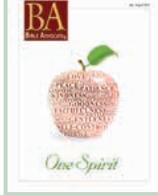




One Spirit



2016: Discipleship



ARTICLES

- 4 The Orchard | Dorothy Nimchuk
- 7 The Day of Pentecost | Melody Manwell
- 8 Our Constant Companion | Robert Coulter
- 12 The Gospel of Restoration | John LeBlanc
- 14 Spirit's Cry | Laurie R. Crowson
- 18 Fruits and Gifts | Calvin Burrell
- 20 Immanuel | Israel Steinmetz
- 23 Hope of New Fruit | Yvonne Kays
- 24 Bare Bones, Fresh Breath | Jason Overman

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — Deep Discipleship
- 11 Questions & Answers
- 16 Sing a Song . . . — Whaid Rose
- 17 Poetry — Marcia K. Leaser
- 27 Mail Bag
- 28 CoG7 In Action
- 30 International Congress — Mission to West Africa
- 31 Last Word — The Big Picture

Scripture quotations

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Deep Discipleship

Where would we be without the Holy Spirit? As I have prepared for this “One Spirit” BA, I’ve been inspired afresh at how essential He is to the life of the disciple – indeed, to all things. Ubiquitous as wind and vitalizing as breath, the Spirit of the Lord holds together Christians and creatures alike.

This Spirit has a close affinity with the Bible we advocate. Open the Book, and there on the first page the Spirit is moving on waters, anxious for creation. Now close it, and on the last page the Spirit is there again – and new creation – inviting each and all to drink of living waters (Genesis 1:2; Revelation 22:17).

Scripture is God-breathed, like creation itself; the Spirit moved it into being (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV; 2 Peter 1:21). As we read the Word, we encounter the voice of the Holy Spirit (Nehemiah 9:30; Proverbs 1:23; Isaiah 59:21; Zechariah 7:12; Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 28:25; Hebrews 3:7; 10:15). The two are nearly synonymous; “the sword of the Spirit . . . is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). It’s epic! The whole Book: all history, one Spirit!

But there’s no discrimination of scale. The one Spirit who meticulously orders the marvelous diversity of cosmos and Bible also stirs, animates the small: each cell, each life, and every disciple. Jesus’ own incarnate life is bracketed, saturated, by the conceiving and resurrecting Spirit of God (Luke 1:35; Romans 8:11).

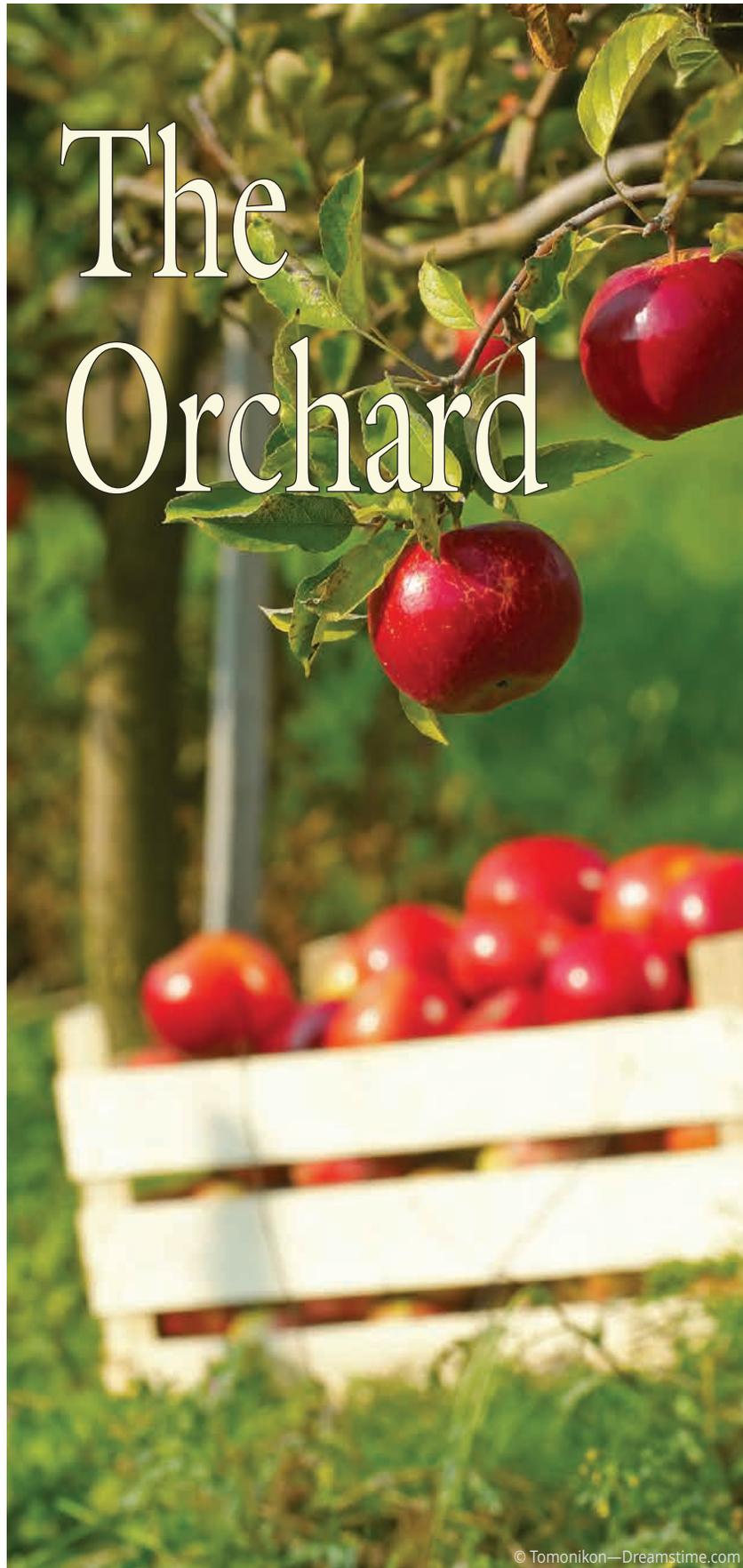
Likewise, we are dependent from start to finish on the Holy Spirit for our life and place in the beautifully structured and varied body of Christ. Where would we be without the Spirit, when without Him we cannot even confess Jesus as Lord, when without Him we cannot hope to enter the kingdom (1 Corinthians 12:3; John 3:5)?

There are many spirits in the world but only *one Spirit*. In our times of cultural confusion and temptation, let’s cultivate deep discipleship, a reliance on the Spirit that searches the deep things of God, that reveals, teaches, judges, makes known His living ways in a world profoundly opposed to Him (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).

In the pages of this *Bible Advocate*, I hope you are inspired afresh to follow the one Spirit’s creating, unifying lead as we battle the flesh in every heart, in every quarter (Galatians 5:16-18), but not by human means: “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit . . .” (Zechariah 4:6).

— Jason Overman





The Orchard

Living on the limb, not just hanging out.

by Dorothy Nimchuk

Let the bank take over and forget it. We can't keep the place going. There's no future here.

It was the 1920s, and a major Depression breathed down their necks. Reeling from the death of their doctor-husband and father, the Crockett family made a nearly unanimous decision to desert the orchard. The daughter, Adele (Kitty) Crockett, thought otherwise, quit her lucrative office job, and moved to the deserted New England homestead.

The once prolific well on the property had long since been reduced to brackish water, though still potable. The house needed repair, and the orchard had been neglected. Singlehandedly and operating in survival mode, Kitty worked to spray the trees, prune their branches, and tend the bees so necessary to the orchard's production. Kitty's early training carried her through the many stages of growth from bud to blossom to ripened goodness before the fruit was graded and packed, then marketed with the aid of a few trusted helpers.

In like manner, God infuses His children with His Spirit to grow fruit for His kingdom. Our lives become new sprouts, tender branches, rooted in Christ Jesus. Our faith needs gentle nurture and protection from the storms that would ravage and destroy the tender new growth.

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Love lost

Over time, fruit begins to appear, the first of which is love (Galatians 5:22). It is no happenstance that it is listed first, for without love, as the apostle Paul so aptly put it, we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13). The church at Ephesus was praised for their many virtues — among them, their works and patience, opposition to evil, and perseverance (Revelation 2:1-7).

However, the churches at Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira had been greatly influenced by Roman culture. They had allowed pagan practices in worship and followed false teachers. They had lost their “first love” of the gospel, and their initial faith had become compromised by traditions and other distractions. These churches had lost sight of their original motivation, their love of the Lord, and their desire to serve Him and others selflessly.

When God placed Adam and Eve in His garden, they were surrounded and influenced by His love. Like sheep, however, the couple sought a hole in the fence to explore what was on the other side. Curiosity: the mother of invention? Perhaps. But it was the drawing card that persuaded them to go against God’s directive.

Curiosity became the weakness in the fence surrounding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve succumbed to that weakness and Adam followed, even as future generations were destined to follow, influenced by the couple’s disobedience.

God’s perfect love had been replaced by a cheap imitation, selfish and self-seeking. The world was doomed; man had

made his choice. However, God was not willing that His creation should be entirely wiped out. He made a way through the death of His Son to restore that love within us.

This love can be acquired only through the infusion of God’s Spirit. The church at Ephesus had previously possessed God’s love but had lost sight of it over time. They still performed good works, possessed patience. They had an aversion to evil but had lost that perfect love and now acted solely by rote.

they who do the Father’s will (Matthew 7:13-23). Some had cast out demons and performed miracles, yet would be rejected; they had failed to produce good fruit. The verdict came down in verse 23: “depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” These people did things their own way and followed the doctrines of men. Lawlessness is but another step away from the first love lost to the Ephesians (Revelation 2:1-7).

In his succinct epistle, Jude reminds us that we must pursue the faith originally given to the

“On our own, we are destined to fail. With God’s Spirit, we will surely win.”

