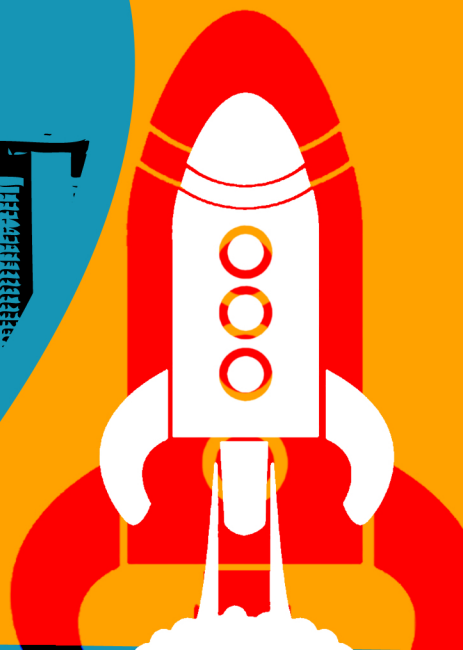


**PRACTICAL
ANSWERS TO
BEING A CHRISTIAN
AND THE POWER IT BRINGS
TO YOUR LIFE**



faithlauncher

BY DAVID FLANDERS



WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

Which of the following makes you a Christian?

Attending Church

Doing good

Praying

Having Christian parents

Living in a Christian country

Keeping the ten commandments

Believing the Bible is true

Believing in God

Believing in Jesus

Whilst all the above are good things and many of them are things that are expected of Christians none of these things on their own, or all together, makes a person a Christian. Anyone trusting in these things cannot receive eternal life. Jesus said "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

He went on to explain that "...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." John 3:5-6 This means that to be a Christian we have to have two births; a physical one and a spiritual one.

What is a spiritual birth or being born again?

To understand this we have to know the following...

1. "All have sinned Romans" 3:23 .

When God made the world it was perfect. Adam and Eve were perfect too.

God made them to be His friends and to have a loving relationship with Him.

To make true love possible He had to give them free will so that the choice was theirs. There was only one law, one choice, do not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and

evil. The Devil tempted them to do this and they chose against God. This is what sin is. They fell from their perfect existence and paradise was over. Disease, death and work came into the world. Adam, Eve and the whole human race were now infected with the disease of sin. And so are we. The only sinless person that has ever lived is Jesus.

2. "The wages of sin is death" Romans 6:23

Death, sin and its consequences went against all that God had hoped for but His justice had to be satisfied. God is righteous, that means that He has perfect standards. He decided that those people who had chosen against His laws should be separated from Him for ever. We don't realise what this means; without God there is no good, nothing good. The absence of God means that absence of everything good. We call this Hell. People who live sinfully reap the "rewards" of that life, death and eternal separation from God.

3. "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 6:23

Obviously God was not happy that the finest of His creations, the one that He loved was ruined. Throughout the Old Testament He spoke through prophets, priests and kings but man's best efforts to keep God's laws all failed because of his sinful nature. But there was a solution. God's justice said that a sinless man could, by offering himself as a sacrifice, pay the ransom for the sin of the whole human race. God Himself, came in the flesh in the person of Jesus to do exactly that. He showed us how to live and then died in our place.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16-17

4. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

What do we have to do to accept Jesus as our Saviour?:

Admit that you are a sinner (see above)

Believe that Jesus is the Son of God "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 1 John 4:15 Commit your life to Him. "While we live, we live to please the Lord. And when we die, we go to be with the Lord. So in life and in death, we belong to the Lord" Rom 14:8

The prayer you prayed when you became a Christian included these things. Remember what you said...?

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner – I am sorry for my sins. Please forgive me and make me a new person. Come into my life Lord Jesus and live in me. I believe that You died on the cross for me – I will live for You. I make You my Lord. I promise that I will love You, serve You and obey You for the rest of my life, as You give me strength. Thank You for saving me and giving me a home in Heaven. In Jesus name. Amen

You were probably told after you prayed this prayer that it is necessary to tell someone. This is important because the Bible says:

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. Matt 10:32-33

So being a Christian is not something we can internalise and keep to ourselves. Indeed if we do not profess or proclaim that we belong to Jesus verbally then we do not. It is not something that we should be ashamed of or embarrassed about. The Bible actually tells us that it is the only thing that we are supposed to be proud of!

