

Holy Spirit People

*Receiving and Releasing
the Life of God*

Mike Beaumont & Roger Cole



Salt & Light Ministries

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Introduction

We love the image on the cover of this book – water pouring over the blades of a mill wheel – because it sums up what this book is all about. Water is a common symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, both in Old and New Testaments. It's a symbol that speaks of life, cleansing, refreshing, power, transformation – all key aspects of the Spirit's work. These were the sort of things that many of us experienced in the early days of Charismatic Renewal, as churches rediscovered the reality, presence, and power of God's Spirit in a new way. People got baptised in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues; meetings were unpredictable – you never knew what might happen or how long you would be there; spontaneous worship and new songs poured out from people's hearts; God spoke life-changing words through prophecy; people got healed. Every time we met we just couldn't wait to see what the Spirit would do. They were indeed exciting times!

But the truth is, we weren't always very good at the other aspect of our cover picture – the blades that are linked to the machinery to produce output. We often focused on ourselves and felt (naively, with hindsight) that if only we got more of God in in our midst then people would come flocking in to find out what was happening. A younger generation has grasped that it isn't as easy as that! They have helped us to break out of inward-looking-ness and have often led the way in developing new ways of taking what we have experienced out into our communities

to see life transformed there. They have understood Ezekiel's image of water flowing out from the Temple and bringing life to everything around (Ezekiel 47).

To return to our cover photo, the water needs the wheel-blade, and the wheel-blade needs the water; *both* are needed. If our experience of the Spirit stays just with us in endless 'refreshing' meetings, then all we are left with is cosy charismatic introspection. But equally, if our desire to share Christ's message, in whatever way, isn't guided and energized by the Holy Spirit, then all we are left with is humanistic good works; and if our gatherings are so tightly planned and geared-up for what we think visitors might like, but never make room for the Holy Spirit to do surprising or unusual things, then all we have is a Christianised social club. *Both the water and the wheel are needed.*

That's what we are trying to underline in this booklet. We passionately believe that everyone who loves Jesus can (and should!) be filled with his Spirit, can hear his voice, experience his promptings, use his gifts, and share what they receive with others; *but this is not just meant for inside the church!* The Holy Spirit is our chief 'tool' for the task Jesus has given us for working with him in his mission. He isn't just for 'the experts' – leaders, or those with special gifts, or those who travel the world putting on big conferences. Peter, explaining the disciples' experience of the Spirit at Pentecost, said that, "*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call*" (Acts 2:39) – in other words, for ordinary people in all times and generations – and that includes us. All of us are included.

The first part of this booklet therefore sets out a Biblical understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit

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and challenges us to ask whether this is indeed *our* experience, both personally and corporately. The second part explores some ways in which the Spirit is at work, both in our churches and in our mission. We firmly believe that both aspects – the water and the wheel – are needed if we are going to not only rediscover our roots as a family of churches but also push on into the new vision that God is calling us to in these days.

Mike Beaumont & Roger Cole

Chapter 1

Two Stories

Mike's Story

I became a Christian when I was eighteen, in the summer holidays between leaving Sixth Form and going to University. A friend had invited me to go to his youth club at the local Baptist Church and, after much pestering, I eventually gave in. It wasn't hard to go again because there were some great-looking girls there! So I started going along regularly – though things nearly fell apart when the youth leader announced that you had to go to church once a month to be able to come. Still, those girls *were* pretty ... and it *was* only once a month. And so I started going to Sunday meetings – and have never stopped. Somewhere over that summer, I became a Christian. A mixture of seeds sown at Sunday School (gladly abandoned when I was 11), the prayers of godly grandparents, open-hearted friendships, and an awakening of God-consciousness through, of all things, the works of French philosopher Voltaire, all combined to set me on a journey; and I found Jesus there waiting to meet me.

Within weeks I set off for Durham University where I quickly found the Christian Union and mature Christians who helped me to grow. By Easter I was baptised in water and by the following summer I was well-rooted in my

faith – so well-rooted it was hard to tell where conviction ended and arrogance began.

And so it was, armed with the knowledge of all truth, that I returned to Durham for the CU's mysteriously-named 'pre-terminal house party'. All went well until an Anglican vicar called Malcolm Widdecombe (brother of former MP Ann Widdecombe) started to spout what was patently (to my mind) utter nonsense. He talked about 'baptism in the Spirit' through which Christians could know God's presence and power in a new way, and about speaking in tongues which (as anyone with half a brain knew) had died out with the early church. By the end of his message, I was livid. How dare he suggest there was something 'more' we all needed!

And yet ... there was something strangely compelling about what he said and the gentle way in which he said it. So I hung around until everyone had gone, went up to him and said, 'I really don't like what you said – but I feel God wants me to talk with you.' It was a measure of the man's graciousness that he simply said, 'Sure. When can we have coffee?'

The following day found him in my room, along with one of my friends, drinking coffee, explaining more about the Bible's teaching on baptism in the Holy Spirit, and answering our questions. At the end he simply asked if he could pray for us to find more of the God we loved and recommended a book we might find helpful – 'Face Up With a Miracle' by Don Basham, one of the earliest books of the charismatic renewal movement. That week we both ploughed through it until we were desperately hungry for more of God. It was then that another member of the CU – one whom, if I am honest, I had steadfastly tried to avoid since he was well-known as 'a raving Penty' – offered to

come and pray with us. And that night my life was turned around.

I was sitting on the plastic chair by my desk while my friend was sitting on my bed, leaning against the wall. The 'raving Penty' (who seemed remarkably gracious now that we had taken time to get to know him) laid his hands on our heads and prayed simply for us to be filled with God's Spirit. And as he did, the Spirit came – though in remarkably different ways. I was grabbed by the scruff of my neck and thrown onto the floor, while my friend simply smiled beatifically and looked like he had fallen asleep. The same Spirit, the same prayer, the same room, the same moment, with the same end result (two young men baptised in the Holy Spirit), but two quite different paths. When we eventually came round, I asked the raving Penty why he had thrown me onto the floor. 'I didn't come anywhere near you,' he said. 'It was the Spirit!' And at that moment I was not only blessed, but afraid. The one who had filled us was no one less than *God himself*, and he had firmly put the arrogant young man where he belonged.

We didn't speak in tongues that night, much to our frustration; but the raving Penty encouraged us to keep praying, assuring us it would come. The next few days were full of a new sense of the presence of Jesus; yet still tongues didn't come. It was a week later that my door burst open as my friend rushed in and shouted, 'I've got it! I've got it!' He could speak in tongues! And I was – angry! When he left, I said to God, 'That's not fair! Why has he got it and not me?' And I felt God say, 'But I've given you it already...' And it was then that I remembered that all week, whenever I had been praying, a strange word had interfered with my prayers. I can still remember it – '*deiste*' – but I had ignored it since I thought it was some Latin I had learned at school.

So I began to speak out that single word, again and again and again; and as I did, other words began to follow. (I wonder if some of you reading this have got stuck at your 'deiste'.)

All that happened well over 40 years ago. But I would not have wanted to live those years without that experience of the Spirit and all it opened up of God's presence, power, enabling, anointing, and gifting. Indeed believing in the Spirit and his gifts has even literally saved my life.

Now, Roger's story is completely different.

Roger's Story

There was a mission weekend at the Baptist Church my family attended when the speaker outlined the gospel in a very engaging way. While I had heard this message so often, that night it was as if every word spoke straight into my life. I tried desperately to resist the preacher's appeal, but finally gave in. On the way home I walked across the fields, leaping and jumping, and saying, 'Father, Father'. I would have been very embarrassed if anyone from our rather Reformed-style Baptist Church had been watching!

From then on I tried to live a Christian life. I was introduced to regular Bible reading; I prayed with the family regularly at home; I attended the lively church youth group; I even played my flute in meetings; and I attended church every Sunday. However I struggled to live what I knew to be a wholehearted Christian life. I started swearing and became very angry when people disagreed with me. I began listening to heavy rock music and was introduced to an alternative culture in big concerts in Bristol. Other friends at school seemed to do such exciting things which I knew were 'out of bounds' for a Christian. I didn't understand it at the time but I was 'backsliding'.

I embarked on a relationship with a girl, with whom I eventually became engaged. But while I was away on my pre-college year on a Devon farm, she developed another relationship. I was devastated and felt my world had fallen apart. I remembered how life was so much better when I was following Jesus and was part of the youth group back home, so I started on a quest to find a lively group of Christians. I wanted to see if I could regain that first surge of life and warmth I had felt when I first became a Christian.

Eventually I found a thriving group of Christians, led by an ex drug addict, who attended the evening service at a local church and ran a youth coffee bar in town during the week. The highlight was their Thursday evening worship and teaching time to which many young people came. I was struck by their warmth and love. They would hug one another at the end of meetings or whenever they met. They worshipped with simple choruses, often repeated several times. What particularly struck me was how they sang and harmonised together using different words and phrases. I enjoyed music and was impressed by what a beautiful sound this was. They prayed for healing by laying hands on those who were sick. They would also sometimes pray in an unrecognisable language and wait for an interpretation. I asked various ones what it was that they had and I didn't, for I had clearly missed out on this love and warmth, and couldn't speak in tongues like they did. They said I needed the Holy Spirit, and I said I had already received the Holy Spirit when I became a Christian and didn't want to grieve him by asking him to come again. But they explained that I needed the Spirit's power and said how, for many of them, this had come through a subsequent experience. They offered to pray for me, but I was uncomfortable. So I took a

leaflet that explained about being filled with the Holy Spirit and read it during that week. As I did so, I was intrigued and wondered why someone hadn't told me about this earlier.

Full of expectation I went the following week to receive this new, powerful, love-filled experience. Two people laid their hands on my head and prayed for me, a number of times; but nothing happened. I felt nothing. No words came out, and I had a foreboding that maybe this was for some but not for me. Maybe I was one of those specially selected by God *not* to speak in tongues! I returned home disappointed, thinking perhaps it was just the excitable types that experienced such things.

Later that week I was rolling a field, a tedious task requiring hours sitting at the tractor wheel. I told God about my disappointment and how I thought this experience of the Spirit would have made such a difference to my life. As I did, a new sense of faith began to rise up; perhaps I had been filled, but what was needed was for me to release this gift of the Holy Spirit. I asked God to help me speak some words I hadn't previously learned, and also for protection from anything false for I had heard some Christians warn that such things were probably from the devil. I began to speak out some words and phrases, half-telling myself it was all made-up. I attempted to speak out new prayers, promising to centre my life on Jesus and asking that what I was receiving and praying out would really be from his Holy Spirit.

By lunchtime I was confidently speaking whole sentences in a new language. I felt elated, but was still nervous whether all this really was from God. I was excited to try it out at the next coffee bar meeting. As people began to sing in tongues, I joined in – tentatively at first, but as the level of sound and harmonies grew, I became more

confident and sang out my new words and phrases. It was such an encouragement when two people asked at the end if I had begun to speak in tongues, and I told them about my experience on the tractor. This experience wasn't just about a new gift I had received; it was about giving my life back to the Lord in a new way.

A month later I was baptised, something I had resisted for years. I was able to end my engagement and receive the ring back without too much despondency. I began to contribute to the group regularly and pray out both in English and in tongues. I went home to retake my A-levels and shared what had happened with my two younger brothers who also were filled with the Holy Spirit. Within a short time we had a group of young people in the Baptist Church worshipping regularly on a Sunday evening and experiencing the gifts of the Holy Spirit together. Fresh commitments to Christ, baptisms and enthusiastic prayer ensued. I also found something else happening. Previously my sharing the gospel at school had produced no interest, but now as I told friends about my new invigorated relationship with Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit, they took an interest and even came to meetings to hear about it and see it for themselves. I had realised in a new way what Acts 1:8 was all about: *'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses...'* This was the beginning of my journey with the Holy Spirit.

Questions:

1. Do you have your own story of how you were baptised in the Holy Spirit (no matter how different it might be from Mike or Roger's experiences)?
2. If not, why might this be?

Chapter 2

The Spirit and the Bible

‘Just because the Bible says that’s how things were, is utterly irrelevant for us.’ If truth be told, it took Mike considerable effort not to react when he heard those words that came, not from a new Christian, but from a young church leader. While he was genuinely trying to be relevant for today, eager to build a church that connected with 21st century life, what this leader was failing to recognise was that if we dismiss the Bible, replacing its authority with our own time-bound perspective and failing to see its principles as the expression of God’s heart, then we are left with no *basis* for what we believe, and no *guidelines* for how we live out those beliefs (though of course we have to find new cultural *expressions* of Kingdom principles for every generation).

