading the Bible, but as I read after being filled with the Spirit, I began to see things in the Bible that I’d never seen before. I began to get insights into the word—not so much reading between the lines, just understanding things. Not in a profound doctrinal way, but little stuff started registering with my heart. It was as though I was being tapped on the shoulder by this quiet, little persistent nudging of the Spirit—and my Bible reading was electrified in comparison to what it had been.

Am I telling you that people who aren’t filled with the Spirit will get nothing out of the Bible? No. Am I telling you that God likes people who are filled with the Spirit more than He likes those who aren’t? No. What a grievous thing it must be to the heart of Father God, who so very much wants to bless His Church with this wonderful, wonderful empowerment to have some people who have experienced that empowerment turn it into a prestige thing, or turn it into “I’m-a-better” kind of thing. How sad to make people who have not perhaps even understood that the privilege was available to them, feel as though they’re somehow less wonderfully adored by God our Father.

I think one of the nastiest tricks of the devil is to keep people from experiencing the fullness of the Spirit, and to trick a bunch of Pentecostal people to get arrogant and have them think they’re somehow better than everybody else is. How sad, how terrible!

So, Jesus says in Acts, about the filling of the Holy Spirit:

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and all of Judea and Samaria, and even the remotest part of the earth.” ~Acts 1:8

OUR WITNESS IS STRENGTHENED

When we get filled with the Spirit there is an empowerment that happens to us. There is emboldening of our witness and proclamation of who Jesus is. We get to learn a lot of things that we didn’t know before.

Here is an episode found in Acts 19. Again, I’m answering the question, “*Is there a difference between receiving the Spirit when I received Jesus as my Savior, and another experience, another*

gateway that we walk through?”—not to make us better than others, but to empower, embolden and enlighten us so that spiritually we’re much more in tune with what God is doing. I’m answering the question, *“Is there a difference between those two?”* I want to show you an episode in the Book of Acts that could be taking place in our own culture yesterday or even tomorrow. An episode where people were first saved and received Jesus, baptized for repentance and the forgiveness of their sins, and then received the power and infilling of the Holy Spirit.

“Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.” ~Acts 19:4-6

There are in the Book of Acts basically four manifestations, or four evidences, that someone has been filled with the Spirit. I am not of the persuasion that these are the only things that can be happening to you, but I do believe that when a person is filled with the Spirit, these four things are a possibility. I will give them to you in kind of descending order of frequency.

We’ll start with the least frequent, or the least often mentioned, in the Book of Acts. That has to do with when you’re proclaiming the Gospel; you’re not easily intimidated. When stuff comes at you, you just rise up and you go for it; you’re not shaken in your composure at all. We have instances of men and women in the Book of Acts who were filled with the Spirit and had great boldness to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ.

Possibly you’ve had that experience when you thought you were going to be intimidated at work if you started talking about the Lord. You might have thought, *“Oh, I don’t know!”* and then all of a sudden something happened and you felt almost like something came upon you. You were able to just go for it and when it was all over, it was like, *“Whoa, whoa! Who was that who said all of that?”* You can’t believe yourself. So, emboldened in the Spirit, I think that happens when a person is filled with the Spirit.

The second thing that is mentioned is people see into the realm of the Spirit. The most obvious example of that is some of the people in Acts, like this man Stephen who while he was being stoned by rocks thrown at him; he was filled with the Spirit and glimpsed into the heavens. He told people about what he saw and that made them really mad. They finally killed him with stones.

The third evidence that I’m mentioning, which is then the second most frequent instance of when people get filled with the Spirit, has to do with prophesying. Prophesying, which is to say, being able to speak things that come directly from God to you for the sake of other people or about other people. This evidence, manifestation or the attending miracle, can happen in a person’s life after they are filled with the Spirit. It is mostly recorded in the Bible as being filled with the Spirit and then enjoying the privilege of being able to speak in a language never learned by the natural mind.

The fourth evidence is this expression to *pray in the spirit*. You may know it as the term, *praying in tongues*, which is the language that is used in a lot of Bible translations. I don't really like the expression *praying in tongues* because even though I'm not a very visual person, I can get certain images in my mind. One is of a very large cow tongue suddenly sprouts three tongues. Instead, I like the expression, *to pray in the spirit, or being led by the Spirit*.

Do you understand that the expression 'tongues' is just the word for language? We can also say—*spiritual language*. We refer to it as a *spiritual language* because we didn't learn it naturally, we didn't come by it through our own effort, exercise, study or from someone else. It's also sometimes called a *heavenly language*, and that's because in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul gives us the statement that he can pray in the language of other humans, or he can pray in the *language of angels*. People will call that angelic language, *heavenly language*. That's where the expression comes from.