Fruitless faith

Paul firmly laid it on the line when he said we are nothing without love. We can preach, teach, prophesy, work miracles and the like; but without love, it will come to naught. Other fruits of the Spirit will become stunted, undeveloped, as well. Without love, where would be our joy, and how could we experience God’s peace within? Without love for our fellow man, how could we be longsuffering, kind, good, and faithful to others? Eventually, gentleness would vanish and self-control rendered void.

Jesus said that not everyone who parrots “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom, but rather

saints and keep ourselves in the love of God (v. 21). We can grow, expand, and be colorful yet tasteless without the infusion of God’s Spirit of truth. An apple may look beautiful on the outside, but when we bite into it, we either experience a luscious taste or get surprised by its sour, woody flavor. Our fruit will leave a pleasant taste on God’s pallet when our works are motivated by His love.

Jesus identified Himself as the true Vine and His followers the branches (John 15). Because of unbelief, some Jews were cut off and the Gentiles given opportunity to be grafted in. Should the Jews recognize and accept Christ, they would be grafted

back in. Conversely, any engrafted Gentile who wandered could be just as easily cut off (Romans 11, "olive tree").

Jesus shared a parable of a man who had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. For three years, he waited for the fruit that never came. "Cut it down," he told the keeper. "It's useless, taking up ground that could be used for something else." The keeper of the vineyard pleaded on behalf of the tree: "Give it another year. If there is fruit, well and good. If not, you can cut it down" (see Luke 13:6-9).

“Paul firmly laid it on the line when he said we are nothing without love.”

In the same way, the Keeper of our souls pleads on our behalf. He has a lot invested in our salvation and is not willing to lose us to the world.

Pure love

Some of us drift through life with no moorings, wrapped in a cocoon of unawareness. If we would love as God loves, we need to be cognizant of Paul's description of love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Do we have an opportunity to be puffed up? Following the course of love, we refuse to act so. Have we been treated rudely? In love, we make a conscious effort to be kind in return. Do evil thoughts entice

us to entertain them? We should slam our mind's door on such thoughts. If gossip beckons, we must turn a deaf ear. If we would seek that pure love, we must be willing to bear, believe, hope, and endure all things.

We may be highly educated and willing to die for a cause; we may help the poor but not have love. We may do good deeds for all the wrong reasons, in which case none of our activities will profit. Many opportunities to take offense will come our way. Either we sharpen our defenses against them or our senses will

dull and we will succumb to the offense.

Satan will attempt to denature, or destroy, the original qualities of God's love within us by applying the heat of peer pressure, the acidity of gossip, and/or other distractions to disrupt our spiritual health and leave us unfit for service. We must remove ourselves from situations that would tempt, drag down, and appeal to our baser nature.

Have any of us fallen victim to these vicious attacks and wish to be restored? Have we been broken off from Christ and wish to be renewed? Satan would have us say, "Let the world take over; forget God. It's too hard to follow Christ. Live it up! Enjoy life!

This is all we get. There's no future for any of us here." But God can and will restore us in His service. He is still able to graft us back again into Christ and use us in His orchard. Our influence can still be felt to His glory. On our own, we are destined to fail. With God's Spirit, we will surely win.

Spirit power

Kitty Crockett toiled throughout the difficult Depression years in spite of opposition. We too sometimes struggle with an economy in a downward spiral and winds of political change, beaten by the storms of life, ostracized by friends and family, lonely. We don't have to admit defeat, for the Lord Jesus is always near to help us thrive and survive the spiritual dearth all around us.

With circumstances out of her control, Kitty had to admit defeat in her fight to save the family orchard. However, the backing we need is readily available in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We need to be willing to step out of our "limp" and go out on a limb to further the kingdom of God.

We must not give up on the Lord. He's not willing to give up on us. He is the root who will prune and nourish our branches and rejuvenate us through application of the Holy Spirit. Truly, we can be fruitful and flourishing at any age! **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk
and her husband,
Nick, serve the CoG7
in Medicine Hat,
Alberta.



The Day of Pentecost



by Melody Manwell

The weary travelers felt their hearts revive as they reached the Holy City. For a small-town villager, Jerusalem was an awesome sight. It was the day before the Feast of Weeks began, and the visitors were in a hurry to participate in the festivities. They sang the Psalms of Ascent as they climbed the mount with great joy. And when they entered the gates of the city, it seemed that all Jerusalem had come out to meet them!

The travelers tried to spruce up their firstfruits offerings — the first of their harvest — putting decorative leaves and grapes on their baskets. Early the next morning, they made their way to the temple, ready to offer their produce and sacrifices in accordance with God’s law for the Feast of Weeks (or Shavuot).

Climbing the many steps to reach the temple was a religious service of its own, but the first glimpse inside was truly awe-inspiring. After a long wait to recite the prayers, the pilgrims beamed as their turn arrived and they gave their offerings to the priest. The familiar ritual was a deep comfort. Once accomplished, they were satisfied.

As they left the temple and descended the steps into the streets of Jerusalem, they were quiet, thinking about what the sacrifices meant to them. On one of the streets they passed, they saw a crowd gathering. Some men were speaking boldly about prophecies being fulfilled. The travelers looked at each other quizzically. *What is this?*

They determined to investigate. There were whispers of a loud, rushing wind and fire floating above the heads of these speakers. *Was this a sign from God?* As they drew closer, they realized that these men were simple, rustic Galileans, yet each one spoke a different foreign language. *How?* The travelers listened closely and heard the men witnessing about someone named Jesus and His crucifixion,

burial, and resurrection. They’d heard of Him. *Wasn’t this the miracle worker?*

“The Messiah has come and the promise of the Spirit!” the men announced. The sign of their foreign languages confirmed what the men spoke was true. The prophecy of Ezekiel came to mind:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (36:26, 27).

The pilgrims needed no more proof. The prophecy of Joel was indeed being fulfilled:

“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy . . . And also on My men-servants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days” (2:28, 29).

The travelers wondered if this Spirit was for them too. *Yes!* That very hour, they believed and became followers of Yeshua, the Christ, and were immersed in His name for the remission of sins.

It was the day we call Pentecost (Acts 2), that special day of the great outpouring of the Spirit of God upon His new covenant people. Why did God choose this day to send His Spirit? Was there a reason, or would any old day do?

God is a specific God, and He gives new meaning to His Word through Jesus Christ. He fulfills His prophecies and laws and makes all things new.

According to Jewish tradition, the Day of Pentecost was the day God spoke the law at Mount Sinai in seventy languages of the nations.¹ This link between God’s giving of the law and gift of the Spirit is intriguing and biblically derived. Both events occurred at the beginning of the third month, after a great Passover of deliverance. Both were accompanied with supernatural signs of power in nature and a word from heaven (Exodus 19:1, 18). Just as God’s incredible power came down on Mount

continued on page 22

Our Constant Companion



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The helping work of the Holy Spirit in Holy Scripture.

by **Robert Coulter**

The Holy Spirit is found throughout the Bible, but His role in the life of God's people develops significantly from the Old Testament to the New as all God's good promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Beginnings

The Holy Spirit is introduced in the creation narrative of Genesis 1:1, 2: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

These verses begin the day-to-day account of creation when God said, "Let there be light," and there was light" (v. 3). God is the Creator, but when He gave

this command, His Spirit produced light! Job said, "By his breath [Spirit] the skies became fair." Regarding the climax of creation — humanity — these words are added: "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (26:13; 33:4).

Later, after the Exodus, the Tent of Meeting, or tabernacle, was built by Bezalel and his workmen with the aid of God's Spirit. They were given the skills and artistry necessary to use many pieces to construct the tabernacle and produce its ornate furnishings (Exodus 31:1-11).

Israel's judges and kings were well acquainted with the Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord was the source of Gideon's courage and Samson's strength (Judges 6:34; 14:6). Judges 11 relates the fascinating account of Jephthah's ancestry and how the Lord used him, by His Spirit, to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Ammonites (vv. 29, 32). And when Samuel anointed David king of Israel, "the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David" (1 Samuel 16:13).

The Scriptures, from Genesis to Malachi, were written by men who "spoke from

God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Therefore, when the prophets addressed Israel, they conveyed messages from God by the Spirit:

But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin (Micah 3:8).

While the prophets declared God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, God also used them to invite Israel to seek God's forgiveness: "'Come now, let us settle the matter,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool'" (Isaiah 1:18).

The prophets spoke with divine authority, acted as Israel's conscience, reminded her of the many great acts God had performed on her behalf, and pleaded with her to repent of her sins and remain faithful to the Lord. Israel needed the prophets' ministry because her people had not been given the Spirit as a helper, or permanent companion. But these very prophets also prophesied of this coming gift of the Spirit (Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 36:27; Joel 2:28).

Fulfillment

The ministry of the Holy Spirit differs greatly in the Christian era. For Israel, it was often a temporary clothing of outward power. But the Spirit's ministry to Christ's disciples is more of a permanent indwelling presence. He plays an essential role in the spiritual life of every believer, as Paul verified: "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9).

Like the prophets before him, John the Baptist foretold that Jesus would give His disciples the Holy Spirit (John 1:33). As Jesus was preparing to ascend to heaven, He promised, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever" (14:16, 17a, HCSB).

Through the Spirit, Jesus and His Father become our constant companions. Jesus told His disciples regarding the Spirit, "for he lives with you and will be in you. I will

not leave you as orphans" (vv. 17, 18).

Further, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (v. 23). The Holy Spirit is God with us!

The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets, John's prediction, and Jesus' promise to send the Spirit occurred on the Day of Pentecost, following Jesus' ascension to heaven. Peter proclaimed, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (Acts 2:32, 33).

Pentecost marked the beginning of the Spirit's outpouring in the lives of all believers. Peter invited, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). Peter assured his audience that this "promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call" (v. 39).

New creation people

The Holy Spirit convicts sinners of sin (John 16:8), leading them to be converted. Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (3:5). Jesus was referring to spiritual renewal, conversion. Paul called it a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). And Peter compared it to participation "in the divine nature" of Jesus (2 Peter 1:4).

