

breath and fire.

The Spirit is not finished with you.

Meet the Person Jesus said it was better for you to
have, and the life that Person makes possible.

A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE FOR ORDINARY DISCIPLES

come hungry

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COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

Pastor Tony Lee

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BREATH AND FIRE

A Spirit-Filled Life for Ordinary Disciples An ebook for the Community of Hope family By Pastor Tony Lee BEFORE WE BEGIN

twenty years in the making

From the Community of Hope family This book comes to you from Community of Hope AME Church, the family God planted in the DMV in 2006, in a nightclub, with eight people who believed God meant every word. Twenty years in the making. Still going. Still hungry. Still convinced that everyone has a chance.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

JEREMIAH 29:11 (NIV)

Whoever picked up this book, whether you have been with COH from day one or you found this on a friend's shelf, the welcome is the same. We don't care how you come to Community of Hope. We only care about the way you leave: empowered, saved, hopeful, renewed, encouraged. That's the work of the Holy Ghost. That's the prayer behind every page that follows.

come hungry

A letter to the reader You good? Real talk for a second. Friend, before you read another word, let me tell you why this little book exists. There's a Person you may not know as well as you think you do. This Person has been with you longer than your earliest memory, helped you say yes to Jesus, and is the reason you are still standing today.

This is the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, as the saints used to say, and the Spirit isn't finished with you. This book is a slow walk, not a sprint. We are going to look at the Scriptures together. We are going to ask honest questions. We are going to listen for what the Spirit might be saying to you while you read. The chapters are short on purpose. You can read one with your morning coffee or stretch one across a week. Take your time.

Pause where you need to pause. Pray when something stirs. If you are new to faith, welcome. You will find a path here. If you have been walking with Jesus for forty years and you wonder if there's more, welcome. There's. If you grew up in a tradition that didn't talk much about the Holy Spirit, this book won't embarrass you or rush you. We will keep our hands open and our Bibles open at the same time. My only ask is this: come hungry.

Jesus said the Father loves to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:13). The whole life God has for you is downstream of that one promise. Let us go find it. It's never too late to start over, begin, or keep going. With you on the road,

Pastor Tony Lee

SENIOR PASTOR, COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

a person, not a power

The Spirit Across the Story

If you flip open the very first page of the Bible you don't have to read very far before you meet the Holy Spirit. Genesis 1:2 says the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. The Spirit was there at creation. The Spirit was the breath in Adam's lungs (Genesis 2:7), gave courage to Joshua, strength to Samson, songs to David, and visions to Ezekiel. The Spirit raised dry bones into an army.

The Spirit whispered to prophets when kings wouldn't listen. In the Old Testament the Spirit was given selectively: coming upon judges for a fight, kings for a season, prophets for a message. Moses, in one of the most underrated verses in Scripture, said it out loud: 'I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!' (Numbers 11:29). It was a longing more than a prediction.

It was a prayer waiting for a date on the calendar. That date was Pentecost. But before we get there, hear what the prophets started saying. Joel said the day was coming when God would pour out the Spirit on all flesh: sons and daughters, young and old, slave and free (Joel 2:28-29). Ezekiel said God would put the Spirit inside the people and give them new hearts (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Isaiah said the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the coming Messiah and that He would preach good news to the poor (Isaiah 11:1-2; 61:1-3). The Old Testament doesn't stop pointing forward. It almost begs for what is coming next.

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

JOEL 2:28-29 (NIV)

This matters for you. The Spirit you are reading about in the New Testament isn't a stranger. This is the same Spirit who hovered over the waters, raised the bones, and rested on the kings. The story is one story, and you are inside it. The God who made worlds with breath wants to fill yours. That isn't a marketing line. It's the plain reading of the book.

Jesus and the Spirit

Here is something that might surprise you. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the Word who was with God and was God (John 1:1), didn't do His earthly ministry by drawing on His own divine resources. He did it the way you and I would have to do it, in the power of the Holy Spirit. If you miss this, you will miss the whole point of the Spirit-filled life.

Watch the trail. • Jesus was conceived by the Spirit (Luke 1:35). • Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at His baptism (Matthew 3:16–17). • Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Luke 4:1). • Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to begin His public ministry (Luke 4:14). • Jesus opened the scroll in His hometown synagogue and read about Himself: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor' (Luke 4:18, citing Isaiah 61). • Jesus cast out demons by the Spirit of God (Matthew 12:28). • Jesus offered Himself on the cross through the eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14). • Jesus was raised from the dead by the Spirit (Romans 1:4; 8:11). • Jesus, ascended, poured out the Spirit on the church (Acts 2:33).