So what has happened to you? Many things. In fact you will spend the rest of your life discovering what has happened and continues to happen to you. It is a great adventure of faith. But just consider these things for now:

Your sins past, present and future have been forgiven and erased, you have become a child of God, Jesus now lived within you, you have the unlimited resources of Heaven at your disposal (love, joy, peace, strength, self control etc), your prayers are guaranteed answers (not always yes!), God's plan for your life can now begin. But the most important thing of all is that you now have a relationship with God, through Jesus. It is the most precious relationship there is – it is what you were made for.

Here are some verses that sum it all up...

"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's judgment. For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God — all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God." Romans 5:6-11 NLT

HOW CAN I BE SURE THAT I AM NOW A CHRISTIAN?

1. The Bible says so!

Christ received sinners. Even the dying thief was accepted by Jesus. He does not reject anyone who comes to Him. John 6:37

2. The Church says so

The recognition and affirmation of the Body of Christ. Christians know when someone else is a believer. Also we find that we love them! I John 3:14

3. Your life says so

Suddenly you have a new motivation – to do good! A change in practice and an inner strength to achieve it! I John 5:18

4. Your conscience says so

Guilt & shame for your past is gone. There is a freedom, lightness and a happiness you have not known before. Romans 8:1

5. Your desires say so

People think Christianity is OK as long as you keep it to yourself...it is impossible! You want to tell everyone. John 4:29

6. Your mind says so

The Bible which was as clear as mud becomes as transparent and obvious! This is a clear indication that the author lives within ~ the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. Luke 24:45

7. The Holy Spirit says so

We know that we know that we know! The certainty that the indwelling spirit gives us makes us surer of Jesus than anything else! Romans 8:16

Extra Thought:

When you have just been born again the Bible says that you are a "babe in Christ". Babies get dirty nappies but they are not scolded just lovingly cleaned up. Don't worry if you make mistakes – your Heavenly Father still loves you and so do we.

THE BIBLE

The Bible is a very special book. It was the first book ever printed (1456 in Strasbourg by Johannes Gutenberg) and since then has always been the best selling book in the world.

It is a holy book - this means different and separate from all other books. As you start to look at it more closely you begin to understand why this is. The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by 40 different authors over a period of 1500 years. It was written on three continents, and several nations. It was written mainly in two languages and its authors were from walks of life as diverse as fisherman and kings. The subject matter ranges from rules of personal hygiene to advice for government, from scientific detail to love poems. Most of the authors did not know each other and many had no access to what the others had written. And yet the Bible reads as an incredibly interwoven and complete book. If a visitor to this planet were to be presented with the facts above he would form one conclusion... that there was an editor whom all the writers knew. Of course he would be right. God.

THE LIVING WORD

Another reason that the Bible is special is that it is a living book. This means that it not only contains the word of life but unlike any other book it has the capacity to always be fresh. After studying the Bible for 40 years I still find new things in passages that I have read a hundred times. Read other books twice and you know what's coming – they become boring.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT ITSELF?

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God...

The word inspired used here means “breathed” so this verse could be read all scripture is God-breathed. This is significant because God made Adam alive by breathing into him. The breath of God is life. When Jesus rose from the dead He breathed on the disciples and said “receive the Holy Spirit” John 20:22 and he opened their understanding (Luke 24:45).

Although men wrote the Bible down God told them what to write; not always by dictation as such but by inspiration. The Bible is so central to our understanding of God, and He went

to such lengths to produce it for us that we have to believe that He is actively involved in keeping it pure and accurate. When the Dead Sea Scrolls, written between 150BC and 70AD, were found in 1947 and compared to the translations that we have today scholars were amazed that there were no noteworthy differences!

LIFE-CHANGING

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

FAITH-BUILDING

John 20:31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

The disciple John tells us the reason that he wrote his gospel (an account of Jesus' life) – it applies to all the New Testament really:

GUIDANCE-GIVING

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

God wants us to read and study the Bible – for good reason. It will help us and encourage us, teach us and guide us. Above all else it is His love letter to us.

