**The Fire of the Holy Spirit**

"There appeared to them tongues as of fire...with the Holy Spirit" – Acts 2:3,4

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Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.

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The Fire and Fruit of the Holy Spirit

The Scriptures tell us that the Lord Jesus came to "baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11, and Luke 3:16). We see this fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Feast of Pentecost.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

- Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2, versus 1-4

Baptized with fire and the Spirit

What is the fire of the Holy Spirit and why did tongues of fire appear over the heads of each of the disciples who gathered together in prayer to the Holy Spirit? Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 AD), one of the early church fathers known for his gift of preaching and explaining the truth of the Gospel, explains the significance of the fire from heaven as the "fire of the Gospel" and the "fire of the Holy Spirit"

"We affirm that the fire that Christ sent out is for humanity's salvation and profit. May God grant that all our
hearts be full of this. The fire is the saving message of the Gospel and the power of its commandments. We were cold and dead because of sin and in ignorance of him who by nature is truly God. The gospel ignites all of us on earth to a life of piety and makes us fervent in spirit, according to the expression of blessed Paul (Romans 12:11).

"Besides this, we are also made partakers of the Holy Spirit, who is like fire within us. We have been baptized with fire and the Holy Spirit. We have learned the way from what Christ says to us. Listen to his words: 'Truly I say to you, that except a man be born of water and spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:5). It is the divinely inspired Scripture's custom to give the name of fire sometimes to the divine and sacred words and to the efficacy and power which is by the Holy Spirit by which we are made fervent in spirit."

- from Commentary on Luke, Homily 94

The grace of Pentecost and the fruit of the Spirit
This issue focuses on the grace of Pentecost and the fruit of the Holy Spirit that enable Christians to live and serve together in love and unity, and peace and joy. Don't miss Steve Clark's article on the Holy Spirit as the Water of Life and Derek Prince's article on The Fruit of the Spirit.

Good fruit is cultivated in stages over time. The primary fruit of the Spirit is love that permeates, strengthens, and unifies all the ways in which love manifests itself in joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (Galatians 5:22-23).

50th Anniversary of Charismatic Renewal
This Pentecost we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Charismatic Renewal - a movement that has swept through the Catholic Church and many Christian churches and communities around the world. Countless millions of people have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and have experienced the gifts and graces of the Spirit at work in their lives. God intends to pour out his Spirit more and more to unite, strengthen, and empower his people for mission today.

Come and See what God is doing
God is pouring out his Spirit today for a purpose - to equip, strengthen, and unify his people to be bold witnesses and ambassadors for Christ. God expects his people to carry on the great commission that Jesus gave his first disciples and to the whole Christian church. That is why we need the power, gifts, and wisdom of the Holy Spirit who goes before us to open doors, build bridges, and tear down walls that divide and separate. Let us pray confidently for renewed boldness and zeal to "cast our nets" as the Lord leads us and to sow the seed of his Word everywhere we go, and to gather in the harvest he has prepared for his glory.

Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation... And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it.
- Mark 16:15, 20

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor

Credit: illustration above, Pentecost - flames of fire, painted by Cleveland Woodward, (c) GoodSalt.com

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Introduction

The first chapter looked at the grace of Pentecost, the “new thing” (Isaiah 32) that is the basis of the new covenant. God’s purpose was to bring into being a people in covenant relationship with him, a people in his image and likeness who loved him and loved one another. As a result of the death and resurrection of Christ, he put his Spirit inside those who believed so that they could fulfill his purpose for the human race.
The second chapter looked at what the gift of the Spirit was supposed to do for us — to make us spiritual or spiritualized people. The gift of the Spirit, viewed corporately or individually, has been given to bring us to what God intended us to be.

How the Holy Spirit works inside of us
We are now going to consider how the Holy Spirit works inside of us. There are two main ways he operates. We might call them “life-mode” and “action-mode”. He gives us life, making us able to live a truly spiritual life, and he works through us to accomplish certain kinds of results. In this chapter we will consider the way he gives us life and in the next chapter we will look at the way he works through us.

This third chapter will allow us to look at the interaction between the Holy Spirit working in us and our humanity — our capacities and efforts. Devout or pious people, in their desire to emphasize what God does, often denigrate what we do after the Lord has renewed us in him. This can easily lead to the mistaken approach that some have called “hyper-spiritualism” or “super-spiritualism”. In fact, the Holy Spirit works in and through us. He transforms us and our ability to act. He does not annihilate us or replace (part of) us or bypass us. We are not supposed to be just passive spectators of our own life in the Spirit, but spiritualized people equipped to live for the Lord and serve him by the gift of the Spirit within us.

The Holy Spirit as the Water of Life
The book of Revelation ends with a vision, often referred to as the vision of the New Jerusalem. It is the vision of what the Lord is aiming at in human history, what he is seeking to bring us to. In explaining the vision, the book says,

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2)

Central to this vision is the river of the water of life, which flows into and through the new Jerusalem. The water of life comes from the throne of God and of the Lamb. On the throne we see the glory of God shining from the Lamb who is its lamp (Revelation 21:23). In other words, those who live in the city can see God’s throne in their midst and on that throne is the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, filled with divine glory, sharing in his Father’s reign over all of creation. The water of life, then, flows from the king of the universe who has died for the redemption of the human race.

The water gives life to the city, the holy city Jerusalem (21:10). We get heavenly life by being “built into” (Ephesians 5:22) a city, a community of those redeemed by the Lord. The water makes that city into a paradise, a place where the tree of life grows. The water, in other words, restores the Garden of Eden or, better, makes the new Jerusalem into a new Eden, a place where God’s original purpose for the human race is fully accomplished.

This is a picture of the end, of what will be. But in a certain way the end is already present now. We are living “in the last days”, as the scripture says, and we are already be-ginning to experience the “first installment” (Ephesians 1: 14; 2 Corinthians 5:5) of what is to be given in its fullness after the Lord Jesus comes again. The vision in Revelation, then, reveals to us what will come to pass, but also reveals to us something of what we can experience even now.

But what is the water of life?
We can find out what the water of life is by looking at a passage in the seventh chapter of the Gospel of John. It is a description of something that happened at the feast of Tabernacles or Booths in the last year of Jesus’ life. During that feast each year there was a ceremony in which water from the pool of Siloam, at the foot of the mountain spur on which the original Jerusalem was built, was carried in procession to the temple and there poured out to symbolize the redemption that the Lord gives his people. In verses 37-39 we read about what Jesus said, probably right after this ceremony:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, “If anyone thirst, let him come to me, and let him who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

“His” in this passage probably refers to Christ. If that is so, his heart refers to the heart of Christ. The rivers of living water, then, flow out of the heart of Christ. This passage tells us that it is the Holy Spirit who is the water of life. The Holy Spirit was not given during Jesus’ lifetime, but was given when Jesus was glorified, that is, after he died, rose, and ascended to the throne of God in heaven. In other words, the water of life was poured out at Pentecost after the glorification of Jesus. It was given by him once he sat on the throne of God sharing his reign. The picture we get here corresponds closely to the one in Revelation 22, although the personal connection between the Lord Jesus and the Spirit is presented more strongly. He gives us of the Spirit that flows from him personally.

But why water? Where does water as an image of the Holy Spirit come from?

That image goes back to the prophets, especially the prophet Isaiah. We can see it in a prophecy in Isaiah 44. The prophecy concerns a future renewal of the people of Israel, and in verse 3 it says,

For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground.
I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants,
and my blessing on your offspring.

Since this is Hebrew poetry, the lines are in parallelism, in this case restating in the second half of each verse what was said in the first half. The Lord is saying that he will pour out water or streams in a desert area. Those streams will be the blessing of his Spirit, which he will give to the people of Israel at a future time of restoration.

The image here is of water in a desert, probably at the time of the spring rains. The prophecy is not speaking about a sand desert like the Sahara — the picture that seems to come to mind for most people who do not live in a desert area. The prophecy is referring to a normal arid desert as is found in Judea on the eastern and southern part of the country.

I had an experience once that allowed me to see vividly what this meant. I was driving in the southern part of Arizona. We were going through normal arid desert sparsely covered with some cactus and other small desert plants, when all of a sudden we drove over a hill and there was a completely different scene. The desert was filled with plants of many kinds all in bloom. It was a glorious sight, even more so because of the contrast with the earlier desert.
We found out later that shortly before we arrived it had rained in the desert, as it does occasionally. In other words, water had been poured on the thirsty ground. The result was that the desert came to life. Seeds had been waiting in the ground for the water and once it came they grew rapidly into plants to take advantage of the moisture. It was the water that brought the dry land to life.

The water, however, did not bring dirt to life. If I had dug in that land before, all I would have seen was dirt and pebbles. But some of those pebbles were seeds. They looked dead and in a certain way they were, because they were inert, without life. But they had the potential to be brought to life by the water, and that is what happened. The water came down, and they came to life.

Equally striking was the variety of life. Had I thought about it before that experience, I would almost certainly have thought that there were only a few plants that might have lived in the desert, but it turned out that there was an abundance of different kinds. Their seeds probably would have looked fairly similar, but the water brought each one to life in accord with the nature it had. If the water touches a hibiscus seed, a hibiscus will grow from that seed, not a cactus.

This is the image we see in Isaiah. The outpouring of the Spirit is like the water that brought that desert to life. The Spirit makes the desert bloom, brings the dead to life. This is one of the prophecies that Jesus was probably referring to when he spoke of the Holy Spirit as the water of life. To say that the Spirit is the water of life is to say that he brings the blessing of life to human beings when poured out upon them.

Now we have to consider what it means to say that the Holy Spirit produces life in us.

**The Spirit Gives Life**

The last part of the Book of Ephesians (chapters 4–6) is an extended exhortation about how to live the Christian life, based on the truths presented in the first three chapters. The fourth chapter begins with an exhortation to live a life worthy of the Christian call, talks about how the Lord builds up the Christian community, and then talks about the new way of life that should result from redemption in Christ, encouraging the recipients of the letter to live it. In the course of this chapter, we come across the following exhortation in verses 17-20:

> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

This passage seems to be a simple exhortation to live well. As we read it, however, we come across an exhortation not to *get drunk with wine*. If we are paying attention, we might ask ourselves why all of a sudden Paul is concerned with the question of drunkenness. Is he planning on signing up the Ephesians for a temperance movement, perhaps?

In fact, he is not especially concerned with drunkenness, but rather he is making a comparison between drinking wine and being filled with the Spirit. Although the words are a little different than the ones we would use, we would speak in a similar way. We talk about people being “tanked”. We also talk about them as “under the influence”. When someone is tanked or “filled with wine”, the wine does not just go into them and sit there, as in a bottle. Rather, it enters into the blood stream and “influences” them. They talk differently, walk differently, act differently. We can tell that they have drunk a great deal by just watching them or listening to
Something similar happens when someone is filled with the Spirit. The Biblical word filled commonly is used to speak about a change in behavior. Some who is very angry is “filled with anger”. The anger determines how they act. In a similar way, when we are filled with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit affects our behavior. He does not just go into us and sit there as in a temple so we can worship him. Rather he “enters into our bloodstream”. He influences the way we live and act. People should be able to tell that this has happened to us by looking at us or listening to us.

The passage goes on to speak about what happens when the Holy Spirit fills us. We worship the Lord, praising and thanking him. Worship is, in fact, a special sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, as we will see. But the truth has a broader application. The Holy Spirit produces holy living in us, daily life holiness. The teaching here is similar to that in the passage about the fruit of the Spirit. Both make clear that the Holy Spirit produces a new way of “walking” or living, a new kind of behavior. And he does it by working inside of us to make something possible that was not possible before.

Does this mean that when the Holy Spirit fills us we become like drunks or robots or automata? Or that we become like possessed people? Do we lose our ability to think clearly or our capacity to choose what to do? Do we become sub-human, less human? The answer most of us would intuitively and quickly make to these questions is no. The Lord does not make us less human but in a certain way more human. He brings us to life according to our nature. When we are filled with the Spirit we are made more able to understand what is good and to choose it. The Spirit does not make us into automata, determined by God to act in certain ways whether we want to or not, but enables us to act spiritually and so more freely.

We can see something of the way this works by looking at the passage in John chapter 15 where the Lord teaches the parable of the vine. In the first half of that chapter it says,

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser…

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned…

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. …This I command you, to love one another.

This passage concerns Christ and the way he dwells in human beings, but it refers to the same reality as the Holy Spirit dwelling or abiding in us. When Christ dwells in us, he dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is here comparing himself to a vine and his disciples to the branches of that vine. Together they make up one plant, similar to the way the various members, arms, legs, etc., make up one body when they are joined with the head.
A vine produces fruit. But we could ask, whose fruit is it, the vine’s or the branch’s? The answer is both. This is not an either/or matter. The fruit is fully the vine’s fruit and fully the branch’s fruit. It makes no sense to say that the fruit is not the branch’s fruit or not the vine’s fruit.

Saying it that way, however, makes it sound like the vine and branches are equal partners. That, however, is not true. The vine does not need the branches. The branches can be cut off and the vine will do fine. It may even do better without a given branch or two. That is why we prune vines. But the branches do need the vine. If they are cut off, they die, because they need to vine to stay alive. The vine is the source of their life and the source of their ability to bear fruit.

It is worth also noting that there are certain conditions for the branches, us, to stay alive and bear fruit. We have to keep his commandments. We also have to love one another, the other branches that are part of the same vine we belong to. We have, in other words, to live in community or communion with one another and obey the Lord. All of this could be summed up by saying that we need to stay connected or joined with the vine and so abide in him. To use the language of the first Pentecost, we need to keep the covenant, because that enables us to be in a living relationship with the Lord.

When God lives in us by joining us to Christ and filling us with his Spirit, he does not make us automata or even simply passive members. We are to be fruit-bearing branches and if we do not bear fruit, we will be pruned. The Spirit does not bypass us, but he enables us to do something we could not do before — to bear the fruit of the Spirit. The two passages in Ephesians 5 and John 15 together make clear — and even clearer when we add the fruit of the Spirit passage in Galatians 5 — that when the Holy Spirit produces life in us, he produces a new way of living, one that we could not produce on our own.

Now it is true that sometimes God works for us or at our request without working in and through us. When he does so, he gives us special helps. The main way, however, that he wants to work with us is by enabling us, through the spiritual life within, to live effectively as Christians. We can see the difference between God’s special help and his ordinary help by considering two examples: healing and having patience. These will show us two models of the way God works.

We can begin with prayer for healing. Suppose that we see someone sick. We might decide that we should pray for that person to get healed. Then he or she might get healed right away as the result of our prayer. This is not the same thing as what happens when a doctor heals someone. Doctors go through medical school and internship. They acquire a great deal of knowledge and skill by hard work and training. They then work at getting people healed, examining them, diagnosing their problems, prescribing remedies, possibly operating on them, checking back with them to see how their remedy has worked, and so on. When they heal someone, they make use of an acquired ability to bring about health, and they usually can tell how they did what they did.

When we pray for someone and they get healed, we are not relying on an acquired ability. Rather, we are relying on something outside of ourselves, namely, the Lord. We are asking him to do something we ourselves cannot do, and we are possibly asking him to do something that would not happen if he did not act, or might not happen for a long time. We are not completely irrelevant. If we did not pray, likely the person would not be healed, at least not now. But rather than accomplishing the healing ourselves, we are more acting like a conduit of something outside ourselves — the healing action of God. It would be appropriate and accurate to say God did this, not us.

Now let us consider patience, or courage, both fruits of the Spirit. Suppose that we are at the breakfast table, and our young son spills his milk all over us once again. How do we respond? Do we hit him because we are irritated? Do we spank him to discipline him so that he learns not to do it again? Or do we say he is too young
to do better so I should just have patience and overlook it? Suppose the latter is the appropriate response. Then we need to just have patience.

At such a point, it would be nice if God would have patience for us or instead of us. It would be nice if we could “just yield to the Spirit” and relax, or “let go and let God” as the old charismatic motto had it. Of course, if we let go, we would be very likely to hit him whether that would be the best thing to do or not. Instead we need to exercise self-control or patience, sometimes with great effort. And we probably should be grateful if we have acquired the ability to do that over the years rather than constantly relying on praying to God for special emergency help because we never did grow in patience.

A number of years ago, I read a newspaper account of a man who saved a woman from rape in the subway in New York. To understand the incident, you should know that the platforms of the subway stations there are lit up where the passengers stand to board the trains, but they extend a ways into the tunnels and there they are dark. The man described how he was waiting for a train and then heard a muffled scream. He looked over and could see two figures in the shadows, one the woman and the other a very large looking man who seemed like he had a weapon. He looked around, hoping to see a policeman, but there was no one else on the platform.

He decided then that since he was the only one who could help, he had to try, even though it looked to him like he would be getting himself into some very serious trouble and perhaps killed. He looked at the scene and fear filled him. What should he have done? Respond by “letting go and letting God?” If he let go, he probably would have run the other way as quick as he could. He actually said, “I decided I had to run to help the woman, and God helped me.”

Now this is a story with a happy ending. The assailant heard him and ran away — “luckily for me” as the man telling the story said. Despite his fear, he needed to act with courage, and he did. He was apparently a Christian, because he recognized that God was at work in him in the situation. He did not, however, stand back and “let God work” or just pray. He acted with courage — and God also worked.

For many of those involved in the Charismatic Renewal, the sole model for the action of God is something like praying for healing. When we pray or just do nothing and rely on God to act, that is when God really can act. But that is only one model of how God acts, the model that emphasizes human passivity. It leaves out of consideration the fact that God often acts in and through us when we act. Sometimes he does that by strengthening us so that we develop the fruit of the Spirit, as when we patiently handle a child causing trouble. Sometimes we just do what we can, as when the man ran to help the woman, and God uses what we do to get something to happen.

This second model of how God works, his working when we are ourselves doing what we can, is the ordinary one. In God’s plan it is the more common one, because God wants to make us spiritual people, capable of handling the ordinary circumstances of life in a good way. He needs to give us special help at times. He even seems to want to give us special help at times just to show us that he is present or to make things happen that are beyond our power. But the ordinary, normal or basic help God gives to those who belong to his son is to work in them to act in a better way.

The failure to understand the difference between special helps and the basic help that God gives us can cause us to remain spiritually immature. Hebrews 5:14 tells us how spiritual maturity comes about:

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

In this passage the author is explaining why he is not going to give basic instruction (something like a Sunday
school or catechism lesson) again, even though it might seem that his audience needs it. In fact his audience is mature and not like babies in their Christian life. Therefore he is saying that he will not give them teaching that is like milk for babies. He will give them the teaching that is like solid food for grown-ups.

To understand the difference between being a baby and a mature person, we can consider the example of the human arm. A newborn child has an arm at birth, and that arm is a gift of God, something the newborn baby could not have acquired by any efforts of its own any more than it could get itself born. However, the newborn child cannot do much with that arm. If we say, for instance, that human beings can use their arms to throw balls, that would be a true statement, but it would not apply to the baby.

The newborn child needs to use his arm over the years before he can throw balls. Even more, he has to train his arm if he is going to become good at throwing balls. For his arm to become the arm of an adult, even more the arm of an athlete, he needs training by practice over years.

Hebrews 5:14 gives us a criterion for what it is to be mature as a Christian. The result of Christian maturity is the ability to distinguish good from bad. In other words, those who are mature can differentiate (judge) between what is good to do and what is bad to do. We can see from the context that the passage is not just speaking about the ability to know the difference between good and bad theoretically, that is, the ability to know that patience is good and impatience bad, or perhaps the ability to give a definition of patience. Rather, he is speaking about the ability to know how to act in a good way rather than a bad way in the various situations in life that we confront (like the one his audience is confronting), an ability that we might describe as good judgment. Someone who is mature as a parent should be able to tell when to discipline a child and when to let something go and be patient because the child cannot do any better — for the most part at least.

We gain this ability by practice. Maturity in Christian living, mature Christian character, develops through practice, and “practiced” character allows us to respond to each situation in such a way that we know the difference, more or less instinctively, between what is good and bad. As a result of experience and practice, we are trained in responding well, developing good judgment as well as skill in acting well. The word trained here comes from athletics. We need to train like an athlete through much practice to have Christian maturity, not just learn about it in a book. Growth in maturity, then, involves hard work based upon a capacity God gives but that needs development.

Christian discipleship training, then, needs to follow on spiritual birth if we are going to become mature Christians, Christians who can handle the various situations in life the way they should. Failure to understand this leads to Christian immaturity. Sometimes that failure is rooted in having only one model of how God acts, the way he acts when he gives us special help, and consequently failing to acquire a formation that allows us to develop in the fruit of the Spirit, which works on a different model.

We sometimes use the word “hyperspiritualism” or “superspiritualism”. Hyperspiritualism is the problem of looking to God to bypass the human rather than transform it, and so to expect things to happen by power of the Spirit without human cooperation more often than is good. People who are suffering from hyperspiritualism miss the fact that we are supposed to be transformed by the presence of the Spirit in us and so live in a spiritualized way. We are supposed to live like human beings — think, decide, act, work and persevere — but to have our human faculties or actions formed so that they express the character of God. We should be able to handle more and more situations “like the Lord would” rather than constantly looking to God to bypass us, to handle difficult situations without us or instead of us.

Hyperspiritualism is not just a matter of overemphasis. It is a depreciation, sometimes conscious, sometimes de facto, of an aspect of the way the Spirit works. We can, in principle, maximize both the spiritual and the good human at the same time. It is not true that if something is spiritual, it does not come from human effort,
anymore than it is true that if the fruit comes from the vine, it does not come from the branches. Both can work together. It is the unredeemed human, not everything human, that is incompatible with the spiritual.

There are limits to this, of course. When we want to see someone healed, we can pray and God may act without human effort. Sometimes that is the only way, or the best way, to get something to happen. Nonetheless, if that is our only model for the way God acts and we want to be spiritual people who rely upon God, we will fall into hyperspiritualism and likely become less effective as Christians. The main way God wants to work is by spiritualizing us, transforming us, so that we become the kind of people who can live and act in a spiritual way.

“Bucket Faith” and “Spring Faith”

The gospel of John gives us a picture of the kind of faith that is a response to the new life the Holy Spirit gives us — spring faith. We can read about it in the fourth chapter, verses 1-14, where Jesus has a discussion with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in the land of Samaria:

Interchange 1

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her,
Give me a drink.
For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

The Samaritan woman said to him,
How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?
For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered her,
If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

Interchange 2

The woman said to him,
Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?

Jesus said to her,
Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

The passage itself gives us background. It tells us that Jesus’ disciples had gone into the nearby city to buy food, and while he was waiting for them at the well, a Samaritan woman came to draw water. The passage also tells us that Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. That, however, is not the best translation, as we can see from the fact that the disciples had gone into the nearby Samaritan city to buy food, certainly some kind of a “dealing” with Samaritans. A better translation is Jews do not use vessels with Samaritans. Jews thought the Samaritans did not observe purity laws properly, and as a result a drinking vessel handled by a Samaritan woman was likely to be unclean and so should be avoided.
The issue, then, concerned maintaining ceremonial purity and was not a matter of simply avoiding Samaritans completely. Nor was it a matter of not speaking to women, as some authors assert to try to make the point that Jesus was more liberal than other Jews were in terms of dealing with women. It was a matter of not using a vessel that could have been made ritually impure by a Samaritan woman. Nonetheless, Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink from her bucket.

The woman responded in an unfriendly manner. She wanted to know why he was doing something he is not supposed to do. Rather than give her an answer that she could understand as a response to her question, Jesus said, if you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

*Living water* is the literal translation of the phrase used. *Flowing water* is an alternate translation, since, in contrast to the water in a well or cistern, flowing water was described as living water because it moved. Probably the Samaritan woman understood Jesus to be speaking about flowing water, because she replied that the only water in the area was well water, water from Jacob’s well. Moreover, he could not even get that water, because he had nothing to draw with, no bucket, and the well was deep.

In using the phrase *living water*, of course, Jesus was making a play on words. The water Jesus had to give was flowing but also alive. It was, moreover, be the gift of God.

The woman’s reply to Jesus’ claim to have flowing (living) water to give was even more sarcastic than her first response. She was in effect saying, “How come you talk so big, when you cannot get yourself a drink of water”. She also recognized that he was implicitly making a claim that he had better water than Jacob’s well contained, and added, “The well was good enough for Jacob, how come it is not good enough for you. Are you such an important person?”

Jesus then responded to her, “I do not just give drinks of water. I give water that stays inside and will be a spring of water inside of people. Moreover that spring will make it possible for them to have eternal life.” As we can see from what he said later on in his discussion with the Samaritan woman, this spring of water refers to the presence of the Holy Spirit in those who receive him from the Lord. He is speaking about the gift of God, the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4). This presence of the Holy Spirit is intended by God to be an ongoing presence in us giving us spiritual life until it brings us to where we should be — to heaven, to eternal life.

Using the image in this passage, we can distinguish between “bucket faith” and “spring faith”. Bucket faith is the kind that looks for divine faith outside of us. At times we need to look for help from God we do not have, to “get a bucket” and go after it. Spring faith relies on something we do have. It relies on the gift inside that does not go away.

To be sure, the life the Lord gives us needs to be fed at times. We need “word and sacrament” or “liturgy of the word and liturgy of the Eucharist” to use the theological phrases. We also need to have the channel cleaned out at time. We need to repent and seek forgiveness. Nonetheless, the life and strength that comes to us when we are joined to Christ is already inside of us and remains there unless something goes radically wrong.