If the sinless Son of God needed the Holy Spirit to do what God called Him to do, what makes us think we can pull off the Christian life without the Spirit? The answer, of course, is nothing. We can't. The

Christian life isn't white-knuckle willpower. It's the Spirit of Christ doing in us what only the Spirit of Christ can do. If Jesus refused to start without the Spirit, who am I to try? This sets up everything that follows. The Spirit you are about to ask for is the same Spirit who anointed Jesus. The mission you are about to be sent into is the same mission Jesus was sent into. Get ready. The story is bigger than your week.

the promise you were made for

Pentecost: When Breath Became Fire

Breath Before Fire Before we get to the fire of Acts 2, we have to stop in the upper room of John 20. The book in your hands is called **Breath and Fire** because the New Testament gives us two distinct moments, and you can't understand the second without the first.

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

JOHN 20:19-22 (NIV)

This is resurrection evening. Jesus has been in the tomb. He has come back. He walks through a locked door, stands in the middle of a frightened, hiding little church, and the first thing the resurrected Lord does is breathe. If your Bible memory is good, your spirit should be tingling. The last time God breathed on a human being was Genesis 2:7, when God breathed life into the lungs of Adam. The next time after that was

Ezekiel 37:9, when God breathed life back into a valley of dry bones. Now Jesus breathes, and what comes out is the Holy Spirit in person. The same breath that animated the first man and resurrected the army of the dry bones is now poured into the church. This is regeneration. This is the indwelling. This is what happens to a person when they say yes to Christ. The Spirit moves in. You become a new creation. The breath of God lives in you.

But notice something. After this evening of breath, the same disciples are still told to wait. Jesus doesn't send them out the next morning. He tells them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8). Why? Because there's a difference between the breath and the fire. The breath gives you life. The fire makes you a witness. The breath is for being. The fire is for going. Both are the work of the same Spirit, and we need both.

That's what Pentecost is about. The same disciples who received the breath of John 20 receive the fire of Acts 2. The Holy Ghost who moved in to give them life now overflows out to give them power. Same Spirit. Two distinct experiences. Both for you. Now read Acts 2 with new eyes.

Wind, Fire, Tongues Acts 2 is one of the most consequential chapters in human history, and most Christians have read it once and moved on. Take it again, slowly, with new eyes. The disciples were gathered. Pentecost, a Jewish harvest feast fifty days after Passover, had come. Suddenly there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind. It filled the whole house. Tongues like fire appeared and rested on each one. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

Three images. Wind. Fire. Tongues. Each one is a sermon. Wind, because the Spirit is invisible but undeniable. You don't see the Spirit. You see what the Spirit moves. The wind blows where it wishes, Jesus said (John 3:8). You can't script the Spirit. You can only catch the breeze. Fire, because the Spirit is purifying. The Spirit warms what is cold. The Spirit burns what is corrupt.

The same fire that comforted the camp couldn't be touched without consequence. The fullness of the Spirit isn't a sleeping pill. It's a refining presence. Tongues, because the Spirit gives speech. The disciples didn't speak in tongues to put on a show. They spoke in tongues because heaven was so full inside them that earth couldn't contain it in their native language.

They started declaring the wonderful works of God in the languages of the people who had come from every corner of the empire. And then Peter, the same Peter who had denied Jesus seven weeks earlier in front of a servant girl, stood up and preached. He didn't have notes. He had just been filled. He told the crowd what was happening. He said: this is what

Joel was talking about. This is the last days. This is the promise being poured out.

This is for everyone. Three thousand were saved that day (Acts 2:41). Not because the disciples were charismatic in the slick sense. Because they were Spirit-filled in the biblical sense. The room had power not their own. People felt it. People asked questions. People came home. Pentecost wasn't the ceiling. It was the floor. This is where you start to see the whole shape of the Christian life.

Pentecost isn't an exotic experience reserved for rare saints. Pentecost is the normal Christian life. The baptism of the Holy Ghost isn't a luxury. It's the floor under your feet. We have settled for less. The Father wants to give you more.

The Pattern in Acts

Some people read Acts 2 and assume Pentecost was a onetime event for the first disciples. The book of Acts pushes back against that assumption five chapters at a time. Take the rest of the trail.

Acts 4. Same Room, Second Filling After Peter and John were threatened by the authorities, the church gathered to pray. They asked for boldness. Verse 31 says the place was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. Notice: these were the same disciples already filled in Acts 2. The Spirit isn't a one-and-done event. The Spirit fills, and fills again.

