

God's Empowering Presence

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I can still visualize the sentence on the page and I can still feel the pull it brought on my heart. It was in a book by Emilie Griffin and it was the very first line of the whole book, “When I first began to experience the power of God in my life” Don’t you want to know what comes after the ...?

Last week we celebrated Pentecost which is all about the Holy Spirit. He has been referred to many ways – the Heavenly Dove, the Shy Member of the Trinity, the Go-Between God. But one way he is thought of is as God’s Empowering Presence.

I don’t know how many times I have thought to God, “I need your empowering presence.” I’m sagging like an old balloon with a leak in it. “Please fill me with yes, love; yes, peace; yes, energy; but right now I really want your empowering presence.” Have you had a similar thought and need? Of course you have.

When God pours out his Spirit it wasn’t limited to that day in Acts 2. That was the beginning of God pouring out himself and he can fall upon us here even today. That Spirit is God’s empowering presence, able to fill us. Where and how do *you* need his empowering presence today?

Pray Read

When we say empowering presence mustn’t we ask about power – what it is, what it’s like? In Paul’s letter

to the Ephesians he uses, in pretty quick succession, four words all which mean power. There's dynamite power, political power, laboring power, and physical muscle power.

One of my favorite movies growing up was from Disney, *The Sword and the Stone*, about Merlin and King Arthur. In it there was some contest and it all seemed about brute strength pitted against each other. Brawn to brawn. Then one of them, by magic, became a virus and entered the other's body making them break out in hives. That was a clever kind of power. A get-inside power.

God's Holy Spirit power is an enlivening inner, inside power, a persevering and lead-to-growing power. But from the get go, let's be clear about one thing. The Spirit is not an impersonal force. You and I deal with a magnetic force differently than a magnetic person with a powerful bomb on your front step, than a powerful person standing there. God's Empowering Presence is a personal presence. He's a "he" and not an "it".

Our passages this morning give us some clues to other features of the Holy Spirit; God's Empowering Presence.

The ***first*** feature of God's Empowering Spirit Presence in us is that while he is empowering, he is not overpowering. Sometimes a Division 1 powerhouse football team will be play a Division 3 lightweight team for tv and money purposes and the Division 3 team is overpowered. Sometimes the horseradish in a dish overpowers the other flavors. And some people are "my way or the highway" kind of people and steam roll others. But notice that God empowers but doesn't overpower.

Here's how we know this—he commands, “Don’t quench the Spirit.” So apparently you can quench him. If you can, you’re not overpowered. The command, “Be led by the Spirit.” You can fall in line or not fall in line. If that’s true, it’s not a forced march. The command, “Be filled with the Spirit.” You open the lid, the window, the door ... and invite. There’s no storming the castle, breaking through the barricades. It’s you and I saying, “Entrez vous.”

I’ve looked up from my desk at home to see some kid walking by and not one of my own. In fact, no child of mine is home. What’s this kid doing? I ask. He says, “I’m looking for Logan.” I think, “You just walked in? Didn’t knock or ring the doorbell?” No. That’s not the Holy Spirit. He enters the way an FPL energy consultant does, with your permission, and he shows you ways you’re leaking and losing energy. He enters the way a home health nurse or a Molly Maid person does, with your request and so as to aid. Or the way a tutor does to help your son with math.¹ He enters the way your best friend does, with a casserole and a smile. And by His personal, loving, smart, and wise presence empowers you and me.²

¹ There are some tv shows where, for example, a restaurant owner who is struggling invites in a successful expert to turn things around. The condition is that the owner actually listen to and implement the expert’s directions. In that process sometimes there is discomfort. The HS’s entry could be thought of as like that with the owner’s invitation.

² One night when I was a married grad student in England it was dark and rainy and cold. We were in a little apartment some distance from our college and a bit isolated from all its activities. There was knock at the door. It was our American friend, Bobby, whom we had known from undergraduate days. He had ridden his bicycle through the rain with Chinese take-out. He came in

The **second** feature of God's Empowering Spirit is that he empowers one's character. Where we see this is in what's called the fruit of the Spirit – love, peace, patience, kindness and so on. You and I are like bushes or trees and with him flowing inside of us, we produce fruit. It's not that inside of us he is a current that electrifies our touch so we can zap³ this disease or that foe. It's him awaking an interest in, for example, being patient.

All the great philosophers, according to the late Dr. Dallas Willard, himself a professor of philosophy at USC, worked with four questions – What is reality? What is a blessed life? Who is a good person? How does one become a good person? And one of the reasons Christianity initially took the ancient world like wildfire is that Jesus answered these questions in a more meaningful way than anyone else had. His answers validated themselves in regular peoples' lives being really different. And he didn't just offer a formula or information but he was there as a personal support, a personal guide, a personal brace. "This is the way, walk in it." "This is love, let me flow through you to others with it."