The fact is that if we don’t take the Bible seriously (though that doesn’t mean mindlessly!), we are left to create a Christianity of our own imagination, a re-vamped version of the old Liberal Theology whose scholars looked down the well of history and saw nothing but a pale reflection of themselves, as one scholar summed it up. Without the Bible, we simply have no way of knowing *who* God’s Spirit is and *what* God’s Spirit wants to do – in *every* generation. So rediscovering what the Bible says about the Spirit, and embracing this for ourselves, so we can apply it in our lives and churches, is crucial. This is especially true

at a time when our world is in turmoil and when, at least in the West, Christianity is seen as increasingly irrelevant and faith is seen as a purely personal matter, best excluded from the real stuff of life. Without a confidence in what the Bible says about God's Spirit, the church robs itself of the power to confidently engage with the world.

Not Backing Off but Pressing On

Charismatic churches are often no different, many having lost confidence in what God's word says about the Spirit too. Born in the renewal of the sixties and seventies, many have lost their initial freshness, excitement, and momentum, becoming at best stagnant, at worst declining. Of course, not everything done in those early days was admirable; the truth is, we became very inward-looking as we focused on restoring elements of life in the Spirit that the church had lost. So we genuinely thank God for the new passion that is turning us outwards. But while we wouldn't want to go back to the old days and the old ways, we do sometimes wonder whether, in an eagerness to make church accessible to unbelievers, we have diluted our experience of the Spirit to levels that take us back to pre-charismatic renewal days, leaving us with what is in effect a non-Spirit-filled life. When meetings are run to the clock, when preaching is reduced to bite-size snacks, when manifestations of the Spirit's gifts are reduced to occasional sharing of 'pictures' to the exclusion of anything 'weird' that might be thought to 'put people off', we have to at least ask the question of whether our experience of the Spirit has settled down to a sort of 'cosy charismatic-ness', expressed at best in the gentle raising of a hand as we allow the band to entertain us.

By contrast, when we take the risk of letting the Spirit 'do his thing', amazing things can happen in the lives of non-Christians. Roger shared a word of knowledge in one meeting about someone who had no hope and had been depressed for two months. A young man, recently separated from his wife, had heard the singing outside and come into the meeting to see what was happening. He told the lady next to him that what Roger had shared described him exactly, so she encouraged him to go and be prayed for. When he was baptized some months later, he shared how that word of knowledge had been a catalyst to his finding new life in Jesus. He was also restored to his wife and family and healed from the depression. On another occasion Roger was speaking at a student meeting in an Oxford coffee shop when the non-Christian brother of one of the students came in and joined them. He responded to a word of knowledge and came to get prayer for healing at the end, experiencing warmth flowing through his neck as Roger prayed. Responding to another nudge of the Spirit, Roger then asked him, 'Have you been thinking about becoming a Christian recently?' The student acknowledged he had, and before the evening was over Roger had led him in a prayer of commitment, right there in the coffee shop. Away from home, Steve Beegoo from Bicester had a dream while on a ministry trip to Mauritius about someone called Nazeem and how her childhood had been damaged through poor fathering. Although he suspected Nazeem was a Muslim name, and knew that Muslims wouldn't be in a church meeting (not in Mauritius anyway), he shared his dream in the next meeting. At the end two women approached him, one of whom was – Nazeem! She had just started to visit the church with her Christian friend and said Steve's dream summed up her life exactly. She was astounded that God

knew her so intimately and cared about her and gladly received prayer.

Such examples show that there really is no need to avoid using gifts of the Spirit when non-Christians are with us. We simply need to explain what is going on – and leave the rest to the God!

This tendency to ‘back off’ can affect our theology too. Many are at best tentative, at worst unclear, about the Biblical basis for our beliefs about the Spirit, his baptism, and his gifts. Others know what they believe but are reluctant to express it for fear of offending other Christians who see things differently. Perhaps it is our postmodern climate, where all experience and truth are seen as relative, which makes it unfashionable to claim we are rooting our experience of the Spirit in objective truth expressed in the Bible. But if we are serious about turning outward and seeing the church grow through church-planting, we cannot achieve this without the Holy Spirit – after all, that’s what Jesus said to his disciples:

‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ (Luke 1:4-5,8).

The Importance of Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Central to this experience of the Spirit, longed-for by the prophets and promised by Jesus, is what Jesus called a baptism in the Holy Spirit – an experience as clear and unmistakable as the water baptism of John. If we doubt

what the Bible says about this, we will never understand this experience and the relationship, gifts, and fruitfulness it is meant to produce. We will never experience it in our own lives or see it empowering our mission. We will have a *desire* to share Jesus with others, plant churches and be missional, but we will be like soldiers sent into battle without weapons. We might have clever words and ideas, but we won't have 'divine power to demolish strongholds' (2 Corinthians 10:4). More than ever, people need to see, hear, taste and touch God's power, to see that he is real and makes a difference to life. While a good miracle is never guaranteed to lead people to salvation, as even Jesus experienced (Luke 17:11-19), it certainly awakens them to spiritual realities.

This is why understanding and experiencing the Holy Spirit, through his baptism and on-going filling, is so important; for only he can equip us to go out and make a difference. And only through the Bible can we find out what the normal Christian life is meant to be.

Let's Start at the Very Beginning

This is why we want to do what the song says: start at the very beginning – with what the Bible says about the Spirit; for to properly engage with him and his work, it is important not just to *experience* his ways but also *understand* them. We are therefore going to start by looking at the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, both his wide-ranging work as the third member of the Godhead, and also the prophets' promise that something better was coming. We will then move on to the New Testament and see both how, and why, Jesus needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and what the implications of that are for us. Finally we will look at

baptism in the Holy Spirit and what flows out from that, before turning to seeing how his gifts can be used today.

We know there is a temptation to jump straight to the 'practical' bits of the book; but our appeal to you is – please don't! For without a good Biblical foundation the Spirit's gifts are like cake icing with no cake underneath. So please, let's start at the very beginning – it's a very good place to start! And it's what will help make sense of all that follows later.

Questions:

1. If you were trying to describe to a non-Christian what the Bible is for you, what would you say? Can you think of examples of how God has used the Bible to speak straight into your life or circumstances?
2. As you look back on your Christian life, are you aware of times when you have 'backed off' from your experience of the Holy Spirit? How was that expressed?
3. Do you personally feel awkward about the gifts of the Spirit being used when non-Christians are around? If so, why might that be?

Chapter 3

A 'He' not an 'It'!

It's easy to forget that the Holy Spirit is not an 'it' – a 'thing' or 'power' or 'influence'. He's a 'person'. The trouble is, so many Biblical images used of him *are* 'things' – wind, breath, fire, water, life, power, dove, oil. Yet the Bible is clear that the Holy Spirit is personal – as personal as Father God and Jesus Christ, and utterly equal to them. In dealing with the Holy Spirit, we are dealing with no one less than God in person.

1. His Personal Nature

The Bible shows that the Holy Spirit is 'personal' in a number of ways. These include -

The name given to him

In the Old Testament he is often referred to simply as 'the Spirit' or 'the Spirit of God', perhaps emphasizing more his power than personhood. But in the New Testament he is consistently called 'Holy Spirit' – used just 3 times in the Old Testament but 93 times in the New Testament – reflecting the change of understanding that the disciples' experience of him had brought. The addition of 'Holy' shows they understood his intimate connection with the Holy God himself and therefore his moral nature, not just his power.

The language used of him

The early Christians' growing realisation of the personhood of the Spirit is also reflected in the language they used of him. In fact they even broke the rules of grammar to make their point. The Greek word for spirit (*pneuma*) is a neuter gender, which means neuter pronouns should always be used when referring back to it. But the New Testament always uses masculine pronouns when referring to the Spirit, underlining the Spirit is a 'him' not an 'it'.

The descriptions made of him

The Spirit is frequently described in personal terms in the New Testament. For example, he has

- thoughts (Romans 8:27; 1 Corinthians 2:11),
- will (1 Corinthians 12:11; Hebrews 2:4), and
- feelings – he experiences love (Romans 15:30)
- and emotions (Romans 8:26-27);
- he can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30),
- insulted (Hebrews 10:29),
- lied to (Acts 5:3-4),
- blasphemed against (Matthew 12:31-32),
- resisted (Acts 7:51) –
– all things associated with a person.

The work attributed to him

The Spirit's work in the New Testament also speaks of personhood. He is seen as

- bringing fellowship (Philippians 2:1; 2 Corinthians 13:14)
- helping (Romans 8:26)
- leading (Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18)
- prompting (Acts 8:29)
- directing (Acts 13:1-2)
- restraining (Acts 16:6-7)
- speaking (Revelation 2:7)
- encouraging (Acts 9:31)
- teaching (Luke 12:11-12)
- warning (Acts 20:23)
- giving gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

In short, he *does* everything Jesus *did*, and *is* everything Jesus *was*, just as Jesus promised (John 14:16-17,26). In fact Jesus called him 'another counsellor' (John 14:15), words that are worth commenting on.

The word 'counsellor' (in Greek, *paraklētos*) is translated differently in different English versions: Counsellor (NIV, NLT), Advocate (NIV 2011, NLT), Comforter (KJV, ASV), Helper (ESV, NASB, NKJV, NCV, GNT), Friend (The Message). The fact that it is translated in so many different, though overlapping, ways should flag something up: communicating the exact meaning of the Greek in just one word is difficult. It literally means 'someone called

alongside to help'. It was often used in law courts, not of your legal representative, but of someone called to speak on your behalf in your time of need. That's exactly what the Spirit will do, Jesus was saying. He'll be there for you when you need him, just as I myself have been.

And that's where the other word – 'another' – comes in. There are two words in Greek for 'another': one means 'another of a different kind' (I don't like this car – I need to buy another that is more economical), the other 'another of the same kind' (I really love this car; I'll definitely buy another when I replace it). The word John used here is the one meaning 'another of the same kind'. Jesus was promising, John wanted us to know, another 'somebody' who would take his place but be exactly like him, who would be to the disciples all that Jesus himself had been and do for the disciples all that Jesus himself had done; another of exactly the same kind. Not a power or help or influence; but a person just like him.

Understanding that the Holy Spirit isn't a power, but a person can make such a difference, for we start to see him, not as some commodity to be used of which we glibly want 'more', but a person to be loved and appreciated whom we want to fill our whole lives.

But not only is he a person, he is a divine person.

2. His Divine Nature

The Holy Spirit is not simply someone sent *from* God; he *is* God. Here we touch the mystery of the Trinity (the belief that God is so complex a being that although he is one God he exists simultaneously in three persons). The church didn't finalise its beliefs about the Trinity until the fourth century AD, though the raw material of the doctrine was there in the New Testament, waiting for its implications to

be drawn out. So while the Bible doesn't explain *how* the Holy Spirit can be God along with Jesus and the Father, and yet all three be the one God, it ascribes clearly to the Holy Spirit all the things that are said about God the Father. For example, it says –

He shares divine attributes

The Holy Spirit is also seen as eternal (Hebrews 9:14), omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:11), omnipotent (Luke 1:35), omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-12). In Revelation John describes him, in most translations, as 'the seven spirits'; but this can also be translated as 'the sevenfold Spirit' (seven being the number in Jewish thinking that was associated with God); and since it is sandwiched between a reference to the eternal Father and the risen Jesus, it is highly likely to be a Trinitarian reference. Here is the Holy Spirit, right alongside the other two members of the Trinity.

He performs divine acts

The Spirit does things that only God himself can do – creating (Genesis 1:2), bringing life out of death (Ezekiel 37:9-11), revealing the future through the prophets, raising Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11), giving new birth (John 3:3-8). This is no mere 'it'. This is the stuff that God alone does!

He is called God

If we are still in any doubt, then in several places the Holy Spirit is actually equated with or even called 'God'. For example Peter challenges Ananias in Acts 5 with lying to the Spirit (v3), but immediately equates this with lying to God (v4). Paul is just as clear, writing: 'Now the Lord is the

Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

God with Us!

What all this means is that it is not merely some aspect, or influence, or power of God that lives within us, but *God himself*. This is why Paul could write, with the sheer amazement of someone who had always thought that God was to be found in the temple in Jerusalem: 'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body' (1 Corinthians 6:19).