Acts 8. The Samaritans Philip preached in Samaria. People believed. They were baptized in water. But Luke tells us very plainly that the Holy Spirit hadn't yet fallen on any of them (Acts 8:16). When the apostles heard, they came down from Jerusalem, prayed, and laid hands on them. Then they received the Holy Spirit. This passage gently distinguishes two moments: believing in Jesus, and receiving the Spirit's empowering. The first is salvation. The second is empowerment for service.

Acts 10. The Gentiles Peter was preaching at Cornelius' house. Mid-sermon, the Spirit fell on everyone listening. They began speaking in tongues and praising God. The Jewish believers with Peter were astonished that the Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. Then: only after the Spirit

had come, they were baptized in water (Acts 10:44-48). Notice the order. Spirit, then water. The Spirit refused to honor anybody's small circle.

Acts 19. The Ephesian Twelve Paul met about a dozen disciples in Ephesus. He asked the diagnostic question: 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' (Acts 19:2). They hadn't. They had only known the baptism of John. Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus, laid hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came on them. They began speaking in tongues and prophesying. Look at the pattern with both eyes.

In three of these accounts (Acts 2, 10, 19), tongues are explicitly mentioned. In Acts 4 and 8, boldness and power are mentioned. In every account, the Spirit comes with evidence: something happens that you can see, hear, or feel. The Spirit is a living God, and living Gods are noticed. Many in the global church have come to see this pattern as more than incidental.

Speaking in tongues, in particular, has been treated for over a hundred years as the initial physical evidence that the Spirit has filled a believer in this baptizing way. We will look at tongues directly in Chapter 10. For now, hold this thought: when the Spirit comes on people in Acts, the Spirit shows up. The Spirit isn't shy. And the Spirit hasn't changed.

Receiving: A Holy Yes

Real talk. When was the last time you sensed God moving through you and not just past you? If you have read this far, something inside you is probably stirring. Maybe you have been a Christian for years and you are starting to suspect there's more. Maybe you have heard older saints talk about a 'second blessing' or a baptism in the Holy Spirit and you have always wondered what they meant. Maybe you have been afraid of what people will think.

Maybe you have been afraid of yourself. Hear me on this. We don't care how you come to this moment. The doubts you carry, the church wounds, the past you wish you could redo, the questions you haven't had room to ask: all of it's welcome at this page. We only care about the way you leave: empowered, saved, hopeful, renewed, and encouraged. That's the work the Holy Ghost wants to do in you right now.

Here is the simplest way to say what the New Testament teaches. When you trusted Jesus, the Holy Spirit came to live inside you. You were sealed (Ephesians 1:13-14). You were made alive (Titus 3:5). You were brought into the family. That's regeneration. That's the breath. But the Bible also describes a separate, distinct moment when the Spirit comes upon believers in such a way that the Spirit overflows out of them in power for service.

Jesus called it being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Paul called it being filled. Peter called it the gift. Whatever language you prefer, it's the same reality, the Spirit who is in you wants to spill out of you. This isn't a second salvation. You can't be more saved than you already are if you are in Christ. This is a fresh empowering of the Spirit

who is already with you. It's the same Spirit doing a new work. Think of it like this: when you became a Christian, the Spirit moved into the house. When you receive the baptism, you give the Spirit every key in the building.

How to Receive Receiving isn't complicated. It isn't earned by performance. It isn't gated by perfect behavior. Jesus said the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:13). That's the whole posture: ask, and yield. Here are four simple steps you can pray through right now. Don't rush them. 1. Be sure of your relationship with Jesus. The Spirit is given to those who belong to Christ.

If you have never given your life to Him, do that first. Confess Him as Lord. Believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9-10). 2. Ask the Father in faith. Ask plainly. 'Father, baptize me in the Holy Spirit.' The Father is good, and won't hand you a stone (Luke 11:11-13). 3. Yield your tongue. The Spirit won't violate your mouth, but will fill it. Open your mouth and begin to speak in faith.

Don't try to rehearse it. Don't try to manufacture it. Don't try to make it sound like English. Speak the syllables that come, even if they feel strange at first. 4. Keep speaking. The Spirit gives the utterance, but you do the speaking (Acts 2:4, 'they began to speak'). Just like walking is a cooperation between your bones and the floor, this is a cooperation between your tongue and your Helper.

A Prayer of Receiving If you sense the readiness, pray something like this in your own words. Out loud is good. Out loud puts a stake in the ground.

