

**E >> Empower**

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One of the most expensive cars on the market is a 2023 Rolls Royce Phantom. Its starting price is only \$460,000, but with all the bells and whistles, the price can be north of \$600,000—for a car! If a person finances the base model at \$460,000 for 84 months (7 years) at the average interest rate for a car loan in June 2023 (11%), the monthly payment is only \$7,875. A Phantom, with its V-12, 563 horse-power engine, accelerates from zero to 60 mph in only 5 seconds, but that’s not something you would want your chauffeur to do. Doing so would attract way too much attention (as if driving a Rolls wouldn’t). For decades, Rolls Royce would never disclose the horsepower of their vehicles. I had heard of that when I was in the market for a car, so I literally called the Rolls dealership on the northside. I pretended like I was looking for a Rolls, a used one, of course. I asked what the horsepower was in a Rolls, and the salesperson responded with a one-word answer, and that was the word “sufficient.” When it comes to describing the power of the Holy Spirit, we can—and should immediately respond with, “More than sufficient.”

For four consecutive weeks, we are exploring the why, the how, and the what of the Holy Spirit, God in us. People feel some pain at the pump when buying gas, and some people choose to “run on empty instead of filling up.” Similarly, are we running on empty or are we filled with the Spirit? Are we living mediocre, run-of-the-mill lives as Christians, trying to do life in our own strength? F.U.E.L. is a memory tool to help us recall four essentials in being filled with the Spirit of Jesus. We dug into the Scriptures a couple of weeks ago and discovered that we must FOLLOW (i.e., surrender to, obey) the Spirit if we are to be filled with Him. Last weekend, we discovered in the Word that to be filled with the Spirit happens when we are UNHURRIED. When we want, wait for, and walk with, we are more aware of His abiding presence, His speaking into our lives as He fills us. This week, we trust the Spirit of Jesus to reveal a third aspect of life with the Spirit, and that has something to do with His power.

We like power. It’s obvious from our vocabulary. Some people are on a power trip, while others trip over power cords, which are now powered with solar power and wind power. We enjoy rides in power boats with lots of horsepower. Move over manpower because women have brain power. Power. We like it and we want it. After all, who likes weak coffee in the morning, weak knees when on a hike, or losing a dispute because of weak arguments, or being weak-willed in the face of danger?

Our daily lives depend on electricity. The extent of my knowledge of electricity is that there is a difference between a 60-watt and 100-watt bulb. Still, there is enough power in the wall socket to recharge my cell phone, as well as to operate a microwave. Electricity flows at a specific rate and that rate is called the amperage, or amps for short. If I open the door to the breaker box at home, I see that there are breakers of different sizes (i.e., 15-amp, 20-amp, etc.) that govern the flow of power.

Back in the day when we used a camera with actual film, we would take a picture to remember an event or a place. It was referred to as a “Kodak moment,” a moment worth capturing on film.

If we think of the Bible as God's photo album, it is filled with one memorable moment after another. In particular, we clearly see moments when the power of the Holy Spirit made all the difference.

Here's the first of **three** ways the power of the Holy Spirit moves.

### Awesome Miraculous Power

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2).

At the dawn of creation, the Holy Spirit "moved" over "that which was empty, a dark nothingness, a place of chaos." The Spirit gave life to that which was not alive, and that is a miracle! Remember to use the word "miracle" in a correct way. When I taught as an adjunct instructor in seminary, a student made the comment, "Gary, it's a miracle! I passed your final exam!" To which I replied, "No, that was not a miracle. That was grace." All too often, we use the word miracle in a cavalier manner. A miracle happens when God chooses to suspend the laws of nature and move in a supernatural way, such as when the waters of the Red Sea divided and the Israelites walked through on dry ground, or when Moses struck a rock and water gushed from it. Creation is the first recorded miracle in the Bible and the Holy Spirit's power was moving greatly in the moment.

Here's another example of AMP: the awesome miraculous power of the Holy Spirit.