This is where spring faith comes in. Spring faith relies on the spring of living water inside. It lives and acts in the confidence that the Holy Spirit is inside of us and is there to enlighten us and strengthen us so that we can handle the various circumstances of our life in a good Christian way.

If we are, for instance, raising a family, there are many times when we will want to get out our bucket and go
for help. We may have been financially responsible, but we now need more money than we did. We may have acquired much good Christian teaching and help so that we mainly know what we need to do, but now we do not have a clue how to handle something that happened to one of our children, or cannot explain a sudden turn for the worse in their life that they will not talk about. Going to the Lord for special help may be needed.

But our family life will go much better (and probably will have less special needs) if we learn to rely upon the fact that the Lord is in us. We can handle difficulties and learn how to be a parent, if we have confidence that we can rely on the Lord at work inside of us. We are his sons and daughters, filled with his Spirit, holding a privileged position. If we live and act with that confidence, with spring faith in the gift of the Lord in us, we will see a better life and better results. Spring faith does not guarantee that everything will go well, but it makes a significant difference.

Spring faith does not always work best by “claiming God’s help in faith” whenever we need it. We do not need to claim something we already have. We need to do that when we use bucket faith to get special help. Spring faith is rather an ongoing confidence in the Lord, one that is nourished day in and day out by remembering who we are, who God is, and what our relationship with God is like — what he has already given us. Sometimes it works best when it is instinctive, when we simply act with the confidence of who we are in the Lord.

This gives us our third conclusion. Our charismatic spirituality is based upon confidence that the Holy Spirit is in us and transforms, enlightens, and strengthens us so that we can be spiritual(ized) people.

> See other articles by Steve Clark in Living Bulwark archives


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Top image credit: photo (c) Volrab Vaclav at Bigstock.com. Waterfall in the National Park Tercino valley in the mountains Novohradske-Czech Republic.
On Fire for God

by Tom Caballes

"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!"

- Luke 12:49 ESV

Have you ever thought of what legacy you might leave behind once you are gone? What impact will you have made on your family, community, and society? Do you want to create a huge wave in the ‘sea’ of life or just a minute ripple that no one will ever notice? Is your life one huge blast for everyone to witness or just a small sputter of light no one will see?

One thing I’ve learned in life is that radical people – either for good or bad - makes a lasting effect on the world they leave behind. Billy Graham, Francis of Assisi, Theresa of Calcutta, and Therese of Lisieux – they made a lasting impact, even up to now. How about you – can you put your name beside them, as one who was on fire for God while they were alive? Can you dare try, in your own little way, to set your life on fire for God? Jesus came to set your life on fire for Him!

So How Do You Grow in Becoming on Fire for God?

1. Being on fire for God starts with your conversion. Before you can change the world, you need to change yourself first. Make sure God is your one true passion, joy, and treasure. Surrender your inmost longings and plans to Him. Offer your weaknesses, sins, and flaws to God. Get rid of habits of sin in your life.
2. Appreciate just how blessed you are. You have a roof over your head, clothes to wear, and food to eat. One way you can think about the purpose of living is to show gratitude to God for all His blessings to you.
3. Let love for God and others be the goal and basis for your living. Let love be your motive in all your relationships and let love be your afterthought to all dealings in life. Being loving is being on fire for...
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God.

4. Act, think, and live like Jesus. In different situations in life especially the hard ones, think of how would Jesus behave and respond. We are called to follow and imitate Jesus, even if it is against our old nature.

5. Lukewarmness is not acceptable in God’s eyes! You need to decide to either be hot or cold for God. Lukewarm people never made any lasting impact on their lives and others. See Revelations 3:15-16.

6. A Christian on fire would also attempt to share Jesus with others by his witness and being vocal about his faith. You may be the only living gospel that others will ‘read’ and meet in their lifetime. So live your life well, be a salt of the earth and the light of the world, in all humility, meekness, patience, and love.

7. Live an ordinary life in an extraordinary way. Saints in the past grew in holiness by conquering their selfishness, learning to forbear in love, and being patient with the people. They had serious issues that challenged their holiness – and by overcoming those ‘small’ battles, they obtained eternal life.

8. Live a radical life for God. What the world desperately needs now are people who are on fire for God. Aim to be either a missionary, a saint or a martyr – or if you want to be truly ambitious, aim to be all! Aim to be a spark that can start a blazing fire for God to all the people you meet. You have only one short life to live – use it for the glory of God!

Other Scripture passages:

1. And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." [Luke 10:27 ESV]

2. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. [Galatians 6:9 ESV]

3. I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. [Revelation 3:15-16 ESV]

4. Other references: 1 Timothy 4:10; 2 Timothy 1:7; and Romans 12:11.

For personal reflection or group sharing

If you were to look at your life from the outside, do you see any visible signs of your life being on fire for God? Or will you see more signs of lukewarmness in your life rather than being on fire? What do you need to do change so that you can be more on fire for God?

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[images above: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edith Stein, Francis of Assisi, a couple of saints in the making]
THE STRATEGY OF THE SPIRIT
Charismatic Renewal and the Church Today
by Larry Christenson

"Like a brilliant field commander who devises unexpected ways to advance his battle plan, God has ordered a strategic outpouring of his Spirit in a way, and to a degree, that we have not known before."

Does the Spirit have a strategy for the church? In one sense, we know that he does – the 'strategy' of coming and dwelling in believers to bring the living, redeeming presence of Christ to reality in and through them. But this 'strategy' is always the same, from Pentecost to the end of the age. What about particular strategies? Does the Spirit carry out his indwelling work in strategically different ways according to different times and circumstances?

I believe he does. I also believe that the broad movement that comprises Pentecostalism and the charismatic renewal is one aspect of the Spirit's present strategy. But my purpose here is not to present a case for this movement. Rather, I would like to identify the message that the movement speaks to the entire church about the Spirit's strategy in our day.

By now, many Christian leaders have had an opportunity to form an opinion of the Pentecostal or charismatic movements. Depending on the local manifestations of the movement that we have encountered, we may have concluded that it is basically healthy or seriously flawed, a major force for renewal or a mere pious devotion. What we have seen of the operation of gifts of the Spirit such as tongues, healing, or prophecy may have awed, intrigued, puzzled, or dismayed us. But whatever reservations or objections we may have formed regarding the movement's diverse theologies and practices, it is worth asking what the movement as a whole may tell us about the Spirit's strategy for carrying out his unchanging purpose in our time.

God's Intervention
The key message of the movement, I believe, is simply that the experience of God's presence and intervention is normal in Christian life.

But this message is difficult for many people to receive because an emphasis on religious experience immediately raises two concerns.

First, a focus on experience seems to imply an indifference to truth. But the central feature of charismatic experience is a profound encounter with the triune God who has revealed himself in the Scriptures, his inspired word. Charismatic experience has the word of the Lord as its basic impulse and as its final norm.

Second, religious experience is also often equated with subjectivity. A concern with religious experience seems to imply an exaggerated concern with one's own feelings. But in the charismatic renewal, 'experience' has a broad, objective meaning. "Experience" is an encounter with God himself or with an action of God, initiated by God and having observable results in the natural world or in the lives of individuals and communities. Authentic charismatic experience is God-given evidence of God's reality and power.
When charismatics talk about 'experience,' they may have in mind an inner perception or change of attitude. But they would draw no significant distinction between this and something visible and concrete, such as a healing. Both would be received as an experience of the working of the Spirit, the only difference being that one took place in the privacy of the inner life while the other took place publicly. The focus is on the empirical reality behind the experience-the intervention of God-not simply on one's subjective response.

Thus the message of the charismatic renewal-that the experience of God's intervention in our lives, according to the pattern and teaching of Scripture, is a normal, objective, indispensable reality - is a message that the whole church should welcome. Without it, our witness to Christ will be weak and impoverished.

The Spirit's Coming

One reason why this message has not penetrated some sectors of the churches is that it has been carried in a theological framework that many Christians have found unacceptable. In particular, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have encountered resistance because of their understandings of how Christians receive the Holy Spirit. The rejection of the theologies offered by the movement has often meant a rejection of the message about the possibility of experiencing God's interventions in our lives and ministries.

But even without accepting the Pentecostal and charismatic renewal explanations, it is still possible to appreciate the reality that their explanations point to.

Three systematic approaches to the coming of the Spirit are prominent in the churches today: the sacramental, the evangelical, and the Pentecostal. Simply stated, the sacramental approach teaches that the Holy Spirit is given in baptism. The evangelical approach links the gift of the Holy Spirit to regeneration: you receive the Holy Spirit when you are born again. The Pentecostal approach distinguishes between a reception of the Spirit in regard to regeneration, and "baptism with the Spirit," understood as a charismatic reception of the Spirit that empowers one for witness and ministry and that happens subsequent to regeneration.

Although these three approaches overlap and do not altogether exclude one another, they nevertheless stand in considerable contention. Pentecostal and charismatic theology, by speaking of a particular experience of the Spirit's coming to those already baptized, has seemed by some to be a denial of the Spirit's coming at baptism and conversion.

Rather than offering an alternative systematic explanation, I would suggest a different way of looking at the reality of the Spirit's coming-away that gives greater attention to the sovereign strategy of the Spirit in varying situations.
A signal outpouring of the Spirit may be necessary when the indwelling of Christ is at low ebb among his people or when they face formidable opposition.

Applying These Truths
In his coming and working the Holy Spirit has not bound himself to one particular way of doing things. Certainly the Holy Spirit is not unsystematic, in the sense of being sloppy and disorganized. But he is goal-oriented, like a brilliant field commander who comes up with unexpected strategies to deal with particular situations. Serving under that kind of a commander can be unsettling: he keeps you constantly on your toes. But the other side of it is that you keep the enemy off balance and continue to advance.

The Spirit is concerned with advancing the cause of Christ. Whether that satisfies our preconceived theological expectations is not the Spirit's major concern. He wants to communicate not merely correct ideas about Christ but the very life of Christ in all its fullness. That requires more than a clear and accurate statement of truth. It requires application of the truth that is appropriate to a given situation—a strategy that can move successfully against powers that actively oppose the life and kingdom of Christ. Fundamental truths in the scriptural revelation are ever true, but the sovereign Spirit applies these truths to specific situations.

Pentecostals and Christians in the charismatic renewal have laid special stress on the outpouring of the Spirit, and in this, I believe, they have accurately assessed a strategy of the Spirit. A signal outpouring of the Spirit may be necessary when the indwelling of Christ is at low ebb among his people or when they face formidable opposition.

Pitting Truth against Truth
If the Lord has prepared a strategic outpouring, it will not do simply to reemphasize the truth that he already dwells in believers, and to counsel believers that no additional experience need be sought. That would be like a company of soldiers plodding straight ahead when their commander has ordered a quick, flanking movement. Mainline churches have frequently made the mistake of pitting a theology of indwelling, with an emphasis on gradual growth, against a theology of outpouring, accompanied by signs—as though the one obviated any need for the other.

The two are not incompatible. Francis Sullivan, a Jesuit scholar, makes the interesting observation that St. Thomas Aquinas saw the two motifs as complementary to one another:

'...St. Thomas asks the question whether one can speak of a sending of the Holy Spirit to a person in whom he is already dwelling, and if so, how this is to be understood. His answer is as follows: There is an invisible sending of the divine Person not only in the initial gift of grace but also with respect to an advance in virtue or an increase of grace ... as, for example, when a person moves forward into the grace of working miracles or prophecy.'

Discussions between different segments of the body of Christ have sometimes become a sterile restatement of positions when they have focused simply on the question, "How do you receive the Holy Spirit?" We may make more progress by shifting the ground of the question and asking, "What is the strategy of the Spirit?" How is he employing these two basic truths indwelling and outpouring in the present situation?

Looking beyond Terms
The Pentecostal and charismatic movement draws our attention to the truths about the outpouring of the Spirit. The use of the term 'baptized in the Spirit' is open to some criticism, but we should direct our attention to the...
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reality that the term seeks to underline the availability of a fresh outpouring of the
Spirit. The movement demonstrates that the outpouring of the Spirit's power initiates or renews witness and
ministry. In the book of Acts, both times the term occurs it describes a dramatic initial outpouring of the Spirit.
The history of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements tends to echo this. A key factor in the spread of the
movements has been the widely shared personal experience of an outpouring of the Spirit.

The experience of 'baptism with the Holy Spirit' has commonly been accompanied by a manifest demonstration
of the Spirit's presence through charismatic gifts, and this is also consistent with the scriptural witness. In the
theology of Luke, the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit consistently results in a manifest
demonstration of the Spirit's presence, usually in the form of exalted speech: they spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4;
10:46, 19:6), prophesied (Acts 19:6), extolled God (Acts 10:46), and spoke the word of God with boldness (Acts
4:31). Or it was accompanied by a supernatural sign—a healing (Acts 9:1718), a divine judgment (Acts 13:9-11),
or a rapturous vision (Acts 7:55).

To state that such an event, or such charisms, are "not necessary' is to miss the point. It goes without saying that
a specific outpouring of the Spirit with the manifestation of spiritual gifts is not "necessary" either for salvation
or for fruitful ministry.

But that would be like saying, 'It is not necessary that an air strike precede an infantry engagement in order for a
battle to be won.' However, if the commander has planned things that way, then another kind of necessity comes
into play—the necessity of paying heed to his strategy. An argument among the troops or junior officers on the
inherent necessity of air strikes would miss the point. The question, rather, is what strategy the commander
wants to use in this situation.

It may be that Pentecostals and charismatics have made a theological system out of their own perception and
experience of the Holy Spirit. We may not agree with some aspects of the Pentecostal way of explaining the
coming of the Spirit. But, I believe, we will not be far off if we acknowledge that they have accurately perceived
the Spirit's strategy. He is calling believers to receive a personal outpouring of the Holy Spirit; he is calling them
to be filled with the Holy Spirit in a way, and to a degree, that they have not been before.

One of the great misconceptions that circulate around discussions of the Holy Spirit is the notion that we have
everything that we state in our doctrines. That is like claiming a victory on the battlefield because you have a textbook on military strategy.

Responding to His Strategy

One of the great misconceptions that circulate around discussions of the Holy Spirit is the notion that we have
everything that we state in our doctrines. That is like claiming a victory on the battlefield because you have a
textbook on military strategy. The Spirit is calling the churches to experience more of what the doctrines talk
about, to go beyond an intellectual belief in the third person of the Trinity to a demonstration of the Spirit and his
power (see 1 Cor. 2:4), to extend our expectation of the Spirit's working to the horizons of Scripture. This will
not happen simply by asserting doctrines of the Holy Spirit. It calls for an obedient response to the strategy of
the Spirit—a personal encounter with Jesus, who fills his followers with the Holy Spirit.

Whether one understands this as an appropriation of something already received (sacramental, evangelical) or a
reception of something promised (Pentecostal), the strategy of the Spirit will be served. The Spirit will be poured
out; believers will talk about the Holy Spirit with a new sense of reality; they will walk in new power, they will register gains against the powers that oppose the gospel.

**Emphasis on Gifts Overdue**

The Pentecostal and charismatic movements have been faulted for an emphasis on spiritual gifts. But, again, while one need not agree with all the ways that participants in these movements have exercised spiritual gifts, one must wonder whether there is not something important to be learned from the movement's explicit encouragement to 'receive the gifts.'

In the New Testament we see that the apostles expected that Christians would receive an outpouring of the Spirit leading to the working of spiritual gifts. "They laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:17). The strategy of the Spirit called for manifestations. The new believers needed to receive the Spirit in that specific sense, and the apostles took steps to bring it about.

It does not seem likely that people will be led into a charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit and his gifts without a clear and energetic proclamation of those particular biblical truths.

If the strategy of the Spirit today calls for manifest demonstrations of his presence, then we need to talk about "receiving' him in this specific sense with the simplicity and directness that Scripture itself employs. Pentecostals and charismatics have been faulted for making too much of spiritual gifts, especially the gift of tongues. If an emphasis on particular manifestations of the Spirit is implicitly linked to the issue of salvation or to one's status as a believer, the criticism is helpful. But if the strategy of the Spirit is the point at issue, then an emphasis on manifestations of the Spirit was probably long overdue.

Pentecostals and charismatics are coming up to the front lines, bearing a clear, even a stern, communiqué about spiritual gifts: 'Pray for them. Use them.' Manifestations of the Spirit are not options. They are equipment that every soldier is expected to receive and use-an integral part of the strategy of the Spirit for advancing the cause of Christ.

**Proclaiming These Truths**

Many Christian leaders are uncomfortable with laying such an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit and urging believers to receive and exercise his gifts. In many sacramental churches and evangelical circles there has been little or no specific teaching on receiving the Holy Spirit and his gifts. Rather, the truth of his indwelling has been emphasized.

But this raises an important question. Does the Spirit come with his gifts on the basis of our holding a doctrinal position about him and simply assuming that he will come, without our specifically proclaiming it? The sacramental tradition says, "You receive the Holy Spirit when you are grafted into Christ in baptism.' Evangelicals say, 'You receive the Holy Spirit when you are born again.' But assuming that both of these traditions teach something important about receiving the Spirit, to what degree will a charismatic work of the Spirit actually happen if a clear word about receiving him in this sense is not part of the proclamation and teaching?

Take, for comparison, another aspect of God's work. Would people experience the reality of forgiveness if the word of forgiveness were not specifically proclaimed, if God were presented merely as creator? If not, why should we think that people will experience guidance, healing, or other spiritual gifts if these are seldom even
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mentioned? Will people be empowered as witnesses by the Spirit if they are never told that such a thing is possible?

It does not seem likely that people will be led into a charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit and his gifts without a clear and energetic proclamation of *those particular biblical truths*. The Spirit comes where the word is clearly presented. That is part of his strategy.

Manifestations of the Spirit are not options. They are equipment that every soldier is expected to receive and use.

**Shifting the Focus**

Killian McDonnell, a leading Roman Catholic authority on charismatic renewal, has observed that, seen from the outside, the charismatic renewal could almost be mistaken for a prayer movement. Especially in the early years of the movement, the prayer meeting was the major gathering place for the nurture and spread of the renewal.

Over and over the pattern was repeated: a handful of people would decide to gather for prayer, and the word would get around. Soon people would come from miles away to study the Bible together, hear a speaker, and pray. Prayer groups sprang up all over. In metropolitan areas one could find prayer groups to visit almost any time of day, every day of the week. It was a springtime of prayer, Bible study, and personal renewal. The pattern is still being repeated as the movement enters its third decade.

Here we come very close to the practical center of the Holy Spirit's basic strategy, vividly described in the New Testament and fulfilling the promise of Christ himself. Prayer is the activity par excellence that bridges the gap between an intellectual belief system and a living faith. In prayer we move from talking about God to talking to God. When prayer ceases to be a ritual formality and becomes a genuine encounter with God, then the central focus of life begins to shift from self back to God.

This fits the strategy of the Spirit: he is coming against the kind of entrenched humanism that has planted the autonomous human being firmly at the center of all things. The Spirit knows that an alternative belief system, be it ever so biblical and orthodox, will not break the grip of secular humanism. The strategy of the Spirit is to equip believers to demonstrate a life that proceeds in every regard from a radical dependence on God. For that, prayer is indispensable.

The lordship of Christ is the central issue that the charismatic renewal raises in the church.

**Against an Opponent**

'Strategy' is a term appropriate to contest or warfare. One employs strategy with a view to an opponent. The strategy of the Spirit is indeed devised with a view to an opponent. "We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph. 6:12). The strategy of the Spirit is devised with a view to how the kingdom of God opposes the kingdom of Satan. His strategy unites us with Christ and with one
another; it fills us with his power, so that together we may move forward in the cause of Christ.

I am convinced that the Holy Spirit has a strategy for our day, and that he is ready and willing for us to learn about it and become involved in it. This does not imply an uncritical acceptance of all present-day charismatic experience or theology. But I believe it requires an accurate understanding of the Spirit's message through the Pentecostal and charismatic movement.

If we speak about charismatic experience, it is because those of us in the movement understand that this is something Christ wants said in his church (consider 1 Peter 4:10-11). If we call for a more radical dependence on the Holy Spirit, it is because we understand that Jesus himself, for a variety of reasons, wants to honor and call attention to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If we emphasize certain parts of Scripture, such as those dealing with spiritual gifts, it is because we understand this to be a present priority of the Lord.

The charismatic renewal has sometimes been dubbed a 'tongues movement,' as though that designation fully accounted for its significance. This would be like dismissing Israel as a 'silent marching people' because that was a feature of their behavior at the battle of Jericho. We know, however, that behind the marching was a command of the Lord, who wanted his people to carry out a particular strategy. The reality of his lordship, not a technique of marching in silence, was the central issue. If the charismatic renewal gives particular attention to spiritual gifts, it is because we believe that the restoration of the full spectrum of spiritual gifts to the churches is part of the Lord's present strategy.

The lordship of Christ is the central issue that the charismatic renewal raises in the church, and it is by this issue that it wishes to be judged (2 Cor. 4:5). The Pentecostal and charismatic movements proclaim that it is his prerogative and desire to set the course for his people.

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The Sober Intoxication of the Spirit

by Father Raniero Cantalamessa

Two Kinds of Intoxication

On the Monday after Pentecost in 1975 at the closing of the First World Congress of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Blessed Paul VI delivered an address to the ten thousand participants gathered in the St. Peter’s Basilica in which he defined the charismatic renewal as “a chance for the Church.” When he ended reading his official discourse, the pope added these words extemporaneously:

In the fourth-century hymn by St. Ambrose that we read this morning in the breviary, there is a simple phrase that is difficult to translate: *Laeti*, which means “with joy,” *bibamus*, which means, “let us drink,” *sobriam*, which means “sober” or “temperate,” *profusionem Spiritus*, which means “the outpouring of the Spirit.” *Laeti bibamus sobriam profusionem Spiritus*. This could be the motto for your movement: its plan as well as a description of the movement itself.

[1]
The important thing to note immediately is that the words from Ambrose’s hymn were of course not written for the charismatic renewal. They have always been part of the Liturgy of the Hours of the universal Church. This is therefore a joyful exhortation addressed to all Christians.

To be more accurate, in St. Ambrose’s original text, instead of “profusionem Spiritus,” “the outpouring of the Spirit,” we find “ebrietatem Spiritus,” that is, “the intoxication of the Spirit.”[2] Tradition subsequently considered his original expression to be too audacious and substituted it with a milder and more acceptable word. In doing so, however, the meaning of a metaphor as ancient as Christianity itself was lost. In the Italian translation of the Breviary, the original text of the verse by St. Ambrose has been restored correctly. A stanza of the hymn at Lauds for the Fourth Week of the Breviary says,

And may Christ be food to us,
and faith be our drink,
and let us joyfully taste
the sober intoxication of the Spirit.[3]

What led the Fathers to take up the theme of “sober intoxication,” already developed by Philo of Alexandria,[4] was the text in which the Apostle exhorts the Christians in Ephesus that says,

Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts. (Ephesians 5:18-19)

Starting with Origin, there are countless texts from the Fathers that illustrate this theme, alternating between the analogy and the contrast of physical intoxication and spiritual intoxication. The likeness lies in the fact that both types of intoxication infuse joy; they make us forget our troubles and make us escape ourselves. The contrast lies in the fact that while physical intoxication (from alcohol, drugs, sex, success) makes people shaky and unsteady, spiritual intoxication makes people steady at doing good. The first intoxication makes people come out of themselves to live below the level of reason; the second makes people come out of themselves to live above the level of their reason. Both use the word “ecstasy” (the name recently given to a deadly drug!), but one is an ecstasy downward and the other is an ecstasy upward.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes that those who thought the apostles were drunk at Pentecost were correct; they were mistaken only in attributing that drunkenness to ordinary wine, whereas it was “new wine” pressed from the “true vine,” who is Christ. The apostles were intoxicated, yes, but with that sober intoxication that puts to death sin and brings life to the soul.[5]

Drawing on the episode of water flowing from the rock in the desert (see Ex 17:1-7) and on Paul’s comment about it in the First Letter to the Corinthians (“All drank the same supernatural drink... and all were made to drink of one Spirit” [1 Cor 10:4; 12:13]), Saint Ambrose wrote,

The Lord Jesus poured out water from the rock and all drank from it. Those who drank it only symbolically were satisfied; those who drank it in very truth were inebriated. Inebriation of this sort is good and fills the heart without causing the feet to totter. Yes, it is a good inebriation. It steadies the footsteps and makes sober the mind... Drink Christ, for he is the vine; drink Christ, for he is the rock from which the water gushes forth... Drink Christ, that you may drink His words... Divine scripture is imbibed, divine scripture is eaten when the juice of the eternal word.
From Intoxication to Sobriety
How do we appropriate this ideal of sober intoxication and incarnate it in our current historical and ecclesial situation? Where, in fact, is it written that such a strong way of experiencing the Spirit was the exclusive prerogative of the Fathers and of the early days of the Church, but that it is no longer for us? The gift of Christ is not limited to a particular era but is offered to every era. There is enough for everybody in the treasure of his redemption. It is precisely the role of the Spirit to render the redemption of Christ universal, available to every person at every point of time and space...