Conversion is an absolute necessity to living a Christian life. Paul contrasted an unconverted life to a converted life:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed . . . You used to walk in these

How many promises and prophecies of the Holy Spirit can you find in the Old Testament? Help us complete a full list at baonline.org.

ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things. . . . Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive . . . as the Lord forgave you (Colossians 3:5-8, 12, 13).

Paul advised the Ephesians, "Be filled with the Spirit" (5:18). The present tense construction of this short sentence in Greek means to "keep on being filled with the Spirit" or "always be yielding to the leading of the Spirit."

This indwelling Spirit of God produces the fruit of the Spirit that composes a Christian's character. "Live by the Spirit,"

Paul wrote, just before and after he identified the Spirit's fruit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23, 25).

Peter teaches that through the possession and exercise of the gifts of His divine power, we can "participate in the divine nature," by which saints escape the world's corruption (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

But possessing a Christian character is not effortless. Peter wrote to work hard at adding goodness to our faith and pointed out, "For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 5, 8).

A church equipped

The Holy Spirit distributes different gifts of service to members of the church for their common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). They facilitate the function of the church in preaching the gospel of Christ. A partial list of gifts includes apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles (which may include healing), helpers of others, administrators, and those who speak in different

tongues. He instructed members to use their gifts in proportion to their faith, generously, diligently, and cheerfully (Romans 12:7, 8).

The Holy Spirit is to receive our utmost reverence and respect. We are not to lie nor test or resist the Spirit (Acts 5:3, 9a; 7:51). We are to be careful not to grieve, insult, or quench the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 10:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). We must not blaspheme the Spirit. Jesus warned, "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven" (Matthew 12:32). He said this in the context of the Pharisees accusing Him of healing a demonic man by the power of "Beelzebul, the prince of demons" (vv. 22-24).

Three great promises

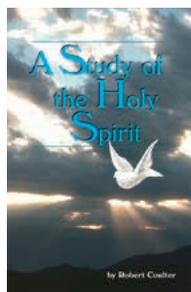
Three groups of texts inform us of God's great promises that He acts and preserves our spiritual welfare by His Spirit.

First, His Spirit helps us in all kinds of temptations and trials to remain faithful to Him (2 Corinthians 1:21; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

Second, His Spirit seals us as His adopted own, His very sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13).

Third, His Spirit is the guarantee of our resurrection and hope of a home in the eternal kingdom of God at the return of Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14).

Only a God of great love for His children would give Himself to them as our God has done through His Spirit! Our constant companion. Hallelujah! **BA**



Get your copy of *A Study of the Holy Spirit*, by Robert Coulter, for \$1.50. Contact bap.orders@cog7.org.

Robert Coulter, former BA editor and General Conference president, lives with his wife, Ida, in Northglenn, CO. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.



Questions & Answers



Is the Holy Spirit a force or a person? What does CoG7 teach about the Spirit of God?

The historic view of “Trinity” holds that the Holy Spirit is a divine person with all the attributes of God — Father and Son. Each of the three, then, has the full divine nature and substance of the others. They exist as one God — not three! — in an eternal relation of three equal persons — not one!

Among non-Trinitarian Christians, one may hear the view that the Spirit of God is not a third person but an impersonal force. Something near this view was expressed in a pre-1994 CoG7 doctrine that read, in part, “The Holy Spirit is an extension of the power of God in the world”

The Church’s current faith statements support neither the impersonal “force” nor the “third person” views referenced above. Rather, they see the Holy Spirit as closely identified with God — who is Spirit and is holy — himself. The Spirit of God is experienced by God’s people in a close and personal way and may be gladly regarded as God’s personal presence with and within His people on earth. As Jesus the Son was Father God’s personal presence on earth in physical form, so the Holy Spirit is Christ the Son’s personal presence on earth in spiritual form.

The Holy Spirit is not named in most New Testament salutations, benedictions, or doxologies, as are the Father and Son. The Spirit is not seen as enthroned or reigning in heaven, as are Father and Son. The Spirit is not worshipped or addressed in prayer, as are Father and Son. The Spirit has no “I-Thou” relation with Father and Son, as they do with each other. Rather than think of the Holy Spirit as a third person of the Deity, therefore, it may be more nearly correct to think of the Spirit as the personal presence of the Father and Son on earth and within believers.

My friend visited a church recently and was told that she wasn’t saved if she didn’t speak in tongues. What does CoG7 teach about this subject?

Speaking in tongues, one of nine spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, figures prominently in the church’s communication of the gospel to new peoples and languages (Acts 2, 10, 19) — but never as a requirement for the salvation that is in Christ, received by God’s grace through faith.

No spiritual gift can do for us what only Christ does by His death and resurrection in our behalf. By clearly implying that not all members of Christ are apostles, prophets, or teachers; not all are miracle workers, healers, or speakers in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:28-31), Paul says positively that believers may be saved through Christ *without* tongues-speaking. God distributes His gifts to each member as He will, not as we will (v. 11).

Sadly, your friend heard another false version of the gospel. This one, like all false gospels, puts something we do to be saved in place of our being saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ. In this case, the thing substituted is speaking in tongues — a good thing in its rightful place but never sufficient for salvation.

Other issues regarding tongues-speaking are not this simple to unravel. In Acts, for example, most tongues obviously refer to known languages. The tongues in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14, however, were likely *unknown* — an ecstatic form of speech that brought conflict to the congregation in Corinth.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Send your Bible questions to bibleadvocate@cog7.org.

The Gospel of Restoration



Praising God for
second chances and
new life with Him.

by **John LeBlanc**

Restore us, O God; cause
Your face to shine, and we
shall be saved! (Psalm 80:3).

One of my favorite TV shows was the History Channel's *American Restoration*. Before a new cast took over the show, it featured a guy named Rick Dale and his shop, Rick's Restorations, in Las Vegas, Nevada. People brought Rick everything from broken vending machines to beat-up motorcycles, asking if he could restore them. Many times he'd take a

deep breath and fold his arms. You could see the wheels turning in his head: *Can I bring this thing back to life?*

Rick loved a challenge, so he usually agreed to the project (for a hefty price). Then he and his crew would get started.

The best part of the show was when the customer came back to pick up the item. Rick let the suspense build a little and then unveiled it. He was so excited to see the reaction to his work. The camera zoomed in on the customer's wide-opened eyes (and mouths), and you'd hear "Oh, my gosh. I don't believe it!"

Then Rick showed them what he and his team had done, describing every step it took to restore the object to its former glory. The really cool thing was that the item worked again; it

had been restored to do what it was made to do.

God of restoration

This show is a good analogy of how God works. He loves to take what is broken down and cast off, and restore it to fulfill its original purpose. But I'm not talking about stuff; I'm talking about *people*. God is all about restoring people — all kinds: broken up, beaten down, and everything in between.

I say this because God showed it. There's a story in the Gospel of Luke about an encounter between Jesus and a man named Zacchaeus, a Jew who collected taxes for the Roman IRS. Tax collectors were despised by their fellow Jews for at least two reasons. One, they worked for the Roman occupi-



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ers, and two, they collected a big commission in addition to the taxes. Consequently, tax collectors were viewed as traitors and extortionists who were beyond redemption — cut off from God and shunned by His people.

So it caused quite an uproar when, passing through Zacchaeus' town, Jesus not only made it a point to speak to Zacchaeus but also insisted on having supper at his house! The tax collector was so grateful that, during the meal, he stood up and told Jesus he would give half his possessions to the poor and pay back fourfold anyone he'd defrauded (Luke 19:8). Quite a change of heart and business model.

Jesus responded to Zacchaeus' repentance and faith by declaring that salvation had

come to his house. Then He told the astonished guests, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (v. 10). Jesus made it clear that His primary mission was one of redemption — to find people and bring them back to God; and then restoration — to so change them that they can fulfill their original purpose from God. I think it's significant that Jesus made this statement in the house of someone whom everyone, including Zacchaeus, thought couldn't be redeemed, much less restored.

Valued people

I've met a few Zacchaeuses. As a young pastor, I would go into the community to visit people, asking them to consider coming to church. A few of them

said to me, "I couldn't come to your church; you wouldn't want me there. You don't know what I'm like or what I've done." They believed (perhaps because they were made to feel) they were beyond repair. In everyone's eyes, they were so damaged, they couldn't be fixed — like a car in the back corner of a junkyard or a tattered chair set out by the curb, unwanted and no longer of any use.

Maybe you know someone like that. If that's the case, consider this: Every person is worth restoring.

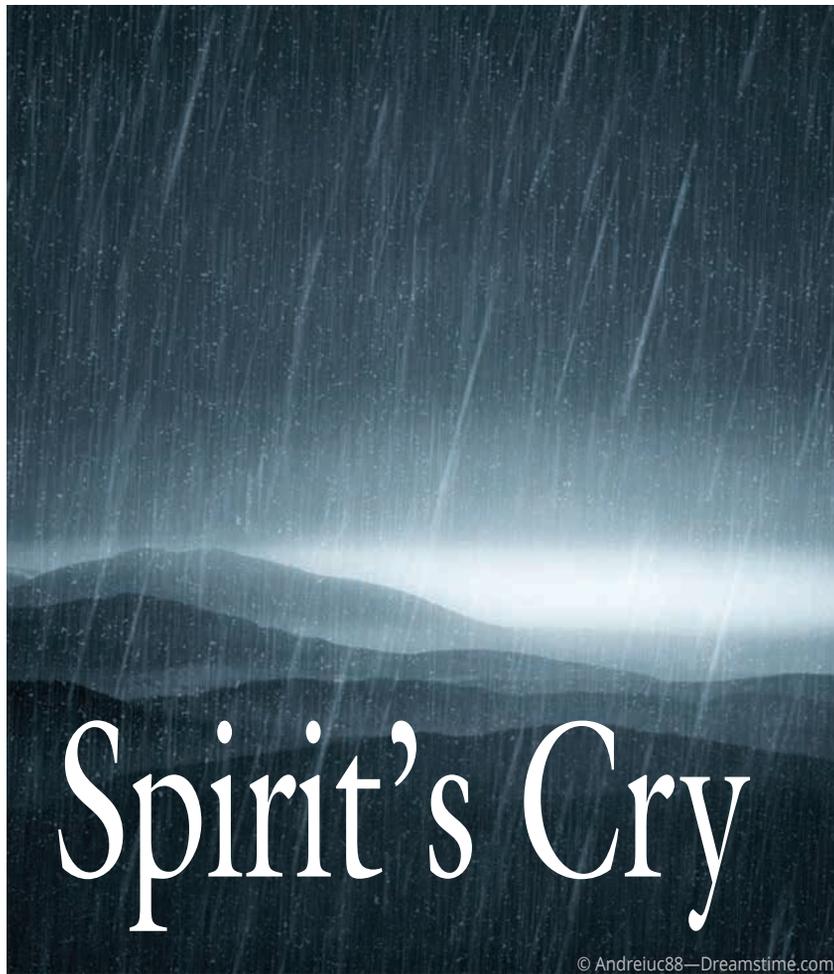
Every item brought in to Rick Dale's shop was worth restoring in the eyes of customers. It didn't matter how dirty or rusted, broken or old; they wanted the item restored. It *meant* something to them, so they brought it to Rick.