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. (Romans 8:9-11)

The power of the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead! Talk about a miracle! The lifeless body of Jesus was fully and instantaneously resurrected! Think with me. If we have a five-gallon container of gasoline and we pour it into a mower, there is a controlled, continuous release of power each time we start and operate the mower. Similarly, if we have a five-gallon container of gasoline and we throw a lighted match into it, there will be a release of power, but it will be sudden and instantaneous. The Holy Spirit's sudden, indescribable power miraculously raised Jesus from the dead!

And does the Spirit do the same today? Does His power produce miracles today?

Here's the second of three ways the Holy Spirit's power still flows.

### Available Ministry Power

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:14-19)

Jesus modeled to His disciples and to us what a Spirit-filled and empowered life resembles. The Spirit empowered Jesus to pursue and fulfill His ministry, His service to God. Likewise, the Spirit’s power is available to us to serve God, doing ministry in His name for His glory.

The Spirit’s power flows through the lives of God’s people, enabling them to serve Him. All Christians have a spiritual gift—or more—as it says, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, thereby administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). Every one of us, as followers of Jesus, has a spiritual gift, and gifts were meant to be given. The Spirit has power available to us to minister to (i.e., serve) God and His world. The night of His arrest, Jesus told His followers, “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). In the moment leading up to His ascension, Jesus said to His followers, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“Power” is the Greek word *dunamis*, from which we derive our English words dynamite, dynamo, and dynamic. Dynamite is explosive; it is loud! People filled with the power of the Spirit live lives that have a loud, explosive impact on those around them. There are a number of different metaphors in the Bible for the Holy Spirit. For example, when Jesus was immersed in the Jordan River, the Spirit descended on Him “like a *dove*.” That is one of many metaphors for the Spirit. Yet another happened on the Day of Pentecost, for it was then that the Spirit came as a mighty wind (Acts 2:2). Wind, though we cannot see it, we can see, hear, and feel its impact. A couple weeks ago, a tornado came through Greenwood. We could not see the wind, but we could see the dirt and debris that enabled us to see a funnel cloud. The tornado went where it wanted. Jesus said it this way: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Why is the Spirit characterized by wind? Wind is invisible, yet powerful. Wind cannot be contained, nor can God. Moreover, air (or wind) is essential to life. Without it, we die. The same is true of the Spirit: we need the Holy Wind of God blowing powerfully in our lives, empowering us to serve God with our gifts, advancing His kingdom in our “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” We each have been given the Great Commission to bring people we know and love to Christ, and that may be threatening and overwhelming to us. Yet, the Great Commission comes with the Great Companion: “And surely I will be with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

The disciples were transformed by the power of the Spirit to pursue ministry. There was a time when Peter and John were arrested and jailed by the Sanhedrin, and the officials demanded that they stop preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. When they refused to be silent, the Sanhedrin threatened them with further punishment, but then released them. Then, check this out. Did they go into hiding? Hardly.

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ““Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one. Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:23-31)

From being cowardly to becoming courageous, from having been stopped in serving Jesus to becoming unstoppable, from hiding behind locked doors in an upper room to taking the name of Jesus to the streets, the disciples took full advantage of the available ministry power of the Spirit—and lives were forever change!

I must not want the Spirit’s power for my benefit, but for the benefit of others. I must want the Spirit’s power that’s available for ministry so that He enables me to bless you and still untold numbers of others, whom you and I have yet to meet. And in particular, the number one purpose of ministry is to bring others to Jesus (Acts 1:8), as we are empowered by the Spirit to be witnesses for Jesus. We don’t need more Bibles. We have the most Bibles per person of any country of the world. We don’t need more Christian books, digital resources, or podcasts. We don’t need just one more Bible study or just one more devotional guide. Even more than academic degrees, we need the Holy Spirit to increase our spiritual fervor by many degrees so that His power moves through us to move the kingdom of God further on earth, as it is in heaven.

### All-Important Moral Power

Please listen carefully for this is the third of three ways the power of the Holy Spirit flows in and through us. It may be that you have heard the word “gospel,” which means “good news.” The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John declare the good news of Jesus Christ, that the Son of God came and died that we can live eternally with Him.