This second path—from intoxication to sobriety—was the path that Jesus led his apostles to follow. Even though they had Jesus as their teacher and spiritual master, they were not in a position before Pentecost to put into practice hardly any of the gospel precepts. But when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, then we see them transformed and capable of enduring all kinds of hardships for Christ, even martyrdom. The Holy Spirit was the cause of their fervor rather than its effect.

There is another reason that impels us to rediscover this path from intoxication to sobriety. The Christian life is not only a matter of growing in personal holiness, it is also ministry, service, and proclamation. To accomplish these tasks we need “power from on high,” the charisms or, in a word, a profound Pentecostal experience of the Holy Spirit.

We need the sober intoxication of the Spirit even more than the Fathers did. The world has become so averse to the Gospel, so sure of itself, that only the “strong wine” of the Spirit can overcome its unbelief and draw it out of its entirely human and rationalistic sobriety, which passes itself off as “scientific objectivity.” Only spiritual weapons, says the Apostle, “have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5).

The Penetrating Rain of the Spirit
Where are the “places” in which the Spirit acts today in this Pentecostal way? Let us listen once again to the voice of Saint Ambrose who was the cantor par excellence, among the Latin Fathers, of the sober intoxication of the Spirit. After discussing the two classic “places” in which one could receive the Spirit—the Eucharist and Scripture—he hints at a third possibility, saying,

There is, too, the inebriation that follows on the penetrating rain of the Holy Spirit. We read in the Acts of the Apostles... of those who spoke in foreign tongues and appeared, to those who heard them, to be drunk on new wine.[10]

After noting the “ordinary” ways of being intoxicated by the Spirit, Saint Ambrose adds a different way with these words, an “extraordinary” way (extraordinary in the sense that it is not predetermined or instituted), that consists in re-living the experience the apostles had on the Day of Pentecost. He obviously did not add this third possibility to tell his audience that it was closed to them and had been reserved only for the apostles and the first generation of Christians. On the contrary, he intended to inspire the faithful to desire the experience of this “penetrating rain of the Spirit” that occurred at Pentecost. Also for St. Ambrose Pentecost was not a close event, but a possibility always open in the Church.

The possibility is therefore open also for us to draw upon the Spirit in this new way that depends solely on God’s sovereign and free initiative. We should not fall into the error of the Pharisees and scribes who said to Jesus, “There are six days for us to work, so why heal and do miracles on the Sabbath?” (see Luke 13:14).
could be tempted to say to God or to think, “There are seven sacraments that sanctify and confer the Spirit, so why go beyond them into new and unfamiliar ways?”

One of the ways in which the Holy Spirit is acting today, outside the institutional channels of grace, is the Charismatic Renewal. The theologian Yves Congar, in his address to the International Congress of Pneumatology at the Vatican in 1981 on the sixteenth centenary of the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, said,

How can we avoid situating the so-called charismatic stream, better known as the Renewal in the Spirit, here with us? It has spread like a brushfire. It is far more than a fad. ... In one primary aspect, it resembles revival movements from the past: the public and verifiable character of spiritual action which changes people’s lives... It brings youth, a freshness and new possibilities into the bosom of the old Church, our mother. In fact, except for very rare occasions, the Renewal has remained within the Church and, far from challenging long-standing institutions, it reanimates them.[11]

The principal instrument by which the Renewal in the Spirit “changes people’s lives” is the baptism in the Spirit. I mention it in this place without of course any intention of proselytism, but because I think it is important that a reality which touches millions of Catholics around the world be known at the center of the Church.

The expression itself comes directly from Jesus who before ascending into heaven, referring to the future Pentecost, said to his apostles: “John baptized with water but you, not many days from now, will be baptized in the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). This is a rite that has nothing esoteric about it but rather occurs with gestures of great simplicity, peace, and joy and is accompanied by attitudes of humility, repentance, and willingness to become like children so as to enter the kingdom.

It is a renewal and an actualization not only of baptism and confirmation, but also of the whole of Christian life: for spouses, a renewal of the sacrament of marriage; for priests, a renewal of their ordination; for consecrated people, a renewal of their religious profession. People prepare themselves for this, in addition to making a good confession, by participating in catechesis meetings by which they are put in vital and joyful contact with the principal truths and realities of the faith: love of God, sin, salvation, new life, transformation in Christ, the charisms, and the fruits of the Spirit. The most common and beautiful fruit is the discovery of what it really means to have a “personal relationship” with Jesus. In the catholic understanding Baptism in the Spirit is not an arrival point, but a starting point toward Christian maturity and service to the Church.

A decade after the charismatic renewal appeared in the Catholic Church, Karl Rahner wrote,

Even an objective and rational theology does not have to reject all these enthusiastic experiences [of grace] out of hand... Here we are certainly confronted with especially impressive, humanly affective, liberating experiences of grace which offer wholly novel existential horizons. These mold the innermost attitude of a Christian for a long time and are quite fit... to be called “baptism in the Spirit.”[12]

But is it right to expect that everyone should go through this experience? Is this the only possible way to experience the grace of Pentecost? If by the “baptism in the Spirit” we mean a certain rite in a certain context, we have to say no; it is not the only way to have a profound experience of the Spirit. There have been and are countless Christians who have had a similar experience without knowing anything about the baptism in the
Spirit, receiving a spontaneous outpouring of the Spirit at the occasion of a retreat, a meeting, a reading, or, according to Saint Thomas Aquinas, when someone is called to a new and more demanding office in the Church.[13]

Having said that, however, it must also be said that what is commonly called the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” or the “outpouring of the Spirit” has shown itself to be a simple and powerful way to renew the lives of millions of believers in almost all of the Christian churches. Even a normal course of spiritual exercises can be concluded very well with a special invocation of the Holy Spirit, if the person leading it has experienced it and the participants desire it. I had that very experience last year. The bishop of a diocese south of London took the initiative to convene a charismatic retreat that was open to the clergy of other dioceses as well. About one hundred priests and permanent deacons were present, and at the end they all asked for and received the outpouring of the Spirit, with the support of a group of laypeople from the Renewal who had come for that occasion. If the fruits of the Spirit are “love, joy, and peace” (Gal 5:22) by the end they were almost touchable with hands among those present.

This is not a question of adhering to one movement rater than to other movements in the Church. Nor is it even a question, properly speaking, of a “movement” but of a “current of grace” that is open to all and is destined to lose itself in the Church like an electric discharge that is dispersed within a mass and then disappears once it has accomplished its task.

Saint John XXIII spoke of “a new Pentecost”; the Blessed Paul VI went further, speaking of a “perennial Pentecost”. This is what he said during a general audience in 1972:

The Church needs her perennial Pentecost; she needs fire in her heart, words on her lips, prophecy in her outlook. […] The Church needs to rediscover the eagerness, the taste and the certainty of the truth that is hers […] And then the Church needs to feel flowing through all her human faculties a wave of love, of that love which is called forth and poured into our hearts ‘by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us’ (Romans 5:5)’[14].

Let us conclude therefore with the words of the liturgical hymn recalled at the beginning:

And may Christ be food to us,
and faith be our drink,
and let us joyfully taste
the sober intoxication of the Spirit.[3]


See Saint Ambrose, *Commentary on Twelve Psalms*, 35, 19, p. 47.


See St. Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I,q.43,a.6 ad 2.


[Excerpt from an Advent sermon given in Rome December 16, 2016, (c) by Raniero Cantalamessa, English translation by Marsha Daigle-Williamson, First published in Zenit.org.]

Illustration credit: *Breath of Life* by Graham Braddock, (c) GoodSalt.com.
Description by the artist: Originally I painted the face of Jesus in the clouds breathing life and renewal into His church, which I symbolised in the form of a traditional, steepled church building. Some people thought the face in the sky represented the north wind. A few years later I painted the dove over the face so that it was no longer visible. Eventually, I decided that there was a place for both, and I repainted the face of the Lord so that it partially obscured the dove. Which did you see first? The dove, or the face of Jesus?
This is a detail from a larger work entitled, ‘Breath of Renewal’.

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The Fruit of the Holy Spirit
by Derek Prince

There is a difference in kind between gifts and fruit. This may be illustrated by comparing a Christmas tree with an apple tree.

A Christmas tree carries gifts. Each gift is attached to it by a single act and received from it by a single act. No time or effort is required of the person receiving the gift.

On the other hand, there is both time and hard work required to cultivate an apple tree. To produce fruit, it must go through a series of stages that takes several years.

First, the seed must be placed in the earth. From this a root goes down into the soil and at the same time a sprout rises upward. Over a period of years the sprout grows into a tree. In due course blossoms appear on the tree. Then these fall off and fruit begins to develop.

But if the tree is to become strong, the blossoms or the young fruit must be plucked off in the first years so that the tree’s root system will develop to support a strong tree. Several years must pass before the apples are fit to eat. (Under the Law of Moses at least four years were required (Leviticus 19:23–25). At various stages in its growth an apple tree is very fragile. Strong winds may uproot the young tree, or at a later stage frost may destroy either the blossoms or the fruit.)
In this process seed and fruit are inseparably linked to each other. Fruit must grow from a seed, but on the other hand it takes fruit to produce further seeds. At the beginning of creation God ordained that every “fruit tree should yield fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself” (Genesis 1:12). This establishes an important spiritual principle: Christians who do not produce spiritual fruit in their own lives have no seed to sow into the lives of others.

The New Testament speaks of spiritual gifts in the plural. The nine gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. On the other hand, the New Testament speaks of spiritual fruit in the singular. The nine forms of spiritual fruit are listed in Galatians 5:22–23: love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Love – the primary form of fruit – is listed first. The others that follow may be understood as different ways in which the fruit of love manifests itself.

- peace is love resting
- longsuffering is love forbearing
- kindness is love serving others
- goodness is love seeking the best for others
- faithfulness is love keeping its promises
- gentleness is love ministering to the hurts of others
- self-control is love in control
- joy is love rejoicing

We could also describe the fruit of the Spirit as different ways in which the character of Jesus manifests itself through those whom He indwells. When all the forms of fruit are fully developed, it is as if Jesus by the Holy Spirit is incarnated in His disciple.

**Seven Stages of Spiritual Development**

In 2 Peter 1:5–7 the apostle lists seven successive stages in the development of a fully formed Christian character:

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

Peter begins by warning us that to go through this process successfully will demand diligence. Paul expresses the same thing in another way when he says, “The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops” (2 Timothy 2:6). There can be no real success in developing Christian character without diligence, or hard work.

The process Peter describes could be compared to that by which an apple seed develops into a mature apple. The seed is God’s Word implanted in the heart. This produces faith, which is the indispensable starting point. Then out of faith there follow seven successive stages of development.
Stage One is variously translated “virtue” (2 Peter 1:5) or “moral excellence” (2 Peter 1:5, NAS). Originally, in secular Greek, the word was applied to excellence in any area of life – to molding a clay pot, steering a boat, or playing a flute. Here in the New Testament also, I believe, its meaning should not be restricted solely to moral character. It covers every possible area of life.

A teacher who comes to Christ should become an excellent teacher. A nurse should become an excellent nurse. A Christian businessman should excel in his field of business. There is no room for sloppiness or laziness in any area of the Christian life. Very rarely, if ever, does God call a person out of failure in a secular calling to success in a spiritual calling. He who is unfaithful in the least (the secular) will be unfaithful also in the greatest [the spiritual] (Luke 16:10).

Stage Two of spiritual development is knowledge. There are, of course, many different forms of knowledge. The knowledge extolled in Scripture is primarily practical, not merely theoretical. It is knowledge that works. Coming to Christ out of a background of speculative philosophy, this was what impressed me most about the Bible. It was so intensely practical!

The scriptural example is the teaching of Jesus Himself. It did not come under the category of what we would call “theology.” He never propounded complicated, abstract theories. His teaching was based on familiar, practical activities: sowing seed, catching fish, caring for livestock.

The most essential form of knowledge in the Christian life is the knowledge of God’s will as revealed in Scripture. This, too, is practical. It demands a regular, systematic study of the whole Bible. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

I have been shocked to discover how many people who would claim to be serious Christians have never once read through the entire Bible. Such people set limits of their own making to their spiritual development.

After knowledge comes self-control – also called self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7, NIV). This is the stage at which a Christian must prove himself a genuine disciple – that is, a person under discipline – and not a mere church member.

This kind of discipline must be applied in every major area of our personality – our emotions, our attitudes, our appetites, our thought life. It must govern not only our actions, but – more importantly – our reactions.

Until we have developed this kind of discipline, we cannot move up to the next stage – perseverance – which implies the ability to overcome the various tests and trials that will inevitably expose any weak, undisciplined areas of our personality. That pinpoints one major reason why some Christians never progress beyond a certain stage of spiritual development. They never fulfill these two requirements of self-control and endurance. To take an illustration from the apple tree, their blossoms are blown away by the winds of adversity or their young fruit is killed by the frost of rejection.

The Three Final Stages
In the three remaining stages of development, the beauty of a truly Christian character unfolds. Godliness is the mark of a person whose life is centered in God – a person who has become a vessel of the presence of God. Wherever such a person goes, the atmosphere is permeated by a faint, but unique and pervasive fragrance. There may not be any preaching or other religious activity. Yet people become strangely aware of eternal issues.

The late British evangelist Smith Wigglesworth relates an incident which illustrates the impact that a godly presence can have in a non-religious atmosphere. After some moments of private prayer Smith took his seat in a railway
Living Bulwark

carriage. Without a word spoken, the man in the opposite seat – a complete stranger – blurted out, “Your presence convicts me of sin.” Smith was then able to introduce him to Christ.

The last two stages of development depict two different kinds of love. The first – brotherly kindness – describes the way that believers in Jesus Christ should relate to their fellow believers – that is, their brothers and sisters in the Lord.

When I first began to consider this list of the seven stages of spiritual development, it surprised me that “brotherly kindness” – the kind of love that Christians should have for one another – should be the last stage but one. But then I realized that the Bible is very realistic. It does not paint a sentimental, religious picture of the way that we, as Christians, relate to one another. Let me say something which may shock you, but which is based on more than fifty years of close association with Christians of many different backgrounds: It is not easy for Christians to love one another.

This is amply confirmed by two thousand years of Church history. Scarcely a century has passed that has not been marked by bitter strife and contention – and even open hatred – between rival groups of Christians, all of whom often claimed to be “the true Church.”

The fact that a person has repented of his sins and claimed salvation in Christ does not mean that his whole character has been instantly transformed. Certainly a vitally important process of change has been set in motion, but it may take many years for that change to be worked out in every area of a person’s character.

When David needed smooth stones to fit in his sling to slay Goliath, he went down to the valley – the lowly place of humility. There in the brook he found the kind of stones he needed (1 Samuel 17:40). What had made them smooth?

Two pressures: first, the water flowing over them; second, their continual jostling against one another.

That is a picture of how Christian character is formed. First, there is the continual “washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). Second, as the stones jostle one another in personal relationships, the rough edges are gradually worn down, until they become “smooth.”

In parentheses, let me add that when Jesus needs “living stones” for His sling, He too goes to the valley – the place of humility. There He chooses stones that have been made “smooth” by the action of God’s Word and by the pressures of regular fellowship with other believers.

It is a mark of spiritual maturity to sincerely love our fellow Christians, not simply for what they are in themselves, but for what they mean to Jesus, who shed His lifeblood for each of them. The final stage of development – agape love – represents the full, ripe fruit of Christian character. This is no longer how we relate only to our fellow believers. It is God’s own love for the unthankful and the unholy. It is the love that causes us to “bless those who curse [us], do good to those who hate [us], and pray for those who spitefully use [us] and persecute [us]”(Matthew 5:44).

It is the love that Christ demonstrated on the cross when He prayed for those who crucified Him, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”(Luke 23:34). It was the same love that caused Stephen to pray for those who were stoning him, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60). It is the love that changed Saul the persecutor into Paul the servant of Christ, who became “all things to all men, that [he] might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

For my part, when I contemplate the Bible’s picture of the fully developed fruit of the Holy Spirit, I am both humbled and inspired. Humbled, because I still have so far to go. Inspired, because I have caught a glimpse of something more beautiful than anything that this world has to offer. I echo the words of Paul: “I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those
things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14).

Derek Prince (1915–2003) was born in India of British parents. Educated as a scholar of Greek and Latin at Eton College and Cambridge University, England, he held a Fellowship in Ancient and Modern Philosophy at King’s College. He also studied Hebrew and Aramaic, at Cambridge University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. While serving with the British army in World War II, he began to study the Bible and experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. Out of this encounter he formed two conclusions: first, that Jesus Christ is alive; second, that the Bible is a true, relevant, up-to-date book. These conclusions altered the whole course of his life, which he then devoted to studying and teaching the Bible.
The Fruit of Unity  
in Our Families and Communities

“A healthy tree bears good fruit, but a poor tree bears bad fruit” - Matthew 7:17

by Bob Tedesco

This article is addressed primarily to members and leaders of the Sword of the Spirit, an ecumenical international network of communities. The practical wisdom and principles addressed here can be helpful for any group of Christians who seek to grow in the fruit of unity.

In naming a discussion about unity, several titles could be used, and this springs from the similarities found in a set of words: unity, union, communion, and community. It is difficult to address the overall topic of community without drifting at some point into a discussion of unity. The scriptures address unity in both specific and general terms, and in some cases, the fruit of unity.

**Scriptures on unity, togetherness and body life**
One of the most foundational scriptures addressing unity is found in Ephesians 1:9-10

“For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

The importance of this scripture cannot be overestimated since it presents God’s plan from before the foundation of
the world.

“...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).

We might say or hear someone saying, “I wonder what the Lord is doing?” In a broad way, at least, we have an answer: he is “uniting all things in Christ.” Togetherness in worship supports God’s plan; togetherness in mission supports God’s plan. We do not always know exactly what the Lord is doing, but he has revealed his overall plans and purposes to those who want to live for Christ.

On the other hand, his enemies – the world, the flesh, and the devil – are diligently working to divide us and to disintegrate individuals, families, groups, denominations and even cities and nations. The world and the flesh are used by the devil to create chaos, division and disintegration. God integrates; the devil disintegrates. God brings us together in life; the devil disintegrates, takes us apart in death. A decomposing corpse is the tapestry of his best work. The resurrected body, united with Jesus, is the work of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

**Good fruit**

“A healthy tree bears good fruit, but a poor tree bears bad fruit” (Matthew 7:17 Today’s English Version). What does bad fruit look like? It looks like disunity, disintegration, and death. Of the Ten Commandments, the positive-sounding (“You shall!”) examples present behavior that unites. The negative-sounding ones (“You shall not!”) warn about behaviors that divide and disintegrate. Murder (and violence), stealing, adultery, lying and coveting all cause trouble and divide human groupings. So we see in all of this a tool for discernment: does my decision, or behavior, or action bring God’s people closer together or further apart? Does my new house or new job mean more community? Or does it mean less community? Matthew 12:33c (Today’s English Version) says, “A tree is known by the kind of fruit it bears.”

**Unity and prayer**

“Again I say to you, if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19).

Some have said, “When two people agree about anything, it’s already a miracle!” This scripture is at least stating that people gathered together (even two!) are God’s plan for how we should intercede. It is often the case that sickness and calamity can have a unifying effect on God’s people, as they gather to bring the Lord’s power into a difficult or even impossible situation.

In my own family, when leukemia struck my grandson, all petty differences and disagreements suddenly were eclipsed by the need for unity in fasting and prayer which brought us closer together. Thirteen years later and defying all odds (including an episode with Ewing Sarcoma), he graduated from high school! Our family came together in prayer and we were joined by brothers and sisters in community, in the Sword of the Spirit worldwide, and in the broader church. One fruit of unity is power in prayer.

**Signs of the times**

“He answered and said to them, “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening. ‘You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and
adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah” (Matthew 16:2-4).

My wife and I love to watch the weather channel. For her, it is like a great adventure. “When Weather Changed History!” is one of her favorite shows. As a show, it symbolizes man’s interaction with the supernatural: 1) we are immersed in it; 2) we ignore it at our peril; 3) it can bring both blessing and calamity; 4) it can be studied but not mastered; 5) you can run but you cannot hide; 6) man’s machinations are subordinate to and far inferior to its power.

The weather can be embarrassing. At one time, I lived near our TV weatherman. One Sunday, while driving to church, I saw him shoveling four inches of “sunshine” (his prediction) out of his driveway. I tooted my horn and smiled in a pleasant (yet teasing) way.

On another occasion, I took two of my friends and their son out for a short boat ride on the lake. The wind came up and we never got out of the lagoon before we were swamped by the choppy water. Fortunately, it was only three or four feet deep and we were able to find their son who had slipped under the boat! I was (and still am) more embarrassed than the weatherman. Decades later, we are still friends and I have a much deeper boat!

The scripture verse warns that we can predict the weather but we cannot interpret the signs concerning these times. It warns that people can be evil and godless and yet ask for a miracle. To be evil and godless is often to be sinning against the Ten Commandments, against God’s plan. His plan is to unite; the world the flesh and the devil are disobedient, divisive, and block the power of God for the miracle that is needed. Some hallmarks of our society are: negativity, slander, disobedience and division... godless evil.

So, to obey is to unite and usher in the power of God. To disobey is to divide people and to block the power of God.

**Wait... together**

“And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, ‘You heard from me...’” (Acts 1:4).

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1).

Two of the most difficult things for modern, independent, individualistic people to do is to wait, and worse, to wait together. Our fast food culture teaches us that waiting is bad, fast is good. Doing it “my way” is better than doing it “our way.” No one getting to tell me what to do is seen as better than being “bossed around.” Even good leadership can be interpreted as “lording it over us.” These postures or mindsets leave us hopelessly incapable of dealing with God who: 1) has tons of time on his hands; 2) wants to be together with us; 3) thinks that he is in charge of this family of his; and 4) thinks that he gets to decide how it is ordered. Because the first disciples were able to “wait... together,” we have Pentecost, the birth of the Christian church.

**Unity a gift... to be preserved**

“Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call” (Ephesians 4:1-4).

Clearly, unity is a gift of the Spirit, and it is a gift that we preserve and we maintain. We make decisions in our lives in a way that respects unity and protects it. Again, we use the little discernment test: *Does this decision yield more...*
community (unity), or less?

One modern approach to Scripture

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

A number of years ago, I had a long, serious, almost fatal battle with knee surgeries, infections, etc. My daughter, Jeanette, gave me a poster inscribed with the scripture shown above. It was quite encouraging hanging from the wall where I could see it from my bed. My friend, Bill, sent the same scripture to me in an email assuring me that the Lord had more for me to do.

Another encouraging scripture that often gets on posters is Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

Personal at the expense of the corporate

Most scriptures can have a beneficial, encouraging effect on the individual (as in my example above). Due to our great division, isolation, and individualism, we often personalize scriptures at the expense of the corporate. The scriptures cited were actually written to groups or to a people. In Jeremiah 29, verse 14 says, “I will gather you in from all the nations.” So it is not originally intended just for my bedroom wall! Revelation 3:20 (Today’s English Version) is written to the church at Laodicea...Christians! Verse 21 follows: “To those who win the victory, I will give the right to sit beside me on my throne.” Verse 22 says, “Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

One more example: it is Our Father, not just my Father, at the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer. Keeping the sense of “our” in my prayer orientation has a joining and a uniting effect on the body of Christ. It deepens our awareness and appreciation of the familial nature of Christianity and diminishes the tendency to over-personalize and isolate the individual. Because of the culture we live in and the way we live (often isolated in our homes), it would be difficult to over-emphasize the corporate nature of Christianity and the unity that is at the heart of God’s plan. There is something mysterious about unity and fruit, as in Jesus’ story about the farmer who plants a seed, does his part, and then does not really understand why or how it grows (Mark 4:26-27).

God’s plan, as scripture reveals, is corporate, with unity in Christ as its goal. Yet, it has personal effect, application, and responsibility.

The fruit of unity

The fruit of unity can be assessed and evaluated from different perspectives. For example, I can examine the fruit of Christian unity in my own life, my own spirituality, etc. I can also evaluate it based on how my personal life has affected other groupings, the kingdom of God, or all of mankind. In the Fruit of Unity, different perspectives are intermingled in the rather long yet incomplete lists of fruit at the individual, family, community, regional, and international levels of our community life. The lists were compiled at a community forum of my community, the People of God. That is to say, after 35 years of community life, we were stepping back to see what fruit we could see in our life together. The lists were compiled in a one-hour session, and are not prioritized or defined.

Some examples of fruit

We will look at a few examples at each level, but it is worth noting that some of the identified fruit mentioned could
be seen as “worthy of the investment” of time, money, etc.

**Fruit of personal maturity**

At the personal level there are a number of things that could be listed under the heading of discipleship: self-knowledge, character formation, teaching, accountability, etc. These are noteworthy effects on the individual, whether married or single, and are specifically intended results of the way our community is structured: initiations [in Christian formation] courses, small groups, pastoral care, etc. The maturing of the Christian disciple is one of the main objectives.

This is a two-part process: there is maturity that we gain from simply receiving the teaching and training, and then there is a second level of maturity that comes from putting the principles into practice in loving and serving our brothers and sisters in the Lord, as well as advancing the kingdom of God in the world.

The second level of maturity cannot be done for you by any leader or teacher, but must be personally engaged in to take effect. Sadly, many brothers and sisters level off after the first stage of maturity and never reap the full effects of Christian maturity that come from engaging the cross of service. In that sense, community life serves us by providing a good place for us to die to self. The phrase “a place to live, a place to die,” describes these two levels of personal maturity.