That's the way God sees it. Every person is worth restoring because everybody *means* something to Him. It doesn't matter how broken they might be; no one is beyond God's ability to redeem and restore. All they need is for someone to bring them to Him, and He'll get to work, as Galatians 6:1 urges: "My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (NRSV). And somewhere along the way, somebody's eyes will get wide and their mouth will fall open and they'll say, "Oh, my gosh! I don't believe it!"

Because just like Rick, God is into restoration. **BA**

John LeBlanc writes from Oceanside, CA.





Standing strong and
praying in the Spirit.
by Laurie R. Crowson

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans (Romans 8:26).

As a girl who often doted on her daddy, I used to imitate some of the things he did. Most summers, my dad, Fred Walter, was invited to speak at district conferences in other parts

of the US, and we would travel so he could preach. Dad often drove until the wee hours of the morning, stopping to sleep for three or four hours in rest areas.

On one such journey I awoke around one o'clock in the morning and heard him whispering urgently. Quietly, I leaned forward and asked what he was saying. Serenity I'd never seen before flashed across his face. "I . . . was praying for someone," Dad answered. "Also, praying safety over us as we travel."

At the time, I had no clue what intercessory prayer was, so I ignored that and mulled over what I could do to help.

While I didn't pray the most verbose prayer, I did pray that God would strengthen Daddy,

keep him awake and alert long enough to reach the rest area, and give us safety on our journey. God granted my requests that night, and many other nights, birthing a spiritual journey I still enjoy today. So let's examine what really happened that night.

Prayer principles

First, Dad felt prompted to pray for someone else. Dad's prayer and the urgency he felt were so strong that they woke a young girl from a deep slumber. As a result, this child learned the power of prayer and its aim against Satan's realm. Ephesians 6:12 sheds more light on this: "For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (MEV).

I think Dad knew this principle as he prayed into that person's life. Many nights I've wrestled with something so deep in my spirit that I needed to pray immediately. For example, one of my former co-workers came to me crying one night about her marriage. She and her husband had said and done things they weren't proud of, but she loved him much and wanted to save that marriage.

I began a prayer journey of intercession with the woman. Not only did she and her husband work things out, they now have two children running around the house! My friend later told me that something inside her husband's heart broke that night, and their trek to reconciliation began.

Second, Dad shared what he'd learned over the years regarding the Holy Spirit's calling to salvation. Thanks to Dad telling me about his prayer that night, I developed a yearning to feel what he felt. This in turn left me wanting to know more about the force that not only evoked so many emotions but also brought on the pure joy I saw on his face.

When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior and follow in baptism, God changes our hearts. The first time I witnessed a baptism, I watched as my sister's friend was dunked in the water and rose up beaming as if a light were shining on her face! It reminded me a little of my dad's face that night in the car all those years ago, so I started studying what it meant to become a Christian. The Spirit birthed something inside me after watching that baptism. Quietly, I pondered what Dad had taught me and where it might lead.

Third, Dad showed just how approachable Jesus can be. Because he shared what he'd been doing in prayer, I made a decision to imitate Dad and start praying myself. So my next question became "How do I keep heeding the Spirit's call as I seek God's answers for my life?"

I found the answer in Ephesians 6:13: "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." One part of this full armor is the "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17). It's important we put on God's armor every day.

Once we are standing our

ground, we are ready to intercede for others: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people" (v. 18).

Practicing prayer

One snowy Thanksgiving my family drove cross-country to visit Mom's family. On our way home to Denver, Dad was deeply concerned that we wouldn't return on time for him to start work, and he worried that we didn't have any snow chains in the car.

“Many nights I’ve wrestled with something so deep in my spirit that I needed to pray immediately.”

Instantly, I knew I had to pray. I simply and earnestly prayed over Dad, our car, and our family inside. I don't know how long I was praying when Dad reached back and shook my knee. When I opened my eyes, he pointed behind us. I glanced back to see three Department of Transportation employees blocking traffic from traversing the highway. We'd made it safely through!

"Were you praying?" Dad asked. I nodded, smiling.

He laughed. "Keep it up." Dad boasted later that God's power carried us through the snow-covered pass. While I'm sure I wasn't the only Walter in our car praying that morning, I am certain that spiritual warfare is real on several levels — many much worse than a snowstorm.

Years later, about a month before Dad died, I was in a horrific auto accident with a semi-truck driver who'd fallen asleep behind the wheel. How God watched over us is a story for another time, but afterward I started having PTSD symptoms.

Five months later, two beloved sisters in Christ found out about my PTSD and prayed over me. While I'd seen lots of miracles in my lifetime, I'd never experienced one quite like this. Immediately, the PTSD left, and I haven't been plagued since.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:10, 11). I invite everyone to join me in putting on the full armor of God daily as we listen to the Holy Spirit's cry, knowing the Holy One's presence will help us stand strong and pray for others. **BA**

Laurie R. Crowson lives with her husband, Jody, and sons J. J. and Greg in Eugene, OR. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.





Sing a Song for the City

by Whaid Rose

Whether or not you're a city dweller, the city should be important to you because it is important to God. We know God loves the city because it looms large in the biblical narrative.

Abraham interceded for the doomed cities of Sodom (Genesis 18) and looked for God's promised city (Hebrews 11:10). Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and died in a city so cosmopolitan, it was necessary to write His title in three languages (Matthew 27:37). And redemptive history will one day culminate in a city: the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). The city magnifies the brokenness of our world and ripens the promise that where sin abounds, grace abounds even more (Romans 5:20). It highlights the good that yet remains in our fallen world: justice, mercy, ethnic and cultural diversity, the beauty of the arts, and more.

Embracing a biblical theology of the city is therefore imperative for churches committed to the cultural mandate. Such commitment inspired Frank North, a minister in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century, to compose a hymn that speaks to big city realities. The hymn was originally published under the title "A Prayer for the Multitudes," but its current title is "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life" (#74 in CoG7's *Worship in Song*). It became a model for similar hymns that have followed, and it captures both the city's dark side ("the cries of race and clan . . . In haunts of wretchedness and need") and the transforming power of the gospel.

So as spring gives way to summer, filling city streets with "restless throngs," may you "catch the vision of [Jesus'] tears." He wept over Jerusalem because of what He saw: masses of people like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He weeps over cities such as Paris and Brussels, and terror-weary places in the Middle East. He weeps over cities torn by genocide and famine, and even American cities where families are displaced by drugs and violence, where immigrants struggle to find adequate housing, and where innocent boys and girls are held captive in sex slavery.

No matter where you live, the city eventually finds you; it's the unavoidable reality of urban-ness. So while cities remain places that lure with greed, we sing, "O Master, from the mountainside,/make haste to heal these hearts of pain;/among these restless throngs abide;/O tread the city's streets again."



**Where cross the crowded
ways of life,/where sound
the cries of race and
clan,/above the noise of
selfish strife,/we hear
your voice, O Son of Man.**

**In haunts of wretched-
ness and need,/on shad-
owed thresholds fraught
with fears,/from paths
where hide the lures of
greed,/we catch the vision
of your tears.**

**From tender childhood's
helplessness,/from hu-
man grief and burdened
toil,/from famished souls,
from sorrow's stress,/your
heart has never known
recoil. . . .**

**O Master, from the moun-
tainside,/make haste to
heal these hearts of pain;/
among these restless
throngs abide;/O tread
the city's streets again;**

**Till all the world shall
learn your love,/and fol-
low where your feet have
trod;/till glorious from
your heaven above/shall
come the city of our God.**

Silent Need

With God's glory around me I find deep in my soul:
a longing, a seeking, a need to be whole.
To crawl out of the box, to present the real me;
the person God knows, who's not easily seen.

I bring to this moment a joy, yet a dread:
an excitement, a query, a truth yet unsaid.
He brings to this moment a quickening breath:
a promise, a future, life beyond death.

To see me through His glory beyond all my sin,
His presence: His conscience alive deep within.
To stand free in His glory, being all I can be:
seeing Him as Creator, and I truly me.

Marcia K. Leaser



The Holy Spirit cultivates and delivers both. What's the difference? Which are most important?

by Calvin Burrell

As the Bible moves from the Gospels (especially John) through Acts and into the Epistles (especially Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Galatians), it gives increasing attention to the Holy Spirit. In particular, two aspects of the Spirit's influence and work — His fruits and His gifts — receive the focus of many paragraphs and even entire chapters in the New Testament midlands.

Both fruits and gifts of the Spirit are good and perfect grac-

es from God our Father. They are often best grasped in the person and work of Christ and are potentially (or partially) present in all of Jesus' followers through the Holy Spirit, promised by Joel and Jesus and received in power on Pentecost (Acts 2).