In other words, once we have grasped who the Spirit is and what the Spirit wants to do, it is surely impossible to remain the same!

Questions:

1. Some of the words we use when praying for others to receive the Holy Spirit can make him sound as if he were a commodity rather than a person. Can you think of examples? Do you sometimes fall into praying this way?
2. How does it help us in grasping that the Holy Spirit is a 'paraclete'?
3. What difference does it make in understanding that the Holy Spirit is no one less than God himself (a) for you at a personal level (b) for us corporately at a church level?

Chapter 4

The Work of the Spirit (and Some Challenging Questions)

Not only is the Holy Spirit a *person*, he is a person who loves to *work*.

1. The Creative Work of the Holy Spirit

When we first encounter the Holy Spirit it is in a ready-for-work posture.

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

The Hebrew word for 'hovering' was used of a bird hovering, waiting to pounce on its prey. That's what the Spirit was doing. As the Father created matter, there was the Spirit, sleeves rolled up, just waiting to get his hands on it and do what he did ever thereafter: bring shape to everything according to God's word.

So it shouldn't surprise us to find that, throughout the Bible, the Spirit is excitingly creative. We see his creativity:

1. *In creation*

- With the created order (Genesis 1:1-2; Psalm 104:24-30)
- With the human race (Job 32:8; 33:4)

2. *In expressive worship*

- In people skilled in arts and crafts (Exodus 31:1-6; 35:30-36:1)
- In musicians and singers (2 Samuel 23:1-2). In fact, the removal of music and singing is seen as a curse (Revelation 18:21-22), while singing is seen as a mark of the Spirit's fullness (Ephesians 5:18-20).

3. *In spiritual gifts*

- 1 Corinthians 12:7ff Where do spiritual gifts come from? One minute you are minding your own business, and the next minute there's a picture or prophecy in your mind. Where did it come from? Certainly not from you; it came from the creative Spirit who, just as at creation itself, brought it out of nothing.

Pause for thought:

The Spirit's creativity is seen throughout the Bible. But is it seen in us? Is it seen in our churches? Or have we become predictably the same?

2. The Renewing Work of the Holy Spirit

Not only does the Holy Spirit love to make things, he loves to make them anew when they've got messed up, or to refresh them when they've got dried up. Again we see this throughout the Bible where we see –

1. The Spirit's renewing of people

In the Old Testament

When Samuel anointed Saul as Israel's first king, he gave him several signs to confirm his appointment (1 Samuel 10:1-5) and told him, 'The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person' (v6). David too knew that God's Spirit could renew what he had messed up, appealing to God after his adultery: 'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me' (Psalm 51:10).

Yet prophets like Ezekiel saw there was a far better renewing yet to come, both at a national level, expressed in his vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37), and at a personal level, as God promised: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

In the New Testament

It is in the New Testament, however, that we see the Spirit's renewing work come to full fruition, made possible through the death and resurrection of Christ. This renewal is so

all-transforming that it is often called ‘a new birth’ (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:4-7) – a giving of the Spirit ‘without limit’ (John 3:34), but available now, not just to ‘special people’ like in Old Testament times, but to whoever believes in Jesus (Acts 2:38-38). And this new birth in turn leads to a whole new life in which the Holy Spirit fills, leads, guides and reassures us that we are truly God’s children (e.g. Romans 8:1-16).

2. The Spirit’s renewing of creation

But the renewing isn’t over. In fact, there is an amazing aspect still to come: the renewing of creation itself presently spoiled by human sin to the point where it longs for the return of Jesus who will ‘liberate it from its bondage to decay’ along with all who believe (Romans 8:18-27). This assurance of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1) was a hope that kept the early Christians going, despite the opposition they faced. Little wonder, at the end of Revelation, that the Spirit joins the Bride (the church) in together crying to Jesus: ‘Come!’ (Revelation 22:17). And when he does, the final stage of the renewing work of the Spirit will be completed.

Pause for thought:

Fasting is something we can train ourselves in! Start by missing a meal, then move on to fasting for a day, then longer – and don't forget to make time to pray!

3. The Empowering Work of the Spirit

1. His empowering work in the Old Testament

The Old Testament has many examples of God's Spirit empowering people. However, these examples are *few* in number and *limited* in scope. It wasn't Mr. or Mrs. Average who received God's Spirit but only those called to special roles, like leaders (e.g. Numbers 11:24-25; Judges 3:7-11; 1 Samuel 16:13), prophets (e.g. Ezekiel 2:2; Micah 3:8), and priests (e.g. Exodus 29:7; 30:30-32).

And yet the prophets looked forward to a day when Messiah ('the anointed one') would come, who would not only have a full measure of God's Spirit himself (Isaiah 11:1-2; 61:1-3) but who would share that anointing freely with others – ordinary others, like Joel promised (Joel 2:28-29), empowering them for God's work too.

2. His empowering work in Jesus

That's why, at the outset of Jesus' ministry, we find a great outbreak of the Spirit's activity, just like at his birth. At his baptism the Spirit came on him and filled him (Luke 3:21-22). Why? Because having laid aside his divine power to become truly and fully a man, he now needed to utterly depend on God's Spirit. That was why, when he went to the synagogue in Nazareth, he could claim to be fulfilling what Isaiah had prophesied centuries earlier: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Luke 4:18-19; quoting Isaiah 61:1-2).

What followed proved that claim again and again: the blind indeed saw; the deaf heard; the lame walked; the

captive was freed – not by any innate power within Jesus himself (he had left that in heaven), but by his complete obedience to his Father and his utter dependence on the Holy Spirit. It was his Spirit-filledness that led to his acts of power, as Peter told Cornelius (Acts 10:38).

Everything that Jesus did – including the cross and resurrection – was through the power of the Spirit, as both Peter and Paul understood (Romans 1:4; 8:11; 1 Peter 3:18-19).

3. His empowering work in the church

Once back in heaven, Jesus could send the Spirit to his followers like he had promised (John 14:15-18, 25-26; 16:5-16; Acts 1:4-8). What Joel had prophesied long before was suddenly here, as Peter told the Pentecost crowd (Acts 2:14-21). The experience of the Spirit was no longer confined to ‘special’ people; it was for everyone – ‘for you and your children and for all who are far off’ (Acts 2:39). This is what is so amazing about the empowering work of the Spirit: it really is for everyone now!

Pause for thought:

The Spirit’s empowering work is seen throughout the Bible. But is it seen in us? Is it seen in our churches? Or have we settled for something less than we see in the Scriptures as the inheritance of God’s people?

4. The Sanctifying Work of the Spirit

Sanctification isn’t a word we use much nowadays; but what it simply means is: becoming more holy. God doesn’t leave us to our own devices to achieve this, however; he sends a holy person to come and live within us to do his holy work.

That's why Paul could write, 'Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature' (Galatians 5:16).

Of course, this shouldn't surprise us; after all, the Spirit is the *Holy Spirit*. The first Christians began to experience that God's Spirit was no mere *power*, but the *presence* of a holy person within; a holy person who wants us to co-operate with him, listen to his nudges, obey his leadings, hearken to his warnings. That is why Paul describes believers as the temple of the Holy Spirit, both individually (1 Corinthians 6:19) and corporately (1 Corinthians 3:16). This is what the New Testament means by 'the sanctifying work of the Spirit' (e.g. 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). It is as we are led by the Spirit that the old, unclean, unhelpful stuff starts to fall away – some of it quicker than others – and the new stuff, the fruit and mission of the Spirit, begins to grow and replace it (Galatians 5:16-25). It's when we aren't responding to the Spirit's inward nudges that, Paul says, we really grieve him (Ephesians 4:29-32).

Pause for thought:

The Spirit's sanctifying work is seen throughout the Bible. But is it seen in us? Is it seen in our churches? Do we see sanctification as something that is 'old hat'? Have we settled for simply being a slightly 'nicer version' of people around us?

5. The Inspiring Work of the Spirit

To inspire means 'to breathe into'. And here's another key aspect of what God's Spirit (or 'Breath') does; he breathes into us so we know what to say and do and where to go.

In both Old and New Testaments we find many examples of the Spirit inspiring individuals – whether to action (1 Chronicles 12:18), prophecy (Acts 11:27-28), creativity

(Exodus 31:1-6), using his gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), taking certain steps (Acts 13:12), or even knowing which way to go (Acts 8:26-29).

The one aspect of his inspiration that isn't open to us any more, however, is the inspiration to write Scripture, whose 'canon', the church unanimously agreed long ago (and reaffirmed many times since), is now 'closed' because it is 'complete'. The Spirit inspired the Scriptures at a double level: first at the level of *the writers* (2 Peter 1:20-21) and second at the level of *the writings* (2 Timothy 3:16). It is this 'double-inspiration' of Scripture that allows the New Testament writers to interpret passages from the Old Testament in ways that we can't, for we do not have 'Scripture-writing inspiration' available to us today.

Pause for thought:

The Spirit's inspiring work is seen throughout the Bible. But is it seen in us? Is it seen in our churches? Have we become predictable, settling for routines that do not expect him to inspire and surprise anymore?

Questions:

1. Look back over the 'pause for thought' questions at the end of each section in this chapter and seek to answer them at the level of (a) you as an individual, (b) your local church.

Chapter 5

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

In the early days of charismatic renewal, baptism in the Holy Spirit was hugely contentious. People who had this experience were often rejected, or at best frowned upon; some were asked to leave their churches; some pastors lost their jobs; the new ‘house churches’ were seen as full of ‘weirdoes’. By contrast today, it often hardly seems an issue. If that were because every Christian had been filled with the Holy Spirit and were using his gifts, in the church and in the world, it would be wonderful. But perhaps a more realistic appraisal is that, while many parts of the church have embraced this experience of the Spirit, it has also been watered down, to the point where smiling beatifically with gently-raised hands to a modern worship song is ‘it’. We want to suggest it isn’t. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a clear, personal experience, as unmistakable as baptism in water. So if you simply ‘think’ you’ve been baptized in the Holy Spirit, we would suggest that you probably haven’t. But you can be!

And what about new converts? Are we praying for them to be filled with the Holy Spirit when they are saved? Or do we leave that for ‘later’, somehow hoping they will ‘catch it’ along the way? This certainly wasn’t Paul’s approach. In fact when he met some believers who weren’t filled with the Spirit, he asked them, “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*” (Acts 19:2) – an interesting question

since it implies it is possible to be a believer yet be lacking in this experience of the Spirit.

So, let's start by looking at what the Bible says about baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Never Mind the Language

The New Testament uses a variety of language concerning God's giving of the Spirit. For example:

- baptise in the Holy Spirit (7x) e.g., John the Baptist; Acts 1:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13
- Holy Spirit being/coming on people (10x) e.g., Acts 1:8; Luke 4:18
- being filled with the Holy Spirit (OT 3x; NT 10x) e.g., Luke 1:15; Acts 2:2,4; Ephesians 5:18
- full of the Holy Spirit (5x) e.g., Luke 4:1; Acts 6:3; 7:55
- receiving the Holy Spirit (16x) e.g., John 20:22; Acts 2:38; 8:15; Galatians 3:2
- sending the Holy Spirit (5x) e.g., Galatians 4:6; John 14:26

Not to mention: being born of the Spirit, receiving life from the Spirit, the Spirit being put in our hearts, being given the Spirit etc. In other words there is a considerable *variety* of language and a considerable *overlap* of language, suggesting that what is important is not what we *call* this experience but whether we have experienced it or not.

Two Traditional Approaches

Historically there have been two traditional evangelical approaches to baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecostal Approach insists on *two distinct stages* in the Christian life: the first, *conversion*; the second, *baptism in the Spirit*. The Pentecostal evangelist R. A. Torrey described baptism in the Spirit as “an operation of the Holy Spirit *distinct from and subsequent and additional* to His regenerating work...In regeneration there is an impartation of life, and the one who receives it is saved; in the baptism with the Holy Spirit there is an impartation of power, and the one who receives it is fitted for service.”

While this might reflect how things happened in many of our lives, it doesn't hold up to scholarly analysis of the New Testament, certainly not enough for it to be the only model of the Spirit's work. For wherever there was a delay in Acts, it was always for a specific reason: the believers in Samaria had to know they needed the Jerusalem apostles to pray for them, thus breaking the centuries-old Jewish-Samaritan divide (Acts 8:14-17), while Paul needed to know he desperately needed the prayers of the Christians he had been persecuting (Acts 9:1-19).

