

Part 5: We affirm a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.

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I remember growing up that there were many things that confused me about Church: “Why do I have to go to school on Sunday?” “Why do I have to dress up like I’m going to a funeral every time we go?” “Why do we stop in the middle of service to have a snack with grape juice and crackers?”

And it is very often the case that when we don’t fully understand things, that we disengage ourselves from them. I remember being in Church one day as a small child, and seeing a woman become excited and moved so much until she started dancing and crying with joy. I turned around to a friend who was seated next to me and asked, “What’s wrong with that lady?” “Oh,” she replied, with a weird calm, “She caught the Holy Ghost.” I didn’t say another word, but I kept thinking to myself, Ghosts are bad! How did she catch it? Is it contagious??? I don’t want the Holy Ghost!!!

As I grew older, I came to understand the Holy Spirit as a person of the Trinity to be known, and not a “thing” to be caught. I learned that the Holy Spirit is not present with us to create passive religious experiences, but rather to foster an active spiritual life demonstrating itself not only in exuberant praise, but also life-changing works of service. I realized that I not only wanted the Holy Spirit, but I desperately needed Him to be the person God created me to be in Christ.

The Evangelical Covenant Church affirms not only the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, but the importance of a conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit...and there are several important reasons why.

First, the Holy Spirit enables our connection to God. Once the Holy Spirit enters the life of the believer upon conversion, His work causes a new life, helping us to know that we are children of God (Romans 8:16), and confirming our adoption into the family of God (Galatians 4:4-7). It is our connection to God that allows us to experience the love, freedom, grace, joy, and hope that prepares us for a new life in Christ.

Second, the Holy Spirit equips us to conform to His image. As we grow into our new family, we transformed from the inside out, and we gradually take on the character of Jesus. The Holy Spirit gloriously performs that work in us (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Holy Spirit is our teacher, teaching and reminding us about the word and the way of Jesus (John 14:26). In John 16, Jesus also refers to the Spirit as a "Counselor" who will guide us in our everyday lives. This is important, because this means that because of the Holy Spirit, we are no longer limited to our sinful nature when making decisions. As we depend on the Spirit, and surrender to the work of the Spirit in us, we become more like Him.

Third, the Holy Spirit empowers us to continue His mission. When we rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit, He helps us to see how God is moving (Isaiah 43:19), joins us in where God is working (Acts 1:8), and releases gifts to the body for us to do what God is doing (1 Corinthians 12:1-7). The Holy Spirit does this beautifully by not only giving individual believers unique abilities and gifts, but by connecting us as one body so that we operate in those gifts interdependently. When we consciously depend upon the Holy Spirit, He helps us to connect with one another across differences and divisions so that we can function as one body, with a diversity of operations, skills, and abilities to serve one God in shared mission.

It is our conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit that transforms us, prepares us and releases us to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the earth.

Bible Study

Acts 1:1-8

Think for a moment about how the disciples of Jesus must have felt when He was crucified. They spent three years with this incredible figure, watching in amazement as He healed the sick, raised the dead, restored sight to the blind, preached with authenticity, simplicity and authority, and restored hope to a nation waiting for a King and a Savior. Their hopes for Jesus were mainly that He would overthrow the Roman Government and restore the Kingdom of Israel, becoming a King more like David and Solomon.

Now, imagine their excitement and hope when they learned that He was resurrected from the dead just as He said He would...YES! Jesus is back and more victorious than ever...they can't even kill Him...it's time to take over!

But then, imagine how the disciples must have felt when Jesus announced He was going away. WHAT??? They had a tough time following Jesus when He was standing right next to them, how much more of a challenge would it be for them to serve Him when He wasn't around!!!

When we really process what was happening, and think about how they must have felt, we can certainly understand the disciples' fear and frustration. If you go away, Jesus, what will we do?

Of course, we know that Jesus was not necessarily interested in ascending to an earthly, political throne, but He instead wanted to rule in their hearts. Jesus knew that in order to build His Church in the earth that He had to go, but He had other plans in mind for the disciples. He planned to send the Holy Spirit that they might be transformed and through this transformation, the disciples would receive power to be witnesses for Jesus locally and globally. All they had to do was wait until they had become aware of the Holy Spirit's presence among them. As these people, all with different experiences and personalities waited together, they developed faithfulness in prayer, compassion toward one another, and a commitment to life together. Little

did they know that in a matter of days, the Holy Spirit would radically transform them to be able to communicate beyond language barriers, share the life-changing truth of the Gospel, and lead thousands upon thousands to Christ.

Questions:

1. What thoughts, emotions or impressions are you left with after reading this text? When you think about how the disciples may have been processing everything that was happening, was there anything that stood out to you in particular that had special significance?
2. The disciples were waiting for Jesus to continue doing great things, but Jesus' plan was for the disciples to be transformed so that the Holy Spirit could do great things through *them*. What great things do you sense that the Holy Spirit could do in your life if you consciously depended upon Him?
3. The disciples went back to the Upper Room where they waited for the Promise of the Father in the person of the Holy Spirit. We see in Acts 2 that their awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence among them radically transformed and empowered them to serve the Mission of God in the earth. Think about some practical ways that you might deepen your awareness of the Holy Spirit in your life on a daily basis.
4. The Holy Spirit equipped the disciples to connect with people beyond language and cultural barriers. Is there anyone in your world that you have rejected because their background, culture or style of worship is different? What do you think the Holy Spirit might work in your life to help you embrace them?
5. How do you think you will experience God's promise of Holy Spirit-powered change in your life?