

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Continue To Be Filled With The Spirit

by Dan Trygg

“And the disciples were continually-being-filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 13:52

“And do not be-being-drunk with wine, for that is wastefulness, but be-being-continually-filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ speaking to one another (lit., ‘to yourselves’) in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;²¹ and subordinating-yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ.”

Ephesians 5:18-21

I love to do the leg work in my study of the Bible, and see things that I had not ever seen before. For example, **the phrase “filled with the Spirit” only occurs four times in the OT.** It describes how God gave the Spirit to Bezalel to give him wisdom and skill to make the articles for the tabernacle (Ex. 31:3; 35:31). The Holy Spirit equipped him with an unusual ability to design and make the tent itself, and all its furnishings, including the holy objects. He also enabled him to instruct and guide the other gifted men to work with him in this endeavor. God filled Joshua with the Spirit to give him wisdom to lead the people, and this empowerment caused the people to respond to his leadership (Deut. 34:9). In Micah 3:8, the prophet described how he was “filled with power – with the Spirit of Yahweh – and with justice and courage to speak out” to declare to the people their rebellion and their sin. That’s it! Now there were other times when different terminology was used to describe the empowerment of the Spirit when He came upon people, but these are the only four instances in the OT where this experience is referred to as a “filling of the Spirit”. Note that **the Spirit was given to enable the people of God to do something.** It is never given just to be a “feel good” experience, or a “sit and soak” encounter. ***The “filling of the Spirit” was purposeful and practical in its effect.***

Then, in the NT, almost all the references to “being filled with the Spirit”, or “being full of the Spirit” are in the gospel of Luke (Luke 1:15, 41, 67; 4:1) and the book of Acts (Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 6:3,5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9,52), written by the same author, Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul. **There is one exception. Paul uses this terminology in Ephesians 5:18.** It could be that Luke’s somewhat distinctive terminology rubbed off on Paul.

However, **Luke was not at all limited to this language.** He referred to the Spirit as “the promise of the Father” (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33,39), “the baptism of the Spirit” (Lk. 3:16; Acts 1:4,5; 11:16), the “coming upon” of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 19:6), the “pouring forth” of the Spirit (Acts 2:17,18,33; 10:45), the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38; 8:19,20; 10:45; 11:17; 15:8), “receiving” the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:15,19; 10:47; 19:2), and the “anointing” of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). **Most of these other descriptions refer to the initial reception of the Spirit,** while the “filling of the Spirit” often seems to refer to **episodes of re-empowerment** to meet a specific need (Acts 4:8,31; 13:9), **or to an ongoing state of being that is developed or maintained through consistency and maturity** (Acts 6:3,5; 11:24; 13:52).

Again, in each of the descriptions of the “filling” of the Spirit, He enabled them to do something, ...usually to speak out for God. In Lk. 4:1, Acts 6:3,5; and 11:24, people who were described as “full of the Holy Spirit” were those who were regularly responsive to Him. They were led by the Spirit, and His activity was characteristic of their lives. **To be “filled” with the Spirit, or to be one who is “full” of the Spirit, seems to be indicative of a person who is empowered to do God’s will, and does it.** So, if *you* are desiring to have a deeper and fuller empowerment from God, ask yourself, “*Am I willing to do whatever God asks of me?*” God will respond to those who are asking Him, and are ready to yield to Him (Lk. 11:1-13). If *that* is your heart, and your prayer, expect Him to act in your life.

In most of the examples we have where we read of the Holy Spirit filling someone, it seems to be a sovereign act of God. God does it. The filling of the Spirit seems to be granted by God to address the need, or opportunity, of the moment. At times, it appears that the “filling” happens even *before* or *as* the person becomes aware of any course of action. In fact, the filling seemed to inspire a relevant response in the moment, without premeditation (cf. Acts 4:8; 13:9-12). **At other times, God seems to give the filling of the Spirit in response to the prayers of His people.** For example, in Acts 2, the people were seeking and praying for the Holy Spirit when He came at Pentecost. **Jesus taught us to be seeking and asking for the “giving of the Holy Spirit”.** In Luke 11, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. He initially taught them a form of “the Lord’s prayer”, but He went on to teach them about importunity (insistence, and almost shameless persistence) in prayer. God responds to those who diligently seek Him. The verbal forms in verses 9,10 are ongoing, continuous verbs. “Ask and be asking, and it will be given unto you; seek and be seeking, and you will find; knock and be knocking, and it will be opened to you.” He went on to make a comparison between us and God, “If a father among you is asked by his son for a fish, he would not give him a snake instead of a fish, would he? If he asked for an egg, he would not give him a scorpion, would he? If you, then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to the ones*

asking Him?” **Clearly, Jesus taught us to be diligently asking for the active presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and He indicated that God would gladly grant that empowerment in answer to our prayers.** As in so many other areas of life, the Scriptures teach a cooperative partnership between us and God. There may be a need for persistence in this pursuit.