By contrast the traditional evangelical approach has insisted that there was not, and could not be, two distinct stages to Christian experience. Baptism in the Spirit is conversion, this view holds, for without the Spirit it is impossible to believe and become a child of God. But this position too has its weaknesses, the first of which is that people's experience shows it simply doesn't always happen like that and we aren't always filled with the Spirit when we commit our lives to Jesus. While experience cannot be normative in shaping doctrine, we certainly cannot ignore

it. But from a textual point of view there are significant weaknesses with this position too.

First, the Pentecost event was not about regeneration (new birth), but empowerment (new power), at least according to Jesus (Acts 1:8). Second, to say the disciples knew nothing of the Spirit before Pentecost is to neglect the evidence of the gospels where they did amazing things. Third, Jesus had already ‘breathed [on them]’ in John 20:22 (the Greek text simply says ‘he breathed’ – there’s no ‘on them’), and from the beginning, breath is associated with the Holy Spirit (in both Hebrew and Greek the word for ‘Spirit’ can mean breath or wind). So Jesus was clearly giving them the Spirit there in some way. It cannot be John’s account of Pentecost, for Jesus is still with them. In fact, the word John uses suggests he had something very different from Pentecost in mind. The Greek word for ‘he breathed’ is the same word as in the Greek translation of Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37:9 – that is, where new creation was involved. This would tend to suggest that John was saying that this was when the disciples received their new life, were truly ‘born again’. This fits with what he noted earlier: that the new gift of the Spirit would not be for the *un-regenerate* to regenerate them, but for those who were already regenerate to fill them with life-giving water that would flow out to others (John 7:38-39).

So neither of these approaches is watertight when it comes to unpacking Scripture, though both undoubtedly explain what different Christians have experienced. We therefore propose a third way of understanding baptism in the Holy Spirit.

A Third Way

This third way sees Christian experience as *one event*, but with *four aspects* – a view based on a foundational verse: Acts 2:38.

Maybe you're thinking: 'Why *this* particular verse? Aren't you just cherry-picking to suit your purpose?' Absolutely not! This is a key verse for one fundamental reason: it was the first time anyone had asked: 'How can we experience this Spirit for ourselves?' The crowds gathered for Pentecost (almost certainly in the great courtyard of the Jerusalem Temple, for that was the only place that could hold such a large number) were astonished at what they saw and heard when the Spirit came. Peter, emboldened by the Spirit's baptism, explained that this was nothing to be fearful of but was simply what Joel had prophesied long before: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy...'(Acts 2:15-18).

He then preached about Jesus, crucified, risen, and ascended, saying it was he who had sent this promised experience – the Jesus they had killed. Cut to the heart, the crowd then asked, 'What shall we do?' (v37). In other words, what is the right response to what you are saying, so that we too may experience, not God's judgment that we now see we deserve, but what you yourselves have received: his promised gift of the Spirit?

This is why this verse is key: it is the first time anyone has asked, 'How can we receive the Spirit too?' And Peter's answer was aimed as much for today as then: 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ

for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off— for all whom the Lord our God will call’ (Acts 2:38-39). We are certainly ‘far off’ – in time, geography and ethnicity – so that promise certainly includes us. And it is a promise that has four key aspects.

Four Key Aspects

Look at verse 38 again and you will see Peter mentions four key things:

- repentance – recognising we are in the wrong and turning to God in faith;
- baptism – immersion in water to express the death of our old life and resurrection to a new life in Jesus by identifying with him;
- assurance of forgiveness – knowing through the Spirit that we are absolutely forgiven and are now God’s children;
- the gift of the Holy Spirit – the filling of the life-giving Spirit that Jesus promised to those who believe.

None of these four aspects is sufficient on its own; *all four are needed to complete the Christian experience*. To use an illustration: these four aspects are like four strands of cord twisted round each other to make a rope. Can you separate the strands of the rope? Of course you can. But it is the fact of the strands being intertwined that makes the rope what it is and that gives it its strength. So it is with Christian experience. The *four aspects* of Acts 2:38 (repentance, baptism, assurance of forgiveness, and receiving the Holy

Spirit) are *together* what makes someone a Christian. And without any one of these aspects, yes, we are incomplete.

However, these four aspects may not always happen in the same way or same order –compare Acts 2:38 with Acts 10:44-48 for example; but *all four are needed* for our Christian experience to be complete and strong. That is why, whenever the first Christians found someone who wasn't baptised in the Holy Spirit, they took immediate steps to pray for them to receive this gift and so complete their Christian experience (e.g. Acts 8:12-17; 9:17-19; 19:1-7).

Pause for thought:

Do you know these four aspects firmly in place in your own life? If not, there is still something incomplete about your experience of Jesus.

To evangelists and mentors: have you been holding back from any of these four aspects in the gospel you share with others?

To church leaders: are you regularly offering prayer for people to be filled with the Holy Spirit as a normal part of life, not just reserving it for occasions when special visiting speakers come?

Signs of the Spirit's Baptism

People often ask, 'How do I *know* when I have been baptised in the Holy Spirit?' The answer is simple: *there will be change!* Because baptism in the Spirit is about receiving the presence and power of God that leads to change, just like Jesus promised (Acts 1:8). Although this 'change' is often expressed in different ways in different people, some of the more common include:

- knowing God in a closer way

- having greater assurance of salvation
- finding prayer easier
- experiencing increased spiritual sensitivity
- knowing new power in life
- discovering more victory over sin
- receiving gifts of the Spirit
- finding the Bible coming ‘alive’
- experiencing more joy
- becoming aware of ‘spiritual warfare’
- experiencing new boldness in sharing Jesus with others

The list is probably endless! But there was one gift that seemed to appear repeatedly in the New Testament – speaking in tongues.

Speaking in Tongues

One consistent sign in Acts was that those who received the Spirit also spoke in tongues. In fact, on every occasion but two, speaking in tongues is specifically mentioned.

In the first example where tongues *isn't* mentioned (Acts 8:14-25), it is nevertheless clear that *something* happened – something observable, tangible, shocking. For we read, ‘When Simon saw that the Spirit was given...’ (Acts 8:18). What did he see? We have no idea! But whatever it was, it was powerful enough to shock a former sorcerer. While it cannot be proved that these people spoke in tongues, the fact that tongues is mentioned on other occasions of the giving of the Spirit in Acts must at the very least make speaking in tongues a very high contender here.

The second example where speaking in tongues isn't specifically mentioned is when Paul received the Spirit (Acts 9:17-19). However later Paul makes it abundantly clear that he spoke in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:8). Did it happen in Acts 9? We simply don't know. But again the repeated mention of it elsewhere as a normal sign of the Spirit's coming would tend to suggest it did.

What Is Tongues?

First, let's make clear what speaking in tongues *isn't*: it isn't 'gibberish' or, as many commentaries explain it, 'ecstatic utterance'. There is no hint in the New Testament of any element of ecstasy. (If you're doubtful, just look at someone speaking in tongues; they really do look quite normal!) Nor is it something 'made up'. Rather 'tongues' is *a real language*, but one the user hasn't learned (in the way we might learn a foreign language); it has simply been given them by the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes tongues as the Spirit himself praying with us and for us 'with groans that words cannot express' (Romans 8:26) – literally 'with spoken groanings that are not articulate'. Elsewhere he explains that, 'if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful' (1 Corinthians 14:14). In other words, when we speak in tongues the Spirit bypasses the normal rational processes of the brain that rapidly works out what we want to say and then tells our mouth and vocal chords to say it. The Holy Spirit links straight to our human spirit and together (for the Spirit gives the words but it is us who must speak them out) we speak the words that have formed.

One of the members of our Oxford church had a massive stroke some years ago, leaving him paralysed down one side and without speech. Over the years he has made a

remarkable fight-back, and has learned to say some words again. But here is the amazing thing (well, his consultant thought so anyway): he can speak fluently in tongues. In fact, he's always been able to speak in tongues, even from the earliest days of recovery. But the bit of his brain that produces speech doesn't work! So where on earth can this come from? Only from his spirit.

We have both found tongues incredibly useful (and we don't mind using the word 'useful' for, after all, the gifts of the Spirit are his tools to help us do the Father's work). This gift helps us –

- *to communicate 'spirit to spirit' with our heavenly Father, without having to worry about getting the words right or even knowing exactly what we're praying about (e.g. Romans 8:26-27; 1 Corinthians 14:2). When we don't know what to pray, we simply pray in tongues.*
- *to build ourselves up spiritually (e.g. 1 Corinthians 14:4). This has been our own experience many times, for the Holy Spirit 'energises' our spirit when we use the prayer language he has given us.*
- *to worship God. When the crowd heard the disciples speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost, it wasn't (as is often, but wrongly, interpreted) for evangelistic purposes. The crowd didn't hear them preaching the gospel but 'declaring the wonders of God' (Acts 2:11). Tongues helps us worship.*

Tongues can be 'of men and of angels' (1 Corinthians 13:1) – that is, either *a human language* (one that someone who speaks that language would recognise, as at Pentecost, Acts 2:11) or *a spiritual language* (one that belongs to the heavenly realms and that therefore no one on earth can

understand, unless the Spirit gives the interpretation – 1 Corinthians 12:10). While the first of these is less common, Mary Norridge (part of our team in Oxfordshire) discovered she was doing this when she spoke in a tongue in a church in Mumbai, India, and the tongue was recognised by two non-Christian Iranian visitors as an ancient Persian dialect!

Does God Want Everyone to Speak In Tongues?

Our short answer is ‘Yes!’ – not because it makes you a ‘better’ Christian, but because it is God’s gift to help us praise and pray. Why would he want some of us to be able to do that more easily than others? As we have seen, in arguably every case in the New Testament (with one possible, though unlikely, exception) people who were baptised in the Spirit also spoke in tongues. Why should it be any different today?

If you ask, ‘Are you saying I *must* I speak in tongues?’ (a question that seems to liken speaking in tongues to a nasty dose of medicine that God wants to force down our throats), then our answer is ‘Of course not!’ God never forces his gifts on anyone! But we would ask: why would anyone not want to receive a gift that God makes available to his children? So, *must* I speak in tongues? – NO! But *may* I speak in tongues? – YES!

But doesn’t Paul say in 1 Corinthians 12:30 that he *doesn’t* expect everyone to speak in tongues? Yes! BUT only in the *context* in which he says that! And the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is using the Spirit’s gifts *within a church gathering* to build one another up – that is, a *public use of tongues*. Later in the same letter, he says he wants all Christians to be able to use this gift (14:5). Since he is unlikely to have forgotten what he had just written, it

seems clear he is now referring to *private use of tongues* (in one's own praying). In other words, Paul says that while not everyone will have the gift of *bringing a public tongue* in a church gathering, everyone can have the gift of *bringing a personal prayer* to God in tongues, whether alone or alongside others.

The River Flows Out

This chapter could seem very inward-looking; and it some ways it has to be, for it is from 'within' that the Spirit's work begins. But it's not where it ends! For while baptism in the Holy Spirit is most certainly a *personal* experience, it isn't meant to be a *private* experience. Baptism in the Spirit is meant to *flow outwards*. When Jesus described what experiencing the Holy Spirit would be like, he said 'streams of living water will flow from within' (John 7:38) – streams that are meant to flow out to bless others, just like the river in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 47). This is where the Spirit wants to take us: not into ever-more navel-gazing in cosy meetings, but out into a needy world where he can truly make a difference. That's what the baptism in the Holy Spirit is intended for!

Nowhere does Jesus make this clearer than in his final words to his disciples. Having told them to await the coming baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), he added, 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). For Jesus the coming of the Spirit was clearly linked with his sending the disciples into the mission field. And even the very day on which the Spirit came – Pentecost – underlined this message, for Pentecost was a Jewish festival celebrating the

harvest. The Spirit was sent to bring in the harvest – and it began that day with 3000 people responding to the message.

Help in Getting Started

So how do we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, or help others to receive it? Here are four simple steps we have found helpful:

1. Believe!

The first step to receiving anything from God is to *believe* that he made a promise and that this promise is *for me*. John 7:37-39 is a good promise to begin with.

2. Ask!

Vaguely reflecting on God's promises doesn't get us anywhere; we have to ask, like Jesus encouraged us to (Luke 11:9-13). Just tell him how hungry you are for his Spirit!

