



## *Communicating Spirit Baptism in Fresh New Ways*

*By: Gary Grogan*

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, even as the Spirit was giving them to declare” (Acts 2:4, A.S. Worrell Translation).

In his footnote on this verse, Worrell states: “This gracious experience — whether considered as an immersion in the Holy Spirit, or a filling with, or the gift of the Holy Spirit, is the privilege of every true believer (verse 39), and his duty (Ephesians 5:18).” How do we teach this privilege and duty in our post-Christian culture?

The Lord wants to baptize every believer in the power of the Spirit. For that to happen, He wants to teach pastors — as He has faithfully done in every age of every culture — how to communicate this experience in fresh new ways that will reach people instead of driving them away. Here are some practical ways to minister the Holy Spirit baptism in today’s culture.

### Decide Holy Spirit Baptism Is a Blessing, Not a Curse

Missional leaders work to communicate with the cultures in which God has placed them. The last thing they want to do is drive people away. Because of this, some leaders develop an apprehension toward preaching or teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> No one needs to feel condemned; this is a legitimate concern, especially for those who are reaching people from diverse backgrounds.

Pastors must decide that Holy Spirit baptism is biblical and is a viable experience for their church today. With some creativity and intentionality, pastors can lead their people into this life-changing experience without scaring them away or freaking them out.

Many younger ministers are walking away from Pentecostal circles because they have become convinced tongues<sup>2</sup> is no longer theologically correct. In many cases, they struggle with past methodologies, not so much with theology.

Everyone I have known who has walked away from proclaiming the Baptism speaks in tongues in his private prayer times. Now, instead of leading others into this joyous experience, they are robbing others of this great gift. That is grievous and unnecessary.

Holy Spirit baptism is a valid, biblical experience that Jesus administers himself (Luke 24:49). I am asking — no matter the hang-ups — that with integrity pastors simply say, “Okay, it’s Bible.” This is where we must start. Pentecost is not a cultural experience that turns us off; it is a Jesus experience, a Bible experience, and an experience for today.

### Be Creative With Teaching Holy Spirit Baptism the Same As You Are With Other Topics

I love the creativity and innovation of this generation. So be creative in teaching this great truth. Use your God-given creativity and make it fun and powerful.

Mark Batterson, pastor at National Community Church in Washington D.C., says part of being Godlike is being cre-

ative. I agree. Be Godlike in proclaiming the truth of Holy Spirit baptism.

I used a Pentecost Sunday sermon series written by Ron Bontrager, pastor of Lakeview Christian Center in Indianapolis, Indiana, entitled “Power-Aide.” My young creative ministry team put more than 100 bottles of Power-Aide on our stage. Each week we gave away drinks. This was a simple but fun way to deal with Holy Spirit baptism. After the third message, we came around the front and worshiped. Many experienced their own prayer language for the first time. It was fun, contemporary, and easy. For weeks afterward, people e-mailed us and testified they had received their language while reading their Bibles at home. One received the Baptism while driving to work.

### Be Intentional

Schedule a stand-alone or short series around Pentecost Sunday. Instead of ignoring Spirit baptism, scheduling this series will force you to make it work in the culture of your church and community. Consider scheduling a Holy Spirit retreat at the end of your Alpha course, or start a class or seminar on Spirit baptism. Resist the temptation to do nothing. A Lutheran church in St. Paul, Minnesota, teaches on the Holy Spirit baptism through classes, seminars, retreats, and other creative ways — more than most Pentecostal and charismatic churches do.

Part of missional leadership is doing the things we know are right but would rather not do. For me, it is preaching on money. I do not like to preach on money; but when I do, our people and church are blessed because of my obedience. Pastoring would be easy if all we had to preach on was grace, but pastoring is not always easy.

Resist the subtle temptation to wait until you have the baptism in the Holy Spirit figured out. It is simply our job as leaders to teach our people and lead the way. We must provide opportunities for growth, and we do that by being intentional. Make plans and then work those plans like we do with other things.