Father, in the name of Jesus, thank You for saving me and filling me with Your Spirit when I first believed. Today I am asking for more. I am asking for the baptism in the Holy Ghost that Jesus promised. Baptize me. Saturate me. Overflow in me. I open every part of my life to You. I open my mouth. I welcome the Spirit to fill me, to lead me, to empower me, to give me the language of heaven. By faith I receive, right now, the gift the Father is gladly pouring out. In Jesus' name, amen.

Now begin to speak. Trust your Helper, who has been wanting this longer than you have. If nothing happens immediately, don't panic. The Father gives good gifts. Some receive in a moment. Some receive over a few days of seeking. Stay close. Pray with a Spirit-filled friend. Read the rest of this book hungry. The promise is for you.

Common Hesitations Before You Yield Most believers who haven't yet received the baptism in the Holy Spirit aren't held back by theology. They are held back by something more tender. Three quiet fears come up

again and again, and each of them deserves a kind, honest answer. The first is the fear of fakeness. 'What if I just make it up?' Listen, you have been making up English your whole life.

Every word you have ever spoken began as cooperation between your spirit, your mind, and your tongue. The Spirit isn't asking you to perform. The Spirit is asking you to yield. The Spirit gives the utterance; you do the speaking (Acts 2:4). If you wait until you have zero hesitation, you will wait forever. Faith is the doorway. Walk through it.

The second is the fear of disappointment. 'What if I ask and nothing happens?' This fear often comes from believers who have asked in the past with great expectation and walked away with nothing visible. Hear this carefully: God isn't stingy, and the absence of an immediate breakthrough isn't the absence of God. Some receive in seconds. Some receive after a season of seeking.

Sometimes a wall of unforgiveness, fear, or unbelief needs to be confessed and dismantled first. Sometimes the Father is teaching you to want the Giver more than the gift. Keep asking. Hannah did, and the answer came. The third is the fear of other people. 'What will my family think? What will my pastor think?' Friend, no one but Jesus died for you. No one but Jesus stood up out of the grave for you. No one but Jesus is your final audience.

If your family loves you, they will adjust. If your church is healthy, it will rejoice. If a relationship sours because you took God at God's word, that relationship was already on borrowed time. Honor everyone in your life. But obey God.

What Receiving Often Looks Like People often ask, 'How will I know it's real?' The answers are wonderfully varied. Some begin with a single word repeated softly, then a small phrase, then a flowing language that rises into a quiet stream. Some receive with tears that have been waiting in the well for years. Some receive with laughter they can't explain.

Some receive with steady, sober peace and an unfamiliar tongue rolling out as plainly as their morning prayer. There's no single emotional template for the Spirit's filling. Don't chase someone else's experience. Welcome your own. In the days that follow, watch for the quiet evidences. A new boldness in conversations you used to avoid. A new desire for the

Word. A sweetness in worship. A burden for souls that didn't used to weigh on you.

A growing capacity to forgive what you used to nurse. The

Spirit's coming isn't measured only by what happens in the moment but by what unfolds in the months. Stay yielded. The first chapter of a Spirit-filled life is just that, the first chapter.

the gifts of the Spirit

A Closer Look at the Manifestation Gifts

Let us walk through the nine manifestation gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 with one or two sentences each. None of these are antiques. All of them are still in operation. The Spirit hasn't retired. • Word of wisdom, a Spirit-given insight into how to apply God's truth in a specific situation. Practical heaven for an earthly moment. • Word of knowledge, a Spirit-given piece of factual information you couldn't have known on your own.

Often used to comfort, convict, or open a door for ministry. • Faith, not saving faith, but a sudden surge of supernatural confidence to believe God for something specific. • Gifts of healings: note the plurals. Not one gift of healing, but many gifts of healings. God moves through different kinds of bodies in different kinds of ways. • Working of miracles, the breaking of natural law for kingdom purposes.

Provision when there should not have been any. Deliverance when there couldn't have been any. • Prophecy: speaking the encouragement, comfort, or strengthening of God to a person or a room (1 Corinthians 14:3). Not always predictive. Always edifying. • Discerning of spirits, the ability to recognize the source behind a manifestation. Is this human, holy, or hostile?

- Kinds of tongues. Spirit-given speech in a language not learned.
- Sometimes for prayer, sometimes for public ministry that needs interpretation.
- Interpretation of tongues, the matching gift that turns a public tongue into edification for the whole gathering.
- Three small reminders before you go on a gift hunt.
- First, every gift is to be tested. Not every voice claiming to be the Spirit is the Spirit (1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22). The presence of a gift doesn't prove the holiness of the giver.
- Second, every gift is to be ordered. 1 Corinthians 14 spends a whole

- chapter on order in the gathering. The Spirit is never the author of
- confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). If something is breaking the room, it's
- not the Spirit doing the breaking.
- Third, every gift is to be loved. 1 Corinthians 13 sits between 12 and 14
- on purpose. Love isn't one of the gifts. Love is the air the gifts
- breathe. Without love, the most spectacular gift is just noise.