3. Receive!

Don't try to 'make something happen'. Simply receive from Jesus (John 20:21-22). You don't have to keep calling out to him to do it, or keep repeating his name; just relax – and receive! It's often helpful to have someone pray with you and lay hands on you. You may feel something physical (heat, breath, tingling, trembling, falling over, a quiet presence); but ultimately it's not about what you feel or don't feel; it is about surrendering your life to him and receiving his power within.

4. Speak!

As we have sought to show, speaking in tongues is a normal overflow of baptism in the Spirit. So seek to step out with this new gift. Don't let your mind get in the way. *Simply speak out whatever words come into your mind.* Remember: nothing is going to 'take you over'; words aren't going to tumble out of your mouth like vomit. The Spirit puts words within your mind for *you* to speak out in faith, just as in Acts 2:4, which tells us that "*they* began to speak as *the Spirit enabled them.*" Step out and speak out – no matter how strange the words might sound or how few they might be!

And what if you've been prayed for, but 'nothing happened'? We understand this can be very frustrating! But what do you do in other areas of life when you pray and nothing happens? You pray again – and again – and again – until you have an answer. So, don't give up! Remember Jesus' promise: 'If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him' (Luke 11:13).

Questions:

1. Consider the four strands of the rope in our illustration (page 42). In which order did these four aspects of Christian initiation happen in your own life? If any is lacking, what might God be saying to you?
2. What would you say to someone who says that baptism in the Holy Spirit is simply another way of talking about 'conversion' or 'new birth'?
3. Do you speak in tongues? If yes, then are you using this gift regularly? If not, why do you think that might be?

Chapter 6

The Spirit's Gifts of Healing

The BBC promoted the last Sunday of a recent Premier Football season as 'the survival of the fittest'. Millions of pounds were at stake as three teams from the Premier Division faced dropping into the Championship Division below. It all depended on the results of the very last matches on the very last Sunday of the season. The BBC took up imagery from Darwin's theory of evolution, with dramatic pictures of how only the fittest survive. As Roger was watching this, he felt God say, 'That's not how I treat people.' And into his mind came words through Isaiah, picked up by Jesus: *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out (Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:20).*

Jesus was saying that people knocked around by life, who were bruised and damaged, would not be broken by him. Those whose life experience had almost extinguished their flame would not be put out by him, as one might put out an old smouldering wick. Rather, he revealed a healing, restoring God who loves to be known as 'the LORD who heals you' (Exodus 15:26). In the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus picked up another of Isaiah's prophecy, claiming it for himself:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners*

*and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” (Luke 4:18-19)*

He was coming to release people held captive by hurts, habits and hang ups as well as those imprisoned by the oppression of others.

While most Christians accept that Jesus did this, we see remarkably little today of those healing miracles we read about in the gospels, the book of Acts or early church history. So how can we experience more, not just for our sake but to impact the world we live in?

Hunger for Healing

Roger did not grasp God's healing power until he was baptised in the Holy Spirit. Someone had lent him a series of tapes by David Pawson on Mark's Gospel where David talked about Jesus' healing miracles and challenged his listeners that this should be happening today. Roger was fascinated that someone with such a grasp of the Bible was concerned that healing wasn't happening today as it should be. It provoked in him a hunger to see the power of God at work.

It wasn't long before he got the opportunity to attend a conference where it was said there would be healings and miracles, including sight being restored and those in wheel-chairs walking home. He was shocked by the arrogance of these claims, but was so hungry to see a miracle that he went anyway. The speaker talked about Jesus being the same yesterday, today, and forever, and said that the miracles Jesus did while here on earth were what he still wanted to do today. And then he shared some 'words of knowledge'.

‘There is someone here with an injury to the back and leg. It happened in an accident when you were in a white van. Who is that?’

A man put up his hand and was invited forward. As he hobbled to the front, it was clear he had severe back trouble and his leg was crooked. The speaker said they were going to pray and that God was going to heal the man’s leg and back. He then spoke out what seemed more of a command than a prayer. ‘In the name of Jesus, back, be healed! In the name of Jesus, leg, be straightened!’

A few seconds passed, and then his leg began to grow and untwist in front of everyone. People were shocked and gasped almost in unison. Then the speaker said, ‘Don’t worry, it’s only God doing a miracle!’ At that point Roger had to make a decision: this was either a con-trick, or it was God doing a miracle before his very eyes. He made a decision to believe it was God and as he did do, chains of unbelief fell off his chest, setting in him a new determination to pray for people in the same way.

Lessons Learned

Roger learned a number of things from this experience that he shares below.

1. Clear, short, specific prayer is effective

When I pray for healing for people’s backs, I often sit them on a chair and put their legs together, holding them out in front of them. You can often see a difference in the length of the legs due to tightening of muscles on one side of the back or vertebrae that are out of line. I often ask someone to pray with me and get them to pray a simple prayer after me. ‘In Jesus’ name, I speak healing to this back...’ Quite often the leg begins to straighten and lengthen even before

they have finished praying. They are usually shocked by how quickly their prayer is answered! It is not long elequent prayers that count, but faith along with clear authoritative prayer that is effective.

2. Learning to pray with authority

When I started to pray for people, it was in a very begging way. 'Please Lord, would you heal this lovely, helpful person who deserves your help and kindness...' But God isn't interested in our bargaining. In fact, Jesus never prayed for the sick. He only commanded disease and demons to go and healing to come, or told the person to get up or stretch out their withered limb. So I have tried to learn to receive and walk in the authority that Jesus has given us in his name, to do the same by the power of the Spirit.

I was once asked to speak at a church anniversary service where I was told that there would be 30-40 people present whose average age would be well over 60. I was also asked to pray for any who needed healing. I spoke enthusiastically and finished with some words of knowledge, but was dissapointed when only two people responded. The second man, aged over 70, showed me his newly-acquired white stick and said, 'Try some of this healing prayer stuff on me, because on my last visit to the eye hospital they said I had completely lost my sight and they don't know why.' I thought, 'I've got to pray with authority for the spirit of blindness to go and sight to come back to his eyes.' So I prayed as if Jesus was standing in front of him and I was his representative. I felt nothing spectacular and saw no immediate results. But three months later I was speaking in the same town to a different group of people and noticed that the man I had prayed for was there. 'Roger,' he said, 'Do you notice anything?' 'Yes,' I replied. 'You have no

white stick and you can see.' 'Yes,' he said. 'When I got home that evening you prayed for me, my sight began to return and has improved ever since.' He gladly gave his testimony in the meeting and everyone applauded.

3. Praying with faith

Hebrews says that, 'Without faith it is impossible to please God' (11:6). Faith needs to be present for healing to take place. It isn't always the faith of the person being healed that matters though. Those who lowered the crippled man through the roof were commended for *their* faith by Jesus. Often it is the person praying for the sick person who needs faith.

I once went to a house group and shared a word that someone had a back injury which affected the left leg. A girl responded but said she had no faith at all for healing. I said, 'Don't worry. I do! Can I pray for you?' She agreed and felt the pain go immediately. 'Bother!' she said, for she was trying to avoid God at that time and avoid facing some things in her life; but this encounter with God encouraged her to face them.

Leaders can encourage an atmosphere of faith. Whenever I visit a group led by Richard Colbrook, for example, there are almost always some special healings. I believe this is because he is so expectant and really believes things are going to happen. He once invited me to talk on healing to a group of youth who played football together. Over pizza and Coke I gave a short talk and then offered prayer before they went off to play their 6-a-side game. I told several stories illustrating God's readiness to heal and gave five words of knowledge I had received before the meeting – specific words about back trouble, a knee difficulty, shoulder and neck pain. I asked who had these

difficulties. There were only six people there, but the five with difficulties put up their hands. I explained that we often see what is happening to backs or necks if we hold limbs out in front of us and pray for correction where things are out of place. As I prayed for the first teenager, his legs moved out as the vertebrae in his back came into alignment. It was interesting to watch the faces of the others who responded with their favourite phrase, 'Su-perb!' As the next guy was prayed for, his arms grew out as healing came to his neck and shoulders, and again the guys responded with a 'Su-perb!' We prayed for the next guy's knee problem and he described warmth coming to his knee as we laid hands on it. 'Su-perb!'

Richard always combines these times when God heals people with an opportunity for salvation. 'You've seen God moving in supernatural healing and, yes, its 'su-perb'; but he's doing this for a reason. It's so you can know him and have a personal relationship with him. So who wants to pray a prayer with me so you can know him tonight?' Four of the five put up their hands, and over the next week the fifth guy returned to become a believer too. Richard has repeated this pattern on a number of occasions. One evening a young guy came who was particularly cynical about both Christians and healing. I had a word that someone had a rash around their chest and under the armpit. He looked under his football shirt to check the location of his rash. Sure enough, it was on his chest and under his armpit. He agreed (reluctantly!) to be prayed for, though was clear nothing was likely to happen. Ten minutes later he checked again and told everyone it had gone. He went white, needing to sit down and take it all in. A week later he contacted Richard, wanting to know how he could become a Christian.

Faith is crucial if healing is to take place. It could be the faith of the person asking for prayer, the faith of those helping at the event, or the faith of the person praying; but faith releases the Spirit of God to work. It is not faith in 'faith', but faith in the ability and desire of Jesus to heal.

4. Healing goes on happening after you finish praying

I often think people give up too quickly after being prayed for. Healing will often begin as we are prayed for and then continue afterwards. Jesus once prayed for a blind man who only got partial recovery of sight at first. People still looked like trees to him. So Jesus prayed for him again, and it was only then that he could see fully. On another occasion he prayed for ten lepers; but while he announced their healing, it was only as they went away that they were healed.

I once went to a pensioner's club meeting where I had been asked to speak on healing. At the end a number of people responded and were prayed for. This encouraged the club leader himself to ask for prayer. He had shattered his hip in a car crash and now could only walk short distances, using a stick and a three inch built-up shoe. As we put his legs together and prayed for his hip to twist back into line, we watched his leg move – but only one inch instead of the three inches needed. I encouraged him to pray again that night as he went to bed. So he prayed, 'Lord, when Roger prayed for me, my leg moved one inch. Can you do the rest?' As he prayed these words, he felt his leg moving on its own. Then he fell asleep. When he awoke the next morning, he got up dressed and did his usual quarter of a mile walk, feeling invigorated and not needing his stick. After his usual distance, he decided to do more, and finished up walking three miles. When he saw me some

weeks later, he explained what had happened and showed how he could walk without a limp. But he told me he now had a problem: he had to spend a lot of money on new shoes without a three inch build-up on one side!

Here was another example of healing continuing after the first prayer had been offered. So while it is very exciting if healing is immediate, it is good to encourage people to continue to expect healing and see what may happen over the next few hours or days.

5. Healing will often lead to a relationship with God

When people who are not yet believers see God's power at work in a healing miracle, it opens up the possibility of a new relationship with Jesus. Many people often need to either have an encounter with God's Spirit themselves, or to see others doing so, before they can believe themselves.

I was once asked to do a lesson on miracles in a local school. The teacher had heard that I believed in miracles and claimed to have seen people healed, and he thought it would be more interesting for his pupils to hear this rather than the usual 'miracles don't happen today' approach. I began with some up-to-date stories of healings and a class which had started out very uninterested suddenly began to liven up.

One girl asked me to pray for her shoulder which had been injured so that she couldn't raise her arm, despite lots of treatment. I said I couldn't do that in the lesson, whereupon she began to cry. So the teacher said that anyone who wanted to stay on during break could receive prayer if they wanted. I expected only one or two to hang around, but the majority stayed, and those that did leave only went to get their friends. I asked the girl to stretch out her hands and put them together in front of her. Sure

enough they were a different length, and by at least 5 inches. Inside I was saying, 'Help Lord! If nothing happens, we're going to look stupid.' But I simply spoke a few authoritative words of healing. 'Shoulder, be healed in the name of Jesus, and back come into alignment.' A few seconds passed. I call this 'waiting faith'. It is the opposite of panic. To the amazement of the students, her arm began to extend little by little in short bursts as she cried in amazement at what was happening. 'That's amazing!' 'That's weird!' 'That's wicked!' they started to say. Then one of them said, 'It's a con-trick'. But another said, 'No, it's not. I can feel it!' And then he sank to the floor, overcome by the Spirit's presence and power. Some were crying, others were stunned; and with new confidence I and the team I had taken offered more prayer. In the midst of all this, one student came up and asked, 'Can you pray that my sins will be forgiven?' We hadn't even mentioned sin or the need for forgiveness; but this girl had been overcome with feelings of the wrong in her life and wanted to be forgiven. We were able to pray for her and saw her at church some weeks later. I went back to that school on many occasions to take RE lessons and assemblies and a number of other students made clear responses to Jesus.

