

What does the Bible Say?

Lesson 10: God's Power: Spiritual Gifts

From the last lesson, we saw how Jesus's identity and authority as Word of God, Son of God, Messiah, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, King of kings, and Lord of lords enabled him to perform many miracles and be resurrected from the dead! Jesus now sits at the throne of God with full authority over heaven and earth. By his grace, Jesus gives us as his followers a new identity: We are his family, friends, and heirs of his kingdom. For this reason, Jesus gives us the right to rule with him on his throne if we're willing to suffer for his name and be faithful to death. If so, we will also inherit the power to do what he did: heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and drive out demons. Many people want that power, but they don't want the cost attached to that promise. Others want that power but for the wrong reasons. Jesus only used his power to love people and help them to know him so that they might be saved. If we are true sons and daughters, we will use his gift in a way that brings honor and glory to Jesus.

The Believer's Power

In Luke 9, we see one of the first examples of Jesus giving his followers power:

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ³ He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. ⁵ If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." ⁶ So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere. (NIV)

Who did Jesus give power to? What power did he give? Why did he give it?

Some people believe that Jesus only gave his power to his first apostles. But in Luke 10 below, we see that this is not the case. But before we examine that passage, we're going to look at something very significant that Jesus does at the end of Luke 9: Several people come to Jesus to be his followers, but instead of saying, "Oh, great! We really need you!", Jesus shares the cost of following him:

⁵⁷ A man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." ⁵⁹ He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹ Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." ⁶² Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9)

Explain each situation of people wanting to follow Jesus. What cost does Jesus lay before them?

How does Jesus define a true follower?

Here Jesus tests the faith of these followers, and Jesus basically says, “No, you’re not ready.” Why? Jesus is inviting us to be co-rulers of his kingdom! This honor requires sacrifice: to lay down our lives the way Jesus did. If these men couldn’t suffer a little for Jesus, they certainly would never die for him. In this, we see how Jesus defines genuine faith. Once we truly know and believe who he is: King of kings and Lord of lords, then we know and understand that nothing he asks is too great. Jesus also knew that in Luke 10, he was about to do something amazing: anoint all his faithful followers with power! And we see that Jesus was not going to give power to anyone who was not fully committed to him.

¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.... ³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road... ⁹ Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’... ¹⁶ “Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.” ¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name...” ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰ However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10)

Who did Jesus give power to? What was he asking them to do?

What power did Jesus give those who were willing to obey him? Why did he give it?

From this passage, we learn that Jesus gave his power to those who were willing to sacrifice comfort, energy, and time away from friends and family; experience rejection for his name; heal the sick; and share their faith with people they even didn’t know. The seventy-two were even willing to travel to other cities to share Jesus with as many as possible. We see what Jesus is asking of all followers, not just the apostles. And why? Jesus wants to use us to help our friends, neighbors, cities, and regions experience him and be saved. In the first few centuries of the Christian faith, followers traveled throughout the Roman Empire and to other countries to make Jesus known throughout the world. Jesus is willing to share with us his power, but we must be willing to “Go!”

You might be thinking, “I thought I was saved by faith?” That’s true! But in John 14, Jesus said, “¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me *will do* the works I have been doing, and they will do *even greater things* than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” [*Emphasis added*]. Have you ever wondered why we’re not seeing more miracles around us? Maybe we need to compare our faith with those of his true followers. Also, did you know that when we pray “in Jesus’s name,” we are praying that our prayers will lead to someone’s salvation? Jesus’s name, actually means “God saves.”¹ Is this my heart in every prayer I pray? These are the prayers God promises to answer.

Power through the Holy Spirit

These definitions and examples of faith may come as a surprise to us because we think of “belief” and “faith” as something intellectual and even heartfelt. We see here that Jesus looks at the actions behind our hearts. This is why James his brother wrote: “Faith without deeds” is “useless” and “dead” (James 2:20,

¹ The Greek name “Jesus” comes from the Hebrew name “Yehoshua.” See “3091. Yehoshua,” Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, unabridged, electronic database, BibleSoft, 2006, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3091.htm>.

26) and why Jesus said, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). In this way, we understand that Jesus’s definition of faith and belief also includes our willingness to testify about him to others who may reject us. If we truly believe he has all authority in heaven and on earth and that the entire world will fall under his eternal judgement, and we genuinely love God and people, then we understand that our comfort, acceptance, and desires are far less important than honoring the King of kings and bringing salvation to the people around us. When we understand this, our dreams become his dreams and our goals his goals. Yet, Jesus never asks us to do this alone. He knows we’re weak. But if we’re willing to love and follow him, he gives us this promise:

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will do as I command. ¹⁶ Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. ¹⁷ The Spirit will show you what is true... and will keep on living in you.... ²¹ If you love me, you will do what I have said, and my Father will love you. I will also love you and show you what I am like.... ²⁶ The Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of what I said while I was with you. ²⁷ I give you peace, the kind of peace only I can give. It isn’t like the peace this world can give. So don’t be worried or afraid.” (John 14, CEV)

According to this passage, what are some of the roles that the Spirit will have in your life? (vv. 17, 21, 26, 27) What responsibilities do we have in this relationship? (vv. 15, 21, 27)

Receiving the Holy Spirit

The New Testament offers several ways that people experience the Holy Spirit. After Jesus resurrected, he appeared to all his followers, except Thomas and Judas, who had died, and we see Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit onto them: “²¹ Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20, NIV).