### Avoid the Ditches of Legalism and Liberalism

We want what is best for our people and do not want our neglect to hinder their walk with God. Leaving out teaching on the Holy Spirit baptism leads people to being critical, judgmental, and into the ditch of liberalism. By liberalism, I mean out of balance.

It is better to drive down the road than to run off the road and into a ditch. People can be injured, our vehicles can be damaged, and at the least, we can delay the journey for ourselves or someone else. We need to be reminded that our calling is to faithfully preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2). We want to do this in culturally relevant ways. This wonderful experience of the Holy Spirit baptism will greatly enrich lives. We need to avoid the ditch of indifference.

We also need to avoid the ditch of legalism. Legalists are never happy regardless of what is said or done. They are certainly out of balance. Legalists often equate Pentecost with certain styles of preaching, singing, and other methodologies. They tend to reject anything they do not understand.

A Pentecostal legalist wandered into our church while I was teaching on the Holy Spirit baptism. I did so in a conversational way and then had a simple time of worship and prayer around the altars for about 10 minutes. Approximately 20 people began to speak in a prayer language for the first time that morning, including Erika Harold, Miss America 2003. This Pentecostal legalist came to me after the service and said, “There is no way those people were really baptized in the Holy Ghost.” I asked why she felt that way and she replied, “Because it wasn’t loud enough and there was no real emotion in it.” She was stuck in the ditch of legalism.

To stay out of both these ditches we need to remember that none of us can save anyone, so why do we think we can fill anyone with the Holy Spirit? In both cases we simply teach the Word of God and create an atmosphere, then God does His part. Preach salvation, and people will get saved. Preach Holy Spirit baptism, and believers will be Holy Spirit-baptized. We get what we preach.

To stay out of the ditches pastors also need to free themselves from the pressure of thinking they always need to have an altar service. Train people to be on prayer teams and have them available to pray with people who necessary to

have a Billy Graham-type appeal to see people saved, and it is not necessary to have a camp meeting-style appeal to see people baptized in the Holy Spirit. Today's audiences will not process old methodology. It may even cause them to freeze up or perhaps walk out.

People do not always respond immediately to a message of salvation. It is the same way with Holy Spirit baptism. People will not always have an immediate response, but eventually some will respond.

### Pray Your People Will Be Holy Spirit Baptized

Praying people through to the Baptism requires no special gifts or abilities. We simply teach God's Word in creative ways, learn to connect with culture and not alienate people, and then pray for the Lord to save and baptize His people. I encourage young pastors/leaders to pray: "Jesus, I need You to baptize these people in the Holy Spirit. You said You would, and I am asking You to do it." Pour out your concerns to Him about people getting weird, demonstrative, and spooky. Ask Him to take care of those things.

I pastor in a city with a large university where people from every walk of life come to our services. We try to do things with order and excellence. I want people to connect with God through salvation and Holy Spirit baptism, but I do not want Pentecostal cultural things to chase them away. I have told the Lord I am not ashamed, but He has to help me make all this work in our setting.

In the past, some Pentecostal churches have left out the Baptism as they have grown or have regulated it to Sunday or Wednesday nights. With the huge cultural shifts we have seen and with the dissolution of Sunday night services, it is imperative we learn how to teach Holy Spirit baptism in relevant ways on Sunday mornings, in our youth or young adult meetings, and other primary meetings.

### Admit Your Fear and Do Some Defragmenting

Paul said to young Timothy, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (fear), but of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7, NIV). Just like a computer needs to be defragmented once in a while, we need to do the same. We need to get rid of junk-like fear that slows us down and keeps us from doing what we know we should. We cannot afford to give in to our fears and apprehensions. Desire overcomes fear and intimidation. If we will simply have the desire and ask the Lord to really help us, He will. If we will be faithful, He will be faithful and will baptize believers in the Holy Spirit.