On many occasions we have been able to lead people to a commitment to Jesus once they have been healed or watched someone else being healed. Healing often has a purpose beyond just healing and draws us into relationship with the Healer, Jesus himself.

6. Testimonies of healing stir faith in others

I once witnessed the healing of a lady from cancer in a meeting led by Ian Andrews. I watched as, on the first night, she made a commitment to Jesus, and then on the second

night received healing. She was in a wheelchair and as she was healed, her face changed colour, going from pale white to glowing red. Strength returned to her body and she walked to the front of the meeting to tell everyone what had happened. It had a great impact on me and planted in me a conviction that God can and wants to heal cancer and that the 'C' word does not need to be a death sentence over people.

Some time later I was invited to Poland to speak and pray at a number of churches. One evening I saw a picture of a black dot on a lady's chest and the word 'cancer' printed over it. We asked if anyone was there with this condition and an older lady who had been invited for the first time put up her hand. The whole group placed their hands on her and prayed for her together. A week later we were told that, although due for an operation to remove the cancer, she had been sent home because it had gone. As a result of her healing she became a believer.

Hearing the testimonies of others stirs faith, both for us who are praying and for those who have similar conditions.

7. Learning to pray in unusual settings

We often find it easier to pray for people in our own church meetings, but we need to be open to praying in other settings too.

I arrived at the garage one Monday to have my car serviced, only to find the owner holding his back and asking if I knew anyone who could fix backs. I wasn't really ready for this question but told him how we prayed for people regularly at church and said I was happy to have a go with him. He thought it was unusual but said, 'I've got nothing to lose and I'm in such pain that anything is worth a try.' So I sat him in a chair in his office, surrounded by the usual

'adult' garage calendars, and measured his legs while holding onto his heavy metal-capped boots. Sure enough, they were well out of line. So I prayed what I normally do. 'Back, be healed and pain be gone in the name of Jesus.' I watched with delight as his leg moved and the boots lined up at the right length. I set them down on the ground again and said, 'Try that'. He stood up straight, exclaiming, 'I don't believe it.' I asked if there was any improvement and again he said, 'I don't believe it!' Even when I said I would return for my car at lunchtime, his response was just, 'I don't believe it.' When I returned later and asked how he was, he replied, 'I haven't felt this good for months. I feel I could jump over the garage roof, my back is so good.' This experience opened the way for me to talk about who was behind this healing and why God was interested in him. Whenever I had my car serviced or repaired thereafter, we would talk about what it meant to know Jesus. It was an unusual setting in which to pray for someone, but God's Spirit was very much present.

Over the years I have prayed for people unknown to me at airports, on planes, in hotels and on the streets. It is so important not to 'switch off' and feel we are only available to the Spirit at certain times and places.

8. Learning from others without copying their style

Over the years our churches in Oxfordshire have often invited speakers who have faith to pray for healing for people. In both training sessions and meetings the impact has been powerful, and it is great to see people begin to speak out words of healing for the first time. It's as if our faith rides on the faith of the ministry invited in.

However, there can be a danger we need to be aware of. While we can learn from others, it is very easy to pick up

the way they pray or speak in the way they do, in an attempt to achieve their results. For example, John Wimber (the founder of the Vineyard Churches) would pray for people with one hand close to their body, but without actually touching them, his hand often shaking as the Spirit moved. Many of those travelling with him prayed in exactly the same way, and others in the UK quickly picked up this manner of praying. What they were unaware of was that this technique of praying for people was developed in California where temperatures are very high during the summer so as not to put sweaty hands on people and leave a mark on their clothing! In the UK, with our temperatures, there really is no need to pray this way! And it is all too easy to shake our hand for effect.

The importance of not copying others came home to me some years ago after a visit from Ian Andrews. Ian often prays for people in a quiet tone of voice and then suddenly raises his voice sharply as he releases people from whatever is blocking their healing. I picked up this practice and tried it out at a meeting for older people where I shared some words of knowledge. One of the words was for angina (I didn't even know what that was at that time!) and a lady responded. She had lost her husband three years earlier and had never really recovered her joy, so I felt I should release her from the wrong grief that had remained on her like a cloud of death and speak healing into her heart. So I copied the way Ian prayed, starting quietly and then raising my voice sharply as I released her from the cloud of death. She immediately slumped in her chair and we thought she had died on the spot. I didn't know what to do, not being accustomed at that time to people passing out while being prayed for. I went through internal panic, but after a few moments she recovered and to everyone's relief blurted

out, 'I do feel better.' My response was, 'And so do I!' While this story turned out well, I realised my foolishness and learned an important lesson that night: not to copy the way others pray but to use the principles they have learned and then pray in a way appropriate to us.

Helping people through blockages

I have never heard anyone give a thoroughly convincing explanation as to why some people don't get healed after prayer. The true answer is, we just don't know! But we shouldn't use this as an excuse not to pray for healing, nor give up out of disappointment. Here are some of the reasons why people sometimes don't get healed. The aim in sharing them is to encourage you into re-engaging in healing prayer again.

Ignorance of God's word

Many believe that God wants them to be sick, as suffering produces character. But this negates the word of God and keeps people from an expectation that God wants to heal them. The Scriptures encourage us to pray for and expect healing (James 5:14-16).

Unbelief

'He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith' (Mark 6:5-6). The unbelief can be that of the person praying as much as that of the one receiving prayer. But for non-Christians, even just agreeing to receive prayer can be the release of faith that brings healing.

Unforgiveness

People who hold on to bitterness and unforgiveness will find it hard to receive healing. We have to decide to forgive, allowing our emotions to catch up later (e.g. Mark 11:25-26).

Lethargy

Sometimes healing has to be taken hold of. The psalms are full of phrases about seeking after God diligently or crying out to him (e.g. Psalm 107:19-20).

Pride

‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’ (James 4:6). We may need to admit our need of God and humble ourselves before he heals us.

Lack of persistence

Many give up being prayed for after one attempt. But we often need to persevere to see healing and take hold of Jesus’ words, ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened’ (Matthew 7:7).

Unconfessed sin

While we must not assume there is sin every time people aren’t healed, we do at least have to consider it. David said, ‘When I kept silent [about my sin] my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long’ (Psalm 32:3). Simply confessing our sin can open the door to the healing power of God.

Rejection of the Holy Spirit's work

Sometimes human tradition keeps some from receiving the agent of healing, the Holy Spirit. Some are frightened of him and this will short-circuit God's power as he begins to move. Learn to receive him, and his healing power.

Occult involvement

Many have been trapped by involvement in popularized witchcraft. This may include going to fortune tellers, using Ouija boards or using other forms of 'new age' healing. Every such connection needs to be cut off for freedom and healing to come.

A demonic hold

This often needs the gift of discernment. Jesus prayed for a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for 18 years. She was bent over and could not raise herself up. When he loosed her from the demon, she immediately straightened up (Luke 13:11-13). I have found that a spirit of fear or infirmity will sometimes come at a time of trauma or even hospitalization. Healing will often follow once the demonic hold is broken in the name of Jesus.

The presence of a family curse

I remember praying for a lady who had arthritis in her hands. She told us that both her mother and grandmother had the same problems so we broke the family curse of arthritis in the name of Jesus. She felt immediate release and at the same time another lady in the room fell off her chair as she too got free from a family curse of arthritis. The curse can be broken as a result of what Jesus did on the cross for us (Galatians 3:13-14).

Negative confessions

I will often pray with people who immediately go into great detail about their problem or sickness and how it has been with them for so long. This can be a real hindrance to faith and healing. Others will speak of how they hate their body or their height. Getting them to thank God for how he made them releases the Spirit to flow in with healing.

God will often highlight one of these obstacles to healing as we pray for someone and it can be immediately dealt with. It is also true that many have been healed despite having some of these obstacles. The obstacles can always be dealt with at a later date. We don't need to be too extreme or confrontational about them. God is generally far more gracious than us!

Questions:

1. What have you personally found helpful when praying for others to be healed?
2. 'If someone isn't healed, it's either because of unbelief or sin in their life.' How would you answer this statement (think biblically!)?
3. Have you had disappointments in praying for healing? How can you ensure that these disappointments do not rob you or your church of faith to keep praying for the sick?

Chapter 7

The Spirit's Gifts of Revelation

As Roger tried to step out onto the glass of the CN tower in Toronto, his stomach tensed up and he heaved inside as he realised he couldn't do it. He tried again, but the feeling that he would fall through the glass onto the street below made him draw back again. Others were walking on the glass happily, so he closed his eyes and gave himself a good talking to. 'Roger, thousands of people have walked on this glass safely before you. It has been tested under extreme conditions and has been proved safe. In fact the concrete floor you are standing on is probably less safe. You can do this.' And so, with eyes closed, he stepped onto the glass and slowly opened his eyes. Although inside his stomach was still churning, he looked down at the little dots that were people on the streets below. He had never experienced anything like it. Soon he was excitedly helping others onto the glass, getting them to approach it just like he had done. It was now just such fun! And then he felt God speak to him. 'I want you to help people step out into the supernatural realm just like you helped others walk out on the glass.'

Three Revelatory Gifts

In his list of gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 Paul notes three 'revelatory gifts': the word of wisdom, the word

of knowledge, and prophecy. It is often hard to distinguish where these manifestations begin and end, for they often overlap, and they are often released by, or release, other gifts too. Here Roger shares how he grew in his understanding and use of these gifts.

1. The word of knowledge

I first learnt to use ‘the word of knowledge’ many years ago at Cote Baptist Church where its then assistant pastor David Freeman often stepped out in this gift. He would say things like, ‘There’s someone here with soreness around the throat that has been lingering for more than two weeks.’ We would wait until someone put up their hand and then we would pray for them. Sometimes they would be healed immediately, at other times it would be later that week that things improved. It was clear that the specific word of knowledge had raised faith for them, first to receive prayer and then to receive healing.

I remember asking David how he received these words, and he explained that they came either as words, pictures, impressions, or as ‘sympathetic pains’. The following week I asked God to give me a word of knowledge, but nothing came. The following week I tried again, and this time I got a tight feeling around my throat and had the impression that ‘three weeks’ was somehow significant. I shared the word and had the delight of a lady responding and coming forward for prayer. I failed terribly when it came to praying for her however. I tensed up under the pressure, feeling that if my prayer wasn’t good enough she might not get healed and would leave disillusioned with the gifts of the Spirit, and with my attempts at praying. But David was on hand to bring a more relaxed approach and prayed a simple prayer of faith. I was never sure of the final outcome but I

certainly learned that it was simply our job to pray and the Holy Spirit's job to do the healing.

Of course, words of knowledge aren't just about healing. They can be used whenever God provides information about someone that couldn't be known by human means (at least by the one who gives the word). They might be about someone's circumstances, past, hopes, fears, or plans. They can be powerful at opening up unbelievers to the reality of God and his knowledge of and care for them.

2. Prophecy

Prophecy works in a similar way. Paul says '*you can all prophesy*' (1 Corinthians 14:31) – it is a gift that we are given for our '*strengthening, encouragement and comfort*' (1 Corinthians 14:3). God is a speaking God who wants to speak into the lives of people around us, unbelievers as well as believers. I was with a group from Manchester that wanted to grow in prophecy and we went to the airport to see if God would give them any prophetic words for people there. One of the girls got a distinct impression that she should buy a gift for one of the checkout girls and give it to her with a word of encouragement. It was clear she was quite sad, so during a slack time the team member went to her and said, 'You spend all day helping people buy gifts for others but no one buys anything for you. But God wants you to know that you are precious to him and he wants you to have this rose plant as a little token of how he feels about you.' The girl immediately filled up with tears and the team member was able to pray for her.

That was a brave step to take for the team member, but it helped the checkout girl get a different view of God. It started with something really simple: the team member receiving just a little phrase in her mind from the Holy

Spirit, a simple sentence: 'You are precious to God'. She watched people for some time and finally felt that it was the checkout girl that this word was intended for. Stepping out was risky – but it worked! We will not always get it right; but great encouragement comes when we respond to the Holy Spirit and a simple word of encouragement can open people's attitude to the gospel.