A Word About Tongues

We need a chapter on tongues, because the New Testament has a lot to say about it and the modern church often doesn't know how to talk about it. Let us be plain. Speaking in tongues is the supernatural ability to speak words you haven't learned, given by the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of prayer, worship, edification, and, in certain settings, public ministry. It shows up in the Bible in two slightly different ways, and both are still operating today.

The Sign That Accompanies the Baptism In Acts, when the Spirit fell on a group of believers in a baptizing way, tongues showed up again and again, at Pentecost (2:4), in Cornelius' house (10:46), and in Ephesus (19:6).

For more than a hundred years, the global Pentecostal movement has read these passages together and concluded that speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence, the first sign, that a believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. That isn't all the Spirit will do, but it's often the first thing: giving you a tongue you didn't have. Why a tongue? Why not a feeling, or a thought, or a healing?

Because the tongue is the part of you the Bible says is hardest to tame (James 3:8). When the Spirit gets your tongue, the Spirit has the rudder of your whole life.

The Prayer Language The other use of tongues is more ongoing. Paul writes about a private prayer language that builds you up in your faith (1 Corinthians 14:4; Jude 20). It's between you and God. It isn't for the room. It's for your

closet. It's the language you can pray when you don't know what to say. Romans 8:26 says the Spirit helps us in our weakness, because we don't know what to pray for as we ought. Tongues isn't the only way the Spirit does this, but it's one beautiful way.

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:15 (NIV)

Both languages, the language you understand, and the language only the Spirit understands, have a place in a healthy prayer life.

Tongues as a Weapon Here is something the saints in our tradition have always known and many modern Christians have forgotten. Praying in tongues isn't only a comfort. It's also a weapon. Paul writes about the armor of God in Ephesians 6 and ends with this: 'And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests' (Ephesians 6:18). Praying in the Spirit is named alongside the sword and the shield.

It's part of how a believer stands. When you don't know what is coming against you in the unseen places, when you sense oppression on a family member, a city, a friend in trouble, and you don't have words in English, you have words in heaven. Praying in tongues lets the Spirit pray through you exactly what the situation needs, even when your mind can't name it. That's intercession with help. That's warfare with help.

That's one of the most powerful inheritances the church has, and it's yours. Use it. Pray in tongues for your children, your marriage, your church, your nation. Pray in tongues when fear comes. Pray in tongues when the room feels heavy. The Holy Ghost isn't weak, and what flows through your tongue when you yield to the Spirit isn't weak either.

Tongues in the Gathered Church Paul holds two things together in 1 Corinthians 14 that are sometimes pulled apart, and there's a third setting many readers miss entirely. Let me name all three carefully, so the church doesn't shut down the very thing the Spirit is trying to give in worship. First, a public tongue directed at the gathered church. This is what 1 Corinthians 14:27-28 is addressing.

If someone stands up and speaks a tongue out loud as a message intended for the whole room, that utterance carries an obligation: no more than two or three in a service, each in turn, and someone should interpret. Why? Because the room is being addressed, and the room

needs to understand. If no interpreter is present, that public message should stay silent, and the speaker should 'speak to himself and to God' (v. 28).

Paul isn't silencing the gift. He is protecting the room from being addressed in a language no one can follow.

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:15 (NIV)

Third, personal prayer in tongues. The closet, the car, the moments alone with God. No interpretation needed, because no one is being addressed but God. This is the prayer language Paul speaks about throughout the chapter, the language that builds you up in your faith (1 Corinthians 14:4; Jude 20). So the rule of thumb is simple. If you are speaking a tongue as a message to the room, follow the order: two or three at most,

interpreted, in turn. If the whole room is worshipping God in tongues together, you aren't addressing the room and you aren't breaking Paul's rule. If you are alone, the language belongs to you and the Spirit. And in every case, Paul closes the chapter the same way: 'earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues' (1 Corinthians 14:39). Hear this clearly. Order isn't the enemy of the Spirit. Confusion is. The goal is never to silence the Spirit in worship. The goal is that the room be edified, the worshiper be free, and the gift not be forbidden.

Common Worries 'What if I make it up?' This is the most common worry. Here is the truth: faith is always the doorway. You will speak. The Spirit will give the utterance. It doesn't feel like dictation. It feels like cooperation. The first words may sound strange to your own ears. They might be repetitive. That's normal. As you keep yielding, the Spirit will deepen the language. 'What if I lose control?' You won't.