By the way, the language you receive when you are filled with the Spirit is an actual language that means something to people who understand that language. It just doesn't necessarily mean anything to you.

I was thinking of the mountains of Senegal in the country in Africa: if somebody was filled with the Spirit and began to pray in the spirit, they could just as easily be praying in English as in any other language. They wouldn't know what it was. They might be thinking, "This sounds funny!" They'd be talking just like I might be talking and thinking, "How weird, what strange noises are coming out of my mouth." It wouldn't mean anything to them, but it would mean a lot to somebody who actually understood that as a language. It's very important to understand this really is a language; we're praying in a *heavenly language*.

One of the reasons that spiritual language should be such a vital part of every believer's life is because it is for each of us the most obvious example of the miraculous taking place in our own personal life. Think of us, especially in America, the fact that we can actually speak another language other than English. This is a linguistic academic miracle to begin with—and when I am speaking a language I didn't learn, this is hugely, hugely miraculous.

So, then the question is, "How can I be baptized in the Spirit? How can I be filled with the Spirit?"

I can't imagine that you are going to go through even the rest of the year without encountering other people who have been not been filled with the Spirit, who would love to be filled with the Spirit. And I hope that they ask you, "Would you pray for me so that I can be filled with the Spirit?" Then you'll be able to say, "*I would love to. Do you mind if I just go over a couple things with you?*" And then you can scramble to the back of your Bible where you might record these following things that could be helpful to somebody.

Please get accustomed to listening with ears that are not just for you, but ears that are for the sake of someone else.

In the Book of Luke, Jesus is speaking to some people, trying to convince them what God is like and that He really will answer their prayers. He says:

“Now suppose one of your fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of the fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” ~Luke 11:11-13

GOD LOVES TO GIVE HIS SPIRIT

If you've never received Jesus as your Savior, make this your simple prayer, “*Lord, forgive me my sins and have the Holy Spirit come into my life.*” And God loves to do that. When you say, “*Holy Spirit come into my life. Jesus forgive me,*” God doesn't say, “*Oh, I'm going to trick you and I'll give you something other than what you asked for.*”

I can remember in college years when people were talking to me about being filled with the Holy Spirit. I was so worried that if I prayed to be baptized in the Spirit, the devil would get in there somehow and instead of me receiving something from God and being baptized with the Spirit, I would be tricked and would end up with a counterfeit-something, strange or bizarre. When someone finally shared with me the simple scripture in Luke 11 I was like, “*Oh, I can just relax because if I ask the Father for the Holy Spirit, that is what He's going to give to me!*”

Here's some simple and practical help for how to be filled with the Holy Spirit and how to then enjoy the exercise of praying in the Spirit. This is what I'd say to somebody who said, “*Pastor, I'd really like to be filled with the Spirit and I've never spoken in tongues before and I'd like to be filled with the Spirit. What should I do?*” First thing I'd say is to begin by thanking the Lord that you are already saved. Just thank Jesus. Start your prayer like this, “*Jesus, thank You that You're my Lord and my Savior.*” I'd remind them that since they've received Jesus, they already have the Spirit inside of them. That's not an issue.

A DECISION OF FAITH

The second thing I'd say is: Ask Jesus to baptize you in the Spirit. Just ask Him to fill you with the Spirit. He's the One who loves to fill with the Spirit. It's a very simple prayer: *Jesus, come into my life and forgive me my sins.* This is a leap of faith. It's something you don't necessarily have. It's not some emotional experience that is going on, but you understand that the Bible says that Jesus wants to forgive your sins. And as simply and as faith-filled as you said, “*Jesus Christ, come into my*

life and forgive my sins,” you can now just offer the same simple prayer, “Jesus Christ, baptize me or fill me with Your Spirit.”

This is where it gets interesting. The instant you say, “*Jesus, fill me with Your Spirit,*” you are filled with the Spirit. You don’t have to ask it forty times. If you’ve prayed before, “*Lord, fill me with Your Spirit,*” you got filled with the Spirit the moment that you asked the Lord to fill you with the Spirit. You might say, “*Yeah, but I don’t speak in tongues and I’ve never prophesied.*” But as soon as you say, “*Fill me, baptize me with the Spirit,*” it’s a done deal.