To whom did Jesus give the Spirit? How did he give the Spirit? Why did he give the Spirit (two reasons)?

Luke includes the apostles, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others with them in this same conversation when Jesus says, “⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24). Again, in Acts 1, Luke records Jesus saying to the Eleven, “⁴ Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (1:4-5).

From John 20, we see that Jesus had already breathed the Holy Spirit on his followers, so what is he promising them in Luke 24 and Acts 1? How are these experiences different from each other?

In Luke 10, Jesus had given his followers the power to heal the sick and drive out demons, allowing them to experience his power. Later, he breathes the Holy Spirit on them and then promises to cover them completely with the Holy Spirit’s power! In other words, Jesus wanted more than just a few experiences or a powerless indwelling of the Spirit for his followers; he wanted them to be filled with the power of his Spirit as we see in Acts! In anticipation, the apostles, along with Jesus’s mother and brothers, stayed in Jerusalem for ten days leading up to the Day of Pentecost “continually at the temple, praising God” (Luke 24:53, Acts 1:14), when Jews from every nation came to Jerusalem to celebrate. On this Day, all one hundred and twenty followers were present (Acts 1:15, 2:1):

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken... ¹⁰ “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” (Acts 2)

Who received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? What are some of the signs? (Acts 2:2, 3, 6-10) Why does Jesus pour out his Spirit? (Acts 2:10)

In Luke 24:53, what are some followers doing *before* they received the Holy Spirit? In Acts 2:1, what else do we notice?

Then Peter stood up along with the eleven apostles, quoting Joel 2 and God’s promise to his people:

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Even on my servants², both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ (Acts 2, Joel 2:28-32)

Joel says that all Jesus’s followers will receive the Spirit’s outpouring. What other signs will they see?

After Peter shares the message of Jesus with the crowd, he gives these instructions:

³⁸ “Repent and be baptized, 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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” (Acts 2)

Peter gives instructions about how to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. What does he say? (Acts 2:38)

While we see the Holy Spirit’s power falling on new believers during times of corporate worship and prayer, we also know that Jesus promises that everyone receives the Holy Spirit when they’ve turned away from sin and are baptized. Even so, we still see examples where believers had not received the gifts of the Holy Spirit at baptism, and the apostles or Spirit-filled elders lay hands on them to receive this power or specific gifts that the church needed (Acts 8:14-17, 9:17, 19:6, I Timothy 4:14, II Timothy 1:6) . The laying on of

² In Joel 2:29, the Hebrew reference to “servant” means “slave,” indicating that the Lord will pour out his Spirit on a people regardless of class, position, or gender. See “5650. Ebed,” Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, unabridged, electronic database, Biblsoft, 2006, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5650.htm>; and “8198. Shiphchah,” Brown-Driver-Briggs, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8198.htm>.

hands may have been regular practice among early followers; however, some passages suggest that apostles and elders were needed for specific cases (See note below for definition and list of “apostles”).³ Much like the believers experienced the Holy Spirit *before* Jesus breathed the Spirit on them, people today experience the Holy Spirit before they are baptized. We know that it’s impossible for someone to begin walking as a follower without the help of the Holy Spirit, so we shouldn’t be confused or surprised by the Spirit at work as people come to Jesus. But Peter teaches that the promise is fulfilled through repentance and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38-39).

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

We see that when Jesus clothes and baptizes people with his Spirit, as opposed to simply breathing his Spirit into them, there is a visible demonstration of Jesus’s Spirit. We also see incredible boldness to praise God publicly and teach boldly about Jesus, testifying to his power. If we think about it, breath is something that we experience on the inside, but clothes are something visible to everyone around us! And these clothes are God’s will for all his children (Joel 2:17) who turn from their sins and are baptized, so they can testify to the world of Jesus’s power available to us. We also notice that before that great Day, the followers were together continually worshipping God. It’s in this environment of worship that the Holy Spirit falls on them so that they can effectively share with over three thousand people their praises of God’s amazing works and the message of Jesus. We see this happen again in Acts 4 when all the believers gather to worship and pray when “³¹...the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Tongues, boldness, visions, dreams, and prophecy were just some of the signs of the Holy Spirit’s gifts.

