

Empowered by the Holy Spirit

Moving People toward Christ, Part 5

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Today we're going to conclude our series on "Moving People toward Christ." In thinking about how to minister to believers and how to point unbelievers toward Christ, we've looked at four different phases:

- **Engagement**, showing love for our neighbors and others who don't know Christ.
- **Evangelism**, the presentation of the gospel to these people, calling them to repentance and faith.
- **Establish** those who have been born again—whether that applies to ourselves, our children or new believers who have come to faith, so that we might be rooted and grounded in Him.
- **Equipped**, seeing ourselves as ministers of the gospel—not content to have a private relationship with God, but to think about how we're called to ministry to others.

Today we'll finish this series by thinking about how all of this is pointless if we do it in our own strength. It will all be fruitless, useless and empty, unless we are **Empowered** by the Holy Spirit. I'll begin by asking you to imagine what it would have been like to have been with Jesus in the upper room, where they celebrated the first Lord's Supper. Maybe you're one of the Twelve. You've abandoned everything to follow Jesus. You quit your job as a salesman or a tradesman or a secretary or whatever you do. You've left it to follow Him.

The longer you're with Him, the more you become convinced that He is the Messiah. This is the promised One Who came to make all things right in this world. This is God. You've seen amazing supernatural works. He took ordinary water and turned it into wine. You saw Him walk on water. Remember that time you were out on the sea, when He spoke to the storm and it stopped? Remember the way nature obeys this Man? You've seen people who have never walked before get up and leap and run. You've seen people who have never seen anything before have their eyes opened. You've seen dead people come alive. Jesus has been doing amazing things.

All this time you are more convinced than ever that this is the Man you want to follow. This is the God-Man, your Savior. You want to be useful in His ministry. And now you're sitting

in a room with Him and He starts speaking about how one of you will betray Him. He mentions that this is the last time He'll eat this meal with you before He suffers. He speaks of going away. Maybe, like Peter, you respond by saying, "Lord, I would never abandon You. I will die for You." Peter and the rest of them believe this. You had already given up everything to follow Him. You want to serve Him and be useful to Him. You want to be with Him. It's in this setting that Jesus is preparing you all for ministry after He leaves. After this Supper, He makes the first promise about the Holy Spirit.

We'll be looking at a lot of Scripture today, as Jesus taught them and is teaching us to be dependent on and empowered by the Holy Spirit. While He is with His disciples, He tells them:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17)

Go to the next chapter, to John 15:4-5:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus is preparing His disciples for the days after He has gone, telling them, "I'm going to send the Holy Spirit. You must abide in Me. You must depend on Me. You can't do any of this on your own. You cannot accomplish God's purposes in this world on your own. Apart from Me, you cannot bear fruit. Apart from Me, you can do nothing." Then in John 15:26 He says, "*But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*" And in John 16:7, "*Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.*"

We see in this context that Jesus is teaching that we must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. We must. It's what He said back in John 15:5, "Without Me—apart from Me—you can do nothing." Compare that to the promise He gives them later, after the resurrection, in Acts 1:8: "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" Jesus says

that when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will receive power, and the Holy Spirit will propel us out to be His witnesses here and around the world.

The Holy Spirit is the One Who will empower us to engage, evangelize, establish and equip so that we will move toward Christ and we will be able to help others do the same. These thoughts are not new to us, but we need to be reminded of how desperately we need to depend on God the Holy Spirit. We are reminded of this not only through Jesus' teachings, but also through the example of His life. Jesus modeled the reality that we must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. It's the way He lived. Even as the second Person of the Trinity—the God-Man—took on flesh, He took on needs. Then He lived in a way that was completely dependent on God the Holy Spirit.