You may notice that spiritual fruits tend to be more inward than are spiritual gifts. The fruits are what a person is at the core of her character, like faithful, hopeful, and loving. Gifts, on the other hand, are more external — what a person does, like giving, discerning, and/or evangelizing.

Fruits are universal: Every Christian can and should demonstrate them all, to a degree. Gifts are more particular and unique: Every Christian has received at least one, but no Christian has them all.

Fruits of the Spirit come in

dozens of varieties, nine of which are the familiar list of Galatians 5:22, 23. The word *fruit* in this text is singular, leading some to conclude that there is only one essential fruit of the Spirit — love — and that the other eight fruits that follow in the text are mere demonstrations of love, using other words.

Is love listed first here because it is most important, even a root to every other fruit? Maybe. Love is the only fruit Jesus said would show all men that we are His disciples (John 13:35). Never did Jesus say that all men could know that we are His disciples by our spiritual gifts, i.e., our knowledge, our administration, our power to heal or cast out demons.

Jesus did say that we could know the wolves and false prophets among us, not by their wonderful works and their proph-

ecies but by their fruits (Matthew 7:20, 21). The Devil and his demons, we are told, can replicate spiritual gifts and thus deceive us (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). They are less adept, apparently, at bearing the Spirit's fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control.

Basic lists of the Holy Spirit's gifts are found in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28; Ephesians 4:7, 8, 11. Not counting duplicates, these three texts contain nineteen distinct gifts, listed here by frequency: on three lists, prophet and teacher; on two lists, apostle and leader-administrator; on one list, evangelist, pastor, minister, exhortation, giving, mercy, helps, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, discernment of spirits, tongues, and interpretations. There is no indication that these nineteen gifts exhaust all possibilities by which the Spirit works through Christians.

Other abilities devoted to God's glory may also be regarded as spiritual gifts, though not on any of the biblical lists above. These may include preaching; music (instrumental, singing); construction crafts (metalwork, woodwork, stonework); writing, speaking; counseling, dispute resolution; hospitality; intercessory prayer, and others.

The Galatians 5 list of spiritual fruit has love first, then joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Other fruit-lists to be compared are in 1 Corinthians 13:13: faith, hope, and love (charity); in Ephesians 5:9: goodness, righteousness, and truth; in Colossians 3:12-15:

tender mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, and love; and in 2 Peter 1:5-7: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

Combining these five lists, we find a summary of fruit varieties and more evidence for the answer to our question on importance:

Love is on four lists.

Goodness is on three.

Faith, longsuffering, kindness, and self-control are on two.

Fruits of the Spirit are personal attitudes and character qualities that God graciously works into His children to display the beauty of Jesus and draw others to Himself through Christ.

Both gifts and fruits are vital to our becoming all we were created to be. Their relative importance is imbedded in the final words of Paul's treatise on spiritual gifts. The apostle links that chapter to the next by first glancing backward: "earnestly desire the best gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:31a).

Love
Joy
Peace
Longsuffering
Kindness
Goodness
Faithfulness
Gentleness
Self-control
Galatians 5:22, 23

WISDOM
KNOWLEDGE
FAITH
HEALING
MIRACLES
PROPHECY
DISCERNMENT
TONGUES
INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES
1 Corinthians 12:8-10

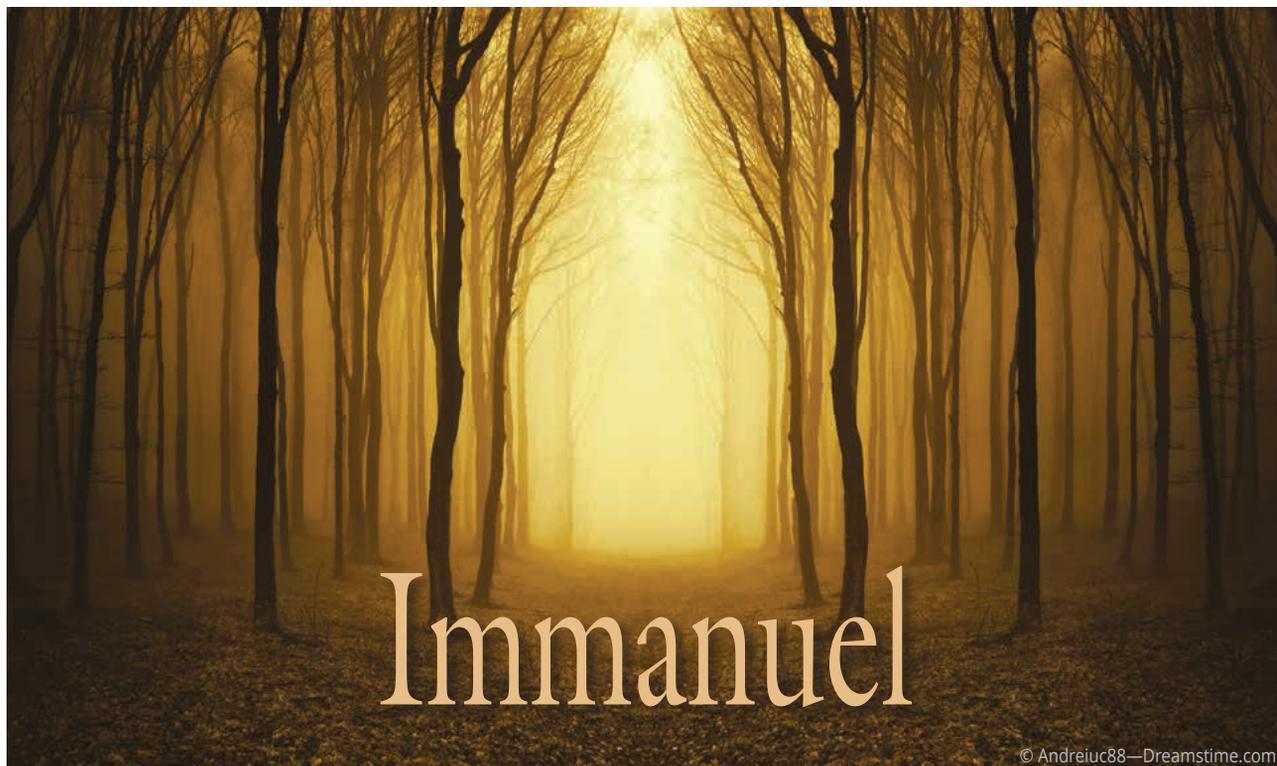
Faithfulness, joy, peace, gentleness, hope, righteousness, truth, forbearance, forgiveness, virtue, knowledge, kindness, perseverance, godliness, and mercy are on one.

Gifts of the Spirit, then, are abilities, anointings, assignments (roles), and activities by which God graciously works through His servants to spread the gospel message of Christ, mature the disciples of Christ, and grow the kingdom of Christ on earth.

Then Paul faces forward to what's even better than the best gifts: the spiritual fruit of love in 1 Corinthians 13 ("And yet I show you a more excellent way, 12:31b). **BA**

Calvin Burrell, former BA editor, lives with his wife, Barb, in Stayton, OR.





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God with us — through
His Spirit!
by Israel Steinmetz

Immanuel literally means “God with us.” What a word! What a concept! Isaiah prophesied that a virgin would give birth to a child who would be called Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). According to Matthew, Jesus fulfilled this prophecy when He came to earth (Matthew 1:23). In Christ all the fullness of God dwelt bodily (Colossians 1:19; 2:9). Jesus was God incarnate (John 1:1, 14), physically with us here on earth! The transcendent God became so immanent that Jesus told His disciples, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Spirit present

Sometimes we envy those first disciples who knew Jesus in the flesh. We imagine having God physically with us as the best possible scenario. As Jesus prepared to leave His disciples, He anticipated this desire and insisted there was something even better than God being with us in the form of one human being. He said, “But 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” (16:7).

Jesus’ teaching about the Spirit in John 14-16 envisions a world in which God is with us — not in the form of one human being but through His Spirit living within all His followers. In this way, Jesus returns to His disciples, not leaving them as orphans. The world is convicted of sin and righteousness and judg-

ment. Jesus’ disciples are led into all truth and are empowered to do greater things than Jesus did. Through sending the Spirit, Jesus brings God’s presence to live within His followers, abiding in them and allowing them to abide in Him. Through the Spirit, God is with us in ways those who first knew Jesus in the flesh could only imagine. Immanuel — God is with us through His Spirit!

Spirit people

We are thus a *people of the Spirit*. As our Vision of a Vibrant 21st Century Church phrases it, we are “Spirit-formed.” A Spirit-formed church is a body of Spirit-formed people living in the community of the Spirit. We are enlivened by the Spirit and are formed by the life of the Spirit into the image of Christ. The Spirit forms the church in various ways that are fully integrated and work in concert. The Spirit-

formed church is identified, sanctified, taught, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Spirit-identified. By identification, we mean that believers are born again by the Spirit (John 3:1-8; Romans 8:11) and are baptized by the Spirit into Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:13). Were it not for the Spirit convicting and drawing us to God, we could not have been reconciled to Him. But through the work of the Spirit, we are brought to God and given a new life. The Spirit seals us and unites us as one (Ephesians 1:13, 14). This identifying work of the Spirit gives life to the church, gives her members genuine spiritual unity with one another, and assures them of final redemption after death. *Immanuel – God is with us through His Spirit to identify us with Himself!*

Spirit-sanctified. By sanctification, we mean the ongoing process of the Spirit conveying the holiness of Christ into the lives of believers, enabling them to overcome sin (Romans 8:13) and walk in true righteousness (Galatians 5:16-25). Were it not for the Holy Spirit sanctifying us, we would be left in the sinful condition we were found in. But just as we were saved by grace through faith, so we are sanctified by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10). Thus the Spirit-formed church is growing in righteousness, being transformed into the moral character of Christ by the Spirit. *Immanuel – God is with us through His Spirit to make us like Him!*

Spirit-taught. When we speak of the Spirit's teaching, we mean the Spirit's ability to convict (John 16:8-11), lead into truth (v. 13), call to remembrance Jesus'

teaching (14:26), and facilitate meaningful communication with God (Romans 8:23-27). Were it not for the Spirit, we would not be able to understand the Scriptures (2 Corinthians 3:14-18) or know the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Through the Spirit our minds are renewed, enlightened, and enabled to think the very thoughts of God! The Spirit-formed church has the eyes of her understanding enlightened by the revelation of God so that she grows in wisdom and the knowledge of the love

of God's power and grace to one another and to the world. The Spirit-formed church is one in which all the gifts of the Spirit function in harmony and order to the glory of God at the Spirit's discretion (Acts 11:12; 13:2; 15:28). *Immanuel – God is with us through His Spirit to empower us to join His mission!*

Through His Spirit

These various activities of the Spirit work in concert with one another. The same Spirit that

“God is with us in ways those who first knew Jesus in the flesh could only imagine.”