The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (1 Corinthians 14:32). The Spirit doesn't bulldoze you. The Spirit partners with you. 'What if I never get it?' You will. The Father gives good gifts. Stay close. Surround

yourself with mature believers who can pray with you. Keep asking. Keep yielding. The promise is for you.

Stewarding Your Gift in Community

The Spirit gives gifts the way a wise parent gives chores, to grow you, to bless the family, and to make sure no one carries the whole load. Here are four habits that turn a gift into a fruitful ministry. • Discover. Get around the people of God in person. Pray. Try things. Listen for confirmation. The right gift in your hands will feel like coming home, even when it stretches you. • Develop. Gifts mature with use.

Even a person with a clear word of knowledge will fumble at first. That's normal. Practice in safe rooms. Submit your gift to the wisdom of seasoned voices. Be teachable. • Deploy. A gift unused is a candle under a bowl (Matthew 5:15). The body needs your gift. Show up. Volunteer. Pray for someone. Encourage the room. Don't wait until you feel ready. You will rarely feel ready. • Defer. Be willing to step back when others are ministering.

Be willing to receive correction. Be willing to celebrate someone else's gift without quietly competing. Mature stewards know the gift isn't theirs. And remember the order Paul gave: pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1). Love first. Then gifts. Always together.

the disciple's inner world

Fruit Over Flash

There's a difference between gifts and fruit, and the difference is everything. Gifts are given. They show up in a moment. They can be powerful even in immature people. The fact that someone prophesies accurately or prays for the sick effectively doesn't necessarily mean they are walking closely with Jesus. King Saul prophesied. Balaam prophesied. Judas cast out demons. Gifts can be present where character is absent. Fruit is grown.

It takes time. It takes seasons. It can't be faked because it isn't on the surface, it's in the life. Love that endures. Joy that survives loss. Peace that doesn't require ideal conditions. Patience that holds when the room turns. Kindness that costs you. Goodness that no one is watching. Faithfulness that outlasts the hype cycle. Gentleness that doesn't bruise. Self-control that no one applauds.

By their fruit you will recognize them.

MATTHEW 7:20 (NIV)

Jesus didn't say you would recognize disciples by their gift. He said you would recognize them by their fruit. This is the long protection of your soul. If you pursue the gifts without pursuing the Giver, you will end up impressive and empty. If you pursue the Giver, the gifts will arrive in their season and the fruit will keep them honest.

Power without character is a short ministry. Fruit makes the gifts believable. We don't pursue the Spirit so we can shine. We pursue the Spirit so we can love and last.

Where Fruit Actually Grows Fruit isn't grown in conferences. Fruit is grown in marriages, in workplaces, in the back-and-forth of family, in the long obedience of showing up. Patience is grown by people who try your patience. Kindness is grown by people who don't deserve your kindness.

Selfcontrol is grown by the unwatched moments where no one applauds. The Spirit won't bypass the very situations the Spirit is using to grow you.

Stop looking for an exit. Start looking for the lesson. The room you want to escape is often the soil the Spirit is using. And remember: fruit is unhurried. You can't microwave a peach. The Helper is unhurried with you, and you are allowed to be unhurried with yourself. Where you see a sliver of growth this year that wasn't there last year, give thanks. Where you see places that haven't yet yielded, don't despair.

The Vinedresser hasn't stopped working (John 15:1-2).

Word and Spirit: The Two Wings

There's an old saying that has weathered the years for a reason: all Word and no Spirit, you dry up. All Spirit and no Word, you blow up. Both Word and Spirit, you grow up. The Word of God and the Spirit of God aren't in competition. They are partners. The Spirit inspired the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). The Spirit illuminates the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). The Spirit applies the Scriptures (John 14:26).

And the Spirit will never lead you to do or believe something the Scriptures clearly forbid. Any 'leading' that contradicts the Bible isn't the Holy Spirit. It's a different spirit. The danger goes both ways. Some Christians grow theologically strong but spiritually flat. They know the Bible cold and haven't heard from God in years. Their faith is correct but cold. Other Christians grow spiritually expressive but biblically thin.

They chase the next prophetic word, the next conference, the next viral leader, and have no anchor when the storm comes. Both are missing a wing. Here is a simple rhythm. Read the Bible expecting the Spirit to speak. Listen for the Spirit expecting the Bible to confirm. The book and the Helper are best friends. They were never meant to be separated. Practical habits. Read a chapter a day. Memorize a verse a week. Pray Scripture back to God.