Now it may be that we have heard about the “prosperity gospel,” a gospel that a number of Christians believe. This gospel teaches that since we are children of the King, we can live like kings. Name it and claim it all in the name of Jesus, from the cars we drive to the homes where

we live to the good health we enjoy—just name it and claim it. After all, Jesus said, “I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Yet that’s not the gospel Jesus taught because He said, “In this world you WILL have trials” (John 16:33, emphasis added).

Then again, we may have heard of the “consumer gospel,” which promotes self and focuses on “me, myself, and I.” People who believe in and pursue the consumer gospel, think, “You meet my needs, you volunteer and do the work, you give the offering to pay the bills, you keep me happy here—and I will stay here. But as soon as I don’t like the music, the preaching, the new color of paint, then I’m out of here and going to another church.” Again, this is not the gospel Jesus taught. To the contrary, Jesus said, “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The gospel Jesus taught was, “If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow after me” (Luke 9:23), and that if we claim to be followers of Jesus, we must live as Jesus lived (1 John 2:6). Jesus said that every student becomes like his teacher (Luke 6:40). Are we becoming like Jesus or do we like having one foot in the kingdom and one foot in the world? The gospel is not only good news of forgiveness. The gospel is a call to repentance! When we were immersed, did we just get wet or did we die?

What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were immersed into Christ Jesus, were immersed into His death? We were therefore buried with him through immersion into death in order that, just as Christ Jesus was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too, may live a new life. (Romans 6:1-4)

When we were immersed, two things happened. God forgave our sins—past, present, and future—removing the penalty of death for our sins by the blood of Jesus. That happened in an instant and it is called justification (i.e., just as if I had never sinned). Second, we received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and then began the journey of what is called sanctification—a life-long process of becoming like Jesus *through* the all-important power of the Holy Spirit to morally strengthen and transform us. After all, yet another metaphor of the Spirit in the Bible is that of a fire—“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (Acts 2:3). Why fire? Fire purifies. John the Immerser preached, “I immerse you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will immerse you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11). We must change and become like Jesus. It’s not an option, it’s an order—and from Jesus Himself.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matthew 7:21-22)

This is one of the hard sayings of Jesus. People have tried to ignore this, or to interpret in some way saying that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees and not to His followers. We must surrender to Jesus as both Savior and Lord. How do we do that? Through the all-important moral power of the Spirit.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:12-17)

God, our Abba Father, loves us indescribably, and nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39). As our loving Father, He expects us to change and become like Him, being a “chip off the old block” as “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” We resemble our Father when we “live according to the Spirit.” And this is a process; it is not instantaneous. Think metamorphosis. A caterpillar slowly weaves a cocoon, and once inside, it gradually goes through a miraculous change and emerges a butterfly. It no longer crawls, it flies. It is no longer a worm on a branch but a beautiful, flying creature. Both its behavior and appearance have changed—and it took time. The all-important moral power of the Spirit can and will do the same in us, but we must cooperate with Him for He is God in our skin. He is in charge, and we are not. We must “present our bodies as living sacrifices,” and we do so by “(not being) conform(ed) to the pattern of this world but (by being) transformed through the renewing of (our) minds” (Rom 12:1-2). Becoming a living sacrifice will not be easy nor comfortable, but it will be entirely possible through the Spirit of Jesus in us!

## **Closing**

FUEL: are we running on empty or are we filled with the Spirit?

F for follow. U for unhurried. Today, be E for Empowered.

Could it be that we are experiencing anemic, run-of-the-mill, stale spiritual lives? Could it be that just as “curiosity killed the cat,” mediocrity is killing the Church? Do we want to see God move in our lives, marriages, jobs, relationships, and more? Do we want to experience God in deeper ways, transforming us day-by-day, even moment-by-moment? Do we long to make a difference in this world, shaping and impacting the lives around us with good and for God? Do we yearn to see the hand of God work in supernatural ways in our lives? If so, we need the power of the Spirit moving in and through us.

It's time to step up and AMP up.