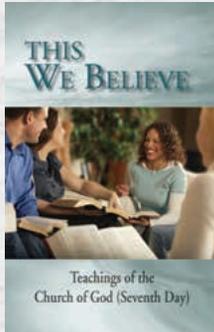
of God. *Immanuel – God is with us through His Spirit to teach us all we need to know to love and glorify Him!*

Spirit-empowered. By empowerment, we mean the supernatural strength and gifts of the Spirit that allow the Spirit-formed church to serve and thereby edify one another, bearing conclusive witness to the loving power of God in the world (1 Corinthians 12). Were it not for the Spirit, we would be left to join in the mission of God with our own wisdom and resources. But by God's Spirit, we are no longer merely human. We are vessels

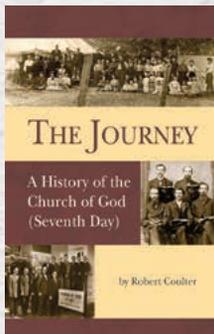
convicts unbelievers regarding righteousness also empowers believers to live in righteousness. Often this convicting and empowering ministry of the Spirit is facilitated through a fellow believer who manifests a spiritual gift. This ministry both edifies believers and affirms their sure salvation as people sealed by the Spirit and commissioned to work with Christ. Thus each of the Spirit's various activities works together. If any is missing, then the work of the Spirit is incomplete. The church that does not experience the work of the Spirit in one or more of these areas is

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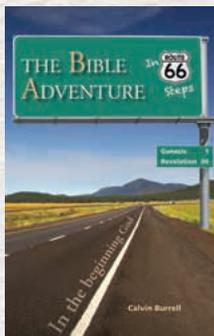
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likely quenching, grieving, or resisting the Spirit in some way.

Therefore, as a Spirit-formed church, we are committed to submitting to and cooperating with the *entire* work of the Spirit. We recognize the Spirit as our *paraklete*, receive Him as the promised gift and Helper, and honor Him as God's Spirit within us. We respond to His conviction, walk in His holiness, listen to His teaching, and manifest His power in the church and the world. We recognize that when we speak of the Spirit, we are speaking of Christ in us, for "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17). God, the Holy Spirit, is present and active in and through His Spirit-formed church.

Immanuel — God is with us through His Spirit! **BA**

Israel Steinmetz, dean of Academic Affairs for LifeSpring School of Ministry, lives with his wife, Anna, and their seven children in San Antonio, TX. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



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The Day of Pentecost

continued from page 7

Sinai, so God's magnificent presence now fell in a new and immediate way on Mount Zion in fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 2:1-3).

This was earth-shattering, a new beginning for God's people. The Lord had once again come in power on this day! But this time the people didn't recoil from Him (Exodus 20:19); they gathered to Him for the gifted anointing of His Spirit. As the prophets foretold, the promise of the Spirit through Christ was given to everyone who believed so that the law of God, which Sinai could never impart to the heart, might be written there from Zion (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10).

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:3, 4).

Today, we bear witness that God is still inviting pilgrims from far and wide to repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **BA**

Melody Manwell lives with her husband and three children in Battle Creek, MI.



1. Howard Marshall, *Acts: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 68.



Hope of New Fruit

by Yvonne Kays

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

I trudged up the winding path to the cliffs on a beautiful October morning. The storm clouds had lifted, and clear skies with a gentle breeze brought pungent scents of the sea. The bright fall leaves drifting down only increased my despondency, though. Everything seemed dead and dying, falling to the earth.

As the days grew shorter and darkness increased, my depression had deepened. My heart felt empty, an aching void. *Will I ever heal?*

So many dear ones had been cut from my life in the last three years. My husband, both my parents, a favorite cousin, my best friend — even my dog had died. A season of grief shrouded the world in gray that seemed unending.

As I reached the crest of the cliffs, I followed the path weaving along the rugged Oregon coastline. I prayed for strength as I watched the waves crashing into the rocks below, mist spraying high. I felt more like the shifting sands than the sturdy rocks defying the wild waves.

One thing in my life that had been an anchor during this difficult time was my work with young people and families. Now my job was in jeopardy, the future even more cloudy, dark, and uncertain.

Heaven seemed silent as I retraced my steps toward the cabin in Quiet Water, where my friends and I had come for a weekend retreat. Something

blue along the shrubbery caught my eye. Drawing near, I saw a pile of hydrangea blooms that someone had pruned and dumped. I picked up one, gently cradling the bloom in my hands. The beautiful blue petals dripped with dew and glistened in the bright sunlight.

But noticing the tinges of brown on the lower petals, I thought, *I'm like this flower, cut off, old and dying.*

Then I heard in my heart, "No, I am the Vine, and you are a living branch. You are not cut off; you have been pruned."

Tears filled my eyes with these tender words. I thought of what Jesus said in John 15:2: "Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." Pruning hurts, but I reflected on that promise — to produce more fruit in me. Gathering up two blooms, I felt a quiver of new hope flutter in my heart.

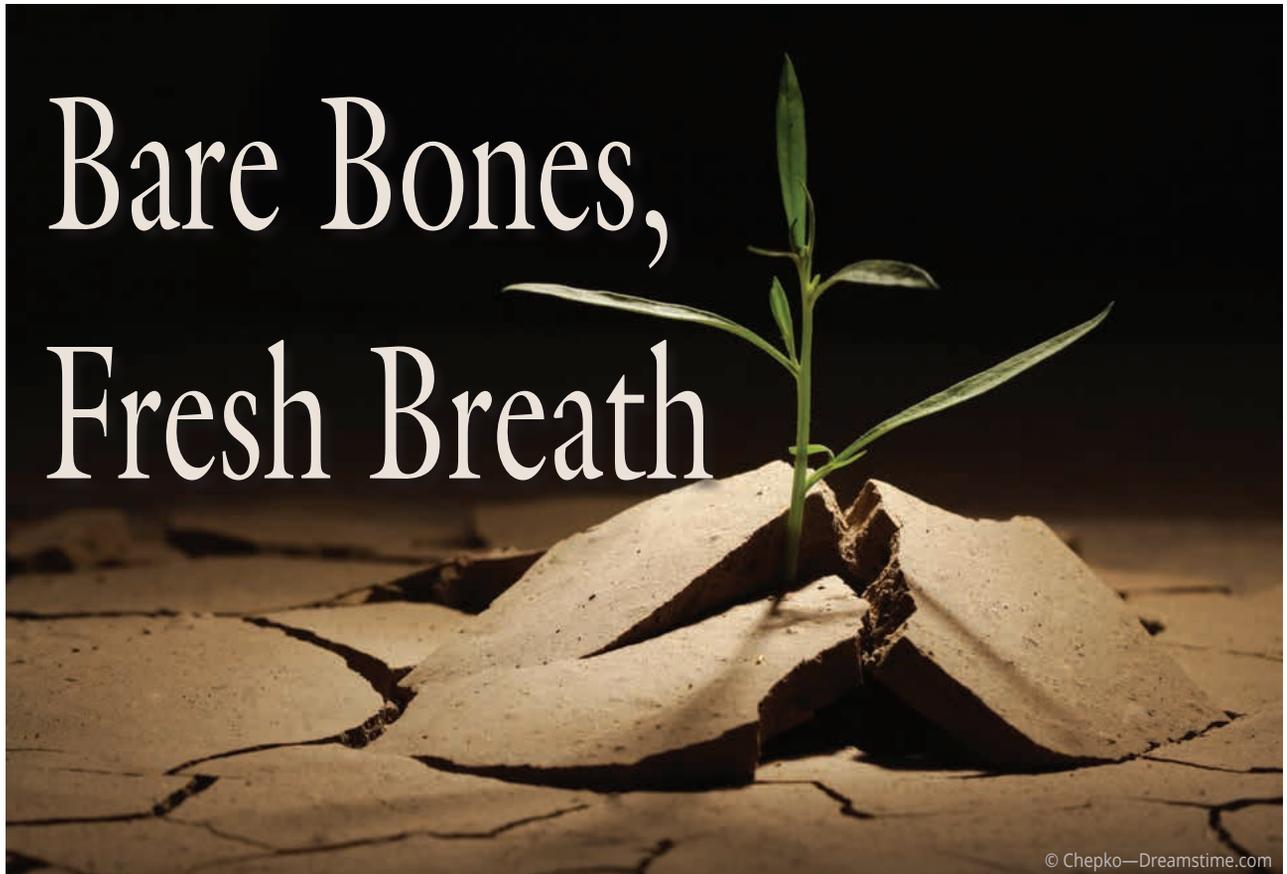
As I neared the cabin, I noticed a pine tree with several knots on its branches. On one of these knots grew a tiny pinecone. I marveled. Fruit had sprung forth from the very spot the tree had been wounded and scarred by an attacking insect. I added the small branch to my hydrangea bouquet and prayed that new fruit would also spring from me.

Two messages had come: I was not forgotten. And regardless of how bleak and severe the winter, spring always comes and with it, the promise of new fruit, as Galatians 5:22 says: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. . . ." **BA**

Yvonne Kays writes from Bend, OR. Scripture quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.



Bare Bones, Fresh Breath



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Ezekiel points the way to
new works of the Holy Spirit.

by Jason Overman

Wherever the Spirit is present, you can be sure that God is up to something.