3. The word of wisdom

Words of wisdom often come as we listen to the Holy Spirit in counselling situations. Once, at the end of a very full Sunday preaching away from home, a girl asked to speak to my wife Di and me. To be honest, I didn't really want to spend a long session looking into why she had become low and felt God was distant, as we had a long drive home. However I agreed to pray and I asked that that God would lift this cloud from her; but I couldn't continue praying because the word 'Gloucester' kept coming to my mind and I just couldn't get rid of it. So I stopped and asked, 'Does the word 'Gloucester' mean anything to you, as that's all I can think of?' She immediately began to sob. 'Oh I knew I had to. I was trying to resist it,' she said. She had felt that God wanted her to be part of a church-plant there but had begun a friendship with a man in her home church who wasn't a Christian and so didn't want to move away. We encouraged her that, although it might initially be nice to have someone take an interest in her, this wasn't God's best for her and she needed to respond to God's direction and take the step of obedience God was calling her to. We encouraged her to pray and the cloud immediately lifted. She soon moved to Gloucester and in due course married a lovely Christian guy and now has a lovely family. Was this a word of knowledge or a word of wisdom? Either way, a

simple word from God at a tricky time in someone's life could change the course of their life for good.

Words of wisdom can also help solve tricky situations or break log-jams of thinking, like when James shared his word of wisdom on the best way forward for Jewish and Gentile Christians to live together more harmoniously in the early church (Acts 15:12-21). While such words can be extremely useful within our church community, don't shut the door to receiving them out in the world, such as your workplace.

How Revelatory Words Come

Revelatory words can come in a number of different ways.

1. Pictures

The Holy Spirit will often put a picture in our thoughts that links to a person's situation. I have often had a picture of a bodily organ that links to someone needing healing in that area. A picture may also be the beginning of a prophetic word as the Holy Spirit gives a link with something he wants to do in someone's life. I once got a picture of fists held by chains and felt that God wanted to release people from spiritual and behavioural holds over their lives so they could be free to worship him freely. The meeting leader then brought more understanding of what those spiritual chains were and several people received prayer and were released.

2. Words

Often the Holy Spirit will give us a word or sentence that is just the beginning of a prophecy or word of knowledge. On one occasion in July I was walking in Scotland with Bryn Franklin, one of our leading prophets. Someone mentioned

that it was 'warm rain' falling on us. Bryn felt the Holy Spirit change that phrase to 'cold rain'. Later, in a young men's meeting, Bryn pointed out one of the young men and said that the words 'cold rain' were significant to him and that God was aware that what he had been part of had been scattered. The prophecy then gave encouraging words about what God planned to do in his life. The young man immediately responded, telling everyone that indeed 'cold rain' was important to him. He lived in 'Coleraine' in Northern Ireland and the fellowship he had been part of had been disbanded a few weeks earlier. He was very encouraged as Bryn outlined the way God knew all about his life and the plans he had to use him.

3. Impressions

These differ from words or pictures because they are more general. I had been asked to take a session on prayer at a Christian school lunch time meeting and only five young guys were present. I wanted to illustrate how God loved to answer specific prayer and wanted a quick illustration. The idea of asthma came into my mind. It wasn't a single word or a chest pain, more of a general idea; so I asked if any of them suffered from this condition. I was shocked when all five put up their hands. We then prayed for three of them who wanted prayer. Two of them immediately felt warmth running through their chests and an easing of the tightness. Often the Holy Spirit will help us with our illustrations and examples in our talks because someone listening has the very same situation or condition that we mentioned. These fleeting impressions can often be words of knowledge or wisdom so don't ignore them.

4. Dreams

I have sometimes been woken during the night by a dream that I used in a meeting the next day. I had been asked to take a pastoral training day and had a vivid dream during the night that I was in a boat that was taking on water and eventually sank. I woke very relieved that it was only a dream! I prayed and felt it would be relevant later that day. In the final session I described my dream and said I felt that a close relative of someone had recently drowned and God wanted to help that person through their pain. One lady immediately responded, sharing how she couldn't get over the death of her father who had died in a boating accident (something her church knew nothing about). Others gathered around her and prayed for her as she faced the reality of her situation and the pain she felt. There was no quick fix but she was greatly helped by knowing that God 'knew' and by others supporting her in prayer through the process.

5. Visions

On a number of occasions I have received what I call 'open visions'. They are like a vivid day dream, like little clips from a movie. I once saw in my imagination a man stuck on the shore while a boat took people to another island. He was left alone and had no way of reaching the island where his friends were clearly enjoying themselves. I shared the vision I had received in a meeting later that day, along with what I felt was its interpretation: some had seen their friends embark in a new journey with God and were enjoying a whole new experience that they weren't part of, and they felt they had no way of getting on that journey. I then gave the solution. It was a simple step of putting their

faith in what Jesus had done for them, turning from wrong things in their life and receiving the Holy Spirit. At the end of that meeting a young man came to me and said that he was sitting in the meeting, watching his friends worship, when he began to daydream about being left on the seashore as they all took off on a boat to a beautiful island. It didn't take him long to be led in a prayer of commitment to Jesus so he could enjoy the journey too.

6. Snippets of our lives that come back to mind

I remember how I had climbed Cader Idris in Wales with my dad and older brother. For fun on the way down I had sat on my jacket and pushed myself off and very quickly had gathered speed. Although it was fun to start with, I was soon careering down the hill out of control, with my dad and brother shouting at me to roll off the jacket and stop before I hurt myself. I managed to stop before it was too late!

I suddenly recalled this incident when someone in a meeting had a picture of walking on scree around a hill because it was a shortcut instead of walking around the longer path. I felt it was to do with someone embarking on a relationship that was not going to do them any good, just like my 'adventure'. At the end of the meeting a young divorced lady, an occasional visitor to our meetings, said she knew it was for her. She had embarked on a relationship with another man and, while it had started full of excitement, she knew it was wrong but couldn't get off. We led her in a prayer of recommittal of her life to Christ and for boldness for her to take steps to finish this relationship. No one had to persuade her it was wrong; God had simply used the incident I remembered and had shared to help her make the change she needed.

7. Sympathetic pains

Sometimes I get words of knowledge through 'sympathetic pains'. As I pray before or in a meeting I may feel a pain come to a certain part of my body. I ask the Holy Spirit if this is a condition that someone in the meeting is suffering from and the pain often increases briefly as a sign that it is. I then ask God if he wants to add any additional information, and I may get a picture or impression of how long it has been a problem or when or how it started. The more detail you can give, the more faith is raised in the person concerned. But beware of the temptation to add to what the Spirit gives you and start relying on your own ideas or common sense. I remember giving a word of knowledge that someone had damaged their left shoulder by hitting a speaker in a recording studio. What I had actually seen was a picture of someone hitting a piece of metal in a recording studio, but I thought that this didn't sound convincing enough and so added the idea of a speaker because that is what you would normally expect to find in a recording studio. But the truth is, it was simply a good guess and so, not surprisingly, no one responded. It was only afterwards that someone came saying she wondered if it might be for her. She had fallen in a recording studio and had damaged her left shoulder, but was unclear whether the word was for her as she had done it by tripping over a microphone stand. We prayed for her there and she received a measure of healing - while I learned a good lesson! It would have raised so much more faith and expectancy in her if I had just kept to the picture I had received.

I often get sympathetic pains in the opposite side to where people are suffering the condition. I first realised this during a training session when I gave out some words

of knowledge but nobody responded. I felt a total failure until people began to say that they suffered from pain similar to the ones I had described, but on the opposite side of their body. This resulted in lots of prayer and others in the group receiving and giving out words of knowledge. Shortly afterwards I learned from Ian Andrews that this often happens to leaders because they spend time in front of people in meetings. He described how a gym instructor when leading a group gets everyone to respond in mirror image to the stretches and movements they do. This can work in the same way for leaders very often.

Don't give up!

People who have been used in these revelatory gifts have sometimes given up, perhaps because they saw so few results and so became discouraged. But we want to encourage you to 'get going' again. No one learns anything by giving up – and failures are often growth-points if only we will ask God to show us what was going on.

Revelatory words were one of the keys to the explosive growth of the church in Argentina. Why should God not do the same here? We may live in a culture that is no longer interested in words about God; but many people are powerfully impacted by God's actions and when they see them it is often the beginning of their being drawn to know him in a personal way.

Questions:

1. Have you personally received words of knowledge? If yes, how did they come to you? If not, have you ever asked God to give you one?
2. Are you actively seeking prophetic words from God when you meet together with your fellow Christians? If you do receive a word, what do you tend to do with it?
3. Have you given up in your pursuit of these gifts of the Spirit, or are you pressing on to grow and develop in their use?

Chapter 8

The Toolbox and the Task

Both of us are quite ‘handy’. Roger is great at mending bikes and Mike is pretty nifty at DIY; so both of us know that to get the job done properly, you need the right tools. Years ago (in less-skilled days) Mike tried to fix a toilet leak with make-do tools; but the job just got bigger and bigger as the day went on. When he finally relented (8 hours later!) and phoned a friend who came with the right tools, the job was done in 20 minutes!

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are our ‘tools for the job’, what Jesus left us to ‘get the job done’. So we are foolish if we try to do the job without them, no matter how cool our replacement tools might seem.

All the Tools

In the previous two chapters we focused on the Spirit’s gifts of healing and revelation; but there are far more gifts than just these, of course. Major lists of gifts are given in Romans 12:7-11, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and 12:27-31, and Ephesians 4:7-13. But there are also passing references to spiritual gifts elsewhere, like the gift of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7. All of them, varied as they are, are *gifts* from God – in Greek, *charisma*, meaning ‘grace-gifts’, underlining there is nothing we can do to earn them (though there is much we can do to develop them). We need all these tools to get the job done.

These gifts have been categorised in many different ways over the years; but we simply list some of the main ones below by *type of gift*, together with a short explanation of each.

Types of Gifts

Gifts of Revelation

1. Prophecy

The Spirit-given ability to receive and communicate an immediate word from God, relevant for that situation.

2. Tongues

The Spirit-given ability to speak a language you have neither learned nor understand, which helps you to pray and worship.

3. Interpretation of tongues

The Spirit-given ability to explain the meaning of a tongue, which will generally be words addressed *to* God rather than words *from* God. Hence the crowd at Pentecost says they can ‘hear them declaring the wonders of God’ (Acts 2:11) – i.e. they are worshipping not bringing a message, as in prophecy.

4. Revelation

The Spirit-given ability to reveal a situation as God sees it, without having any prior knowledge of it, or to bring some understanding of truth.

5. Word of knowledge

The Spirit-given ability to know facts (past, present or future) that speak into a situation for encouragement, release, or even rebuke.

6. Word of wisdom

The Spirit-given ability to resolve difficult situations by finding a way forward that glorifies God and brings peace (e.g. James in Acts 15:12-21).

7. Discernment

The Spirit-given ability to see whether what is motivating a particular action or situation is human, divine or demonic.

Gifts of power

1. Faith

The Spirit-given ability to discern God's will with extraordinary confidence and to pray that into being despite circumstances, obstacles or resistance.

2. Healing

The Spirit-given ability to serve as a channel through which God heals people or frees them from Satan's grip.

3. Miracles

The Spirit-given ability to be channel through which God can perform powerful acts that change the usual course of nature and point to his intervention.

Gifts of caring

1. Pastoring

The Spirit-given ability to care for others on an on-going basis.

2. Mercy

The Spirit-given ability to feel compassion for those in need and to act to alleviate that need as an expression of Christ's love.

3. Exhortation

The Spirit-given ability to bring words of comfort, hope and encouragement that helps people to press on.

4. Hospitality

The Spirit-given ability to provide an open home where all are made welcome and blessed.

5. Giving

The Spirit-given ability to contribute material resources to others with generosity, freedom and cheerfulness.

Gifts of enabling

6. Serving

The Spirit-given ability to see unmet needs and to use one's resources to meet those needs.

7. Helping

The Spirit-given ability to invest time or resources to increase the effectiveness of others in their tasks.

8. Administration

The Spirit-given ability to understand goals, and to devise and execute plans that help achieve those goals.

9. Leadership

The Spirit-given ability to inspire others into embracing the God-given task.

Gifts of proclamation

1. Teaching

The Spirit-given ability to communicate Biblical truth in life-giving and relevant ways.

2. Evangelist

The Spirit-given ability to share the gospel in a way that brings people to faith in Christ.

3. Apostle

The Spirit-given ability to plant churches, train others, and do the signs of an apostle to see the church's mission expanded.