I personally prayed to be filled with the Spirit about two years before I ended up speaking in tongues because nobody explained to me how to speak in tongues. I know that I asked to be filled with the Spirit a long time before that. It was a step of faith when you prayed to receive Jesus. There was a time when you decided, “*I don’t even understand all of this, but I know that I’m a sinner and I want forgiveness, and I believe that although I can’t see You, I believe, Jesus, that You are real. Come in to my life and forgive my sins.*” And it is just in the same way, by faith, that you say, “*Lord, I don’t know about this but I ask that You would fill me with Your Spirit.*”

Now, the moment that you do that, your spirit knows a language that you have never learned. Notice I didn’t say your mind knows a language that you never learned. Your mind will start scrambling about saying, “*Yeah, well I asked to be filled with the Spirit and I don’t know another language. I can barely speak English.*”

Your mind is racing around saying, “*I wonder where that language is, I wonder what drawer or behind what door it’s in? And, oh no, they’re going to ask people who don’t have a language to begin to speak in this language. I don’t want to be one of those people. Quick, where’s my language?*”

We look around in our mind for it and our mind is clueless. That’s when the panic sets in and that’s where the resistance sets in. But what I’m telling you is that in your spirit, you now have a language that you are fluent in. You don’t even know that you know how to speak in this language—your mind begins to draw back a little bit.

The next thing that I would say to somebody is after they’re finished praying to the Lord to fill them with His Spirit, then I always pause to say, “*Now, great. Do you know that you have a language that you can speak and if you will just begin speaking in that language, that’s what speaking in tongues is?*” And of course, a lot of times they give me this saucer-eyed look saying, “*I don’t know how to speak in that language.*”

Let me ask you a question. When you’re going to say a sentence in English, do you think of the sentence in your mind first, and then speak it? We wish we would say more, but generally speaking, you just talk. And you’re not at all worried when you turn to the person next to you to give them a

greeting. You're not secretly wondering, *"Oh man, I hope English comes out when I give them a greeting."* You don't even think about it. You just speak. And it's the same way. Instead of speaking from your mind, you just begin to speak, but it's not in a language that you know.

There will be times when I say, *"Now, here, I'll just lay my hands on you and pray for you. I thank You, Lord, that they're filled with the Spirit."* Then I start praying in tongues a little bit. The majority of people start praying in the Spirit. It's wonderful.

But there's about forty percent that don't. So, I will say to them, *"God will sometimes take this language, or nonsense syllables that you think are nothing at all about, you've never even seen or heard before, and some people might almost get a picture of those words going across their mind, and not even know how to pronounce them because it looks so funny. You might even begin to very faintly hear the sound of words or syllables that don't make any sense to you at all."* And I'll say, *"Now, it's very kind of God to give you that. These words or syllables that you sort of see or have an urge or desire to say, just go ahead and start speaking them."*

When my wife and I were leading a Bible study at UCLA, we prayed for hundreds of people to be filled with the Spirit. Hundreds. It was amazing. For a two-year period of time people came streaming through, one after another. There's this other chunk—about twenty percent—that I would explain everything, *"And, so you may get words and just go ahead and speak."* So, I'll pray for a little bit and I'll say, *"So do you have anything?"*

"No."

"Really, well, OK, let's just pray a little bit more. No nonsense syllables? Or, just a desire to say something that sounds a little bit funny or strange?"

"No."

"Not even one or two syllables?"

"No."

"You don't see any words...?"

"No."

Finally, when they get tired enough, I'll say, *"Now, you're sure there was nothing at all?"* And here's what they'll say perhaps forty minutes later.

“Well, you know, there was this dumb sounding little phrase. I didn’t want to say anything because it sounded so stupid to me.”

It’s a faith thing and you and I have to decide it’s real. This is when your mind really cranks it up into high gear. Your mind becomes aware of these nonsensical syllables. It wants to start telling you right away that it’s the most ridiculous sounding thing you’ve ever heard of in the world. It doesn’t make any sense at all. And of course, your mind tends to agree with itself—for the most part. Your mind wants to dictate what you can do and your Spirit is crying out, *“Daddy God, Abba Father.”*

If you’ve prayed to be filled with the Spirit and don’t yet speak in tongues, I’ll bet you it’s because you’re waiting for something a little bit more profound to come along.

Learning to partner with the Spirit is still an act of faith. Let’s not fall into the trap of deciding that foolish things don’t count in the Kingdom. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to basically out do the things that the world says are really important (1 Corinthians 1:27).

The word for “foolish” here is a Greek word that means “hidden.” It’s behind something fairly thick and you can’t easily see it. God’s chosen such things to ultimately accomplish His work and His purpose.

How much are we really going to enter into the things of the kingdom of Heaven? How much do we want to be led by the Spirit of God? How willing are we to partner with Him and His work to see great life happen?

Yes, we all have the opportunity to be filled with the Spirit! It’s so wonderful. Hallelujah. Praise Your Name.