The Bible discloses this truth throughout its pages. Genesis 1:1, 2, with its reference to the Spirit of God hovering over the waters of creation, becomes the inaugural example that fixes the grand pattern of Spirit-work to follow.

Another Bible story that follows this creative “Spirit work of God” paradigm is Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones (37:1-14). Curiously, this prophecy

has the highest concentration of references to the Hebrew word *ruach* (“spirit”) found in the Old Testament. It is one of my favorite passages in the Bible.

But before we dig into this text, let’s take a closer look at the word *ruach*.

Defining *ruach*

In the Old Testament, the word *Spirit* (or *spirit*) is usually a translation of *ruach*. What’s tricky about this Hebrew word is that it has multiple meanings. The correct usage depends on the context. For instance, if the setting is the realm of nature, *ruach* is usually translated “wind.” When the context is the realm of animate life, then *ruach* is ordinarily translated “breath.” And related to this in the realm of hu-

man beings, where emotions or intellect, attitudes or aptitudes of people are in view, *ruach* is often translated “spirit.” Finally, when the presence and activity of the transcendent God is the context, *ruach* is translated “Spirit.”

We can see the progression from natural to personal in these definitions. The first two speak of moving, corporeal air, while the second two terms speak of conscious being — human or divine. *Ruach* in all four usages communicates the idea of a dynamic, invisible presence essential to life, known principally through its effects. And since wind and breath are common elements of nature, it is not unusual to find them employed as potent metaphors for the work of the Spirit. This is precisely what we find

when we turn to Ezekiel's valley of dry bones.

Ruach and exile

Ezekiel writes from exile in Babylon. On the banks of the river Chebar, he receives visions of future hope for a scattered and devastated Israel with little more than the memory of the blessed land and life they had, but lost. This is the historical context in which his vision of bare bones and fresh breath occurs.

A careful reading of Ezekiel 37:1-14 reveals that what the prophet witnesses "in the Spirit" (v. 1) is the full range of *ruach* work. In our English translations it's typically lost on the unwary reader that *ruach* is found ten times in these fourteen verses to reveal the astonishing creative work of God in His people:

- God moves Ezekiel "in the *Ruach* of the LORD" into a valley full of dry bones (v. 1).
- God speaks to these bones by Ezekiel: "I will cause *ruach* to enter into you" (v. 5).
- God promises more by Ezekiel: "I will . . . put *ruach* in you; and you shall live" (v. 6).
- The bones rattle and join, all fleshed out, "but there was no *ruach* in them" (v. 8).
- God commands Ezekiel to "prophesy to the *ruach* . . . and say to the *ruach* . . ." (v. 9).
- "Thus says the Lord God: 'Come from the four *ruach*, O *ruach* . . . breathe . . .'" (v. 9).
- Ezekiel obeys and prophesies, "and *ruach* came into them, and they lived . . ." (v. 10).
- God promises His people, "I will put My *Ruach* in you, and you shall live . . ." (v. 14).

In this *Ruach*-drenched prophetic utterance, the winds, the

breath, and the Spirit of God all coalesce to bring a people into existence, a nation back from exile – to give life for death and hope for despair. While this prophecy is suggestive of New Testament themes of death and resurrection, in a literal sense, the prophet speaks of a figurative death in Ezekiel 37. Israel exists

*“Wherever
the Spirit is
present, you
can be sure that
God is up to
something.”*

as refugees far from their land for their rebellious sin against God. This "death" equates to a dry-bone and a grave-like subsistence. Four times in two verses Israel is identified as captives in graves in need of a fresh Spirit-breath in order to rise up out of them (vv. 12, 13).

Ruach and return

The counterpoint to this dry and deathly existence, and allied with the main *ruach* theme, is the word *live* (Hebrew: *hayah*), which appears six times in fourteen verses. God's singular

question to the prophet in this bone-littered valley is "Can these bones live?" (v. 3). Ezekiel hesitates to answer, though he surely knows the answer: Spirit gives life; man cannot conjure it. As in the creation story of Genesis 1-2, where divine word leads to action and God breathes life into *adam* on Day Six, we know with Ezekiel that when and where God's Spirit-breath is present and active, revival and restoration and *life* spring up.

Again, while the life promised here anticipates the promise of physical resurrection to come in Christ (and the kingdom beyond), the fresh, vivified life offered by God here is spiritually understood. This is new life formed in God – life in the promised land, life as God intended for His people all along. This is nothing other than *real life* – not a life bound and doomed by human rebellion, but rather, life quickened and restored by the gift of the Spirit.

The first and last verses of this prophecy exhibit a meaningful symmetry. In verse 1, Ezekiel is in the Spirit and moved by it to the valley of vision. When we come full circle to verse 14, Israel is promised a similar indwelling and movement in history: "I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land."

The text concludes with the assurance that what God has said, He will do: "Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD." Notably, the strong "hand of the Lord," moving "Spirit of the Lord," and energizing "word of the Lord" (vv. 1, 4) work together as one in a pro-

phetic utterance that discloses both the word and the response, the vision and its reality, the emblem and its interpretation, a promise given along with its fulfillment. This is all the vital, formative work of *Ruach*.

Ruach and sin

“Can these bones live?” is not just a question for the sixth century prophet Ezekiel and his fellow captives; it is a question as perennial as death itself. As Apostle Paul would state it, this prophecy of bones and breath, death and life, is for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11). The prophecy may, and has been, read as individuals, as families, as congregations and churches, as nations, or as the entire human race. It is a living word capable of speaking to each of these — and others too — simply because each one can so easily become its own valley of barren bones.

Centuries before Ezekiel and Israel’s return under Ezra, King David felt the full weight of this truth in a most personal way. In his intimate confession in Psalm 51, evoked by the prophet Nathan’s word of rebuke over his destructive transgression with Bathsheba, the poet laments his “broken bones” of sin and guiltiness (v. 8) and in three successive verses petitions for the reviving and sustaining work of God’s creative *Ruach*:

Create in me a clean heart,
O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit
within me.
Do not cast me away from
Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy
Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of Your
salvation,
And uphold me by Your gener-
ous Spirit (Psalm 51:10-12).

David’s bones found new life — and return — after a personal exile into sin. How dry do you have to be to be beyond the work of God’s restoring Spirit? What about the Pharisees? Jesus told them they were like painted graves “full of dead men’s bones” (Matthew 23:27). And yet after the Spirit was poured out in Acts 2, as God had long promised to

“Spirit gives
life; man
cannot
conjure it.”

give His people, we learn that some Pharisees did believe and *raise up* — like one Saul turned Paul (Acts 15:5; Philippians 3:5).

Ruach and life

Paul knew firsthand the generative power of the Spirit. He too was dead in sin as a Pharisee but found the fresh breath that comes from the gift of the Spirit

of life. This is the legacy of the church: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. . . . For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Romans 8:2, 6).

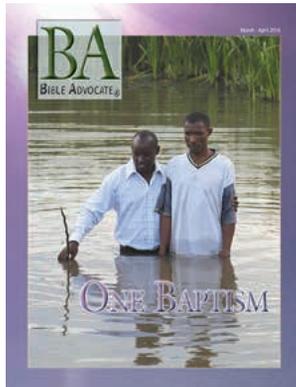
Paul championed the profound importance of the Spirit-gifted prophetic word in the mission of the church because it transforms lives (1 Corinthians 14:1-3, 24, 25)!

Our Lord understood the vanity of mere flesh, the empty graves we dig for ourselves, and the bare bones left behind when our pride has run its course. Jesus also knew the Spirit-word of power that brings dead things to life: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

The gospel of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit make Ezekiel’s vision of that valley of dry bones a recurring theme of our lives and ministry and worldview. We see dead bones everywhere: in ourselves, in our families, in our churches, in cities and nations and world. There’s a wasting addict, a looming divorce, spiritual apathy, racial distrust, cultural collapse, a violent planet . . .

God asks us, “Can these bones live?” Yes, yes they can!

God is up to something: one *Ruach* and a new creation! **BA**



More baptism blessings

The issue about baptism [March-April 2016] was special to me. It was a moving report to hear of the people sharing their baptism experience. It shouldn't be the case, but I thought knowing those people made the bigger impact. To me, church is family, and knowing someone versus not knowing them should not make a difference — but yes, I know and understand them better.

*E. F.
Perry, MI*

I read the March-April 2016 issue of the *Bible Advocate* with great interest, as just a few days prior to receiving it, I had started a study into baptism. I agree with much of what the many articles had to say. For example, Calvin Burrell — that baptism is an outward action reflecting an inward reality; Jason Overman — that baptism should be a proclamation of your faith (i.e., a public declaration); Sherri Langton — that we should not approach baptism lightly and that it should be carefully and prayerfully considered.

I also agree with Sherri Langton that there seems to be a problem with an impromptu offer to be baptized without some kind of counseling. I have seen people go forward for baptism at such an invitation and then were never seen or heard from again.

My personal opinion is that eight is too young to be baptized (Israel Steinmetz and Loren Stacy), and I even question if 15 is possibly too young to know and be accountable for the action you are taking (Jason Overman even calls the 15-year-old a boy, not a man), but it worked for all of them. The Jews have a bar mitzvah when a male becomes 13, to acknowledge his coming of age to be accountable to God for his actions, but that is a man-made tradition. In the Scripture, the age a male was counted in the census and eligible for war was 20.

Both Sherri Langton and Calvin Burrell quoted Matthew 28:19, which is also used in the booklet *This We Believe* by the CoG7, page 74, where it says, “. . . baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” However, it appears that all the baptisms and all the instructions recorded in the book of Acts by the apostles were to baptize in the name of Yahshua (Jesus) only, and not in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It seems to me that either the apostles did not follow Yahshua's instructions or something is amiss with Matthew 28:19.

*D. E.
Meeker, OK*

Editor's response: Since CoG7 practices “believer's baptism” rather than infant baptism, I do share your concern about baptizing the very young and easily impressionable. How we define “very young” (years/maturity?) is, of course, debatable. The Bible does not provide a specific ruling, other than the necessity of intentional faith. Therefore, churches and pastors should counsel and prepare our youth for baptism at a time appropriate to each case.