We wouldn't for one minute claim that these are all the gifts there are, or that this is all there is to be said about them. In fact, the sheer variety and breadth of the Spirit's gifts is underlined by the very Greek words used of them in 1 Corinthians 12:1-7, where they are described in five

different ways in just seven verses – *pneumatika* ('spiritual things', v1), *charismata* ('grace gifts', v2), *diakonia* ('serving', v5), *energēmata* ('workings' or 'energizings', v5), and *phanerōsis* ('manifestation', v7). It is as if these gifts are so varied and widespread that there aren't enough words to describe them.

All the Tools for All the People for All the Task

Not one of us is left out in the Spirit's distribution of these gifts. As Paul noted, '*To each one* the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good' (1 Corinthians 12:7). Note that phrase: 'to each one'. These are God's tools given to God's people for God's mission in God's world – and not one of us is missed out! No one can say they don't have a spiritual gift. In fact, we all have a whole 'gift-mix', which makes for great variety. And even if one gift becomes more dominant, we need to be constantly open to the Holy Spirit who always loves to surprise us.

In the early days of Charismatic Renewal, these gifts were primarily used within the church (after all, the Bible does say they are for the building up of the saints). But many of us have increasingly seen that God wants us to use these gifts in the world too, which is where the book of Acts so often places them. In the following chapter we give some examples of how some of our people have had the excitement of seeing the Spirit's gifts at work 'out there'.

Questions:

1. How do you respond to hearing the gifts of the Holy Spirit described as ‘tools for the task’?
2. Look over the main lists of gifts on pages 82-85. Which of these gifts (a) have you ever been used in (b) are you used in quite often?
3. Are there any of these gifts that you would love to experience? If so, have you asked God about it?

Chapter 9

The Spirit on the Street

The vast majority of Jesus' use of gifts of the Spirit took place out in the world, in the midst of needy people, rather than in the safety and privacy of religious meetings or mentoring sessions. Jesus was eager for ordinary people to see God's Spirit at work in their ordinary lives and circumstances; indeed for him the manifestation of the Spirit's work was what demonstrated that the Kingdom of God had truly come among them (e.g. Luke 11:20).

Here are just some of the ways in which members of our Salt and Light family of churches have been seeking to do that in our own day.

Healing on the Streets

Some churches have become involved in 'Healing on the Streets' (HOTS), which involves Christians going into their town centre, setting up a banner, and simply offering to pray for anyone sick. Many people have been experienced the love of God and the work of the Spirit through this outreach. The following stories all come from Salt & Light churches.

Someone suffering from depression said, after receiving prayer, 'It feels like the sun is shining in my head.' Another said the team's presence was like a fresh breeze to her. An older lady suffering from flu said her symptoms felt much relieved after prayer, and left smiling and grateful.

Someone with a chest infection and breathing problems, who struggled to take the appropriate medication, said she felt heat in her chest as she was prayed for. A young woman who had had a weak leg for 15 years due to a dislocated knee which had ended her ballet dancing was using crutches, but when prayed for felt heat in her leg and went away limping noticeably less. One young man with a disk problem was given a word of knowledge about his love of football and acknowledged that it was once a big part of his life but that he hadn't been able to play since a car crash. He was curious but cautious, though he at least went away knowing there is a God who knows all about him.

A member of the Derby HOTS team met a couple and their 30-year old son who looked frightened and depressed. He asked if they could pray for anything for them, to which they replied (pointing at their son), "Well only God can sort him out, 'cos we've tried everything else, me duck." Further conversation revealed that he was agoraphobic and alcoholic, and this was the first time he had been outside the home in seven months. So, led by the Spirit, the team member prayed against the oppression and alcoholism. One month later all three were back at the HOTS spot, and all three were beaming. They asked the young man what had happened, to which he replied, 'It were amazing! I got home and opened t'can o' Skol, and for some reason I couldn't swaller it or owt.' (We hope your Derbyshire is fluent!) He had been dry since the day he had been prayed for, was now going out without his parents, and was thinking about getting a job — an amazing transformation .

All of these people experienced something of the Holy Spirit through God's people stepping out and were moved further down the God-consciousness spectrum. Sometimes such contacts need time for the Spirit to work on them, like

the lady who came to one team saying they had prayed five months earlier for her son who had meningococcal meningitis and was seriously ill in ICU. Defying all expectations, he had made a near total recovery and she had now brought him to show the team and to ask them to pray for the last bit of healing.

Street Pastors

Another development has been the work of Street Pastors, who seek to engage with people on the streets between 10pm and 4am to listen, care, and befriend. Much appreciated by local police and local businesses, they can often diffuse situations by Spirit-prompted wisdom and kindness, especially among the young people and clubbers, who are generally (perhaps surprisingly), open to the care that is offered to them.

While the care extended is often at a very practical level (providing bottles of water to people who are dehydrated or flip-flops to those who have lost their shoes), many good conversations are also held through looking for the promptings of the Holy Spirit. One of our Street Pastors got chatting to a young man who wasn't walking easily, so asked what the problem was. It turned out to be his knee, which was so painful that he couldn't stand up in the mornings when he woke up. So they prayed for him, after which he simply wandered off — though they heard later that he started telling everyone he met about how impacted he had been by this encounter (it could almost be a story from the Gospels!). The Street Pastor met him a month later and heard that knee was completely healed. The young man then asked if they could pray for the other knee, which they did. A month later it too was better.

Treasure Hunting

'Treasure hunting' involves a group asking the Holy Spirit to give them 'clues' about whom God would have them speak to as they go out onto the streets. Armed with these 'clues', they then look for the people in question and seek to engage in conversation, often by simply saying they are involved in a Treasure Hunt and could they chat. As they explain further, most people are taken aback that God would know about them or their situation and are open to chat. The following examples all come from some students in Oxford.

One team member got the clues 'Virgin Media store', 'lime green jumper', 'black jacket', and 'ankle'. So they went to the Virgin store, and there was a man wearing a lime hoody and a black jacket. They got into conversation with him, explained they were engaged in a rather different kind of treasure hunt, explained prophecy, and prayed for his painful foot.

Another student, treasure-hunting for the first time, received the words 'George', 'Black Sheep Gallery', 'grey hair, grey coat, glasses', and 'arthritis'. They set off for the Black Sheep Gallery and immediately saw a man exactly matching the description. The student was initially cautious, but the team leader encouraged him to go for it and to trust the Holy Spirit. So he caught up with the man and his wife, explained he was on a treasure hunt, and asked them to look at the clues. It turned out his name was George and he had arthritis. So the student prayed for them both and asked for healing for the arthritis. They were really touched – and the student was really encouraged.

Yet another student had the clues 'Afro hairstyle', 'Isaac', 'Joanna/Jo', 'Ashmolean', 'loneliness', 'drug addiction', 'money problems', 'flag' and 'kilt' – a long list

indeed! But all of them proved true as the student went to the Ashmolean Museum and saw a guy with big curly hair. Conversation revealed his name was Isaac, his fiancée was Joanna (but liked to be called Jo), the three problems described his mother-in-law, and he was just about to go to Scotland. They prayed together for the mother-in-law's healing and then for the man himself as he acknowledged that he too needed prayer for healing from the pain of bereavement. As the student said later, 'This is why we do it! Because God is good!'

These people didn't become Christians that day; but something was certainly broken in their mind-set by people stepping out with these gifts of the Spirit. They started to see that there is indeed a God who knows about us and cares for us.

Mercy Ministries

An increasing number of our people are becoming involved in mercy ministries – everything from working with the homeless, to challenging trafficking, to providing furniture and food – all expressions of God's love for the needy and downtrodden and of his hatred of injustice.

Derby City Mission runs a weekly drop-in centre for the homeless and every week feed, clothe and pray with some 50 people for a variety of issues. One regular visitor was a young Polish guy who had been living rough in a tent behind a derelict factory for over three years. Originally trafficked to the UK with the promise of a job, he fell ill with a knee injury. Now abandoned, and with no passport or papers, he ended up destitute and living rough. One day, when he was absolutely at the end of himself, Ally Kay, the Mission's Director, felt he should pray with him for healing from his knee injury so he could work again. The young

man then ate his meal, and got up to go outside for a cigarette – only realising once he was outside that he had walked out without his crutches and was completely healed.

One of our church members in Oxfordshire felt that the Holy Spirit might be speaking to her about setting up a food bank. While her leaders were encouraged by her compassion, they were doubtful there was any real need for something like that in their relatively affluent town. However, over the next two months, completely out of the blue, the church had two requests for emergency food for a desperate situation. They took this as a clear sign that the Holy Spirit wanted them to go for it. While they thought they might give out just one food parcel a month, requests started to flow in (from agencies, not individuals) as soon as word got out that the Food Bank was being planned. It has now been running for two years, thanks to one lady's responsiveness to a nudge of the Holy Spirit.

In the Workplace

Since most Christians spend most of the time in their workplace, this should surely be natural place for us to expect to see the Spirit's gifts at work. Here's just one example. A primary school teacher in a state school was taking an RE lesson with a class of 9-11 year olds from a wide variety of social and religious backgrounds. The topic was Christian prayer and he explained how, for Christians, this was a two-way conversation. He decided to show them how God could use a Bible verse or 'picture' to 'speak' to us because the Holy Spirit is there to help us hear God's thoughts, and that God wants to give us his advice on life. Seeing a cap nearby, he received a word of knowledge so shared it, saying that God wanted to help the owner of the cap with their thoughts and to protect them from negative thinking. It was clear that the

word was 'bang on' once the owner of the cap revealed himself, as all the children could see.

Now excited, they all wanted to 'have a go'! So the teacher trusted God and gave them all a piece of paper and encouraged them to ask God for something to write down. They would then put the pieces of paper in a box and all draw one out at random to see what God might say. So they all eagerly started to listen to God. One child, who had learning difficulties, was clearly struggling and eventually went to the teacher and asked, 'Can I write, "*Don't forget to brush your teeth?*"?' The teacher said 'Okay!' but secretly hoped that he would pull out that particular piece of paper to save embarrassment. The children then placed their pieces of paper in the box, by now really seeming to have got the idea that God might want to help them through each other. As they picked out the paper in turn, time and time again what was written really connected with the child who had taken it out. The Holy Spirit had spoken through them! And what about '*Don't forget to brush your teeth?*' The boy who picked that particular one out was 'the joker' of the class who normally got really irritated by the boy with learning disabilities because of his slowness. When he read it, his jaw nearly hit the floor. For the previous week it had come to light that he was the only child in the class who didn't regularly brush his teeth - and he had drawn the paper that highlighted that. Both boys were amazed - the first that God could speak through him, and the second that God could know him like that.

OK, this happened to be in an RE lesson; but for the teacher concerned it was in his workplace and he was genuinely trying to bring the Spirit and his gifts into his everyday life situation. Why couldn't all of us look to do something similar?

Conclusion

Not all of us can be engaged in all of these expressions of reaching out; but all of us can – and should – be involved in *something*, seeking to use the gifts of the Spirit for the benefit of those outside the church as much as those inside it. Why should God not bring a word of prophecy to unbelievers or heal them? After all, there are lots of examples in the Bible of him doing just that. And why shouldn't it be fun at times? (God invented fun, not the devil!) Our post-modern (perhaps post-post-modern) culture desperately needs to see and experience something real, and not just hear words, if their mind-set that says there is no God is to be challenged. Of course words are ultimately needed too to explain what has happened and to introduce people to the God who has done this stuff; but there is nothing like a heart softened by experiencing the miraculous or mysterious to find a landing place for those words.

Of course, all of this can only happen if we are all seeking to be Christ-centred, Spirit-filled individuals and churches – which takes us back to where this booklet started, our inviting you to consider whether you are baptised in the Holy Spirit, and whether you are seeking to be constantly filled with him, as the Scriptures promise we can be. And is *your church* expecting on a regular basis, both inside and outside your meetings, to see the Holy Spirit do unusual things that reveal the love of the Father and the saving power of Jesus?

Both the water and the wheel are needed if the job is to get done. The Holy Spirit's presence and gifts are his tools for the job. Without them, we're not quite sure whose job it is we are working on.

Questions:

1. How did you find yourself responding to these stories of the gifts of the Holy Spirit being used out in the community?
2. As you consider the examples given in this chapter, is there an area where you feel God would have you or your small groups step out into?
3. If you are honest, where does your focus inevitably end up returning to – the water or the wheel?