**Another fruit of unity: Family life**

At the family level, marriage support, children (protecting the value of life), parenting support, peer support for kids, and understanding of the roles of husband/wife and mother/father are all significant fruits of community life. If we existed just to help marriages to stay together, it would be worth the investment.

For family life to have its full effect, children must be involved in both levels of maturing presented above: 1) formation; and 2) dying into family life. Refusing the second step retards their maturity.

As with the individual, families are also invited to go beyond the first stages and “die into” the broader life and mission of the community. This approach for family life helps to keep the membrane of the nuclear family receptive to the nutrients and support that can flow into the family, protecting it from a self-centered stagnation.

**A third fruit: Local community**

Because we stay together in unity, we are able to do things as a community that none of us can do separately: men’s retreats, men’s breakfasts, women’s retreats, conferences, summer camp, community retreats, University Christian Outreach, Life in the Spirit courses, healing weeks, etc. Our unity produces fruit that is not only beneficial to us, but to the wider church and to the world. As a group, we are a witness to the Lord, a reflection of the unity that has its root in the Trinity and is a gift of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). Additionally, our denominational life is supported as we celebrate weddings, baptisms, communions, etc.

As with the family, the local community also gets to serve and sacrifice at the regional level as we serve in trans-local community building, regional youth work, summer conferences, etc. Our local life and schedule are often disrupted for the good of serving and participating at the regional level.

**Fourth fruit: International cooperation**

Our North American region is one of the five regions that make up the Sword of the Spirit. The fruit of that international unity is first of all a bulwark: a community of communities that share a common way of life and a common mission. We are blessed with a global vision, teaching resources and courses, music gifts, mission trips,
Further comments and summary
At the beginning of this chapter, I said that this could have several titles. One could be, “What happens when Christian individuals, families, clans and tribes stay together?” The answer is, “A lot!” Another title could be, “What happens when Christian people stay to themselves?” The answer is, “Far less.”

Two words
Our local community was initially inspired by two words from the Lord: 1) “Gather my people together”; and 2) “Build to last.” The first word implies community or some kind of body and not just a threshold ministry. The second implies some kind of approach or order or structure that serves the ongoing unity. We have tried to do that and we think that the initial fruit identified encourages endurance and faithfulness to the call and mission.

Discipleship: a change of plans
One of the hallmarks of a disciple of Christ is his ability to handle “a change of plans.” This shows up several times in the life of Joseph of Nazareth. He plans to “put Mary away” but is instructed in a dream to change his plans (Matthew 1:20). He plans to stay in Bethlehem awhile but is told to flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13). He plans to stay awhile in Egypt but is told to return to Israel (Matthew 2:20). We don’t know a lot about Joseph, but we do know that he followed the Lord and that he could lead his family in obedience to the Lord. Who among us could ask his wife to take a trip to Egypt as a new mother (Matthew 2:14)?

Being gathered together in a way that lasts involves a life of changing our plans, first for the new disciple, then for the new Christian family, and finally for the mature disciples and Christian families. Simply said, “Our ways are not his ways;” “Our plans are not his plans,” and the sooner we realize that, the sooner we can move freely in the life of a mature disciple.

To see or not to see
All of this having been said, it really does seem that those who give the most get the most. Those who die into the Lord’s will get the most life. Those who see the most light and move toward the light seem to see even more clearly. Those who are most committed and determined to stay together seem to enjoy the most fruit of unity.

Evidentiary fruit
For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made So they are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).

The Bible says that God’s invisible qualities are perceived in the things that God has made. So, creation is evidentiary to the nature and existence of God. It is to be presented at the trial of the wicked and the godless. We would say, in a similar way, that the fruit of unity is evidentiary to the power and presence of God in our midst.

The gap
Even though we see a gap between the ideal of Christian community and the reality of its human expression, the fruit is astounding! So, we must get over any differences that we may have, stay together, and continue to produce fruit that is pleasing to the One who created us.
Bob Tedesco is former President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit. He is a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 40 years.
We Must Stand Together

by Dr. Vinson Synan

I am often asked the questions: What is God doing now? What is the now word for the church? What is the Lord trying to say to us today? Such questions seem to imply that I have a direct pipeline to the Lord, but it is my belief that it is possible for anyone to look around and discern what the Lord is saying. Conferences, world events, and prophecies given by tried and proven spiritual leaders are all sources of God's word to us.

Of course, what the Lord is saying today is not, as some critics suggest, claimed by Christians as new revelations on the same level of the Scriptures. But through word gifts God can inspire us, warn us, and draw us to his purposes for us. These gifts of the Spirit must have been in the Lord's mind when he said to the seven churches of Asia Minor, "I know your works" and then ended each message with the admonition "let him that has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (see Rev. 2, 3).

The Lord knows the condition of all the churches in all ages, and this scripture further indicates that the Holy Spirit is continually speaking to the current condition of the churches. It is through the gifts of the Spirit that we can "hear" and communicate what the If God knows our works and is speaking to us, we desperately need to hear what he wants us to know.

What many have been hearing in recent months is summarized in the name of the New Orleans Congresses: The Holy Spirit and World Evangelization. This title encompasses the whole purpose of God in raising up the Pentecostal and charismatic movements of this past century. For decades the Lord has been pouring out his Spirit "upon all flesh" (see Joel 3:1) with a veritable explosion of charismatic gifts and graces. The restoration of such gifts as healing, speaking in
tongues, prophecy, the casting out of demons, and so on, has galvanized the churches into new growth, excited Christians in all denominations, and led to tremendous evangelistic breakthroughs in many nations of the world.

If God has said anything in this century, it is that he intends to pour out his Spirit "upon all flesh" in these days. And when the Holy Spirit comes, he distributes the charismata to believers as loving benefits for the body of Christ. We should never allow these gifts to become common or "old hat" to us. Paul warns us against "quenching the Spirit" by lessening the importance of the gifts in the church. He also tells us not to forbid speaking in tongues and not to despise prophesying. Evidently there were already some people in Paul's day who did just that.

Another thing God has said clearly in the last few years is that he wants the church to find a unity in the Holy Spirit that responds to Jesus' prayer in John 17:21. He prayed, "that they all may be one as I and the Father are one." In Kansas City, Missouri, in 1977, the hearts of the great throng at Arrowhead Stadium were broken by the poignant prophetic refrain stating, "the body of my Son is broken." The tragedy of the broken body is not so much in the broken fellowship of those who ache to be one in the Lord, but in the millions of unbelievers who refuse to accept Jesus as Lord because of the multitudinous divisions in the churches.

Jesus prayed to the Father that we would be one "that the world may believe that you have sent me." The world indeed sees our divisions and finds the Gospel incredible, especially when so many groups proclaim that they, and they alone, are teaching the truth. Unbelievers do not know who or what to believe. Thus the ultimate goal of Christian unity is not fellowship, as wonderful as that may be, but evangelization. I believe that the most important thing that the Lord has been saying lately is that we must take our gifts out of the churches and prayer rooms and into the streets of the world's great cities, using them to convince unbelievers that Jesus Christ truly is Lord.

The goal of winning a majority of the world's population to Christ in our time is a wonderful and worthy vision. This tremendous goal will not be reached, however, if the churches continue to use only the traditional methods of evangelizing that have been used in the past. Missiologists such as David Barrett predict that at present growth rates, an even smaller proportion of the world population will be Christian at the turn of the 21st century than in 1987. Dramatic breakthroughs for Christ are needed into the Muslim, Hindu, and communist worlds for us to change that direction. Unbelievers among these peoples will not be won merely through theological arguments, social programs, or traditional church-planting of forts. It is only through signs and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit that these breakthroughs can occur. Furthermore, Jesus said that these results come only as a result of "prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21).

God has also been speaking a word about righteousness and holiness to the religious leaders of the world. The scriptures still cry out, "be clean, you that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isaiah 52:11). The Lord seems to be cleansing his church and its leadership for the great evangelistic thrust of the next decade. He is reminding us that his soldiers should travel light and not be burdened down with the materialism and sensuality that characterizes this age. Holier leaders will make the church better able to minister to the lost and dying peoples of the world.

In the end, all Christians share in the call to holiness and righteousness and as individuals have a responsibility to discern the signs of the times in the light of the Scriptures. We all need now to redouble our efforts to win people to the Lord.

While reflecting on God's word for us, my mind has repeatedly returned to a word I received while ministering in Ridgecrest, North Carolina, at the National Leadership Conference. It was: We must stand together, or we will fall apart!

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See also > The Century of the Holy Spirit: Growth of the Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal, and Charismatic Renewal Streams, by Dr. Vinson Synan
Dr. Vinson Synan is one of the leading authorities on the history of Pentecostalism. Writing and editing more than 18 books in his lifetime, he has contributed works such as The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States, The Old-Time Power, and his most recent major work, The Century of the Holy Spirit. In addition to these publications Dr. Synan released his memoirs titled An Eyewitness Remembers the Century of the Holy Spirit in 2010. His work and writings are authoritative resources on the history of Pentecostalism and various other topics in the church. In addition, he was one of the founders of the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS) in 1970.
Growing Unity Among Charismatic Covenant Communities

by Paul Dinolfo

When the first Christians were baptized in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost they experienced an internal change and a new power for mission. They also experienced an unexpected fruit as they were drawn into a unity expressed in Christian community. In time this unity was extended beyond the Jewish believers. Samaritans and Gentiles gave their lives to Jesus, were filled with the Holy Spirit and brought into the Christian community.

Our experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit parallels that of the early church. At first the main fruit we recognized was a deeper spiritual life, worship, spiritual gifts, love for Scripture, and power for mission. But, we also experienced an unexpected fruit as we were drawn by the Holy Spirit into unity with Christians from other church traditions: Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox. And, like the early Christians we were also drawn into Christian community.

From 1967 to 1975 a number of charismatic, covenant communities were formed. Some were Catholic, but many were ecumenical. In 1976, several covenant communities in the USA gathered together for a “community of communities” conference. It was at this conference that many of us heard the Bulwark prophecy, which called us to come together as communities – to extend our covenant love and commitment beyond our local communities. This resulted in the formation of the Association of Communities.

Over the next several years, leaders of communities that comprised the Association met regularly to work out
how we would come together on a practical level. Not surprisingly, there were different views among us. Some wanted a high degree of structural unity, while others wanted a somewhat loose relationship.

This disagreement led to the dissolution of the Association in 1981. Over the next few years the communities that were part of the Association developed into three networks of covenant communities: The Sword of the Spirit, the Catholic Fraternity, and the People of Praise.

Unfortunately, there were some hard feelings among some over the dissolution of the Association. In time there was some reconciliation between the leaders involved in the dissolution, but for the most part the three networks went their separate ways and had little to do with each other. Some individuals and local communities continued to have regular contact, but these interactions were relatively rare.

When we were making plans for the 2012 International Coordinators Meeting in New Jersey, the International Executive Council decided to extend an invitation to communities in the Catholic Fraternity. Alleluia Community (Augusta, Georgia) and City of the Lord (Tempe, Arizona) sent some of their coordinators. Since then leaders of those communities, as well as the Community of God’s Delight (Dallas, Texas), and Mother of God (Gaithersburg, Maryland) have regularly sent leaders to our international and regional leaders conferences.

When Alleluia Community received our invitation to attend the 2012 International Coordinators Meeting, Bob Garrett (their senior coordinator) invited me to attend the Charismatic Leaders Fellowship (CLF) meeting. CLF began in the 1970’s. Its purpose is to bring together leaders within the charismatic movement to build relationships and discuss issues of common concern. The CLF was behind the 1976 Kansas City conference. Sword of the Spirit leaders had at one time been very involved in CLF, but we had not been invited for many years.

I have since attended the Charismatic Leaders Fellowship (CLF) meetings. My wife, Marcia, usually attends with me. Dave Hughes has also attended. One of the main benefits of CLF is that it has provided “neutral ground” for relationship building with Catholic Fraternity and People of Praise leaders. This year the covenant community leaders added an extra day to meet together. Marcia and I attended, along with leaders from three the Catholic Fraternity communities. The People of Praise leaders were unable to attend, but we hope they will attend in the future. We used the time for relationship building and to discuss ways we could support each other as communities.

In 2015, the Catholic Fraternity invited me to attend their North American council meeting. At the meeting, I shared ways we might develop a more active friendship. Since then, St Paul’s Outreach (SPO), Kairos and Sword of the Spirit, and City of the Lord formed an alliance to work together building covenant community among young people in the Tempe, AZ, area. In 2016, the Catholic Fraternity invited Mike Shaughnessy and Dave Hughes to their North American council meeting. Mike shared our vision for working with youth, the community youth bridge, which was very well received.

I am encouraged by the growing friendship between the Sword of the Spirit and the Catholic Fraternity in North America. I believe it has already been beneficial to both the Sword of the Spirit and to the Catholic Fraternity. More importantly, I believe it is an expression of unity that pleases God and is a fruit of our common baptism in the Holy Spirit.

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Come and See How the Spirit Is Moving Today

In 1989 four couples were baptized in the Holy Spirit and began to explore a deeper call to community life and mission together

by João Perloiro

Comunidade a Boa Nova (the Good News Community) was founded in Lisbon in 1989 by 4 couples who came from former Portuguese colonies, mainly Mozambique. The couples all belonged to the same Catholic couples sharing group and all felt they needed something more – a way of life that involved being more committed day to day. Our community didn’t start like many other communities with youth groups or young couples but with retired couples in their sixties who were searching for something more than just having their faith.

They studied the Acts of the Apostles and went on a retreat together where the talks were all about telling others about Christ and about prayer. Soon after this retreat the four couples felt like they had an inner encouragement to meet every week to praise God in a more spontaneous way, to deepen their knowledge of the word of God and to more openly share their lives with one another. At these meetings they also studied works about charismatic life and worship such as Jesus Is Alive, The Cross and the Switchblade by David Wilkerson, Evangelization in the Power of the Spirit, and They Speak with Other Tongues.
These weekly meetings continued uninterrupted for a year and a half. The couples felt that they had been called to something, but didn’t yet know the Lord’s will. They realised that they needed something more, a qualitative leap in their Christian life. They contacted the charismatic movement in Lisbon, but it seemed to them that it wasn’t their call. The unrest and uneasiness persisted.

During this time of searching and questioning, one of our brothers – Fernando Freitas – wrote to Victoria, Spain, to his good friend, Fr. Ariztì Victoriano, with whom he had worked in Mozambique in giving courses in Christianity. He told Fr Victoriano that the four couples wanted to know more about the community experience in Victoria.

The answer was short: *Come and See*.

Two couples went to Vitoria and lived intensely that Christian community life that had already started there in 1990, with about a hundred people. Their stay was enriched by the presence of five people who had been in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, in the late 1960s at the beginning of the charismatic prayer group there.

In February of 1990 the 4 couples went back to Victoria for another visit and attended the Life in the Spirit Seminars and experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on them as individuals. Back again in Portugal, they felt a very strong sense that the Lord wanted to form them into a community with the characteristics of covenant community, that we now experience in such a strong way. They were all touched and blessed by the Holy Spirit in a very special way, and a short time later they began their own Life in the Spirit Seminar in Portugal to help others come to know Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit. Some 25 people attended their first Seminar in Lisbon.

From that moment on, our connection with Vitoria, Spain, has been very strong. The community in Vitoria, *El Señorio de Jesús* (the Lordship of Jesus) have continued to be our spiritual parents. We still receive guidance and help from them.
In May 1993, on the day of Pentecost, after a community gathering that was full of joy, the senior coordinator of the community, Fernando Freitas, died suddenly. It was a tremendous loss for us because from the start he had been the encourager of our community and its undisputed leader. He was a man of intelligence, charity, discretion and humility far beyond the natural gifts. He was a man characterised by a total giving of himself to others. Although his loss came as a huge shock to us, we were able to carry on with the vision of covenant community, remembering his zeal and inspiration.

The brotherly and sisterly relationships we have with members of older and more mature communities and the knowledge and experience they share with us have helped and motivated us. The leaders’ teachings and international retreats and meetings reinforce the sense of belonging to the larger community of communities that is the Sword of the Spirit.

Our community is located in the outskirts of the city of Lisbon, on the picturesque Estoril Coast where we have our community center, and all our members live in this area.

We have 71 community members of varying ages and from a wide range of professions: from kindergarten teachers to university teachers, architects, engineers, social workers, government employees, secretarial workers, economists, pharmacists, office workers, aides to the handicapped, accountants, psychologists, and more.

Our weekly community gatherings happen on Sunday afternoons, and we also meet weekly in smaller pastoral groups. These days we are focusing on running Alpha Courses to bring others to know Christ and experience the power of his Holy Spirit and working with our young people.

We believe that the Lord is calling us to move forward by going on mission, spreading the good news, bringing others to Christ, and loving one another.
João Perloiro is the senior coordinator of Comunidade a Boa Nova in Lisbon, Portugal. João is an architect by profession. This article was first published in the Sword of the Spirit website.
The following brief commentary from the First Letter of John, Chapter 1 is lightly edited with the consent of the author, Dr. Daniel Keating, from the book, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: James, First, Second, and Third John*, published by Baker Academic, 2017. While it was written from a Roman Catholic perspective, the material can be beneficial for Christians from other traditions as well. – ed.

**Prologue: The Word of Life (1 John 1:1–4)**

The prologue to 1 John is both beautiful and challenging. We know implicitly that the Word it is speaking about is Jesus, but at the same time the sentence structure is awkward and the main verb ("proclaim") does not show up until verse 3! This probably is not accidental; John may have wanted his opening words to cause us to pause and reflect. As readers we simply cannot skim over these profound lines. We have to go back over them several times before we can begin to make sense of their meaning. As we do, we slowly begin to grasp John’s subject—the Word of life—and our eyes are opened to see the deep truths unveiled.
What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life—

2 for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us—

3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing this so that our joy may be complete. [1 John 1:1-4]

**NT reference:** NT: John 1:1–18; Phil 2:16; 2 John 1:12

### [1:1] The opening verse presents us with four parallel clauses, each beginning with “what.” Shortly we will learn that the subject of these four clauses is the “Word of life,” but to start with, we are given four descriptions of a subject without knowing what the subject is.¹

First, we are told that this subject **was from the beginning.** What “beginning” is John referring to here? The Gospel of John (1:1) opens with the words “In the beginning . . .” In that context “beginning” refers to the creation of the world in Gen 1. Here, however, “beginning” most likely points to the eternal origin of Jesus, the “eternal life that was with the Father” (v. 2) and was then made visible.

Second, John says that this subject is **what we have heard.** What group is represented by “we” here? These are the first disciples of Jesus who accompanied him in person and who heard him preach and teach. John then adds a third description: **what we have seen with our eyes.** Not only did they hear this subject, but also they were eyewitnesses to it. Fourth and finally, John adds, **what we have looked upon / and touched with our hands.** Is “looked upon” just a repetition of “seen”? Possibly, but many commentators believe that John is pointing to a deeper kind of seeing here, such that they not only saw with their physical eyes but also “beheld” with a deeper insight.² The sense of touch is now added: those who were “earwitnesses” and eyewitnesses also touched this subject with their very hands. There is something inescapably physical about this subject that was heard, seen, and touched.

Only now at the end of the verse does John reveal the identity of his subject, telling us that this **concerns the Word of life.**³ This sheds some light but also keeps us to a degree in the dark. A word can be heard, but how can a word be seen or touched? Our subject is clearly much more than simply a message that conveys life. As John will disclose in verse 3, this “Word of life” is the person of Jesus Christ.

### [1:2] Verse 2 is an interjection, marked off from the main sentence by dashes, that gives us a further description of the “Word of life.” John declares that **the life was made visible,** and then he more fully explains what he means by adding **we have seen it and testify to it / and proclaim to you the eternal life / that was with the Father and was made visible to us.** John has now identified his subject by three parallel titles: “the Word of life,” “the life,” and “the eternal life.” As F. F. Bruce observes, “If the Gospel speaks of the incarnation of the Eternal Word, the Epistle speaks of the manifestation of the Eternal Life.”⁴

What does John tell us about this “eternal life”? First, this life was “with the Father,” a phrase that echoes John 1:1, which states that the Word “was with God.” Second, this life was then “made visible” such that John and the other eyewitnesses “have seen it.” This closely parallels the Gospel prologue: “And the Word became flesh . . . and we have beheld his glory” (John 1:14 RSV). Third, John says that he is testifying to and proclaiming what he has seen—he is truly fulfilling the role of an evangelist.

### [1:3] John now completes his opening sentence and sums up in shorthand what he has said thus far in verses 1–2: **what we have seen and heard / we proclaim now to you.** But then he adds the intended result of this proclamation:
so that you too may have fellowship with us; / for our fellowship is with the Father / and with his Son, Jesus Christ. The logic here is not at all obvious. What exactly is John saying?

John often compresses a great deal of material in a few words—we can call this “Johannine shorthand.” We have to decompress and expand those words to get at his meaning. In this case, John is assuming that he and the other apostles, who were eyewitnesses of Jesus, have already come into living fellowship with Jesus through hearing and believing his word. Is the “Word of life” a message or a person? It is both at the same time. The Word of life is Jesus Christ himself, but it is also the message about him that John is proclaiming in this letter. The gospel is a message about a person who himself imparts eternal life.

And so John says that he is now proclaiming that same word to his hearers, so that they too may come into that living fellowship that John already shares “with the Father / and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” The key word here, “fellowship” (koinōnia), can also be translated as “communion.” The intended result of John’s testimony, then, is nothing less than genuine communion with the Father and the Son, shared with all those who have already entered into this communion (see sidebar, “Koinōnia,” p. 140).

Only now does John give the proper name of his subject, “Jesus Christ,” the Father’s Son. Now we know the personal identity of “the Word of life” and “the eternal life.” Why does John delay in naming his subject? Because he wants his readers to peer more deeply into what he is saying about that subject. By referring to what was heard and seen and touched, and by speaking of “the eternal life / that was with the Father,” John reveals a great deal about Jesus even before he names him, and he anticipates one of the principal themes of the letter, the incarnation of the Son.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Koinōnia

In the New Testament the Greek word koinōnia is translated in a variety of ways: “sharing,” “partnership,” “contribution,” “participation,” “communion,” and “fellowship.” It can refer to the sharing of money and material resources within the Christian community (2 Cor 8:4; 9:13; Heb 13:16). It is used to designate the common life shared by the first Christians in Jerusalem after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life [koinōnia], to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Koinōnia also applies to our relationship with the persons of the Trinity: we are called into “fellowship” with Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9); we jointly share “fellowship” with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3, 6); and Paul prays for an increase in “communion” with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:13 NRSV). Paul also speaks of our koinōnia (“participation, communion”) in the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:16). When we have koinōnia with God, we share in his life and power; when we have koinōnia with one another, we place our lives in common and share our resources as brothers and sisters. In 1 John, koinōnia describes both our fellowship with God and with one another—a rich communion of life and bonds of love that are meant to characterize the faithful.

[1:4] To complete the prologue, John adds, We are writing this so that our joy may be complete. By “we” John is referring to himself, but he writes here on behalf of all those who heard, saw, and touched the Word of life. The reference to “writing” shows that 1 John was not originally given orally and then later written down. John is intentionally composing a written message to his audience in order to testify about the Word of life.

Many early manuscripts have “so that your joy may be complete.” This well-attested reading would seem to make more sense: the joy of those who receive the testimony is brought to completion by coming into fellowship with God and with other Christians. But the reading “our joy,” adopted by most modern translations, also rings true. For those who have already been brought into the communion of the Father and Son, it is a source of great joy to announce this word and to welcome others into that fellowship.

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Perfect joy comes not from hoarding the gospel and its riches but from sharing it and enabling others to come into the same life-giving fellowship.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

The Two Prologues

The Christian tradition and most modern scholars are in general agreement that the Gospel of John was written before 1 John and so supplies important background for this letter. It is also evident that the prologue to 1 John has close affinities with the prologue to the Gospel (John 1:1–18) and that they share many themes and words in common. For example, both describe a “Word” in relation to “the beginning” that was with God the Father and was then made manifest to us; both speak of this Word in relation to “life”; and both conclude by identifying this Word as the Son of God, Jesus Christ. But there are also differences in phrasing and in emphasis; the two prologues are by no means identical. How should we understand the relationship between them? Some commentators believe that 1 John is simply an expansion and further explanation of the Gospel prologue, giving special attention to the eyewitnesses and to the proclamation of the message. Others believe that by underlining the historical manifestation of the Word to the eyewitnesses who heard, saw, and touched him, 1 John was written specifically to correct flawed interpretations of the Gospel prologue that denied the fully human reality of Christ. Whether the prologue of 1 John was written as an expansion of the Gospel prologue or a clarification of it, the two prologues should be read together for the complementary yet distinctive witness that they give to the Word, who has appeared for our salvation.

Reflection and application (1:1–4)

The prologue to 1 John shows us something important about the work of evangelization. John is proclaiming a word, and that word happens to be a person. He is proclaiming “a word about the Word” that he has personally encountered—heard, seen, and touched. And this proclamation does not convey just information or even inspiration; it actually imparts life and communion. No merely human word can impart “eternal life” and “fellowship with God.” But the word of the gospel can and does. It is a word that imparts life because when this word is received in faith, it brings about communion with the Word who is life. And the result of this is deep joy—joy both for the one who proclaims the word and for the one who receives it, because both now share in the life-giving fellowship of the Triune God. There are many facets to the broad work of evangelization, but the prologue reveals its heart and center: to proclaim the One we have personally encountered so that we may all joyfully share in the eternal life of God.