You do not need to lose your mind and put on a gospel freak show to teach the truth on Holy Spirit baptism. But you do need to be willing "to preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), to convince, reproach, and encourage, as you teach with all patience" (2 Timothy 2:4, GNT) like you promised to do when you were licensed and/or ordained to full-gospel ministry.

As men and women of integrity, pastors must do what they promised the Lord they would do. Pastors need to be like Jet Li, the warrior in the movie Fearless. His family name was shamed. He regained honor for his family by defeating the best warriors in the land. We need some young, fearless ministers to show us how to do this in post-Christian culture.

Pastors do not need to preach on the Holy Spirit every week, but they need to be willing to preach this important Pentecostal doctrine. Perhaps a stand-alone or short series around Pentecost Sunday is sufficient. If there is no sin in preaching on the Incarnation and Resurrection only around Christmas and Easter, why do some hyper-Pentecostals (who are on spiritual Ritalin) think we have lost it if we only deal with Holy Spirit baptism once a year? Do not let legalists ruin preaching on Holy Spirit baptism for you. You can mention Holy Spirit baptism in your teaching throughout the year by saying: "Some of you need to search out the claims of Holy Spirit baptism to see if it's true just like you did the claims of Christ. This is a Bible church. I promise you I would not teach on it unless it was in the Word. See if God has a prayer language for you."

The way we say things will either free people or freeze them. As missional leaders, we are trying to connect with and

reach people, not run them off.

I also talk about Holy Spirit baptism at the end of prayer meetings when people are around the altar. I show a PowerPoint outline and go through the basics of Holy Spirit baptism. (See sidebar Six Steps To Receive the Holy Spirit Baptism.) Nearly every time people receive the Baptism and start praying in a language they have never learned.

The atmosphere in a prayer meeting is different from our Sunday morning services when those exploring or window-shopping Christianity show up. I am not embarrassed being Pentecostal. It is just a matter of trying to be wise and reach as many people as possible for Christ. After all, that is the primary reason Jesus told us to receive this promise of the Father, that we might be His witnesses (Acts 1:4,8).

Many people get their ideas about Pentecost from movies like *The Apostle* or from TV evangelists, many of whom culture makes fun. Because of these obstacles, many fear teaching and praying for people to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Deconstruct your fear and teach the Baptism in a way that does not violate your personality or the culture of your church. Styles that work at camps, retreats, and conventions do not usually work on Sunday mornings. That is okay.

#### Wrap-up

I apologize to our younger generation of ministers who sometimes feel abandoned. Forgive my generation for not being better spiritual fathers. Forgive us for making methodology and programs sacred. Please avoid the mistakes we have made and embrace the baptism in the Holy Spirit. My word to our younger ministers is: “desire earnestly to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues” (1 Corinthians 14:39, A.S. Worrell Translation, emphasis mine).

I love praying in a language I have never learned. Many times I have not known what to do, but when I pray in the Spirit, the Lord gives me a word of wisdom, prophecy, or insight to bring healing and help to a person or situation. Many that I know and love who are trying to reach the unchurched need the Holy Spirit’s fullness to help them. Whether it is Joel Gross in the Minneapolis uptown area, Brad Riley at the University of Colorado in Boulder, or Terry Austria at the University of Illinois in Urbana — they realize without the help of the Holy Spirit they cannot reach people in their unique cultures.

None of us can afford to leave Holy Spirit baptism out of our preaching. We must learn to do things better and debunk Pentecostal myths.<sup>3</sup> The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a tremendous blessing to everyone who receives. As a young minister, be creative, intentional, stay out the ditches, pray the Lord will Spirit baptize your people, and do some de-fragmenting of your own fears. We all struggle. Ministering Holy Spirit baptism in a post-Christian culture is a struggle for many young leaders. But know you are loved, believed in, and given leeway to figure things out. Let us not walk away from each other. Let us embrace one another as we journey together. I am passing the baton to you.

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