That said, however, we are not to think of our relationship with the Holy Spirit as going from one episodic high point to another. The Scriptures indicate that we can be continually filled with the Spirit. We can develop a mindset and practice that will produce consistency in our relationship with Him. In Acts 6, the apostles told the people to “look for men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom” who could be appointed to serve in the ministry of distributing food to those in need (Acts 6:3). *These were people who customarily walked in partnership with the Holy Spirit in a recognizable way.* Again, in Acts 11:24, Barnabas was described as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith”. *He had developed a consistent, interactive relationship with the Holy Spirit that was recognizable to others, as well.* **This is not only a possibility; this is the goal for our walk with God.**

Because of this, we should not be surprised to find the apostle Paul charging us to “be-being-continually-filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). The fact that we are commanded to “be-being-filled” implies that not only is this a possibility, but it is a responsibility that belongs to us. We are responsible to learn how to develop and maintain a relationship of interactive interdependence with God, where we do our part to create hearts that are longing for, expecting and responding to the movement of the Spirit in our lives. **If we are in Christ, God has already given us His Holy Spirit.** Galatians 4:6 says, “Because you are sons and daughters, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, ‘Abba, Father.’” The Spirit is the seal of our salvation, the down payment or engagement ring of His intention to fully redeem us when He returns (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). So, **we have the Holy Spirit, and Jesus said that He would never leave us (Jn. 14:16,17). But having the Holy Spirit, and being filled with the Holy Spirit are not the same thing.** You see, we can resist the Spirit, grieve the Spirit, quench the Spirit, and even insult or offend the Spirit by how we respond to His activity in our lives (Acts 7:51; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19; Heb. 10:29). **Most often, I think the problem is that we are living by our own fleshly, human perceptions and are dull or impervious to the Spirit, so we ignore Him.** “Ignore” can mean “not know or recognize”. **To be filled with the Spirit, we need to turn those dynamics around. We need to pray for, seek, ask, watch for, and, finally, respond to the Spirit when He reveals Himself and His leading in our lives. These are choices that we make to show that we are welcoming His direction in our lives.** It comes back to the principle of relational reciprocity: “Those who honor Me, I will honor; those who think little of Me, will receive little from Me” (1 Sam. 2:30). **As we draw near to Him in our seeking and obedience, He will draw near to us by opening up more revelation and empowerment in our lives to do His will (Heb. 4:16; Jas. 4:8).**

The believers in Acts 13:52 were caught up in the excitement of a new-found faith that came as Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in their city. They responded to the word of the Lord, and excitedly shared it with others, even in the communities in the region around their town. Even though the enemy raised up opposition and persecution against them, they continued to share their faith in Jesus, and they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. **They kept on experiencing this joy and fullness as long as they continued to respond to the Spirit’s leading.**

In Ephesians 5:18, we have Paul’s command, “be-being-continually-filled with the Spirit”. Note that this is in contrast to the typical manner of living of those who do not know God, ...that of escape, sensuality and drunkenness (cf. 4:17-19). That is the way of our world. That is what most people are doing. The apostle declares that there is a different way to live, a way that will bring the power of God into our lives and produce His fruit. Remember, this letter is written to a group of people, ...the church or called-out-gathering of believers in Ephesus. Paul’s vision for their meeting together is described in Ephesians 4:11-16; Romans 12:1-21; and 1 Corinthians 12-14. **The body of Christ is to be an interactive community of believers who are gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to invest in one another’s lives in order to help each other grow and become productive for Christ.** That is the context for Ephesians 5:18-21. **There is one command, followed by five participles (‘-ing’ words) that help to fill out how we are to do that. We are to turn away from drunkenness and self-absorption and, instead, “be-being-continually-filled with the Spirit” (the command). We do that by “speaking/verbalizing to yourselves (to one another in the group) in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making-melody in your hearts to the Lord, giving-thanks at every moment on behalf of all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father, subordinating yourselves to one another in reverence of Christ.”**

Some observations: (1.) Note the change of direction from worldly living. Instead of focusing on “my feelings”, and looking for escape or entertainment, we come together to rejoice in God and invest in encouraging and building up one another. **We focus on giving instead of getting. (2.) We choose to engage in what God wants us to be doing in our gatherings together: to praise and thank Him, and to encourage and love one another. (3.) We are active and expressive, not passive spectators.** We align our hearts, minds and bodies with the Spirit to express praise to God and love to one another. **(4.) We choose to arrange ourselves in the proper order: arranging ourselves to serve God and others. As we do these things, we align with the Spirit, and He will fill us with His freedom, vitality and joy in the Lord.**