Notes

1 In the Greek text the pronoun “what” is in the neuter. This leaves the reader at this point unclear about the identity of the subject, which John will declare only in v. 3.

2 “Looked upon” translates the same Greek verb found in John 1:14: “We saw his glory.” This may point to a deeper kind of seeing that penetrates beyond the merely physical.

3 The NJB is more explicit: “The Word of life: this is our theme.”


5 The prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1–18) adopts the same strategy: the proper name “Jesus Christ” is not revealed until v. 17.

6 In the remainder of the letter, John uses only the first person singular (“I”) when referring to himself as the writer of the letter.
7 This exact wording is also found in John 16:24: “Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”

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"Any observer of contemporary culture will recognize that Anderson’s and Keating’s lucid commentaries arrive at just the right time, when Catholics at the parish level and in undergraduate and seminary coursework desperately need resources that acquaint them with the scriptural text, the broader scriptural context, and the ways in which scriptural passages have been understood and lived within the Church’s rich tradition. Well instructed in contemporary scholarship, Anderson and Keating put us all in their debt by focusing firmly on the heart of the matter—namely, learning from the letters of James and John how to live and love as Christians in a fallen world."

Matthew Levering, James N. and Mary D. Perry Jr. Chair of Theology, Mundelein Seminary

Commentary on James, by Kelly Anderson, and Commentary on First, Second, and Third John by Daniel Keating, Baker House Publishing Group, 2017

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God Can Use Anybody
by Charles Simpson

This article is adapted from a talk given by Charles Simpson at the Ecumenical Charismatic Renewal Conference held in Kansas City, USA in 1977.

JESUS WANTS YOU!
I wish I had a big poster like the one where Uncle Sam is recruiting men for the army and he's pointing out of the poster and saying, "Uncle Sam wants you!" Only I wish I had a big one like that with a picture of Jesus on it, pointing out, saying, "Jesus Christ wants you!"

I believe Jesus Christ wants us – that the Holy Spirit is pointing to us and saying, "Jesus Christ wants you!" Turn with me to the first chapter of First Corinthians. I want to read from verse 23 through the sixth verse of the second chapter . .

But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
For consider your call, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away.

Now the apostle Paul is saying to us that, in the initial stages of God's dealings with people, He doesn't approach them as though they were wise or powerful. How many of you remember what you were like when you first met the Lord? Some of us remember that we were really poor. Others of us may not have been literally poor, but we realized our spiritual poverty.

What I see from this scripture and others is that God can use anybody – for the power is not in the man but in the God who calls him. Now God may give him wisdom and strength. God may give him wealth. God will equip.

But it's important to see that God can use anybody.

**ORDINARY PEOPLE: EXTRAORDINARY DEEDS**

Historically, God has used ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Later, we deify those ordinary people because we see what God has made of them and we attribute what they became to themselves, when in fact they were nothing until God laid hold of them. We think, "Well, I could never be like that." But if we could have known them as God first knew them, we could identify with them.

One of the things God is doing is helping us see the people He uses the way they are. God is helping us to realize that He doesn't need much – He just needs someone that's available, that's all.

Turn with me to James 5:17.

Now, this scripture tells us about Elijah – one of my favorite prophets. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, yet he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it didn't... not for three and a half years. Then he prayed again and God poured out rain on the earth.

The King James version says, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are..." He had the same problems. He had the same temptations. He had the same nature. But God used this ordinary man in an extraordinary way.

Elijah went in before the king unannounced and said, 'It won't rain or dew 'til I say so. See you later.' For three and a half years it was bone dry until he appeared again. By that time, all the nations around were looking for him . . he had the water handle in his hand. When they found him, he stood and prayed a very
simple prayer of around 18 or 20 words, and turned the water on. Fire came down from heaven and burned a saturated offering on the altar of God, so that all of Israel fell on their faces and said, "The Lord He is God. The Lord He is God." Elijah was a man just like we are. The difference between him and any other man was God Almighty. That was the difference.

You know, I can't help but wonder what we would have done with Elijah had he appeared today. Elijah comes into town, looks up the local elders and says, "I feel like I have a word."
"Where are you from?"
"Tish."
"Tish? Tish? We don't know anybody from Tish. Where were you trained?"
"I have a word that I feel I need to deliver..."
"Well, brother, if you'll just spend a few years in seminary..."

How many of you know that if he had gone through the traditional religious training to get ready to deliver that word, it would have been too late to deliver it, anyway? And when they got through with him, he probably would have doubted everything he thought he had from God in the beginning. Often we minister so much doubt to ordinary people that they can never do extraordinary things because they lose the simplicity of their faith.

I'm not saying it's wrong to train people and to equip them. But their function in God depends on God's choice of them and their availability – because God uses ordinary men to accomplish extraordinary things.

Jesus violated all the known norms of His day. He called ordinary men to change the world. Scripture goes to great lengths to point out that the men Jesus called were from among the people – rank and file; not some group that had already been chosen and accepted by their society. Yet look at what God did through them.

God has likewise promised to do a mighty work in the earth in our day. Do you believe that's true? You know if there's one thing that I've gotten out of this conference, it's a new hope and a new faith that God's going to do something bigger than I thought He was going to do.

Many of us, when we came to the Lord, were hopeless... "without hope and without God " (Ephesians 2:12), But when we came to God, a spark of life came into us by faith, and as we've gone on with God, that life has increased and our hope and our faith have constantly grown.

**OVERCOMING PESSIMISM**

God has promised to do a mighty thing in the earth. Now I didn't always believe that. There was a period in my ministry when hope had dimmed to a flickering flame ready to be snuffed out completely by even the slightest breeze. Cynicism and sarcasm took over my personality. All of my jokes bit, and behind every smile was acid because hope was gone.

During that period of time, I became very politically oriented and joined the John Birch Society. I became gripped by a negative feeling that if nothing changed, the whole world would be communist by the mid- 70's or late 70's. As a result, I became a negative preacher.

I talked regularly about the need for a return to the faith, but I'll tell you, without the Holy Spirit, faith doesn't make any sense. And with the Holy Spirit, that faith is a live, raging fire. With every attempt to preach a return to the Bible and to warn people to look out for liberals, communists and modernists, things got worse. Each week, my sermons consisted of the latest crime statistics and how much worse things had gotten since the week before. I preached about apostasy and I got it every week.
It was in that condition, stewing in a squalor of pessimism and cynicism, that I somehow began to preach through the Book of Acts. And God began to thaw out my own heart. Finally, one Thursday morning in a little prayer meeting in a tiny storefront building in Pensacola, Florida, Jesus baptized me with the Holy Spirit and fire! Oh, hallelujah, what a day of rejoicing that was!

Now, that day I happened to be with an exuberant group, and I didn't get the baptism quietly. I have no complaints. You can get it any way God will give it to you. But I got it loudly, thank God, laughing and crying and rejoicing. I did everything but speak in tongues because I thought Baptists didn't have to speak in tongues. A few days later, though, God wonderfully liberated my tongue. But the first thing I did was prophesy.

The interesting thing was, I prophesied something that I did not know. What I heard coming out of my mouth was that God was going to do something mighty in the earth... that He was pouring out His Spirit and there would be a great revival! Now there was no room for that in my theology. My theology was that the Church was going to get sicker and sicker until, on its deathbed, Jesus would come and get it and give it mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on the way to heaven. But all of a sudden, that theology exploded and I was talking about a glorious church without spot or wrinkle and a wonderful, exuberant, beautiful bride that the Bridegroom was coming for. Glory to God, that's a better picture.

My mind had to catch up with my spirit, which sometimes takes years. At times I found myself trying to preach the old doctrine with a new anointing. You talk about getting messed up! I was trying to warn people to look out while at the same time wanting to shout "Glory!" It's hard to get those two things to go together, so you can guess which one I let go.

**ARISE AND SHINE**

I found that when I talked about the glory of the Lord, a joy came in and people wanted to serve the Lord more than when I beat them. I also found that when fed them the word of God and began to lift their hope by preaching the scriptures like Isaiah 60, where it says, "Arise and shine for your light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you," that people wanted to rise to it.

Glory to Jesus! I began to preach that. As I shared on the glory of the Lord, I saw our people come alive with smiles and a new desire to be in church to worship the Lord and pray and read their Bibles. Something beautiful and wonderful was happening. We were rising to a vision, yet unclear–but its truth was dawning; Gad was going to do something awesome and mighty and splendid in the earth.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, I began to see scriptures I never saw before. Have you ever come across a scripture that you had read before but never really seen? God starts to show you something, and you say, "My goodness, Lord... You mean You're going to do that before You do this? I thought that was all going to happen over there. You mean that's going to happen here? Praise the Lord!" God's word teaches us.

We've heard Joel 2 quoted "it shall come to pass, saith God, that afterwards... (after all that fasting and prayer Joel talks about) I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh." Now Peter quoted that on Pentecost, and it was fulfilled in a measure at Pentecost. That was a foretaste. But Joel 2 is still being fulfilled. It's not finished. It's connected with the end times.

We have quoted James 5:7, "The husbandman has patience for the fruit of the earth until it receives the early and the latter rain," There's going to be a great rain.

The Scriptures demonstrate that even the prophets who prophesied destruction and great problems always ended their prophecies with words of comfort. "Comfort ye! Comfort ye My people, saith the Lord. I will yet do a great thing..." The Lord begins to lift their hope. He rebukes them and even brings judgment at times in
order to purify them for what He is yet to do. Even God's judgment is redemptive, for on the other side of the chastisement is both a glorious reward and additional work that God wants to do. The evidence is all around us.

Who could come to this ecumenical charismatic renewal conference here and deny what God is doing? It is unthinkable that a movement less that 15 years old should assemble the largest ecumenical gathering or convention of any kind right here in Kansas City. That alone is a fantastic testimony that Jesus is doing greater and mightier things in our midst.

PREPARATION: THE EVIDENCE OF FAITH

Now, if you believe the Scriptures, the evidence that you believe is preparation. It is foolish for us to testify that we believe God will do a mighty work in the earth... that the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea... and make no preparation. Preparation is the evidence of faith.

The Lord spoke to a man named Noah, whom the New Testament calls "a preacher of righteousness." According to the Scriptures, he's the only man in his family who found favor in the eyes of God. He lived in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation – very much like the secular society in which we find ourselves. But his heart was right toward God. He was a covenant man with a covenant family. He was an example to his wife and his sons. His sons, in turn, had apparently been an example to their wives – and their families were intact. They were walking in the ways of God in the midst of a disintegrating society.

Now God spoke to Noah one day as they were walking along. "Noah, you know what I'm going to do?" "No, Lord."
God said, "I'm going to destroy the world by a flood, But you've found grace in My eyes." Now Noah believed that.
"So I'll tell you what I want you to do, Noah. I want you to build an ark . . . a ship 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. I want you to get right to work on it."

Notice, Noah didn't go home and teach on the ark. He didn't start the ark prayer group. He didn't put out an ark periodical. I'm not against any of those things; all I'm saying is: what Noah had to do was build the thing. A lot of us have been content to study the blueprints – to attend seminars about it – and to read magazines about it – and sing songs about it – but we haven't built the thing. If we really believe God's going to do what He said, preparation is required.

That's not easy. Building is dirty and hard and toilsome. We've got to get beyond the seminar state into the building state; joint to joint; member to member; tying in; fitting together; working it out; reconciling ourselves to one another; and agreeing together in the Holy Spirit. It takes a long time to build. Scripture says that after Noah started building the ark, it was 100 years before he got in it.

Well, after Noah had this conversation with the Lord, he went home to his wife, She said, "What's the matter with you?" He said, "Let's have dinner first."
She said, "Have you and God been talking together again?"
"Yeah, I guess so."
"Well, what did He say?"
"You're not gonna like it."
She said, "Tell me anyway."

"Well," he said, "God told me it was going to rain!" "What's rain?"
"Well, you see all those clouds up in the sky? They're full of water and when that water falls out of the clouds down to the earth, they tail it rain!"
"They do?"
"Yeah, and God tells me there's gonna be an awful lot of water – that it'll cover the whole earth. He says we gotta build a boat."

"I see. Are any of the neighbors gonna build boats?" "I don't think so. I think we're the only ones!"

"You mean our yard will be the only yard with a boat in it?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Well, how big a boat?"

"Real big! And we're gonna build it out of gopher wood and we have to put two of all the animals in the boat with us."

"Us and the animals all in one boat?"

"That's right!"

"How long are we gonna stay in that boat?"

"A lot longer than you'll want to."

So Noah and his sons started gathering gopher wood to build the ark. Remember, they didn't have any modern tools to work with.

Twenty-five years later, the boys were talking together one day while they were still cutting down that gopher wood, without a saw – lust rough, crude old axes, and Sherri says to Ham, "You think it's going to rain?"

Ham said, "I think so."

Thirty years later, "Daddy's never lied to us before."

Fifty years later, Japheth said, "Well, at least it's a different group criticizing us now. The other group died off,"

Seventy-five years later, and they didn't call him Noah anymore, but "the guy with the boat in the front yard. You'll see it; it's on the right."

But a hundred years later, when it started raining, the boat was ready. it would have been sad if 95 years later – after things had continued to get much worse – Noah would have said to his wife one day, "You know, I think we ought to start on that boat." It takes as long as God says it takes to do what God says must be done. It's too late to wait until it's apparent. Now is the time to start preparing.

**Zachariah and Elizabeth**

Zachariah was a man who prayed but didn't believe. Zachariah and Elizabeth prayed all the time that God would give them a child. A lot of years had slipped by, and they were up close to 90, well past child-bearing age. But Zachariah was a religious man, the kind used to praying without getting answers. And he had done it all the time. One day he was standing before God's altar and the angel of the Lord appeared to him... and he got scared – which tells you there's a lot of difference between ritual and reality. When reality hits a ritualistic person, it scares the daylights out of him.

But the angel of God said,

"Zachariah, your prayers have been heard. I'm going to give you a son,"

Zachariah said, "You can't do that. What do you mean, give us a son? Why, Elizabeth and I are too old."

God said, "Well, you'll still get your son, Zachariah, but you won't talk till it happens because you didn't believe Me." And after that Zachariah went around writing for nine months. The Bible says he praised and prophesied when God loosed his tongue. I'll bet you he did.

**Simeon**

Simeon was a different kind of man. The Bible says he was just and devout, looking for the consolation of
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Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. When Mary and Joseph laid the little baby Jesus in his hands... of all the hundreds of babies laid in his hands... when this one baby was laid, Simeon said, "Take no home, Lord. I've seen your salvation." He was looking. He was prepared.

PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT GOD SAYS

Now if we believe, it makes no sense to believe and do nothing about it. The Bible says, "Take earnest heed of the things that have been entrusted... Don't neglect the salvation. War a goad warfare. Listen to the prophecies that have gone on before time" - 1 Timothy 1:181.

Now there are prophecies... and there are prophecies. Some prophecies are for exhortation, edification and comfort. Sometimes God will give you a revelation that will change your life. Other times, a prophecy may just be words of the flesh. But it pays to discern prophecy, and when you believe God has spoken, to take note of it. The Bible warns us not to despise prophesying. There have been instances when prophecy has affected the course of my life.

God once spoke a word to me when three of us Baptist ministers – Ken Sumrall, Ralph Branham and myself – were together. The three of us had been filled with the Holy Spirit together and night after night we used to drive 60, 70, and 100 miles just to be together to pray.

That time, each of our ministries was in quite a state of turmoil – Ken had been asked to leave his church, Ralph was about to be asked to leave his, and I wasn't sure about mine. Back then there was no charismatic movement that we knew of. We just knew we were being asked out of something and into a sort of wilderness, to trust God.

The night God spoke to me, we had been praying together late at night. All the lights in the church were out except the altar lights and it was about midnight. Ken and I were walking up and down the aisle together praying, and Ralph was standing in front of the altar.

Now, Ralph had a way of prophesying colossal, stupendous things... and I was always the careful, conservative one. God will always put those two kinds of people together to do each other good. Ralph used to always get me into trouble and then I'd have to pray my way out.

Anyhow, this particular time, Ralph began to prophesy concerning Ken Sumrall and me. "Thus saith the Lord, even as you two are walking up and down the aisle together, so shall you now go around the world and preach the gospel." I said, "God, You've got to forgive Ralph. He gets carried away. I've hardly ever been out of this county preaching the gospel, let alone the world." But five years later, when Ken and I boarded a plane together in New York and sat down heading for around the world, it hit me. I said, "Do you remember that prophecy?" Ken said, "I was just thinking about it."

God's word is faithful. If God says it, He will do what He said. One night, when about 20 or 25 of us were gathered together, seeking the Lord in our prayer room, God spoke to us. We'd been through a real persecution – at least in our understanding of persecution – from other Christians. We'd been through the fire. In the middle of that situation, as we were waiting before the Lord, God gave us a word. He said, "When you are not gathering the harvest, don't sit around on the porch. Get your tools ready and get your barn ready because when the harvest comes, it'll be too late to do that. And the harvest is going to be so big that when you're bringing it in from the field, you're going to drop it along the way and weep because there are not enough of you to get it all in. Get ready. Don't wait."

There was just a handful of us then, but most of those men heard that word. And today, twelve years later, most of them are sitting right here in this room because they got ready. Nearly all those men are full time
harvest gatherers now. Because they got their tools ready, they now know the joy of the harvest. And I want to say to you: This is not the harvest, this is just the laborers' meeting. The real harvest is out there! Let's get ready for it.

You say, "Charles, I'm not experienced in gathering the harvest." Well, let's just touch on the kind of laborer I'm talking about. I'm going to say something that will sound strange to some, but the calling that I see in Matthew 9:36 is not your typical evangelistic laborer – he's a shepherding laborer.

Prior to Matthew 9:36, Jesus had just toured the whole area and had great miracles, deliverance, healing, tremendous revivals. If I had conducted that campaign, and someone had asked me about the results, I would have said, "Hallelujah! We've just had great victory. God is moving." But what Jesus said was quite different. He was downcast... He was sorrowful... He was compassionate... and He said, "The thing that impressed Me about the meetings was that there's nobody to take care of all those people. They are sheep without shepherds." Then He said to His disciples, "Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth shepherding laborers who will take care of the harvest."

**BEING AVAILABLE**

Now, we can't ripen the harvest. God does that. We can't send the rain. God does that. But conservation and care are our responsibility. You say, "Well, I'm not experienced in that." Well, Peter wasn't experienced in it. Neither were John or Andrew. I want to stress one word – what God wants from you is availability.

Are you available to the Lord? Not everybody has the same calling. Not everyone will be a pastor or an evangelist or a prophet or an apostle; but all of us, under God, need to be available to God.

In 2 Kings 6 and 7, the Scripture talks about a time when Samaria, which was the capital of the northern ten tribes, had fallen into such grave sin that God had allowed the Syrians to lay siege to them. A siege is the most horrible form of warfare. Those under siege were literally devouring one another. It's a hard chapter to even read. Two women having a controversy over eating a child sought out the king, and the Scripture says the king had rent his garments and he was humiliated. He wasn't humiliated, because he didn't seek God – but he was humiliated and frustrated. This king got angry at God, which is what sinful people do when they get in trouble if they don't repent. He got mad at God.

Now Elisha, the prophet of God, was in town, but he wasn't starving to death. He was sitting in a house with the elders. And he said to them, "That son of a murderer (talking about the king) is going to try to kill me. Even now his messenger's at the door, and bet he's right behind his messenger." Sure enough there came a knock at the door and the man walked in with the king right behind him. The king said, "Why should we pray anyway? God's the One that did this."

And Elisha said, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Tomorrow wheat and barley are going to be normal and there's going to be an abundance and it's going to be great."

Now the next verse could have said, "And the Lord raised up a mighty warrior in the land who went out and slew the Syrians," Or it could have said, "That manna came down from heaven and angels came with buckets of water and the people were satisfied." But it doesn't say that, either. You know what the next verse says? it says, "Outside the gate there were four leprous men," "Aw, come on, God! You're not going to fool with them, are You?"

"Yeah, that will be interesting. I'm gonna use four leprous men."

"Leprous men, Lord? But, they're not even in the city dying with everybody else. They're dying out here by themselves" "Yeah," He said, "they don't have nothing to lose."
They were just there dying—at the gate in their filth and starvation—and logic overtook them, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

One of them said, "What are we doing sitting here? If we sit here, we're just going to rot. If we go in with those inside the walls, we're going to starve to death. We don't have anything to lose. Let's go over to the Syrians and see what will happen," I like that.

Now the Bible says, "They arose early the next morning." I bet they hadn't been getting up early in the morning before that. You know, the minute you get into the purposes of God, something exciting begins happening to you

So they went over to the Syrians, four excited lepers, not knowing if they were going to be killed or what, God didn't fool with those Syrians. He didn't even get His hands dirty. He just thundered, and the Syrians said, "It sounds like the army of the Egyptians coming after us. So they fled in panic and left everything: the food on the stove, their horses, their goats, their tents, their clothes, everything!

Can you see those four lepers coming into that camp? "Well, what have we here? My, my, barbecued goat—right on the grill." They began to eat and they began to try on clothes. One said, "How do I look in this?" They began to ride around on the horses. I don't think God bothered them for a while. He just laughed with them, After a while, one of them said, "You know, this is not good, We ought to go back and tell the king's household about this,"

Available. That's all those lepers were. When John the Baptist said of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," there was a throng, but there were only two or three that were available. The Pharisees were there, but they weren't available. The scribes were there, but they weren't available. Somebody said, "Why doesn't God use the best people... the wise people?" Usually because they're not available.

When Jesus went up to Galilee He looked at Peter and He said, "You want to come with Me?" Peter said, "I'm available." Something about the way Jesus said it grabbed him.

Jesus walked by the tax collector's table and said, "Matthew." Matthew said, "I found all there is to know about money. I'm available."
"Thomas?"
"Well, I doubt if you can do anything with me, but I'm available."
"James and John?"
"Well, if there's a fight around we're available.
We always did want to see fire fall on somebody."

GOD USES AVAILABLE MEN
Jesus believed the Father. The Father had told Him, "You're going to be a light to the Gentiles," He believed the Father in spite of Peter's denial, in spite of Thomas' doubt, in spite of James' and John's immaturity, He believed the Father, that God would fulfill His promise.

Pentecost was no surprise to Jesus. It might have surprised a lot of people, but it didn't surprise Jesus. God has promised, and if we'll believe Him in spite of ourselves and in spite of what we see, we'll see what He promised come to pass.

Jesus taught His men to look for other men like themselves and do in them what He had done. He said, "I want you to go fish for men—just ordinary men. It's not the kind of men they are, primarily. It's what you're going to
do for them, and what you're going to teach them."

Jesus was the best fisherman there ever was. He could stand and see a man under a fig tree and He could cast over there and hook him. He knew how to fish, He knew how to bait His hook. A good fisherman knows when, where and how to fish and what to fish with.

Good fishing is not an accident. Catching men is not a mass plan that gets some by luck, but misses most. It comes by the discerning of the Spirit. Now, I have nothing against mass evangelism. But right now I'm talking about fishing for men individually – personally. A good fisherman is not necessarily the man with the biggest boat and the most seats in it. He's the man with the fish.

I want to close with this story. Douglas Hyde, who was the number one communist leader in England years back and who edited the London Daily Worker, wrote a hook after his conversion to Christ called Dedication and Leadership. In this book, he said, "There's one condition for making a leader, and that's dedication." One day he was challenged by a man who came up after one of his lectures. The man was obese, introverted and shy and he had a terrible stutter. He was an unlikely candidate for any kind of leadership, but he walked up to Douglas Hyde and said, "Mm–m–mister H–y–y–d–e, mm–m– make me a 11–1–leader." Hyde said he almost threw away his idea.

But Douglas Hyde took that man, and tutored him. He said he saw one thing in this man – he was dedicated. Hyde taught him dialectic materialism until he knew the book backwards and forwards. Soon the man became confident because he knew what he was talking about. And then Hyde gave him one man and said, "Tutor this man." And he tutored that man – and then he tutored another. Then Hyde taught him a trade, and he became so successful in his craft that finally he became president of his union. Douglas Hyde said that when that man died, he was the leading labor leader in all England at that time. That man had one quality. He was available.

God's going to do a mighty thing in the earth. He's looking for laborers, and as I give this message, I'm looking at a lot of laborers. Are you available? The job is open. We don't need to make the plan. God's got the plan. All we need to do is give ourselves to the will of God, to make ourselves available.

I want to ask you four questions and all I want you to do if you're available is to say "Yes" right out loud. If you're not available, keep silent. Now here are the questions:

1. Are you willing for Jesus Christ to be your Lord?
2. Are you willing to be controlled by the Holy Spirit? Are you willing to be trained by someone who has proven they know how to fish?
3. Are you willing to commit yourself to walk faithfully with your Christian brothers?

If you're available, and if you've said "Yes" to those four questions, you can count on God. He's going to use you.