As someone once said, seven days without the Bible makes one weak!

SIN-CHALLENGING

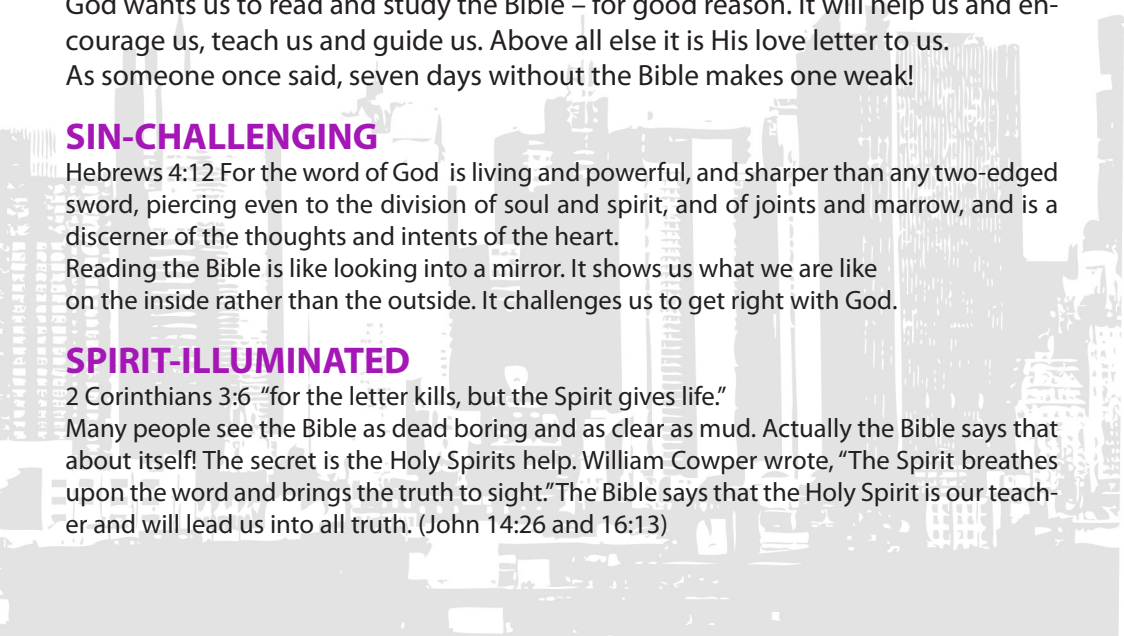
Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Reading the Bible is like looking into a mirror. It shows us what we are like on the inside rather than the outside. It challenges us to get right with God.

SPIRIT-ILLUMINATED

2 Corinthians 3:6 "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Many people see the Bible as dead boring and as clear as mud. Actually the Bible says that about itself! The secret is the Holy Spirits help. William Cowper wrote, "The Spirit breathes upon the word and brings the truth to sight." The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is our teacher and will lead us into all truth. (John 14:26 and 16:13)



OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Moses' Books

Joshua
Judges
Ruth

1 Samuel
2 Samuel

1 Kings
2 Kings
1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles

Historical Books

Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther
Job

Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon

Wisdom Books

Isaiah

Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel

Major Prophets

Daniel
Hosea
Joel

Amos
Obadiah

Jonah
Micah

Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah

Minor Prophets

Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

BIBLE INDEX

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

Gospels

Acts of the Apostles (Luke)

Romans

1 Corinthians

2 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

Thessalonians

Thessalonians

1 Timothy

2 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

Hebrews

James

1 Peter

2 Peter

1 John

2 John

3 John

Jude

Revelation of John

Letters of Paul

Other letters

The two parts of the Bible are called testaments. The Old Testament is the book of the Jewish faith or Judaism. Some of the stories are also in the Koran. Christianity takes the whole of the Old Testament as holy and adds the New Testament which contains the story of Jesus, the early Church and Revelation (the prophesy of Jesus Second Coming). The testaments are the two covenants, or agreements that God has made with mankind: the first through Moses and the second through Jesus. We must remember that the Bible is a gradual revelation over 1500 years and what some people call "contradictions" are understood by passage of time.