In these passages, underline the different spiritual gifts available to God’s church, place a box around reasons for the gifts, and circle words or phrases that tell us who receives them. (Share what you learn after each passage.)

I Corinthians 12

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines... ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then

³ “Apostle” is a spiritual title that simply means “messenger” or one who is “sent.” [For Greek definition, see “652. Apostolos,” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/652.htm>.] By many biblical examples, apostles appear to devote their lives to the work of the Gospel, and Paul distinguishes this role as one who has the power to display “signs, wonders and miracles” (II Corinthians 12:12), a position that included anywhere between seven to fourteen men and possibly one woman during Paul’s lifetime. Epaphroditus was an apostle (Philippians 2:25), as was Matthias (Acts 1:16), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Andronicus and Junius, possibly a female name (Romans 16:7), likely Silas and Timothy (I Thessalonians 1:1), and finally Paul Galatians 1:1, who received his anointing from Ananias (Acts 8:17). While many scholars interpret Acts 6:1-6 as the appointing of the first deacons, including Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, in close contextual reading, the responsibility given to these seven men, considering verse 7 and the passages that follow (the stories of Stephen and Philip, Acts 6-8), was the ministry of prayer and the Word, not the waiting of tables; the antecedent for the reference can be one or the other. Clearly waiting tables was not the focus of Stephen and Philip, as immediately these men were sent out to preach the Word and perform miracles. Stephen is busy performing miracles (6:8) and dies from boldly sharing his faith, not waiting tables. Likewise, we see Philip traveling and preaching away from the city, not staying in Jerusalem for a new appointment as waiter. The Twelve also chose men filled with the Holy Spirit, not a requirement for feeding widows. The role of taking care of widows was likely left to the other followers that the Twelve had gathered in verse 2 so that preaching the Word could remain their unhindered, undistracted priority.

miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

Romans 12

⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Ephesians 4

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The Holy Spirit not only gives us power in the ways above but also to do what Jesus asks and to have power over sin (Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:14-16; Romans 8:37), Satan and his principalities (Romans 16:20, Colossians 2:15, James 4:7, I John 3:8), false teaching (I John 4:1-6), and fear (II Timothy 1:7, John 14:27). We shouldn't be surprised if the Holy Spirit gives us gifts we don't even know about! Yet in all this, Paul encourages us to "eagerly desire the greater gifts" that build up the church (I Corinthians 12:31). In I Corinthians 14, he explains that tongues with interpretation, as we saw in Acts 2, help unbelievers to know God. But when believers speak in tongues that no one understands, then the believer only builds up themselves and no one else. Paul quotes Isaiah 28 that says, "with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people" (28:11), letting the believers know that the purpose of tongues is to proclaim God's message to unbelievers, unless the believer is alone praying to God. If not, then they or someone in the church should interpret so that the church is built up by the divine revelation or teaching. For this reason, Paul elevates the gift of prophecy over tongues so that all may be encouraged (I Corinthians 14:2, 5, 13, 18) and tells us to desire gifts that will make the most impact on the church and those seeking to enter the kingdom of God.

While we know that not every spiritual gift is given to every person, Paul strengthens us in Ephesians 1 with these words: "²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." In other words, the fullness of Christ is found in the church, not an individual, and in I Corinthians 12, Paul emphasizes how much each member of the body needs one another. So, whether we have one gift or another, few gifts or several, it's the church working *together* to see and manifest the fullness of Christ. Whatever gifts we do receive, Paul commands us to exercise these gifts regularly and fearlessly to continue growing in them for the sake of the Gospel (II Timothy 1:6-8).

If you have already received a gift from the Holy Spirit, share what you've received and how you use it to help others to build up the kingdom of God.

Talk about your desire for the gifts of the Spirit and how you want to use these gifts to impact others both in and outside the church.

This Week:

- Set up a time to pray with other believers also involved in this study. Spend significant time worshipping Jesus and ask the Lord to give each believer special gifts.
- If you're able, continue praising the Lord, asking him for an outpouring of his Spirit, and praying over the gifts for ten days, just as we saw the first believers doing before the Holy Spirit fell on them. If possible, do this together in person or online, or commit to prayer in some other way.
- If you or anyone else in your group doesn't believe they've received the Holy Spirit after prayer and baptism, find a Spirit-filled apostle or elder to lay hands on you.
- Read all of Luke 10:1-20. Make a list of all that Jesus asked of his followers in this passage. Create an outreach plan for yourself and other faith-filled believers. Set a date when you will go out as a group to pray for the sick and share the Gospel with those who receive you. If anyone in your group needs to be baptized, be sure to do the next study, which covers baptism, and help them to be baptized before going out.