Test every prompting against the Bible's clear teaching. Don't be afraid to ask, 'Lord, is this You?' The Spirit isn't offended by an honest question. The Spirit is a Person, and Persons appreciate it when you check.

walking it out

Honest Questions, Honest Answers

Here are eleven questions I have heard a thousand times. Short answers, given in love. 1. Don't all Christians automatically have the Holy Spirit? Yes: every born-again believer has the Spirit indwelling them (Romans 8:9). The New Testament also describes a distinct, subsequent filling that empowers believers for service. Both are real. Both are biblical. You don't have to choose.

2. Did tongues stop with the apostles? There's no verse that teaches that. The argument that tongues ceased is built on inferences, not on direct biblical command. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of believers across every continent are speaking in tongues today. The simplest reading of the Bible and the testimony of the modern church both point the same direction. The gift hasn't been recalled.

3. Is speaking in tongues weird? It can feel that way the first time. So does swimming, the first time you put your face in the water. The strangeness isn't a problem; it's a doorway. Yield, breathe, speak.

4. What if I can't understand what I am saying? That's the design. 1 Corinthians 14:2 says the one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to people but to God. Your spirit prays with help. Your mind goes along by faith. Both are good.

5. Do I need someone to lay hands on me? It's biblical (Acts 8:17; 19:6) and it can be a powerful catalyst, but it isn't strictly required. The Father can pour out the Holy Spirit on you in your kitchen tonight. You aren't at a disadvantage if you are alone.

6. What if I don't feel anything? Feelings aren't the measurement. The Word is. Some receive with weeping. Some receive with laughter. Some receive with quiet steadiness. The evidence isn't what you feel. It's what flows out of your mouth, and how you change over time.

7. What if I had a bad experience in a Pentecostal church? Take your time. Don't let one room define one God. Read the New Testament with fresh eyes. Find a healthy community. Let the Spirit reintroduce the Spirit to you. The Spirit isn't the bad room you remember. The Spirit is the Person Jesus told you about.

8. Will I lose control if I open up to the Spirit? No. The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control (Galatians 5:23). The Spirit makes you more in command of yourself, not less. The picture of a Spirit-filled person isn't a wild manipulation. It's a settled, sober, confident son or daughter of God.

9. What if I receive and then sin tomorrow? You will. You are still being made holy. The Spirit will lead you to repentance. The gift isn't contingent on your perfection. It's contingent on the Father's faithfulness, and there's plenty of that.

10. Is this experience for me if I am a quiet, intellectual person? Yes. Some of the most articulate Spirit-filled believers in history have been thinkers. C. S. Lewis read of it with curiosity; J. Rodman Williams wrote a three-volume systematic theology saturated in it;

thousands of professors and physicians have received and continued to be the same careful, sober minds afterward. The Spirit doesn't require you to leave your brain at the door. The Spirit fills the brain God gave you. If you are wired to think before you feel, that's fine. Bring your whole self. The Spirit will meet you where you are.

11. What if I have prayed for the baptism in the Spirit before and never received? Try again. Faith isn't a one-time roll of the dice. The disciples waited for ten days in an upper room. Many believers receive in their second or third or seventh time of seeking. Sometimes the delay is preparation. Sometimes there's a sin or unforgiveness or fear that needs to come out into the light first. Sometimes the Father is teaching us hunger. Whatever the reason, don't interpret a delay as a denial. Keep asking. Keep yielding. Keep loving Jesus. The Father knows the plan.

Sent

Every Spirit experience in the New Testament leads to a doorway. Acts 2 ends with three thousand baptized. Acts 4 ends with the people speaking the word with boldness. Acts 8 ends with the gospel running into Samaria. Acts 10 ends with Cornelius' household redeemed. Acts 19 ends with the word of the Lord prevailing in Asia. The Spirit fills, and then the Spirit sends. This is where many Christians get stuck.

We treat the Spirit as a personal experience to be enjoyed. The Spirit is, but the Spirit is more. The Spirit is the wind in your sails for a journey you haven't begun yet. The Spirit who fell on you in your bedroom is the same Spirit who will lead you to your unsaved coworker on Monday. The Spirit who anointed you to sing on Sunday is the same Spirit who will give you a word for your neighbor on Tuesday.

"But 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 (NIV)

You are a witness. Not a recruiter. Not a salesman. A witness: someone who has seen and heard, and who tells the truth about what they have seen and heard. The Spirit does the convincing. The Spirit does the saving. You just tell the story. Where is your Jerusalem? It's your home, your block, your job, your friend group. Where is your Judea? It's the wider city or county where

God has placed you. Where is your Samaria? It's the people groups you wouldn't naturally cross over to, the ones the Spirit is going to push you toward. Where is the end of the earth? It's wherever God sends you next, whether on a plane or in a prayer. Go. The Helper is with you. The Father is for you. The Son is in you. You aren't alone.