This won't be an extensive teaching on all that was entailed in the incarnation. We know that Jesus never stopped being God, but when He took on flesh He limited His divine attributes and became dependent on the Holy Spirit. We can see this in Luke 4, right near the beginning of His ministry. After His baptism, He faced a severe temptation from the devil, but He resisted that temptation through the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke 4:1-2 says, *“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.”*

We know this story of how Jesus resisted temptation. Then in verses 14-15, after He comes out of that time of testing, Luke says, *“And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.”* Later He quotes Joel in the words of His sermon, telling the people that this prophecy was being fulfilled in their hearing:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. (Luke 4:18-19)

In Matthew 12:28, Jesus says, *“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”* So Jesus is saying, “I'm casting out demons by the Spirit of God.” Acts 10:37-38:

You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

So He was God, yet living this life here on earth, God was with Him. The Holy Spirit was filling and enabling Him, as He resisted temptation, as He proclaimed the good news, as He cast out demons. Throughout His ministry, Jesus was filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:11 Paul says, *“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you....”* So even in the resurrection, it was the Holy Spirit Who raised Jesus from the dead. *“He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”*

We worship Jesus as God, and He is. We can see throughout His life that Jesus did not attempt to live and do ministry in His own strength. He was filled with the Spirit. He was empowered by the Spirit. He was enabled by the Holy Spirit. Which leads us to ask this question: why do we think we can live this Christian life and accomplish things for God and do ministry and engage this world and see people come to Christ in our own strength? Are we tempted to think if we just put on a good service on Sunday, with good enough music and good enough greeters and good enough programs, that people will come and be changed and choose to follow God? No, we must be dependent on the Holy Spirit. God must do that work.

Are we tempted to think we can handle our personal sins and temptations in our own strength? We wouldn't say that, I don't think. But how often are we begging God to fill us with His Spirit when we face temptations, asking Him to deliver us? Are we tempted to think we can raise our kids in our own strength? Are we tempted to think we can have good marriages in our own strength? Are we tempted to think we can teach Sunday School classes and serve in the nursery and serve in other ways in the church—or be a light of gospel witness to our neighbors and friends—just by coming up with the right words to say?

We must be dependent on the Holy Spirit. Jesus was, and as a result His ministry was fruitful and powerful. Church becomes irrelevant when it becomes purely a human creation. We're not all we were made to be when everything in our lives and in our churches can be explained apart from the presence and work of the Spirit of God, as Francis Chan explains in his book. I hope that causes us to pause. First, are we as a church desperately crying out for Him to do things that cannot be explained by us? As individuals, are we longing to see Him do things in our lives that cannot be explained by the power of our own wills?

John Calvin said it's the Spirit Who inflames our hearts with the fire of ardent love for God and for our neighbors. This series began by looking at these two calls: the great command of God to love Him with all our hearts and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This propels us to engage our world, telling others of the good news. It causes us to be established in faith and

doctrine, in character and community and mission. But none of these happen apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. He inflames our hearts with the fire of ardent love—passionate love for God and others. All of this must be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. So I want us to think for a few moments about how we, as a church, can depend more on God, trust more in Him, be filled with and empowered more by the Holy Spirit.

First, let's look again at the example we see in Jesus' life of prayer. In Mark 1:35—at the beginning of His ministry—it says, *“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”* Jesus realizes He's beginning a significant ministry, so He goes out alone and prays, because He knows He needs God to be at work in Him. Toward the middle of His ministry, in Mark 6:45-47, we read, *“Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.”* Again, He set Himself apart from the crowd to go to His Father in prayer.

Then near the end of His life, in Mark 14:32-33, we read, *“And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.”* We know in that story that even as He took Peter, James and John, He went apart from them to pray alone. Many times in His earthly life, Jesus would find a place to be alone and spent time in prayer. Is that the practice in our lives? It's not something we do to be seen by or to impress others, but it's because we know we desperately need God to be at work.

We have different opportunities in our church to pray in groups. We have regular prayer meetings starting again on Wednesday nights. There's a ladies' prayer time. Many of us pray in our Care Groups. Others are getting together to pray with friends. I hope you're praying with others in our church, as that is essential to the life of our church.

Jesus also taught there are times we should be praying in our closets—not to be seen by others, not to be heard by others, not to say things to impress others, but to go to God desperately, knowing how much we need Him to fill us, just as we see Jesus filled with the Spirit, living a life in dependence on God.

Second, besides praying in general that God will help us, we need to ask specifically that He will give us power from the Holy Spirit. Or said another way, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to fill us, to enable and strengthen and empower us. In Luke 11:13, Jesus said, *“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much*

more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" He is teaching us to ask God to give us the Holy Spirit.