Physical therapy has been a big part of my and my family's life of late. Picture an atrophied or damaged or just cranky muscle ... on, say, an arm. See the therapist, hear the therapist ... "Let's take your good arm and together let's lift the other one." Feel the therapist's hand beside yours, feel the strength, feel him or her guide the movement in just the right way. That's the way of the Holy

and he brightened and nourished our whole evening. That's the Holy Spirit.

³ He is sap but not zap. Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8 (v28) approaches the Spirit in this wrong minded manner.

Spirit with our character such that we become the truly good people we want truly to be.

A **third** feature of God's empowering Spirit is that he empowers us for others. Usually, instinctually, we want power for our getting ourselves into a better position. Our congressional person is chair of the Ways and Means Committee and that's good for us. But the Spirit is bringing a power that is about good for others.

The Dead Sea in Israel is dead because it has no outlet. Everything flows in but nothing flows out. It is a symbol for the sinful soul. We rotate around ourselves. As they say, sin is S and N around I. Our lives and souls are meant to be connected, to God and others; to be connected in uplifting and growing ways. This is what the gifts of the Spirit are all about.

Each one is, with God inside of us, empowered with a contribution to make so as to help others. With his eyes, we get our eyes off ourselves. With his gifting and enabling and connecting, we not only are given those to love but ways to love.

The Holy Spirit is an empowering presence. He, a way of putting it is, is about love empowerment. The most extended NT conversation about the gifts of the Spirit is I Corinthians 12 to 14. Chapter 13 would be that one in the middle, the meat in the sandwich if you will. That chapter is? The famous one on love. Love is at the center of God's empowering Spirit. He helps us receive it and he helps us show it in practical ways.

A **final** feature, for today's message, of God's empowering Spirit is that he empowers us in our weakness. I liked, when I was a kid, the comic book *Ritchie Rich*. I liked

that he wasn't weak financially. Who likes being weak financially? I liked when I was a kid, the comic book *Superman*. I liked that he wasn't weak physically. Who likes being weak physically? I liked Yoda in Star Wars because he wasn't weak spiritually. Who likes being weak spiritually? I liked Sherlock Holmes because he wasn't weak intellectually. Who likes being weak intellectually? No one likes weakness. We want power over weakness. The Holy Spirit gives us power in weakness. We want power over weakness. The Holy Spirit gives us power to face it and use it with God.

One of the most typical, standard, normal, frustrating, bothersome, agitating, defeating feelings that a person feels when their loved one is sick, or dying, or has died is helplessness and weakness. I've seen it time and again. I've felt it time and again. And we want it taken away. Bring in Richie Rich, Superman, Yoda, Sherlock Holmes ... and the Spirit... and give us power to reverse it, make it go away, or have it cry for mercy. But here's the truth – much of the time, in many situations, human beings are helpless and weak. We need wisdom with respect to it. You see, the Bible doesn't say that God just does away with weakness. Romans 8:26, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. The weakness is an occasion for the Spirit to help us. II Corinthians 9, God's strength is perfected in weakness. Therefore, I make room for weakness, because it is making room for the Spirit to do something.

No, the empowering Spirit doesn't make us super-powerful supermen and superwomen people. He makes us people helped, helped in it and by it; helped and not sidelined by weakness but advanced in it such that we are grateful to God.

I love Fred Astaire. I love his suave moves. I am anything but that on the dance floor. I picture, however, him coming to me and offering to help me ... he puts his limbs by mine and doesn't force them but gently pushes them, and where my sense of the music or my step is heavy, he whispers, "This is when I can guide you best." This Fred Astaire with my arms and feet, who meets me ... and you on the dance floor of your life, my life, and helps us dance in it is God's Empowering, Loving, Spirit.

Say, "Yes," to the Holy Spirit today.

Prayer -- Lord Jesus, this day I would humbly ask you to fill my life with your Spirit. I need your personal presence whether sleeping or waking. You've made my body with lungs that fill with impersonal air but you have made my self with a soul that needs your personal presence. Commune with me and lift me and fill me and pressurize me and animate me ... blowing out all that is dead and deadening and freshening all that is alive and lively. (I invite all of you to say something like this in your hearts to God.)

Holy Spirit, I don't want to quench you or grieve you. I know when I offer help that I know someone needs, I don't like it when they ignore me or just plain say that my help is no good or not wanted. It's not so much the insult but thinking, "They are not going to do well without this advice." Sadness and grief. I don't want to be that way with you. (Invite)

Holy Spirit, I want four star, 100%, 18k character. But many is the time I feel like an alloy, iron mixed with clay. Even in "success" I can end up full of a shadow side. I want love ... to me, yes. But from me, yes. Sometimes I'm not

there. I find it's all about me, my appetites, my resentments, my this or that. Will you, and I am so grateful that you offer, teach and empower my character? Teach and empower me to love? (Invite)

Holy Spirit, you reside in each of our lives so that we are like living temples. You reside in our churches, in our togetherness, so that we each are like living stones constructed together and being a temple for you. Come and in-dwell us with all your truth and love and power and wisdom and goodness. Come even now as we pray. (invite)

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or have someone pray with you, the pastor and elders would welcome your call.
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