Charles Simpson is an internationally-known author, Bible teacher, and pastor, serving in ministry since 1955. In 1964, he experienced a profound personal spiritual renewal and began traveling and teaching in churches worldwide. He became widely recognized as a pioneer in the modern Charismatic Renewal Movement.

Charles Simpson became part of the inaugural issue of New Wine Magazine, an international publication dedicated to Christian Growth, in 1969. During the next seventeen years, Charles wrote and served alongside other notable Bible teachers on the board of New Wine, including Don Basham, Ern Baxter, Bob Mumford and Derek Prince.
Charles resides in Mobile, Alabama. His wife of 47 years, Carolyn, went home to be with the Lord in 2008. Charles has three adult children and nine grandchildren.

This article is adapted from a talk given by Charles Simpson at the Ecumenical Charismatic Renewal Conference held in Kansas City, USA in 1977. First printed in New Wine Magazine, Vol. 9. No. 9, 1977.

See related article on >
First Gathering of Charismatic Renewal Streams Meet Together in Kansas City 1977
Every four years athletes from nearly every nation on the globe compete in the Olympic Games. They are chosen for their excellence in skill and discipline. Those who bring home gold medals are treated as national heroes. As Christians we are called to not only run the good race of our faith, but to strive for excellence as men and women who bring honor and glory to God. We are called to be a holy nation – a people who reflect God’s own character as he has revealed it in Jesus Christ, and who bear it proudly as citizens of his kingdom.

We Christians tend to neglect the importance that God places on our character. We can become more concerned with living a “good life” or “getting by.” We often fall into the trap of looking at the world around us and deciding that I’m not as bad as she is or I never do that sort of thing, and think that in comparison with the world we’re doing pretty well. Living the Christian life is a far more glorious call than we often imagine. For God's intention is to restore us fully to his image and likeness, to make us “perfect.” And this has implications. It means that we must be concerned with more than believing the right things and obeying certain commands. We must also be the right thing – from the inside out. As a result, although we all have quite different personalities and talents, certain qualities of character should typify all Christians because the character they reflect is God’s.

Though these often go unnoticed, the New Testament lays out some specific instructions about Christian character. It frequently presents a number of qualities to which we should aspire. Among them are such godly virtues as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, reliability, meekness, self-control, compassion, zeal,
forbearance, and perseverance.

It is not at all easy to grow into God's character and to become increasingly like the Lord Jesus Christ, acting and responding as he would. But that is the goal that lies before us if we will pursue it. The temptation is always to resist, stopping short of all that God intends to do in us. His process of reforming us is often uncomfortable and at times quite painful, and the easy road of settling for less is so attractive. Our justification might go something like this: “Well, there are some pretty sizable discrepancies between Jesus' character and mine, but my faults and character defects aren't that major, and besides, nobody's perfect. Sure, I can get pretty grouchy and irritable at times, and that streak of selfishness doesn't show any signs of going away. Yes, I probably need to learn to control my tongue better, because it gets me into trouble at times. But, that's the way I am, and I've learned to accept myself and be content.”

But should we be so easily contented? If we will cooperate with God's grace at work in us, more of our faults and defects can actually change. He has a great and splendid plan for us and is not likely to settle for less, provided that we don't. The holiness of our character is a high priority for him. If we will allow it, he will never cease working to bring us to perfection. C. S. Lewis has aptly described God's work of building our character:

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what he is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of: throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making court yards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but he is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it himself. [C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1943), p. 174]

Growing fully into the character of God, into his image and likeness, is a lifelong project. In fact, it will never be completed on this side of the grave. But God's upward call will lead us daily into a richer and better life, into becoming more like his Son Jesus, true children of our Father in heaven.

Brokenness: The necessary step for change

Ever since the Fall, we humans have been a stiff-necked, headstrong, rebellious, self-centered lot. And many of us have been shaped by the same forces that Paul describes to the Gentile Christians in Ephesus. We were “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air,” and “following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:2-3). To fully put on the Christian character of Christ, such as meekness and zeal, requires from us substantial internal change, because these servant-like, godly qualities wage war on the stiff-necked self-will and rebelliousness of our fallen nature. True character cannot be acquired simply by accepting the abstract theory. There must be a change within us, a death to ourselves. Some Christians have used the word “brokenness” to describe this necessary change. Rightly understood, I believe this idea can be of great use to us as we learn the character of Christ.

**What is brokenness?**

At least two very different images could come to mind when this term is used. One of them is somewhat inaccurate and unappealing. The other can be a valuable aid to us. One misleading image of brokenness
interprets it as a condition that involves being crushed or smashed. According to this we are something like the porcelain figurine my family had on one of our basement shelves. One night when we were kids, a violent thunderstorm knocked out the electricity supply to our house. A few of us were playing together in the basement when everything went pitch black. After a few moments of consternation and confusion, I said “Okay, everybody get in single file and hold on to the one ahead of you, and we'll all feel our way upstairs.” I led the way, groping ahead of me in the dark. Unfortunately, the first thing I made contact with was that porcelain figurine. I drew my hand back quickly, but too late. It crashed to the floor and broke in several pieces. Even though we later tried to glue it together, it was never the same. Something like this may happen to people who have come through the harrowing experience of brainwashing and torture. They can come out “broken individuals” who are never quite the same again. Their spirit is crushed; they have no heart left to fight, or sometimes even to live.

This image has also been used of one who suffers a crushing personal defeat or humiliation. For example, in 1938 Adolf Hitler took over Czechoslovakia. Hitler accomplished this feat without a fight by summoning Czechoslovakia’s president, Dr. Hacha, to Berlin. There, the Czech president, an old man in ill health, was kept up most of the night, mercilessly browbeaten by Hitler and his aides, and threatened with the destruction of his people. Finally, in despair, he consented to sign a statement that authorized the entry of Hitler's troops into Czechoslovakia. Hacha left Berlin defeated and utterly humiliated, a “broken” man.

Now, this is not the kind of “brokenness” God wants to do in changing us. He does not wish to crush us, to leave us in a weak, decrepit, or miserable condition. How could we be strong, forceful, and confident in serving him we were like that? We would be defeated rather than victorious.

The second and more accurate image of brokenness is really quite different. I can best depict it by describing a movie I saw many years ago. It was the story of a young American Indian boy and a great, white, wild stallion. This horse was well known to the Indians of the territory, but no one had succeeded in catching, much less riding, this magnificent animal. The young Indian went out into the wilderness, and with great patience, love, and firmness succeeded in catching and then training the proud, wild beast to the point that it obeyed him, carried him bareback, and stayed loyally with him to the death.

This is a good analogy for the kind of brokenness that applies to us. The Lord is certainly not much like the Indian boy, but we are a quite a bit like that wild horse, whom the Lord must corral and then “break” with love,
patience, and firm discipline. This notion of “breaking” a horse is frequently used by cowboys, not in reference to crushing a horse's spirit, but in regard to taming his wildness and curbing his will so that all his strength and ability can be harnessed and made useful.

Herein lies a key to character traits, such as meekness and zeal. Our strength must be tamed and channelled by God if we are to be his profitable servants. While he loves us even in our wild, untamed condition, we will only be of limited use to him until he has “broken” and trained us. Once broken, we go from being headstrong, wilful, selfish, and unpredictable to being responsive, obedient, and trustworthy servants of God. There is no diminishing of strength entailed in being broken. If anything, our strength increases as we submit ourselves to God's training, because our strength is properly channelled and harnessed.

**Breaking self-will**

A fundamental internal change – this is what brokenness is all about. Part of this change involves letting go of our stubborn wilfulness and our determination to get our own way. This letting go should characterize our thinking about major decisions we must make (eg. What should I do with my life? Should I take that new job? Should we move to another city?). We must be free to do God's will, which sometimes coincides with our own will but sometimes does not. This change should also characterize our approach to the small issues of our daily life, where our tendency is to push for getting our own way, even when it matters very little. We would do well – when there is nothing more at stake than our own preferences – to insist less often on what we want, and to let others have their preferences more frequently. This is especially true in marriage, where both husband and wife must each undergo a certain breaking of their preferences and self-will.

For some of us, a problem with self-will is not immediately obvious, since it only surfaces on certain occasions. It tends to rear its head precisely at those times when we are crossed, when things don't go the way we want them to, or when others find fault with us. For instance, one women I know (we'll call her Sandra) is a very nice, kind person. She's generous and agreeable. But when Sandra wants something, she wants it. And she doesn't graciously take no for an answer, even from those who have authority to decide. At the first resistance to her will she prods and cajoles, but if the no remains no, her eyes begin to flash, her voice gets sharp, and she can become pushy and even nasty. Or take my friend Bob. He's a very talented and likable fellow, who makes a good first impression. Bob, however, is a firm believer, in the infallibility of his own opinion, and in the vast superiority of his way of doing something over all comers. A while back, Bob, who teaches catechism in his Catholic parish,
was corrected by the director of his program for taking a different approach to the material than the one they had agreed upon. Bob got irritated and defensive, tried several justifications of his methods, and showed great unwillingness to make the minor changes that his director required.

Sandra and Bob still have a lot to learn about Christian meekness. Some of the necessary internal breaking of self-will still needs to take place. Having their self-will broken, though, won't mean that they will become weak-willed or will lose all their capacity for having strong opinions or preferences. In fact, it is a great virtue to have a strong will, provided that it is exercised toward the proper ends. As Christians, we are to strongly exercise our wills toward the accomplishment of God's will. At the same time, we must learn to lay down our own will: our attachment to our own way, our preferences, and our desires.

**Breaking wildness**

The white stallion in the movie manifested his wildness by reacting violently whenever he was confronted with difficult circumstances. For example, if a man tried to approach him, he would react in fear, turn tail, and race off like the wind. When another stallion attempted to challenge his domain, he snorted and neighed with anger, pawed the ground, and charged in full fury with hoofs flying and teeth bared.

As with the horse, there can also be a streak of wildness in us that needs breaking—a tendency to violent, emotional reactions when facing difficult situations: for instance, a tendency to freeze, or else to bolt and run in fear, or a tendency to lash out in anger. Being broken of our wildness means learning to overcome the unruly emotional reactions within us in such a way that we are free to make the response which is proper to a servant of the Most High King.

Being broken, even in the sense used in this article, is always a trying and painful experience. But there is no way around it for those of us who would take on the character of the Lord. Our strength must be brought under God's control, and our self-will and wildness must be broken in order to bring about the full internal, change that frees us to be true servants of God.


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Top photo: Eric Liddel, Olympic gold medalist, served as a missionary in China, photo from new movie, *The Last Race*, 2016
Awake O Sleeper

Pastoral Priorities for Building Strong Committed Families and Communities

by Bob Tedesco

This article is addressed primarily to pastoral leaders and members of the Sword of the Spirit, an international network of covenant communities. The practical wisdom and principles addressed here can be helpful for any group of Christians who seek to build and maintain strong committed relationships in their families and communities.

As we move through the calendar we are reminded by certain days and seasons to consider our progress, our purpose. Some of them are natural (New Year’s Day), and some are spiritual or church oriented. In these seasons, we are challenged to grow, to change and to improve. These tend to be personal seasons, but they can also be corporate: our communities and groups can also be nudge to improve, to grow and to change. We intentionally challenge our lethargy and consciously raise our awareness…to be present to the Lord.

In the overall scheme of things, Christian community is a complex network of many different kinds of individuals in many kinds of relationships who are determined to live the Christian life. Foundational is the relationship with the Lord in the power of the Spirit. That relationship joins us and strengthens us in brotherly and sisterly, pastoral, small group, service, parental and single relationships. In our community we have a whole network of summer camp relationships. This network has even joined us to other communities as their members joined the staff in the yearly effort for a weekend of evangelizing and training our youth.
Most of these various relationships are intentional and are of some substance. Some are mainly pastoral; some are mainly mission-oriented; most are centered in community. They all can serve as a sort of fabric that supports us in both difficult times and in more peaceful times. Those who center most of their relationships in the community know the value and stability of long-term relationships supportive of the Christian life. The locus, the main place of our relationships, is most logically the center or the main thing that we are intending to do: to live life as a disciple of Christ.

Relationships require work and the investment of our time and resources to succeed. Those which fail have often been neglected and decisions are often made without concern for the relational stress and destruction that they cause. It follows then, that communities (a network of relationships) require work and the investment of time and resources. A typical community schedule describes some of the work of building community: 1) both individual and corporate prayer nurture and support our relationship with the Lord; 2) gatherings and small groups build our relationships in community. So both the first commandment (love God) and the second (love your neighbor) are supported by the most basic schedule. The Lord’s Day celebrations build community in similar ways, and they also serve to build family life and undergird our approach to family order.

Our covenants describe how we plan to nourish and support these relationships, while some of the general statements of the covenant are given more detail in our courses. For example, we learn how to forgive in the Christian Personal Relationship course, and how to financially support the community is described in the Living in Christian Community course as well as preparation for public commitment.

To summarize this introduction, relationships require investments of time, money and intentional connection. Community requires a deliberate centering of our lives and relationships together.

Commitment and Focus
Commitment and focus are two attributes of the Christian disciple. They are also crucial to the kinds of relationships mentioned earlier: those relationships of family and Christian community. Some examples of commitment (for this community/discipleship application): 1) commitment to the elements of our community covenant (most of our communities have a covenant; a disciple takes this seriously and intends to apply it to his or her life); 2) your word is reliable (if you say you’ll be there, you are...some say showing up is 80% of the battle!); 3) if you say you’ll tithe, you are tithing or have a clear, pastoral plan to get there; and 4) if you are taking a community course, you are serious about attendance; 5) you are “blooming where you are planted”.

Focus is a similar, but not identical personal quality. Some examples of focus are: 1) you are single minded, you know what you are called to and most of your available energy and resources are there; 2) you are not easily conscripted or lured into some other group or movement; 3) you are not easily scattered to multiple activities outside of the community; 4) if you are serving outside of the community (and some of us should be), you are careful to still be able to be significantly engaged and centered in community life and relationships.

If we are lacking in these two qualities, our life and our service can become scattered and incoherent. It is worth noting that those of us who are in a community will be engaged in some sort of balancing act with parish/congregational service. As an example, I led a parish contemporary choir for 29 years where I was
able to share the scripture-based music that is a fruit of our international community. It was fairly easy service since the choir was mostly community members who knew all of the music; it did not require an extra evening of practice. I know the call that is on my life for community building, yet I can still serve in my parish.

If we are in social/hobby groups we’ll have to be “limited” members to be available for mission and service. I am a member of the Experimental Aircraft Association, where I serve in a limited way.

Another personal example: one of our founding brothers was given the nickname of “old flint face” for his steadfast and resolute commitment to his calling. His dedication was a support to the rest of us in times of trouble. The name is reference to Isaiah 50:7 which reads, “Therefore, I have set my face like flint.” Some other applicable scriptures are:

Luke 9: 51 When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Matthew 24: 13 “...But he who endures to the end will be saved.”

Acts 20:24 But I do not account my life at any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the grace of the gospel of God.

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Community Building

In the Sword of the Spirit we have missionary coordinators and senior women’s leaders to help newer or information communities. Missionary coordinators usually have personal pastoral tools that help assess a groups development and to identify areas needing work. One such “rough” pastoral tool that has emerged follows. We first make a table that lists all of the full members (publicly committed, initiations completed) on the left side. Second, to the right are four columns: 1) gathering attendance; 2) small group attendance; 3) service; and 4) tithing. These are important elements of our life together and they can be measured. The third step for the tool is to enter (for each person) a “yes” in the first two columns if their attendance is 50% or more. If their attendance is less than 50%, a “no” is entered. In the third column are entered the types of service the person performs in the community. If none, a “no” is entered. In the fourth column, “yes” is entered if they are giving 5% or more of their income to the community. If less than 5%, “no” is entered. One “no” would be considered an item that the pastoral worker would address. Two “no’s” would signify a need for a more serious intervention by either a coordinator or a senior woman leader. Three “no’s” and we should ask the member to do what they agreed to or consider some other status such as associate or friend.

A few things are worth noting: 1) 50% is not a good attendance (a coach who shows up for only half the team practices would not win the “Coach of the Year” award); 2) these are not all of the elements of our way of life; 3) this tool provides a quick thumbnail sketch of the health of the community and covers areas that commonly slip when a community is growing and maturing; 4) one could argue that these are not the most important elements of community life, but a missionary coordinator would know how important tithing is for a community’s youth work and for getting the help it needs from the community building team (travel expenses, etc.)
Another element of our community life is the place it holds in our heart. That is a hard one to evaluate, as each person is more aware of that than the pastoral leaders. Sometimes even the individual is surprised when their commitment is tested by an outside event: an illness, a job loss, a promotion. As I’ve worked with a number of immigrant communities over the years I have recognized certain strengths and weaknesses. One strength is their tightly-knit relationships. Most of their friendships are in the community. For some, their itinerate lifestyle and their career-based mobility is a weakness. Since we are building intentional covenant communities, this can present stability issues. I was discussing these concerns with several community coordinators when one of the men anticipated my line of questioning and said, “Without a doubt, with some of our people, career trumps community every time!” They had left country and family to come to America to “make it”. Furthermore, they had been raised by their parents to take that approach to life. Are we raising our children to seek first the kingdom of God? Or are we also raising them to “make it big”? Without the right orientation of our children in the family, we will never be a transgenerational community. If our children are raised to think that their career success is of the utmost importance they will have a hard time making the change to be servants of the living God.

Haggai 1:5b,6,9  Now therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little...You have looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while you busy yourselves each with his own house.

Hollywood teaches you that your dream comes first...before marriage, family and any other relatives or relationships. I may be the only one who was more than a little nauseated by “LaLa Land” when the young man gave up his “soul-mate” for a jazz club. I know that shallow approach to life was the point of the movie, but in many other movies, that is the happy ending!

Another little story here...After my Air Force service, I got a degree in aerospace engineering from the University of Pittsburgh. There was much clawing and scraping to graduate since we had seven children at the time. I was quite impressed with myself since this was considered one of the tougher engineering disciplines. My first job after graduation was working for the Boeing Corporation on the 747. One day I was standing on the flight-line looking to the left and right to survey these behemoth machines of aviation. Feeling quite satisfied with myself, I thought, “I am working on the largest airliner in the world!” I heard a voice say clearly, “So what?” “So what?” I was devastated. It had taken me eight years with a mix of night and day school to get to this place. I thought I deserved to at least brag a little. The voice was not audible, but it was even more piercing and impacting. I knew it was the Lord. I thought, “He could have told me this eight years earlier!” He was clearly unimpressed with my “accomplishments”. I have spent 45 years of the remainder of my life studying, building, and declaring the kingdom of God. I still like nuts and bolts but I love eternal things. I got the message: Career does not take precedence over the kingdom of God and we should raise our children with an eternal perspective.

**Evaluating our Personal Vision**

As individuals, we can evaluate our vision in terms of relationships, attendance, tithing, etc. First, we should look at our relationship with the Lord: are we faithful to daily prayer, and scripture study? Are we sensing a closeness to Him?

Are we close to the brothers and sisters, or to our small group members and pastoral workers? Do we try to center our lives on the community?
Are we faithful to our financial commitment? In our Community, we teach a 5%-5% split, tithing equally between the community and our denominational parish/congregation. If we’re not there, we need a pastoral plan to get there. For example, if I get a 3% pay raise, I’ll add 1/3 of that (1% gross) to my tithe. I will do that with every successive raise in order to keep my tithe commitment at 5%. Exceptions to the covenant should usually have a plan to grow and improve.

Speaking of growth, we might be reminded of Talk #6 in the “Life in the Spirit” series entitled: “Growth”. The Wheel of Growth has four spokes: prayer, study, community and service. When doing a personal review of vision and commitment, service is one of the areas needing a heart check. Do we serve with a good attitude? Would we be embarrassed if the Lord revealed our heart’s posture toward our assigned service? Every one of us should serve in some way and no area of service is too unimportant for us to be called to.

So, we occasionally evaluate our core values; what we live for, what we’re passionate about, what takes first place in our thought life, how we make decisions, etc. Good news! The kingdom of God trumps everything else. That reality makes decisions and choices easier… “Seek first the kingdom of God.”

One question is revealing when we are evaluating vision: “What would you say is the greatest event of the twentieth century?” At one time, I would have answered that it was the invention of the airplane. It’s a fun question since it can be approached from different directions and generates a lot of discussion. I would now answer, “The Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the resulting communities and ministries.” From Topeka, Kansas, and Azusa Street (circa 1900), up to and including the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Over one hundred million Catholics along with untold numbers of Protestants and non-denominational Christians have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Multiple Pentecostal Churches and even whole denominations have been formed. Many thousands are in communities of disciples who raise up and train more disciples. Most of these communities have campus outreaches to evangelize and work with the next generations of Christians.

So we have to love the call, love the community, and love the church.

It’s a blessing and an honor to be serving the Lord in the greatest event of the 20th century!

**Awake O Sleeper!**

> Therefore it is said, “Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.” - Ephesians 5:14

Young people, career does not trump community! That makes decisions easier. Take seriously where the Lord has planted you!

Older community members: Our level of commitment and focus speaks volumes to the younger generations. When we are passionately committed to our call, more of our young people are likely to catch fire. When our time and money are radically committed to our call, that will be contagious.

> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. - Matthew 6:21

Let us decide to:
Respect the call.
See the privilege of our call.
Love the call!

In the holy days and seasons to come, may the Lord help us to grow in our commitment to him and to his people.

Bob Tedesco is former President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit, a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 40 plus years.

Top illustration of Jacob's ladder and vision of stairway to heaven, by Clive Upton
Building Communities of Fraternal Care, Service, and Mission

An Interview with Dave Hughes
Sword of the Spirit North American Region President

Dave Hughes began serving as regional president in October 2016.
In this interview, Dave lays out his vision and priorities for the region.

Question: For the benefit of those who don’t know you well, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Answer: First, let me tell you about my family. My wife Jane and I have been married for 35 years. Jane is a wonderful wife and support for me and whenever we can, we try to serve together. We have five children, four of whom are now married and have produced nine wonderful grandchildren. Family is a great joy for us and we look forward to spending time with all our family.

Both Jane and I got involved in the charismatic renewal and covenant community in the 1970’s and have been active ever since. I have been involved in leadership in various capacities since the 1990’s. Most recently I served as the Senior Coordinator for Word of Life in Ann Arbor. I have also filled various service roles in our region and internationally in the Sword of the Spirit for the past ten years or so.
Jane and I are members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. We find a great fit between Reformed theology, the working of the Holy Spirit, and living out covenant commitments with believers from many traditions. We are confirmed ecumenists!

I am an engineer by training and recently retired from an executive level position at General Motors in order to serve the Lord in a more full-time, volunteer capacity. I also tend to accumulate hobbies—we have a large garden and orchard, I raise bees, love to sail, golf poorly, etc.

**Question:** What does a Regional President do?

**Answer:** That is a good question and on one level I’m still discovering the role. Simply stated, the role of regional president is to ensure that the region moves forward in unity, finding effective ways for the communities in the region to support one another as well as to support and further our common outreaches—things like our regional youth work, Kairos, and building new communities. We have a pretty collegial working structure in the Sword of the Spirit so most of the role involves leading a collegial, team approach to what we do. We have various councils and committees to get this all to work well, so a lot of what I do is to make sure this all works together peacefully and in unity. I get to work with some great brothers and sisters.

**Question:** What is your sense for what the Lord is doing among us and in our Region of the Sword of the Spirit?

**Answer:** To begin with we need to see that God is always doing a lot and we are always in the position of trying to discern what he is already doing. We need to then go do that too. We are meant to follow in mission, not lead.

Having said that, I think we live in interesting times. We live in a season of mission and open doors. Yes, times are dark but that is a good time to be a light. I see a lot of opportunity for mission and clearly that is something the Lord is always doing. The Lord is always on mission and we need to be as well.

At the same time, a core part of our call and charism is to find effective ways to love and support one another in our modern setting. We never outgrow our need to attend to the basics of loving one another. As a senior coordinator I learned that in any body of believers at any given time there will always be some who are hurting, who need special care, who are in a season of trial. We need always to be ready to walk alongside and pastor these brothers and sisters in our midst.

I often picture the scene from Nehemiah of the workers with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other. They are doing two things at the same time. I picture that for us as well: we do mission (the sword) and we build our common life (the trowel). And there’s no inherent conflict in these two things—we can do both things well and in harmony.

**Question:** What priorities do you see for the region?

**Answer:** It’s dangerous to ask an engineer that question—I always have a long list of priorities. At our most recent council meeting last October we looked at a set of new initiatives and then did a prioritizing exercise to sort out what we collectively thought were the right next steps. A couple of things came out of that exercise. Generally they fit into 2 ‘buckets’—things we can do to improve our support for local communities and things we can do for mission.

In the first bucket, supporting local communities, we want to try some new ways to foster communication and sharing amongst leaders on critical topics facing all of us. We have some ideas on how to do this in a low
resource way via video conferencing between leaders to avoid the cost and time of travel. We also are looking to strengthen and improve some of the existing ways we support one another — things like visitations and the outside coordinator role.

In the mission bucket, we have some exciting efforts underway to strengthen and expand our work by building new communities in places where we have university outreaches. There are some promising efforts already well underway — places like Grand Rapids, Kansas City, Columbus, Tallahassee — and we think the Lord has much more labor for us in these fields. So we have a team working on this. We are also looking at some new ideas for developing and distributing our worship music as a form of mission. I’m personally pretty excited about this opportunity and we are gathering ideas and interest from many young people around the region on how best to do it.