We believe when we're born again that we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We're indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But we also read of later times when we are to continually "being filled" with the Spirit, as we'll see in a minute. In Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus, he prays:

...that according to the riches of [God's] glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Think about that last line. We're to live a life dependent on God in prayer, asking Him for help, expressing our needs and asking the Spirit to strengthen us until we are "*filled with all the fullness of God.*"

Third, we need to set our minds on the things of the Spirit. Romans 8:5 says, "*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.*" If you're hearing this and you can say, "God, I have not been depending on You; I have not been praying to You," then likely your mind has been set on the things of the flesh. These could be sinful things, or they could just be self-sufficient thoughts, the idea that you can handle things on your own—which is also a form of sin. Paul goes on, "*Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds...*"—their affections, their hearts— "*...on the things of the Spirit.*"

In our praying, we're asking God to help us, we're asking Him to enable us, we're asking the Spirit to fill us—and then we ourselves are to fill our minds with things of the Spirit. Ephesians 5:18-19 says, *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.*" This parallel helps us understand what it means to have the Holy Spirit filling us. A person gets drunk when they are drinking in a lot of wine and it begins to control them. Similarly, Paul is saying, "Set your mind on the things of the Spirit. Take in the things of the Spirit and let Him begin to control you."

When we do this, the effects are that we will be "*addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.*" Paul goes on to say we should give thanks to God in all things, "*...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" In another letter, Colossians 3, we find a parallel passage where we see these same effects: addressing each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual things, giving

thanks, and having spiritual relationships. But instead of the command there to be filled with the Spirit, he says in verse 16, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...*” It produces the same results: psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, thankfulness to God and submitting to one another.

So we see that one of the ways we are to be filled with the Spirit is to set our minds on the things of the Spirit, to let the words of Christ live in us. It requires reading, meditating on and memorizing His words, letting them live in us as we abide in Him. Remember, apart from Him, we can do nothing. This is one of the core values of our church. I don’t know how often you think through these core values, but they’re on our website along with our mission statement.

Right here are these two values that tie in so closely to what we’ve been talking about: the active presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the expression of our dependence on God through prayer. These are core values central to who we are as a church, because apart from these things we gather in vain. Apart from these things we bear no fruit. Apart from these things we can do nothing.

Just think about how this practically shapes your life from day to day. Maybe you are facing temptation that you’ve just given up on. You repeatedly give in to it. It’s just one of those besetting sins that seems like it will always be there. Maybe you’ve stopped trying to fight it, thinking, “There’s no way I can gain victory over this anger problem, or this lying problem, or this lust problem.”

Are you going into your days dependent on the Holy Spirit, asking Him for help, asking Him to empower you and change you? That won’t remove the temptation, but He is powerful to save. He’s powerful to change. We must be dependent on Him. Sometimes even our sinfulness and our weaknesses are there to drive us to this need. So we must not let them cause us to give up on God, but let them drive us to Him—to a greater dependence on Him—so we can see God do a work in our lives.

Maybe there are neighbors, family members or friends about whom you think, “There’s no way God can change them. There’s no way God can rescue them. They’re too lost. They would never believe. They would never repent.” Are we settling in to just expecting God to do what could be explained by our own strength, or are we crying out to Him for more? God can do more than we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

My wife and I were talking a couple weeks ago about parenting. Are we seeking to parent our kids in our own strength, or are we crying out to God? “God use us. Help us in the words we say and the tone we use. Empower us to parent in a way that reflects the gospel; that reflects the kindness, grace and mercy of our Father toward us.”

Maybe for you it's your relationship with your spouse or with someone else. It's not just these, but it's in every area of our lives where we need Him.

I want to give us a few moments to silently respond to these questions. Ask God to open our hearts with a greater longing for Him to be at work in us. Ask God to help us be empowered by the Spirit and be people of prayer. Ask the Spirit to fill us and give us the ability to set our minds on the things of the Spirit. Pray that if someone were to watch us for a day and know our thoughts, they would be able to see, "This is a person who knows that He must depend on the Holy Spirit." Ask God to create that in us today or to renew that in us today.

I'm going to close by reading this prayer from Ephesians 3. Paul says, "*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.*" I want to pray for our church what Paul prayed for the Ephesian church, "God, according to the riches of Your glory grant us to be strengthened with power through Your Holy Spirit in our inner being, so that, Christ, You would dwell in our hearts through faith—that we would be rooted and grounded in love, that we would have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of Your love. God, help us know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Help us to be filled with all the fullness of God.

Let's read the rest of this together: "*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*"

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