One Last Word for the Ordinary Disciple Most of what the Spirit will do through you won't happen on a stage. It will happen at a kitchen table. In a hospital corridor. In a parking lot before work. In a conversation you almost didn't have. The Spirit loves the unseen places, because that's where the Spirit gets to be the only audience.

You may go your whole life and never have a podcast or a platform, and you may still leave the world quieter, gentler, freer, more full of Jesus because you walked in step with the Helper. That's the win. Heaven isn't impressed by influence. Heaven is impressed by faithfulness. So do the small thing. Pray for the coworker. Forgive the family member. Tell your child a story about Jesus. Pray in tongues for ten minutes in the car.

Read a chapter of John tonight. Whisper a thankyou to the Helper at red lights. Walk home. The Spirit-filled life isn't somewhere out there. It's the next breath, in the room you are already in.

You Are Before you close this book, hear who you are in plain words.

You are filled with the Holy Ghost. You are a witness. You are an heir of the promise. You are a vessel of the same power that raised Christ from the dead. You are loved, you are forgiven, you are sent. You aren't weak. You aren't alone. You aren't finished. Now go. The wind is at your back. The fire is in your bones. The Father is for you, the Son is in you, and the Helper walks with you. Let the Spirit flow through you to change your world.

Period.

GO IN POWER

hand it to somebody

A closing blessing Friend, I want to leave you with a blessing. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 13:14. Read them slowly. Receive them. Hand them to someone else.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:14 (NIV)

May the Father pour out the Holy Ghost on you afresh. May the Son walk through every locked door of your heart, the way He walked into that upper room. May the Helper teach you, lead you, fill you, and send you. May your tongue become a harp. May your hands become a healing place. May your feet carry good news. May your fruit be slow and your roots be deep.

And may you, disciple of Jesus, never settle for less than what the Father gladly gives. the Father is still pouring. From the Community of Hope family, to whoever the Lord placed this book in front of: you are seen. You are wanted. You are loved. There's room for you here, and there's more for you here. It's NEVER too late.

Simple.

In the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father: amen.

let the Book keep working

Scripture index A handful of the most important passages cited in this book. Bookmark them. Read them in context.

Let them keep working in you long after you finish this last page. • Genesis 1:2; 2:7 • Numbers 11:24–29 • Isaiah 11:1–2; 61:1–3 • Ezekiel 36:25–27; 37:1–14 • Joel 2:28–32 • Matthew 3:11; 12:28; 28:19 • Luke 4:1–21; 11:9–13; 24:44–49 • John 3:5–8; 7:37–39; 14:15–31; 16:5–15; 20:19–23 • Acts 1:1–11; 2:1–21, 33, 38–39; 4:23–31; 8:14–25; 10:34–48; 19:1–7 • Romans 8:1–17, 26–27; 12:3–8 • 1 Corinthians 12:1–31; 13:1–13; 14:1–5, 26–33, 39–40 • 2 Corinthians 3:17–18; 13:14 • Galatians 5:16–26 • Ephesians 1:13–14; 4:7–13, 30; 5:15–21 • 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 5:19–22 • 2 Timothy 1:7 • Hebrews 9:14 • James 3:8 • 1 Peter 4:10–11

- 1 John 2:20, 27; 4:1
- Jude 20

Soli Deo Gloria

pull up Sunday

You're invited The Spirit-filled life was never meant to be lived alone. Community of Hope AME Church started in 2006 in a nightclub with eight people, because we believe church should meet people where they actually live. Twenty years in the making, that hasn't changed. We preach and teach Jesus unapologetically. We go into dark places and call it being the light. And we mean our name: this is a community where everyone, everyone, has a chance. We don't care how you come. Come with doubts. Come with a past. Come hungry for more of the Holy Spirit. We only care about the way you leave.

PULL UP SUNDAY

Sundays at 10:00 AM Crossland High School 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748

CAN'T MAKE IT IN PERSON?

Watch live on YouTube: @hiphopenationtv Facebook: @CmtyofHope · Web: www.hiphopenation.com

WANT SOMEONE TO PRAY WITH YOU?

If you prayed to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit while reading this book, or you want to, reach us at info@hiphopenation.com or 240-273-9115. We would be honored to seek with you.

We'll save you a seat.

where everyone has a chance. We'll save you a seat.

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COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

Sundays 10 AM · Crossland High School