Of course, these are just some of the new initiatives. There is also all the excellent work being done by our existing outreaches and teams — for example the community building team in our region involves dozens of men and women leaders, working with 21 communities in various cities.

Kairos continues to do a great job of serving our youth. University Christian Outreach (UCO), St. Paul’s Outreach (SPO) and the Brotherhood of Hope (BOH) are all doing great work on college campuses and expanding their impact.

I am optimistic that the Lord has much for us to do — to do more of what we are already doing and add some new things. All of it of course needs to be discerned and submitted to the Lord’s direction.

So, a lot of priorities…

**Question:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Answer:** I ask for our communities to please pray for the leaders in the region. They all work very hard and we need to appreciate their service. Pray for the brothers and sisters who serve us in the regional office. Pray for wisdom for me as well. Finally, let’s pray that the Lord would send us all out into the harvest. Let us go do mission and may God be with us.

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A Reconnaissance Flight

To survey why things that used to run so well are now in such a mess

by Carlos Mantica

This is intended to be an inspirational presentation. To some it may inspire pity, to others laughter, but I know it will inspire something in everyone. I am going to present some issues which anyone can regularly encounter in a variety of Christian groups and church settings today.

I have accumulated many years of "flight experience" in the things of the Lord, and I have come across many different Christian groups, associations, and movements in various parts of the world. And sometimes, in some places, I have found that things are not in a very good shape. Sometimes, somewhere, I have even found that things are in a frankly bad shape. Not usually, though. What I have usually found is that, even where things are in a better shape, a series of phenomena take place which seem to recur everywhere, and which are the reason why things which have been running well end up in a mess.

I will be talking about things that we will almost surely find in places where things are running better, but which are the reason for things to be in such a bad shape. And if you did not understand what I just said, maybe you’re part of the problem.

In war, when a nation is planning to bombard an objective, it will usually carry out first what is known as a
reconnoitering flight. Somebody takes a plane, and from the sky he observes and surveys the territory they are going to attack. If he can, he takes a picture of the targets, but without attacking any of them for the time being. Even though we are in no war with anyone, this talk is a kind of reconnoitering flight. We are offering no solutions to the problems we have found. We only intend to take a look at the field we will be working in. And with this preface I will land onto my topic.

Peter’s Principle
There were a set of books that became fashionable for some time in the United States, which tried to explain why it is that things come out wrong. The most famous was possibly Peter’s Principle. And the explanation Mr. Peter gives why things always come out wrong is stated like this:

\[
\text{In every hierarchy every person is promoted to his level of incompetence. Therefore, in time, every position tends to be occupied by someone who is incompetent.}
\]

In a company, for example, this guy is such a good salesman that, sooner or later, someone comes up with the bright idea that it is only logical to appoint him as the sales manager. This poor salesman, who has sold nothing since the day he was promoted, somehow manages to hide what he does not know, and surely, some time later, he is nominated as general manager. By then the company is going downhill because all the good salesmen it used to have are now occupying some kind of managing position, and they know nothing about management. But if the company happens to survive, because our manager works until midnight and has even taken a Dale Carnegie course, he will unavoidably be promoted to the position of president of the company.

We also find similar situations in the Christian sphere. This parish pastor was such a good administrator of his parish, that someone thought the least that could be done was to appoint him as bishop. One day they catch the Holy Spirit asleep, and… wham!.

Something similar could happen in our communities. So-and-so was such a good men’s group leader and the talks he gave were so beautiful, that the regional coordinator decided to promote him to district head. The last time I saw him he was doing much better, and they had already taken him out of the straight-jacket at the nut house.

We are constantly being promoted to our level of incompetence. I, for instance, used to be an average community coordinator, and as you see, I have been promoted into an international superstar. The only good thing is that, as a superstar, I have had to visit a lot of countries, and then I have been able to note how certain phenomena recurred almost everywhere as a law. So I began to name those phenomena, just as Mr. Peter did.

I am fully aware that nothing of what I am going to mention takes place in the contexts you work in, where, I am sure, everything is okay. But since nothing is fully well as long as it could be better, here it goes.

Murphy’s Law
The first law is not mine, but it is quite true. It says: “If something can go wrong, it will certainly go wrong.”

This is what is known as Murphy’s Law, whose fifth corollary completes the idea as follows: “Things, when left to themselves, tend to go from bad to worse.”

Sometimes I go to a given place and they tell me that Murphy’s Law does not work there. And not because things are well, but because they are so bad that they can’t go from bad to worse any longer.

But, in fact, many things came to their present condition due to neglect. They were left to themselves. No one took responsibility to make sure they went better. Most of the times this was so because those who knew, or
thought they knew, or said they knew how to solve things, found it easier to devote themselves to criticizing them than to get involved into fixing them. So they turned criticism into a genuine ministry.

In other places, what happened is similar to an old story whose four characters are Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important task to do, and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got very angry, because it was Everybody’s task. Everybody thought that Anybody could do it. But Nobody realized that Everybody was not going to do it. At the end of the story, Everybody blamed Somebody, because Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

The moral: one of the ways to leave things to themselves is to ask Everybody to do what Somebody should have done and Nobody did. And that is why things go from bad to worse.

On other occasions Anybody comes up, with more enthusiasm, commitment and spirit of charity than the others, and cries out, “Something must be done! It is urgent to do something!” And Everybody starts to do something.

The Activist’s Principle
But this reminds me precisely of what I call “the activist’s principle”, which goes like this: “Something must be done… no matter what, but something must be done.”

Unfortunately, we soon discover that doing something is not enough. I once had a very interesting experience that confirms this, and I would like to share it with you.

A few years ago, a very nice priest appeared at my office and, after the required greetings, said: “Don Carlos, I am here because I would like to invite you to be a member of the Board of Directors of a new institution, a very big and good one, a real blessing from the Lord.” For years I have avoided Boards of Directors, but for some reason that caught my interest. The priest then said: “A very wealthy and generous lady has donated several million pesos for the construction of a peasant training institute. The purpose is to teach peasants all the skills of their trade. The pavilions are now ready, and we hope to launch the Institute very soon.”

The priest went on, full of enthusiasm about the project. At a given point I asked, “Tell me one thing, Father – have you ever wondered how the wife and children of this peasant are going to make their living for the three or six months this course takes?” The priest stared at the wall behind me. It looked as if he had fallen into a shock, or into a state of mystical ecstasy. After some time he grabbed his documents, turned around, and left. I never saw him again.

All these good people had thought it was necessary to do something for our peasants, but the problem is that wanting to do something is not always enough as a solution. Those facilities are there, accommodating the minor seminary of the Archdiocese of Managua. The lady who donated the money is now in heaven, and so is the priest, because he died the following week. They are no doubt thinking together that something must be done for their poor Nicaragua. Maybe that’s why we are in the situation we are in.

The Cowboy’s Principle
There are two or three more principles in this line of improvisation. The next one is the one I call “the cowboy’s principle,” which is stated with a phrase that is very common among our peasants cowboys: “The saddlebags will be arranged on the road.”

Maybe yes, maybe not. But I also have several experiences concerning this. Any resemblance to individuals living or dead, anywhere in the world, is mere coincidence.
One day the telephone rings at my house.
“Hello, is that Chale?”
“Yes, who is this?”
“This is Father So-and-so.”
“Hello, Father, how are you?”
“Listen, could you give a talk the day after tomorrow?”
Since the priest cannot see me, I smile on my side of the telephone and think, “Not again!”

“It’s a retreat for the youth,” he says.
“I see. And what do you want me to talk to them about?”
“Just whatever you want, my friend. You know how that is.”
“Well, but I would like to get some orientation. What is the intent of the retreat?”
“I want you to make them tremble! Shake them well!”

“Well, I’m not too good at that, but I’ve got a friend who is known as ‘The Electric Chair’ who could do a good job… But tell me something, do you have any follow-up plans after the retreat? …. Hello?”

A long silence follows, and communication seems to have been interrupted.

This Christian leader belongs to the Cowboys’ Party – the saddlebags will be arranged along the way.

**The Dog-Behind-the-Car Syndrome**

This kind of improvising is responsible for what I call “the dog-behind-the-car syndrome.”

I’m sure all of you have had this experience. You enter one of those small neighborhoods or towns in any of our countries where there seem to be more dogs than people, and as soon as you enter the town, a dog starts running after your car, barking like mad, and he follows you for half a mile until he gets bored and just turns around. Well, that may happen to other drivers, but not to me, because I take my time to study what it is that the dog does. So when the dog starts following me I first reduce my speed, I let him catch up, and then I stop the car. Something quite funny happens at that point. There are two kinds of dogs. The first of them seems to lift up his chest (you can almost see the smile of satisfaction on his foamy mouth), turns around and goes away trotting, full of pride at his deed. The second one bows down his head, sticks the tail between his hinds, and goes back full of shame and depressed. Neither of the two does anything with the car.

And this is the dog-behind-the-car syndrome: When they catch up with the car, they don’t know what to do with it.

I am very amused whenever this happens, because it reminds me of many Christians who run after a candidate for Christ for several months, and when they finally succeed in taking him to a retreat they just don’t know what to do with him. They just turn around and go away. Some of them are just extremely proud of their achievement and move away. Others are puzzled, not knowing what to do now.

One thing is common to all these problems – improvisation, the lack of vision, of a clear purpose, of priorities, of planning.

If you belong to one of those groups where, week after week, year after year, at every meeting, they wonder what they are going to do for next Friday’s talk, then you already know what improvisation is.
If you belong to a team of leaders who devote all their meetings to put out the fires of that week, with an agenda dictated by the problems that come up, without planning for anything that would detect and fight the causes of so many problems, you are surely going to end up on a psychiatrist’s couch.

Once you have your plan ready, you go to the group that has requested your services, and you begin to get to know the local leaders. And what you usually find is… an absolutely obscure, confused situation! So you kneel down in thanksgiving – God’s hand is no doubt among them! In fact, that is the only explanation why they have not killed each other or have not yet done away with the little that remains.

**Philip’s Principle**
The explanation for so many problems that we find at the leadership level is what I call “Philip the Apostle’s principle.” I have no time to explain to you why I gave it this name, but if you read the Gospel attentively (or our chapter “The Men the Lord Chose”) you will discover that our friend Philip never did anything exactly well. Philip’s Principle goes like this: Every Christian is a human being, and what fails is usually the human being and not the Christian.

It is usually the human being that fails, and when the human inside us fails, everything comes out wrong. Unfortunately, people’s human maturity is often not sufficiently valued in Christian environments. Some time, somewhere, we have found problems that happened because someone failed in his Christian life. There was a big scandal – the spiritual advisor of a movement ran away with a movie star, or twenty corpses were found buried in the basement of the house of the community’s senior leader, or things like that. However, things are not normally like that.

Most of the times things are not going very well, not because people are bad, but because people are immature. Half the problems we come across are due to childishness on some leader’s part. One of them causes trouble because he has a superstar complex. The other has the complex of a banana republic dictator. The next one is resentful and does not talk to I don’t know whom, for I don’t know what reason, since who knows when. The other because he lacks good judgment. The following one because his intelligence is like gold – scarce. And still another because he’s outright irresponsible.

In my country, and in other places, we have paid high prices for the mistake of placing exotic people in visible leadership positions. The witness of their lives was beyond doubt. Some of them had a heroic conversion. Some were super-charismatic, able to raise a dead man and then bury him again, but they were people no one was willing to imitate or follow. They were problem people, people you could not trust or people you could not rely on. They were genuinely crazy, sometimes feminized, moody, unstable, or simply odd.

In my opinion, the main criterion in choosing our leaders should be their character. A mature man can be christianized. A crazy man can also be christianized, but most usually he will continue to be a crazy saint, because grace builds on nature.

In too many places, it is believed that the best candidate for a government position is the one who knows the most and who speaks the best—that is, the best informed individual. I would rather have a complete fool, with the simplest kind of faith, if he is a calm, composed man, patient, serviceable and without envy, who does not take airs, who believes all things, who bears all things, who hopes all things in the Lord.

In our personal lives and in our communities, we are often trying to solve problems, which is like spending your time popping zits, when the solution is to remove the infection that produces them. And the infection is always inside ourselves. This takes us to “Freud’s Principle.”

**Freud’s Principle**
One of the reasons why there are so many people like that is what I call “Freud’s Principle” (Freud, of course, is the father of modern psychiatry). The principle is: “If there were no problems, there would be no psychiatrists.”

In the modern world, everything is oriented towards problem-solving. A married couple has problems because the lady was spoiled as a young girl, and she was the daughter of spoiled girls for five generations; and the husband is Daddy’s little boy, to say the least, whose daily breakfast is scorpion soup. So the two of them go to the psychiatrist, to have him solve their problem. “Doctor, I have brought my wife for you to fix her.”

And the psychiatrist, to be sure, cannot solve the problem, except perhaps by prescribing some poison for the two of them, because the only problem is them. What we have here is a problem of character formation (or deformation).

In traditional families, every father knew that the child had to be formed, with the rod if necessary. Modern psychology tells parents that every form of discipline is bad for whatever reason, and that therefore the option for parents who do not form their children is to send them to a reformatory… or discard them. Which is exactly what is done with appliances that break down, or with poorly formed wives who no longer work or who deteriorate.

We think that the important thing is not to solve problems, but to form people, so that they will cease to be a problem themselves and stop causing problems to others, and learn to solve their own problems instead.

Every once in a while we come across problems that do need to be solved. But most of the times, what we find is problems of deformation in people. Deformation in their character, their values, their relationships. And in church movements and lay organizations nothing is done towards their formation as persons. These groups will usually settle for informing them with teaching, which is not the same. And this leads to the next principle.

**Solomon’s Principle**

This is what I call “Wise Solomon’s Principle,” which I would state like this: “He who knows, knows… and he knows… and he knows… and he knows…”

What I want to illustrate with this principle is the attitude of many people who want to know more everyday, as long as nothing else is asked of them but knowing. I know hundreds of people who militate in Christian movements, who have listened to so many talks that their ears have become antennae. They have full notebooks, where they keep the perfectly well-ordered notes they have taken in the last eighty-seven courses or retreats they have attended… but their lives are exactly the same as before. They are people who know everything you need to know about prayer, except they don’t pray. They know everything you need to know about evangelization, but they give no service in that ministry. Or they take a course in public relations, but they do not speak to their sister-in-law. They know the Bible by heart, but they do not let the Word of God confront them. Blessed are those who listen to God’s word… and put it into practice, says the Lord.

One of the greatest problems of the Church is that it has at its disposal many means for people to know more doctrine, but very few to show them a practical way to live it out. What we need is a scriptural teaching that is at once simple, practical and relevant.

Lack of experience in forming new leaders has resulted in several phenomena in church movements, which are often repeated in other contexts as well.

**Some Phenomena**
The most frequent phenomenon is that of cliques or apostolic mules, who are the ones that bear the burden, and who are the best sign that no new leaders have been formed or promoted. That is, they have not multiplied the mules.

All of this generates what I call gerontocracy in the Lord’s vineyard. This is a government by the same old leaders. There are sectors in the Church that are only renewed via the decease of their leaders.

Gerontocracy, cliques, sacred cows and old Israelites would become history if we knew how to apply two principles:

**Pythagoras’ Principle**
The first of them I have called “Pythagoras’ Principle”, for the great mathematician of ancient Greece. Not after my friend Pete Agoras. It goes like this: “If you want to conquer, divide; if you want to succeed, multiply.”

There are leaders who only know how to divide. Many of them, through God’s grace, have learned to add. They know how to involve people into the work. But very few of them are concerned about multiplying.

**The Shepherd’s Principle**
This I can explain better with the second principle, which we could call “The Shepherd’s Principle”. It is actually a very simple principle of genetics, that says: “Sheep beget sheep, shepherds beget shepherds.”

I have never seen a shepherd woman give birth to a lamb, or a cow that gives birth to an engineer. Every individual generates what he is. Shepherds are supposed to generate shepherds, and leaders generate leaders, as the Argentinean preacher Juan Carlos Ortiz has rightly reminded us. In many groups, however, shepherds engender sheep, and sheep engender problems.

A different way to say the same is that many of our leaders generate admirers, converts, fans, partisans, followers, and many other things, but they do not generate new leaders. And a leader is supposed to generate new leaders instead of lambs.

The prevalent gerontocracy in many environments of the Church is an alarm that warns that many good ministries can disappear when their old leaders die, if we are not careful enough to apply this simple law of genetics.

**The Principle of Uncle Sam**
Many leadership problems and many of the Philips we find in the parishes where we serve, as well as in many a group, are rooted in what I call “Uncle Sam's Principle.” It says: “Volunteers needed.”

Someone comes up with a very serious, very good, and very large project, and then the leader of the charismatic prayer meeting or the pastor in the parish announce from the pulpit, “Volunteers are needed. Those who want to help, please raise your hands.” And you feel like crying, “Heelp!”

I have a great admiration for enthusiastic people who are willing to serve, such as volunteers often are. But Christ’s lesson is that he does not hire the first who shows up. Christ never worked with volunteers. When a fellow came by and said, “Lord, I will follow you wherever you go,” what he responded was, in so many words: “Yeah, but who has called you?”

Christ calls his disciples one at a time and will spend the whole night in prayer before choosing them. He chooses them because he knows the kind of persons he needs for the job. And if, despite having chosen them and formed them patiently, we know that one of them was a failure, just imagine what would have happened if
he had called for volunteers. “If anyone would be my disciple, let him raise his finger and follow me.”

**Ecclesiastic Principles**

Up to this point we have dealt with more or less personal faults of people who are more or less ignorant. What follows is much more serious because it does not have to do with defects among the laity, but among priests and even at the level of the whole church. I will mention only the most evident.

**Nathanael’s Principle**

You come to a place thinking that, with the scarcity of workers in the vineyard, and with the fruits you can show as credentials, you will be welcome in that other plot of land of the vineyard, but the first thing you find is what I call “Nathanael’s Principle,” because it was Nathanael who said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

A second statement of this could be, “Every initiative from a layperson is bad or suspicious, unless proven otherwise.”

Prudence continues to be a virtue, and priests need to be prudent. They are supposed to care for us and to watch over us so we won’t go astray or get into trouble. But Scripture says that, when a sheep was stuck among the bushes, Christ took it on his shoulders and carried it home. So this is what we ask of them: that they take us on their shoulders, that they orient us and correct us, but that they will not reject us or quench our hearts’ infinite thirst to serve the Lord, because what they regard with mistrust is, in the end, nothing but the fruit of that infinite thirst to serve the Lord and an enthusiasm that, to be honest, not even their rejection will be able to stop.

Some brothers and sisters think that I am anticlerical. That’s not true. I simply agree with that definition that says that a pessimist is an experienced optimist.

Out of love, I am sharing the things that experience has taught me, not in order to criticize but in order to offer solutions, as far as we are able, to the problems we find.

One of the most serious problems we find is the general dislike, in most parts of the world, for the things of God. This is a real tragedy, and it is worth wondering about the reason for that dislike.

**Bonnin’s Principle**

And, possibly, the first reason for this dislike is what I call “the Principle of Eduardo Bonnin” (who was the founder of the Cursillo Movement). What Bonnin’s Principle tells us is that “everything in the Church seems to be organized to satisfy a thirst that does not exist, and nothing is organized to provoke that thirst.”

The Church is full of institutions, associations, movements, entities, schools, works of all kinds, where good people can express and quench their thirst for service. But very few things exist in the Church that are destined to awake that thirst.

One day the Lord had mercy on his Church, and gave to it the Cursillo Movement. I think this movement was the first (at least in this century) to consciously seek to awake that thirst in human beings, with the disinterested purpose to have each person then satisfy that thirst according to his call and in the place where God has planted him.

There are now many more people who are concerned for awaking the thirst for God, but usually with the purpose to sell their particular product – their association, their movement, their work. We need to have a deep
respect for each individual’s personal call and vocation, and to regard with joy the fact that the Lord often calls them to places or missions which are different from ours.

Our work as leaders also includes continuing to awake that thirst. What we find in many places is dislike, lack of thirst. People are content. Some are satiated. Others are frankly fed up of the things of God. This is especially true in the case of young people. Perhaps we thought that it was enough to awake the thirst, and we neglected to continue awakening it. Perhaps that is why the Lord is repeatedly calling us back to the first love, to our early thirst.

The consequence of so many years when everything in those contexts was oriented towards channeling or satisfying the thirst which once, for some reason, was awakened, has been that, in too many places in Latin America, what we find today are not Christians, but baptized pagans. I have noted sometimes that in the past the Church used to baptize converts, but our problem today is to convert the baptized.

And this also explains why things are in a bad shape. Ninety percent of the problems we come across everyday in our communities and in the Church is simply due to the fact that our best leaders are not converted enough.

We often find brothers who one day ceased to be bad guys and became good guys, and we rejoice at the fact that they have not gone back to their old life. That’s what we call perseverance. But we also realize that very few of them are today more converted than the day their first retreat ended.

**The Kelvinator Principle**

A second cause for this phenomenon is a principle I have termed the “Kelvinator Principle,” that is, the principle of the refrigerator. As we know, refrigerators are used to prevent foods from decomposing. The principle of the refrigerator is stated thus: “Everything in the Church seems to be organized to prevent the good ones from decomposing.”

The reasonable thing would be to work for the bad ones to become good and for the good ones to be better each day. But almost no one works for that. They work to prevent the good ones from becoming bad. There seems to be no place for the bad in Church organizations, and yet the Lord came to save what had perished, and told us that it is the sick and not the healthy who need a doctor.

Caution! I’m not saying that there is no room for the bad in the Church. Of course there is… but on the condition that they become instantly good. Even our communities are in danger of becoming a “Club of Saints,” instead of being a group of human beings, with all the problems that being human involves, who want to be holier each day and are very sorry that we are not yet holy enough, but who are still far from being what God wants us to be. When communities become clubs of saints, their small groups tend to become contests of verbal holiness, and the smallest fault is regarded with horror. I often remind my brothers that our community is not a club of saints, but a meeting place for those who would like to be saints.

In some Church contexts, this absence of a place for the bad in the Church results in what I call “the syndrome of the refrigerator salesman in the North Pole” – nobody wants them.

Since everything in the Church seems to be organized for the greater comfort of the good, the bad have no interest in the things of the Church or of the Lord. And this is quite serious. They think that the Church has nothing to offer them, when, on the contrary, it is the only group that has what they need. And this may be due to the fact that the Church has entered the business of selling refrigerators, when the Lord came to kindle a fire in the world, and what he wants is for it to burn.

**Paper Pastoral Projects**
Perhaps the most notable result of this reality is what I call paper pastoral projects. Our bishops, pastors and even lay leaders develop beautiful plans. Recently they have incorporated all the techniques of modern sociology. They print them in a beautiful pamphlet which they distribute among those concerned; but that pastoral project, so beautiful, so wonderful on paper, just stays there printed, because there is no thirst, no hunger; because in the North Pole no one is interested in buying that pastoral refrigerator, or that refrigerated pastoral project; because in the lukewarmness or glacial cold of their hearts there is no place or no use for that pastoral refrigerator which then becomes a paper pastoral project.

**DuPlessis’ Principle**

I think this lack of interest for the things of God is especially true in the case of our youth. Then another principle emerges. Maybe this is the wisest principle I have heard, and I call it “DuPlessis’ Principle.” David DuPlessis, also known as Mr. Pentecost, whom Pope Paul VI once decorated for his ecumenical efforts, once heard a voice that said, “God has no grandchildren.”

For many days he wondered what that sentence meant, until he finally understood. John’s Gospel, in fact, says, “to all who received him… he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:12). Through conversion and baptism we become children of God, but God has no grandchildren. Our children will not in turn become children of God in the full scriptural sense, unless they are in turn evangelized and converted. They will continue to be baptized pagans, as most of us once were. And this is also something very serious we should meditate on.

Our communities will not always be what they once were, unless every new generation in our communities has a living experience of the living God, and sincerely chooses to follow him to the end.

But someday, someone, somewhere, ever more for God’s grace, begins to establish the priorities of Jesus Christ, to take seriously the Christian’s mission to proclaim the good news of salvation, and begins, as we did, to evangelize like mad. He begins to awake hunger for God and to seek out the bad ones. Men begin to get converted, churches are packed full, the parish bursts out. There is a revival. Our hearts are full of joy, and our mouths are full of praises and thanksgiving. But then something begins to happen. It is the first few symptoms of what I call “the revolving door syndrome”.

**The Revolving Door Syndrome**

The revolving door syndrome means that, quite soon, the number of those who enter is equal to the number of those who leave. Years go by, a hundred retreats are given, a hundred short courses, a hundred seminars, and the number of those who remain evangelized is the same. Those who remain, in Bonnin’s words, are usually the holiest, who are always few; the most stupid, who are always more... and those who attended the latest retreat.

We need to ask ourselves why this is so. Maybe one of the viruses that produce this syndrome of the revolving door is what we could term the perpetual childhood of God’s children.

“To all who received him he gave power to become children of God,” but for some reason the children of God continued to be children. (This is what St. Paul accused the Corinthians of.) There was no one there seeking their progressive and integral conversion. Maybe the leaders themselves were immature as Christians, and they generated disciples in their own image and likeness.