TIPS ON HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

1. Get a version that you are happy with
2. Pray before reading asking God to speak to you
3. Begin by reading the Gospels and Acts
4. Have a reading plan: a daily reading book or "Through the Bible"
5. Have paper and pen to write down things that crop up
6. Ask someone to explain anything you don't understand
7. When God speaks to you obey!
8. Have a pocket sized Bible with you whenever you can
9. Try to learn verses by writing them on cards
10. Have a set time each day to read
11. Listen to the Bible online or on CD
12. Talk about what you have read with someone

THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew (O. T.) and Greek (N.T.). It was first translated into Latin and stayed that way for more than 1000 Years. The Roman Catholic church believed that ordinary folk could not be trusted to read the Bible themselves, only priests should do it. During the Reformation people like Martin Luther strove against fierce opposition to bring us the Bible in our own native tongue. Eventually the reformers won and the Bible soon became available to all. We must never forget that people gave their lives to win us this privilege.

The whole Bible has been translated into 392 different languages and portions of it into 1895 others. People are still working to produce the Bible in every language. Some countries ban Bibles – China has 100 million Christians but every Bible has to be smuggled in!

EXTRA THOUGHT

Why so many translations of the Bible? There are many reasons but the main one is to make it accessible to everyone in a form of language that they are comfortable with. The message never changes just the type of language used.

PRAYER

Prayer is conversing with God. As simple as that sounds prayer remains one of the things Christians want to know more about. First let us look at the enormous privilege that prayer is as a Christian.

Here are some wonderful things about prayer

Anyone can talk to God

You can talk to God at any time 24/7

You can talk to God anywhere

You can talk to God about anything

You need no rituals or regalia

You need use no special words

Prayer is a two way conversation. Often people talk to God but do not wait for His reply. What kind of friendship is that? We must understand that God wants to talk to us more than we want to talk to Him - so always allow some quiet time for Him to do that.

God even helps us to pray!

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 with groans that words cannot express. Romans 8:26

GOD INVITES PRAYER

One of the first things that we read in the Bible is that Adam and Eve talked to God. As this is one of the main reasons for man's existence when we pray we fulfil our destiny on a profound way. Throughout the Bible people are encouraged by God to pray. The great figures of the Old Testament were all great prayers but Abraham, David, Elijah and Daniel stand out. Jesus himself was a man of prayer and sought quiet times and places to do so.

Abraham's prayers teach us that prayer can change God's mind! David's prayers teach us about intimacy with God, Elijah's prayers teach us that ordinary people can do extraordinary things through prayer and Daniel's prayers show us the importance of regularity in prayer. (Genesis 18, The Psalms, 1 Kings 17 and Daniel 6)

Let us have a closer look at the prayers of Elijah...

1. PRAYING IN LINE WITH SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 17:1 there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

Elijah's first recorded prayer was a declaration. He could be confident that it would be answered because it was in line with scripture, God's covenant with Israel.

Deut 11:17 "lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you."

We need to know the Bible and the difference between the Old and New Testaments to correctly apply them. Prayer must always be in line with God's word.

2. LIVING IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD

1 Kings 17:14 "For thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.'"

This was another declaration in prayer. Elijah could be confident that God would answer because he had been obedient to God and was where God wanted him to be. (Chapter 17:3 and v9)

3. IDENTIFICATION IN INTERCESSION

1 Kings 17:21 And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him."

Elijah stretched himself out on the child three times. He identified with the object of his prayer unpleasant as it was. There was a cost. Elijah knew that God requires us to be involved and to identify with or prayers. We cannot be detached and refuse to ourselves be the answer should God give opportunity.

4. A HEART IN TUNE WITH GOD'S

1 Kings 18:36..."Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word."

Elijah knew God's heart and His will. He could be confident enough to challenge the false prophets of Baal because he knew God's plan for Israel.

5. AN HONEST RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1 Kings 19:10 I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Elijah might have had a case of the "poor-old-me's" here but at least he was honest and intimate enough with God to tell Him the truth. There was no pretence with Elijah. God would rather we were honest and forthright with Him. This shows that Elijah had an intimate relationship with God. God decided to answer Elijah's prayer by visiting and speaking to him. This shows us God's commitment to Elijah.