The final paragraph of our Christian Baptism tract directly addresses your question about the apparent discrepancy between the Acts and Matthew baptism formula. I think it is helpful in finding the true focus and goal of baptism:

There is no essential difference between being baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” according to Acts 2:38, and baptism “in [literally, “into”] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” according to Matthew 28:19. The vital matter in baptism is not what words are spoken at the moment, but what faith and trust resides in the mind and heart of the new believer.

Thanks for hymns

Just a few lines to say how much I enjoyed the March-April BA. I especially like the new “Sing a Hymn of” piece by Whaid Rose [p. 16]. I have never heard of these hymns before, but they are nice.

*J. C.
Dillon, MT*



CoG7 In Action

Prayer Power

The General Conference announces a new e-mail address (prayer@cog7.org) for prayer requests, prayer updates, and thanksgivings. Please remember to acquire prior consent before e-mailing requests on behalf of another.

The General Conference office will combine these e-mails and periodically send out a consolidated e-mail to the Prayer Partners, a new e-mail group. This newsletter will relay the prayers but not provide an ongoing prayer list. We rely on our Prayer Partners to transfer requests to their own prayer lists. Since requests are many, we ask that they be stated concisely and that they refrain from direc-

tives, such as fasting. We want to respect our Prayer Partners and trust them to do as God's Spirit leads them.

Visit cog7.org/newsletters to sign up for Prayer Partners or our other e-mail newsletters. Please join in this vital ministry!

LifeSpring Grads

Congratulations to Germaine Reece (Acworth, Georgia), for graduating with a Certificate of Biblical Studies in Winter 2016.

Also, congratulations to the Winter 2016 Dean's List Recipients*: Francisco Garcia Gonzalez, Brownsville, Texas; Germaine Reece, Acworth, Georgia; Samuel Santos Preza, Laval, Quebec; Adam Slawson, Owosso, Michi-

gan; Esther Winchell, Saginaw, Michigan.

* These students took courses half time and earned a minimum 3.5 GPA.

Fall Children's Curriculum

Intermediate. *The Promise of a Savior.* Lessons focus on Old Testament prophecies about Jesus' first coming, His birth, baptism, and temptations. Students will learn that we all need a Savior and that Jesus answers our need.

Primary. *The Shepherd King.* This study highlights stories in 1 Samuel, from Hannah asking God for a son to David becoming the king of Israel. Students will also study Psalm 23.

Preschool. *God - Eternal Ruler, Awesome Creator, Loving*



Categories

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Savior. Students are introduced to God as the Eternal One who always existed and created all things. They will learn about Adam and Eve, their fall, and the plan of salvation.

G. C. Convention

Mark your calendars for the General Conference Biennial Convention in Springfield, Illinois, July 2-8, 2017. The Crowne Plaza Springfield will be convention headquarters, with all activities offered under one roof. Plan now to join your Church leaders and fellow believers as they conduct business and explore the theme "Worthy is the Lamb!"

Watch for detailed information in the months ahead. In the meantime, begin praying for the Convention Committee as they make plans to serve you before and during Convention 2017.

Calendar

July 18-24 - West Coast District Youth and Seeker Retreats, Capital Mountain Christian Camp, Weimar, CA

July 18-24 - West Coast District Youth Retreat, Camp Wamatochick, Prescott, AZ

July 24-31 - West Coast District Youth Retreat, Sis-Q Meadows Camp, Cave Junction, OR

July 31 - August 7 - West Coast District Seeker Retreat, Sis-Q Meadows Camp, Cave Junction, OR

August 3-7 - Dakota Youth Retreat, Crystal Springs Baptist Camp, Medina, ND



LifeSpring Name Change

Over the past seven years LifeSpring School of Ministry has transformed from a fledgling ministry school to a vibrant Christian college that is equipping Christians in all areas of ministry.

As it continues to grow, one word has significantly inspired and influenced what LifeSpring is becoming. That word is *artios* (AR'-tee-oss). *Artios* is a concept highlighted in Ephesians 4 that embodies three elements key to equipping believers for vibrant ministry:

- embracing solid biblical foundations;
- restoring and realigning lives and relationships to reflect God's intent;
- stewarding gifts and calling with focused training.

Artios not only has come to define what LifeSpring is about but also continues to shape who we are becoming. Therefore, the administration of LifeSpring is proud to announce that in January 2017, LifeSpring School of Ministry will become known as Artios Christian College.

LifeSpring staff members are immensely excited about the future of Artios and are currently reimagining all of the aspects of this change. As the rollout date of January 2017 approaches, plans are being put into place to make this transition a huge success.



August 19-21 - West Coast District Sword Retreat, Sky Camp, Fall Creek, OR

September 12-17 - North American Ministerial Council, Ridgecrest, NC

For a more complete list of events, including contact information, please visit cog7.org/church right.



IMC in Buenos Aires (Argentina)

Delegates from 30 or more national churches will travel to Argentina for the quadrennial meeting of the International Ministerial Congress (IMC) October 10-15, 2016, in Buenos Aires. Delegates from the General Conference (US and Canada) are Chip Hinds, Sam Holland, Whaid Rose, and Loren Stacy.



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Mission to West Africa

Tom Benzen (Arkansas) and Bryan Cleeton (Colorado) worked with CoG7 leaders in Sierra Leone and new brethren in Liberia April 7 - May 5. Their mission was to review ministry work and further strengthen CoG7 efforts in these countries.

Under the leadership of Peter Blackie, 45 congregations in Sierra Leone assist 150+ orphans and widows with the support of CoG7's Orphans and Widows ministry. Twenty-two of these are young CoG7 women, Daughters of the King (DOK), who have graduated and are receiving university training in nursing, business, and other fields. Tom and Bryan met with these orphans, widows, and DOKs. They included Rashida Koroma, who is attending medical school, and Zainab Adian, who completed her nursing degree, serving on the front lines in the recent Ebola crisis of West Africa.

During this crisis, CoG7 provided key Disaster Relief funds to the Church in Sierra Leone. Food aid was supplied to quarantined families. Six motorbikes were purchased to transport health workers and assist those affected by Ebola. An Ebola sensitization and evangelistic campaign was also launched, reaching numerous villages with life-saving information. Tom and Bryan met Ebola survivors and orphans, health and campaign workers, and families who received food aid, as well as villages where CoG7 was planted as a result of these efforts.

Within the last three years, thirty new churches have been planted in Sierra Leone. Some are located in villages that have not had a church and include converts from Islam. The book *This We Believe* has been a key resource to introduce CoG7 and train new leaders. Tom and Bryan visited sixteen congregations and participated in the baptism of more than 90 persons.

To sustain the growing ministry in Sierra Leone, the Church is implementing agriculture and other income-generating projects. Tom, an agriculture expert, provided valuable advice on improving a large-



Tom Benzen (far right) and Bryan Cleeton (not pictured) visit CoG7 in Maworr Village, where 21 baptisms took place.

scale farm and smaller gardens cared for by local congregations.

Traveling to Liberia, Bryan and leaders from Sierra Leone met new brethren there who wish to join CoG7. Six congregations and four schools were visited. Concluding their mission, a leadership meeting was held to plan a way forward for the development of CoG7 in that country.

Thanks be to God for all He has done!

— Bryan Cleeton



Daughters of the King, with Peter Blackie (back row, second from right) and CoG7 leaders in Freetown, Sierra Leone.



The Big Picture

The saying “Can’t see the forest for the trees” describes a person so focused on part of something that he can’t see the whole of it. As a result, he may misinterpret both the part and the whole! The parts and the whole of anything are both important. This certainly is true of God’s Word.

This current series in the *Bible Advocate* magazine has zoomed in on the one sentence found in Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (NASB throughout). This current issue has zoomed in on one phrase from that one sentence: “one Spirit.” But zoom out with me. Let’s see the whole.

The apostle Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians follows his common pattern: begin with theology and close with practical application. Romans, for example, begins with eleven chapters of wonderful theology about salvation by God’s grace through faith, apart from the law. Chapter 12, however, begins, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. . . .”

This transition is followed by chapters instructing how a person who is being transformed will live. Similarly, Ephesians begins with three chapters of theology about why and how all believers in Christ are one in Christ, then concludes with three chapters of instruction about how that oneness in Christ can and must be lived out in our relationships.

The pivot from theology to application is made in Ephesians 4:1-6. So let’s zoom back in.

Because of our oneness in Christ (chapters 1-3), we are to live with one another in a certain way: “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:1-3).

We are to be humble, gentle, patient, and loving. We are to carefully guard “the unity of the Spirit.” Nothing can be allowed to cut the fragile cord of peace that binds us together in Christ. Why? “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (vv. 4-6).

Zoom in closer. Does it seem odd that the seven “ones” of verses 4-6 begin with “one body and one Spirit” instead of the normal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit order? Zoom out again. The whole of Ephesians may be read as a plea for behaviors that “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” and the seven “ones” of verses 4-6 are the basis for those behaviors and that unity. The “one body” and the “one Spirit” are seriously related: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . .” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Peace and unity, within our church as a whole and within each of our congregations, are essential. Let’s not miss the forest or the trees.

— Loren Stacy





Missions of Redemption

Nineteen CoG7 widows, mostly indentured servants of the harsh brick-making industry in Pakistan, have been released from their bondage, thanks to generous donations through the Church's Orphans and Widows ministry. With sewing machines and training provided through G. C. Missions, these women now have the means to provide for their families.

New motorcycles have been purchased for pastors in Kyauk Tain village, Myanmar, so they can evangelize in nearby villages and towns. During a recent meeting in Kyauk Tain, a Buddhist accepted Jesus as Savior. Seven others received baptism near Mindat, Chin Hills.

Support G. C. missions like these in Pakistan, Myanmar, and around the world. Contact us at gcmisions@cog7.org; 303-452-7973.