I often insist that it is us, with our own lives, who set the standard of Christian life in our communities. And this is where another principle comes into action – the one I call “Sinbad’s Principle.”

**Sinbad’s Principle**
This principle says: “Don’t make waves!”

I know places where people’s growth stops, stagnates, not because there is no life, but because it tends to level at what I call “a Christian standard of life”, which is usually determined by the leaders. And this is a big responsibility.

In the movements I once militated in, a man would come out of a retreat with his soul full of dreams, of commitment and of a spirit of charity. He then sought for ways to channel those things. In the experiences of other people he would seek a model to express his own Christian life. If what he encounters is institutionalized mediocrity, impoverished dreams, conditioned commitment or minimized love, he will accept that standard of Christian life as his ultimate goal, as his measure of perfection.

But, all of a sudden, an uncomfortable being comes around. It is someone whom love is leading to new levels of commitment. At his small group meeting he shares this with humility and naturalness, but his commitment is far too jeopardizing for us. So Sinbad cries out: “Don’t make waves! Don’t rock the boat”! Don’t wake me up from my sweet sleep. Don’t make things complicated for me. You don’t need to be a fanatic! No extremes, please!” Saints are always uncomfortable for others, and a group leader comes around who feels in the obligation to help them come back to earth.

Peace returns to our hearts once again. It is the peace of a graveyard. The boat is safe. There’s nothing to shake it, nothing to horrify it, nothing to disturb it. Even the saint will learn the lesson that there is no need to exaggerate, and so he takes on his leader’s standard of living, or the standard of living of his retreat rector, who ten years ago was also willing to give up his life for the Lord, but who has now become older and more prudent, and has learned the lesson that there is no need to exaggerate.

What I do thank the Lord for is for having placed along my way several true saints and at least a couple of martyrs, who many a time caused me shame because of my mediocrity, but who always increased in me the desire to be like them – holy uneducated people.

But there are places where the highest ideal seems to be focused in preventing the boat from sinking, even if it never moves forward or gets anywhere, even if people are not taken to the point where God wants them to be. We then settle for being well-behaved citizens, without even suspecting that there exists a whole new world and an extraordinary, new life, where love has no limits, where commitment involves laying down your own life, and where our dream would be to have more lives so we can also lay them down for Christ and for the brethren. We settle for polishing the boat’s deck, but we keep it anchored at port so that everyone can come aboard easily.

Another application of Sinbad’s Principle has to do with the necessary evolution of our communities. When there are changes, there always comes up a Sinbad who cries: “Don’t make waves! Don’t move my boat!” But I have never seen a boat that doesn’t rock when it is moving forward. If it doesn’t rock, it’s because it’s anchored.

What I am intending to illustrate is the situation of those places where everything is going so well, really so very well, that nothing should happen, lest things change. Everything must be done according to the most rigid orthodoxy, which is almost always mixed with the way we have been doing things for the last 20 years.

I would not want to say whether this is right or wrong. However, common sense tells me that something that does not move cannot get anywhere, and certainly will not get very far. It can only mean that we have already arrived. Or that we have not even lifted the anchors.
Since the world and the Church continue to move ahead, this can mean at a given moment that we have been left behind. I am not in favor of change for change’s sake, but I do understand that things that are alive have movement, and things that do not move end up in atrophy.

In our community we became aware that, without doing anything to achieve it, we are today a radically different community than we were 18 years ago; that the world around us is also different; that we ourselves are not any longer the same; and that, therefore, we cannot continue to function as if nothing had happened.

Change always brings problems, and many an individual will feel tempted to cry out, “Don’t make waves!” Let us ask the Lord for wisdom so we can discern things that must be permanent and unchanging in us, and things that need to be continually adapted to our new realities.

But we must now return to the problem of the revolving door and its causes, and thus we move to Palau’s Principle.

**Palau’s Principle**
I have given it that name because of something I experienced many years ago. Luis Palau is a Protestant preacher who once visited Nicaragua. And since, as I said before, I have a lot of leisure time, and I have a very good friend who has a lot of leisure time and invited me, the two of us went to the stadium where Palau was preaching, just to see what tips we could catch.

Palau began to preach and, to be honest, I have heard better things. But when he was about to finish, something took place that shook me very strongly, and which I had never seen or heard before. What happened was simply that, as he finished preaching, he invited all those present to make a decision for Jesus Christ and to step forward. I was frozen! I had studied with the Jesuits for 18 years, I had attended a Cursillo retreat, I had given and received countless seminars and retreats, and no one had ever told me: “Make a decision!”

So this is Palau’s Principle: Make a decision.

It is embarrassing, but I think that only Catholics have received permission to spend their whole lives without ever being called to make a decision, to choose for Christ. The Lord had said: “If any man would come after me, let him… take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). No one ever invited me to take that step. The involvement of our intelligence is encouraged, but not the involvement of our will. No one ever invites us to turn our deep convictions into firm decisions… so the door continues to revolve.

I will end this talk with the last principle. It is the most tremendous of all, the most devastating, although, thank God, it is the one that occurs least frequently. But in any case it is the most dangerous and most subtle one, the one that can disguise itself as an angel of light, the one that can by itself frustrate God’s plan for you.

**Ralph Martin’s Principle**
In a talk he gave at a Latin American Charismatic Conference, Ralph Martin said that we often take this attitude – we see that God is raising something around us, and then we say, “Here is the charismatic renewal, what a wonderful thing! What are we going to do with it?” Or, “Here is the Neo-catechumenate, what an extraordinary thing! What can we use it for?” Or, “Here is the multitude, how can we make use of it?” Almost imperceptibly we move one step forward and we say, “Here is Christianity, how can we use it?” And finally, “Here is God, what an interesting, beautiful and great thing! How can we make use of him?”

Quite unfortunately, this is no exaggeration. We live in a country where everyone wants to utilize God and make Jesus Christ a tool for their own ends. Christ then becomes a banner, a symbol, a cause, an appealing figure that can therefore be exploited, manipulated, turned into an instrument to carry water to my own mill, to
attract people to my group, to second my purposes, to bless my plans, to give prestige to my projects or ideas.

But these are just the most obvious issues. The Lord is continuously raising things in his Church. We are living at a privileged time in history, when the Lord has raised and continues to raise wonderful works in his Church. And the Lord has a plan and an aim for all he does. The Lord has a purpose, and it must be our role to be faithful to God’s purpose. The Lord has placed us as leaders of a concrete work of his for us to be at his service, with a view to a concrete mission, and not for us to serve in it according to our preferences.

Let us make sure, in our work, that we are helping communities so they will never become an end in themselves. Let us make sure we are respecting those communities whose concrete call is different from ours, helping them if we can, but without ever attempting to impose our own call on them. And of course, let us invite all those whom the Lord has called, to work arm in arm with us in this common mission.

> See other Living Bulwark articles by Carlos Mantica

This article is adapted from the book, *From Egghead to Birdhood (hatch or rot as a Christian)*, (c) copyright 2001 Carlos Mantica.

Carlos Mantica is a founder of The City of God community (La Cuidad de Dios) in Managua, Nicaragua, and a founding leader of the Sword of the Spirit. He served as president of the Sword of the Spirit between 1991 and 1995.

Top photo credit: aerial view of a group of people (c) by Madrabortair at Bigstock.com

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In 1975, three friends and I participated in a 200-mile bicycle marathon on Belle Isle, an island-park owned by the city of Detroit. The course was a five-mile circuit which you circled forty times. Every time you passed the “finish line,” someone stamped your plastic vest. The race lasted twenty-four hours and the goal was to get forty stamps, representing 200 miles.

My friends and I were foolish high school boys (pardon my redundancy) and not one of us trained for the event. I had to borrow an “English racer” (with its tortuously narrow racing seat) because I didn’t even own a bike. Nevertheless, we decided to ride forty-one circuits (sort of a biker’s-dozen of 205 miles) just to say we did.

The race began at noon on a Saturday. We rode at a reasonable speed, and by midnight, we had biked 180 miles. We were ahead of schedule, a bit tired, and didn’t want to finish at 1:30 in the morning, so we decided to take a sleep-break.

The ground was wet and we hadn’t brought sleeping bags, so we found four plastic trash bags and curled up fetal-style for a nap. (Did I mention we were foolish high school boys?)

When we awoke, our legs had stiffened into baked pretzels; we could barely straighten them much less pedal a
bikes. One of us decided 180 miles was good enough and quit; two of us wobbled our way the final 20 miles; and one of us went the extra lap for 205 miles.

Later, the “biker’s-dozen” boy casually critiqued our failure by observing that we “just didn’t have the willpower” that he has.

The Insidious Self-praise of Willpower

The idea of willpower was created by the Victorians. The Industrial Revolution made them believe they could control their environment, so: Hey, if we can manage nature through horsepower, let’s rule ourselves through willpower. They worshipped their power over the self:

Will-power is self-mastery. It is kingship over all life. At the center of your being sits yourself. Your seat ought to be a throne. If you are not in control … you are not the king you should be. (James Russell Miller, 1911)

The strength of life is measured by the strength of your will. (Henry Van Dyke, 1908)

English-speakers survived for centuries without “willpower” in their vocabulary. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, the first time the word was ever penned was in 1874. Its use immediately proliferated as thinkers used it to praise their own strength.

Real-power

Unfortunately, many Christian adopt this godless Victorian idea. We resist sexual temptation (or take our daily prayer time) through our willpower and self-discipline. But that leaves other believers feeling helpless because they don’t have our pedal-power.

Any goodness that draws attention to our own strengths is a hindrance to leading people to God. If our holiness does not draw others to Christ’s miraculous life in us, we are worshiping a false god. We have put ourselves on the throne.

God calls us to doubt natural strengths not glory in them. Eternal life is not merely a gift of God, but the life of God himself in us. Only in him can we do all things, because he can do all things, and he lives in us.

We need God-power not willpower. Our natural willpower decreases as God’s life in us increases. So, when others see us, they can hope. Because God can live in them too.

I finished, (just barely) that bike marathon in 1975. But I didn’t ride a bike again for ten years. I simply didn’t have the willpower.

Besides, my butt still hurt.

Sam
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Praise for Hearing God in Conversation

“In this book, Sam Williamson shares his deep spiritual wisdom with a kind of disarming humility that will help readers hear God’s extraordinary voice as an ordinary life experience.” – Jean Barbara, president of Sword of the Spirit

“I’ve just finished reading Sam Williamson’s compelling book on hearing God. Sam treats this crucial subject with wisdom, humor, and deep conviction. His highly readable personal stories and spiritual insights will surely inspire many to pursue with greater confidence the life-changing experience of daily conversation with God. Hearing God in Conversation is a helpful and well-balanced spiritual guide which I would not hesitate to recommend to men and women from all the Christian traditions who hunger to walk more closely with God.” – John Keating, Servants of the Word elder

It is a tragedy that so many Christians believe that God does not speak to them. This book is one of the best I’ve seen at equipping ordinary people to listen to God in everyday life. I especially loved the description of how to “brainstorm with God” – what a wonderful way to demystify the process of seeking guidance. Most importantly, the author puts the emphasis where it should be: on a biblically grounded, conversational relationship with God in which we let God take the lead. If you’ve ever secretly longed for your friendship with God to be much more interactive than it is and you are finally ready to do something about it, read this book. – Thomas E. Bergler, Professor of Ministry and Missions


Top photo of cycling racers by (c) Tim at Bigstock.com
In training, we see runners putting on extra weights on their bodies so they can develop more strength and endurance. But during a race, runners run with the least amount of weight in their bodies. Why? Anything extra they carry around will make their run more difficult. They will be carrying unneeded, and in fact, burdensome, dead weight. In the Bible, the path to discipleship is often compared to a long-distance race: a marathon. As we begin our walk with God, we start getting rid of some of those dead weights; and as we move along, we continue to unload some more. But along the way, we may also pick up things that make our journey more troublesome and slow us down. Ideally, we should be running with almost nothing, so our race, which is very challenging in itself, will become a bit easier. How about you – how much dead weight do you carry around in your spiritual journey? Wouldn’t you prefer to run towards heaven with a lesser dead weight?

So How Do You Carry Lesser Dead Weight in Your Spiritual Race?
1. You are a new creation in Christ [2 Corinthians 5:17], and you received the Holy Spirit. But you need to know that you are a sinner until the day you die and that you need to repent of your sins before God continually. Sin clings to you so easily, but God’s love and mercy never fail. Develop a habit of examining your conscience daily and admitting your sins to God, who opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. [James 4:6]

2. You need to examine your ‘spiritual backpack’ and see what things are you carrying around but are not needed. What attachments do you have in life? What personal ambitions and plans do you have that you have not surrendered to God yet you keep on chasing them? Do you aim to please people first, rather than God?

3. One thing that can truly bog you down in your spiritual race is a lack of forgiveness – and it can come in the form of anger, resentments, grudges and bitterness. You need to examine your life and acknowledge these things in your life, and then learn to forgive and let go. It is very difficult to do, but for your sake, you need to do it. This dead weight can literally cause you to stop the race – or get disqualified from it.

4. What emotional baggage do you carry with you? Are you walking with self-doubt, anxiety, stress, fear, or other similar emotions? You need to deal with those emotions so you can be free to walk with and serve God.

5. Learn to live with less spiritual ‘complications.’ Be faithful to the roles God has given you. Be committed to your daily prayer and scripture. It is a spiritual marathon, not a sprint. Have spiritual blinders so that you can be single-hearted and simple-hearted in your walk with God. You should be ready for a very long race, although you cannot know exactly when your finish line will be. Patience, long-suffering and endurance are vital character traits you need to have. Have peace in yourself, and develop a grateful disposition in life.

6. Keep your eye and focus on the finish line. After all, this is your life hidden with God. See Colossians 3: 1-4.

**Other Scripture passages:**

1. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. [Hebrews 12:15 ESV]

2. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [Colossians 3:1-4 ESV]

3. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [Philippians 3:13-14 ESV]

4. Other References: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; and 1 John 1:9.

4. Other references: Ecclesiastes 3:12-13; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Timothy 6:6-12; and Proverbs 16:20.

**For personal reflection or group sharing**

What attitudes and way of thinking do you need to change for you to be joyful now – and stay joyful?
Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
Listen to a video recording of a new song by Joseph Matthias, performed with Will Cannon, and followed by an interview conducted by Martin Steinbereithner

produced by (c) The Servants of the Word - April 2017

I Delight in Your Will

A New Song by Joseph Matthias

I Delight in Your Will

Lyrics adapted from Psalm 40

Patiently I sought the Lord;
He has heard my cry,
and he has drawn me up
And made my steps secure.

And I said, “Behold I come
in the steps of my Savior before me.
Behold I come to you!”

I delight in your will, oh my God;
and your law is within my heart.
And I come to serve your Word.
And I will speak of your steadfast love
And I’ll tell of your faithfulness.
Yes, I come to do your will,
For you have set me free.

Sacrifice and offering you do not desire
But you have given me an open ear, Oh Lord.

And I said, “Behold I come
in the steps of my Savior before me.
Behold I come to you!”

I delight in your will, oh my God;
and your law is within my heart.
And I come to serve your Word.
And I will speak of your steadfast love
And I’ll tell of your faithfulness.
Yes, I come to do your will,
For you have set me free.

Great is the Lord! Great is the Lord!
Let all who love him say it:
Great is the Lord!

Sheet music can be downloaded here: "I Delight In Your Will" Sheet Music

Joseph Matthias is a lifelong member of the Servants of the Word. He currently lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA where he was also born and raised. He graduated from the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan with a concentration in Russian. He currently serves in University Christian Outreach at the University of Michigan, while pursuing a Master's degree in Theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit.

Will Cannon is an affiliate in formation with the Servants of the Word in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, and also serves on staff with University Christian Outreach in Ann Arbor. Will is originally from Norcross, Georgia, USA. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 2008 to attend the University of Michigan where he graduated with a degree in Audio Engineering and Electrical Engineering.

Dr. Martin Steinbereithner is the Director of Communications and Development for The Servants of the Word and is a lifelong member. Martin is Viennese, and currently resides in Chelsea, Michigan (USA). Previously he worked for twenty years in campus ministry in North America, Lebanon and England and for over the last ten years with Christian communities in the Middle East, Poland, Russia, Belgium, Germany, Austria, France, the UK and Africa. Martin holds a doctorate in organizational behavior and non-profit management. He is a research associate of the Nonprofit Research Group at the Vienna University of Business and Economics and consults with various faith-based non-profit organizations. Personal Website: http://tinostein.blogspot.com/

For more information about the Servants of the Word, visit their website at http://servantsoftheword.org

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Youth Presentations to Syriac Orthodox

In December 2016, James Munk, the North American Region Kairos Director, and Ed Moccia, Saint Paul's Outreach Mission Director in New Jersey, joined the clergy of the Syriac Orthodox Church Eastern US Archdiocese for a conference focused on improving youth work in the Archdiocese. The retreat took place at the Mor Aphrem Center in New Jersey.

The Syriac Orthodox Church traces it beginnings to the earliest years of the Christian era. It has churches throughout the Middle East, Iraq, and India. As a result of immigration, the Syriac Orthodox Church now has churches in Europe, the Americas, and Australia as well.

Our Sword of the Spirit Community, People of God, in Beirut, Lebanon, has a strong connection with the church and suggested James and Ed as a resource. Archbishop Mor Dionysius John Kawak acted on that suggestion and invited James and Ed to address this conference of priests from his Archdiocese.
James and Ed made six, one-hour presentations to the 18 priests and the Archbishop. These presentations outlined the Sword of the Spirit’s approach to working with youth.

- Understanding Youth Culture
- The Postmodern Mind
- SOS Theory of Youth Work
- Raising Up Young Leaders
- Working with Transitional Adults
- Improving Your Parish Youth Work

James and Ed stressed the importance of engaging the youth themselves in Christian mission, a key element of creating radical disciples. They suggested that the Archdiocese bring together some of their more committed young members to develop a strategy for engaging young people in the church.

Plans have already been made for subsequent connections. One of the priests from New Jersey will be visiting the Saint Paul’s Outreach chapter at Seaton Hall, especially to observe the men’s household environment there. Another priest from Michigan plans to attend the Kairos YES! Retreat—he may even bring along some youth from his parish. There are many opportunities for joint action in the future.

James and Ed found great inspiration among the Syriac clergy. “I was having lunch with one of the priests,” Ed said, “he shared with me how he had to flee Mosal, Iraq, when ISIS invaded 18 months previously and had recently immigrated to the United States.” “The men we met with,“ said James, “clearly love the Lord and want to do the best they can for their young people. Hopefully, we can support them in this endeavor! “

[This article was first published in the Sword of the Spirit North American Region (NAR) Newsletter, April Issue, 2017. See NAR website and Newsletter archive.]
YouthWorks–Detroit

Joy in Detroit

by Joe Mahony

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” James 1:2-3

Coming to Detroit was the biggest step of independence I have ever taken in my life. I was almost naive to the fact that I was moving away from home, going out to serve the Lord and live a life where I have real responsibilities like paying rent or having to cook three meals a week.

Looking back to when I made the decision to come I never considered the fact that I would be leaving all my family, all my friends and everything that I had ever known. This would be my first time in America and I was going for 11 months! To do all that at the age of 18, as a very big home bird, was huge for me. It wasn’t until the honeymoon period faded that I realised the step I had taken and all of a sudden I became very home sick.

Those first 2 months were very difficult for me, getting used to the cultural differences, trying to get to know the people I’d be living and working with (who I’d never met before), getting to know the youth I was going to be working with, finding out where all my service would be and a lot more. And then I got to know the youth, and I started to feel very much at home with them.

I serve in the Youthworks program Bezalel which I absolutely love. As all programs that work with kids are, the first day and every day since has been crazy! But I love it. These kids come from some of the most broken
homes I personally have ever experienced and yet they seem to have a real authentic joy. There’s one kid in particular who doesn’t come from a great home situation, but she is also the most joyful of all the kids! She sometimes can’t even contain her joy and she just breaks out into these spontaneous dances of joy. The amount I am learning from this 10 year old girl on how to live a life of joy is unbelievable.

As I reflected on Lent just gone by and this Easter season I am realising that Christ had joy and he wishes us to have joy through everything we do. Christ had joy through his passion, not because of pain and suffering he had to endure, but because he knew that God the father would look after Him and he knew that he was doing his father’s will, and that brought him great joy.

I am learning that God doesn’t give us an easy path to walk, there are hardships involved in doing His will, but there is no greater joy then the joy you receive from doing His will. And so I’m looking forward to working with all the kids this summer and I’m very excited to learn more from these kids on how to live a life full of joy.

“Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do.” Ecclesiastes 9:7

Joe Mahony grew up in Dublin, Ireland in the Nazareth Community and currently serves with YouthWorks-Detroit.

To learn more about YouthWorks-Detroit visit their web site and Facebook page

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Sing a New Song to the Lord!

by Aoife-Marie Buckley

“Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth” Isaiah 42:10

The Lord has given me a new song to sing since arriving in Detroit seven months ago for a Mission Year with YouthWorks–Detroit. It is a song of hope, of joy, of rejoicing in God, of leaning into him, of beginning to share more of what he has done for me.

In stepping out in faith and moving overseas to Detroit, he has done great things for me. He has brought me further out of deeper suffering and placed my feet on steady ground. He has given me back a sense of purpose and a new hope for my future that I did not always have for myself.

He has given me amazing sisters who speak into my life and call me on in life.

In Detroit I have become more rooted in God, more so than ever before.
It has been a time of immense blessing for me. (Has it been hard sometimes? Yes. Have I learnt a lot of new things about myself and who I am in God’s eyes? Yes!) God has shown me many new facets of Himself, through the people I live with, serve with, meet with and through Detroit as a place.

Detroit is a place where you can feel (and accept) your brokenness, and not let it hinder you. It is a place where you are surrounded by crumbling buildings and people filled with hope for them.

I think God has a lot to say to me through Detroit still, and I am excited to follow Him deeper into it and continue to sing my new song!

“Shout for joy, you heavens! Earth, rejoice! Mountains break into joyful shouts!” Isaiah 49:13

Aoife-Marie is from Dublin, Ireland, and graduated from University College Dublin with a degree in Architecture. She enjoys visiting art museums, going on walks, taking photos, drinking coffee and a good bowl of ramen! She currently serves with YouthWorks-Detroit.

To learn more about YouthWorks-Detroit visit their web site and Facebook page

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Some Spiritual Reading Resources on Pentecost and Gift of the Spirit

**Reflections for Pentecost**
- *Pentecost: The Way to Conversion and Unity*, by Raniero Cantalamessa
- *The Grace of Pentecost: What does Pentecost mean for us today?*, by Steve Clark
- *The First Fruits of Pentecost - Shavuot*, by Don Schwager
- *The Indwelling Spirit*, by John Henry Newman (1801-1890)
- "Come, Holy Spirit" – A selection of prayers and invocations

**Sermons / Homilies on the Holy Spirit from the early church fathers**
- *The Sending of the Holy Spirit*, by Irenaeus of Lyons (115-202)
- *The Living Water of the Holy Spirit*, by Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386)
- *The Holy Spirit Perfects and Renews Us*, by Didymus of Alexandria (313-398)
- *The Anointing with the Holy Spirit*, by Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386)
- *The Spirit Restores Paradise to Us*, by Basil the Great (392-379)
- *The Spark of Divine Love Within You*, by Basil the Great (392-379)
- *The Coming of the Holy Spirit*, by Leo the Great (400-461)
- *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is truth*, by Leo the Great (400-461)

**Prayers for Pentecost**
- "Come, Holy Spirit" – A selection of prayers and invocations
- Prayer of Intercession for Pentecost - prayer of Taize Community
Living Bulwark

- **Come Holy Spirit** - a prayer by Stephen Langton (13th century)
- **Fire of the Spirit** - a prayer by Hildegard of Bingen (12th century)
- **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**, a poem by Edith Stein
- **Sweet Manna from the Son’s Heart**, verse by Edith Stein

**Baptized in the Holy Spirit**
- **The Baptism in the Holy Spirit - A Grace for the Whole Church**, by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa
- **The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Proclaiming the Gospel Message**, by Sue Cummins
- **Baptized in the Holy Spirit**, by Steve Clark
- **The "Breath" of God and Gifts and Graces of the Spirit**, by Steve Clark
- **The Fire of the Holy Spirit**, by Don Schwager
- **Why God Wants Every Christian to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit**, by Don Schwager
- **The Magnificent Stranger**, by Carlos Mantica
- **The Holy Spirit and a New Society**, by Jerry Munk
- **The Century of the Holy Spirit**, Origins of the Pentecostal - Charismatic Movement, by Dr. Vinson Synan
- **Empowered to Live in Community**, by Bob Tedesco
- **Preparing Children for a Spirit-filled Life**, by Jerry Munk

**Gifts of the Spirit**
- **Gifts and Graces**: Part I - The Breath of God, by Steve Clark
- **Gifts and Graces We Can Expect**: Part II, by Steve Clark
- **Spiritual Gifts**, by Steve Clark
- **Have the Gifts of the Spirit Ceased?** by Jerry Munk
- **The Gift of Prophecy – The Prophet's Role**, by Bruce Yocum
- **The Gift of Speaking in Other Tongues**, by Don Schwager
- **Yielding to the Gifts of the Spirit**, by Don Schwager
- **Godly Hobbits: On the Pentecostalism of Tolkien’s Inspired Heroes**, by Lance Nixon

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