We notice that Elijah's prayers were simple, short and full of confidence. There was no super-spirituality displayed only a love and passion for God and his purposes.

Our Father who art in heaven,	<i>Correct address ensures delivery</i>
Hallowed be thy name.	<i>Worship / recognition of who God is</i>
Thy kingdom come.	<i>God's desires above our own</i>
Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.	<i>Praying the will of God = perfect</i>
Give us this day our daily bread.	<i>Provision of all that we need</i>
And forgive us our trespasses,	<i>Confession</i>
as we forgive those who trespass against us.	<i>Forgiveness</i>
And lead us not into temptation,	<i>Protection from our old nature</i>
but deliver us from evil:	<i>Protection from the Devil</i>
For thine is the kingdom,	<i>Résumé of who God is and</i>
and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.	<i>declaration of faith in his ability</i>
Matthew 6:9-13	

The Lord's Prayer is a wonderful all-encompassing prayer.

It is useful in the following ways:

to ensure we have everything covered or when we have little time for anything more or when we are finding prayer difficult.

Jesus said that we should pray to the Father in his name ...

Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. John 16:23

That is because there is only one way to come to God and that is through Jesus:

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 2:5

Did you know that Jesus "prays" for us?

Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Romans 8:34

10 HINDRANCES TO ANSWERED PRAYER

1. **Sin in your life** (*Isaiah 59:2*)
2. **No fear of God** (*Proverbs 1:28-30*)
3. **Unforgiveness in your heart** (*Matthew 5: 23-24*)
4. **Unbelief** (*Matthew 13:58*)
5. **Selfishness** (*James 4:3*)
6. **Doublemindedness** (*James 1:6-8*)
7. **Wrong motivation** (*Matthew 6:5*)
8. **Against God's will** (*1 John 5:14*)
9. **Disobedience** (*1 John 3:22*)
10. **Marital disharmony** (*1 Peter 3:7*)

DIFFERENT KINDS OF PRAYER

Corporate prayer – the kind that we engage in at Church

Devotional prayer – what you do in your daily “quiet time”

Intercessory prayer – a deep level of intense prayer

Unceasing prayer – an open channel to Heaven

Arrow prayers – very short emergency prayers!

Prayer concert – a time when everyone prays at the same time

Praying in the Spirit – speaking in tongues (prayer language)

Prayer partner – somebody whom you meet up with to pray

Extempore prayer – ad-lib or spontaneous prayer

Liturgical prayer – written prayers

EXTRA THOUGHT

When you close the physical door God closes the spiritual door. You are in a safe and uniquely private environment with God when you are praying.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Most people are aware that the Bible tells us God is a Trinity. This means He is three persons in one; Father, Son and **Holy Spirit**. Each person of the trinity has a separate identity and a separate role. The supreme role belongs to God the Father, the role of interaction with mankind belongs to Jesus the Son (who manifests himself in flesh) and the role of indwelling and empowering belongs to the Holy Spirit. All three persons have always existed and always will. (The question, "who made God?" is illogical.)

The Bible records each of the three persons of the Trinity's activities as they relate to the world. The first we hear of the Holy Spirit is;

Genesis 1:2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And the last;

Rev 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

In the Old Testament... we see the Holy Spirit empowering people in a "one-off" way e.g. Samson, Samuel and Saul (*Judges 14:6 And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart*). The Holy Spirit did not live in them but "came upon them" when necessary.

In the New Testamen... we see something different; John the Baptist was "*filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb*" *Luke 1:15*. As was Jesus himself. When Jesus was baptised the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. (*Matthew 3:16*) This marked the launch of his ministry.

When Jesus had died, risen and ascended into Heaven the Holy Spirit came to indwell the disciples and those who were with them (120). This was on the day of Pentecost – the day the Church was born! From that time on the Holy Spirit has lived in people.

The Holy Spirit is also referred to as the Holy Ghost, the Spirit, the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ, the Comforter etc.

WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES?

WORSHIP

"He shall glorify me." John 16:14 The Holy Spirit not only glorifies Jesus himself, just as Jesus glorified the Father, but he directs our worship to Jesus. Holy Spirit directed praise is a powerful and beautiful thing. It turns dull and repetitive singing exercise into a vibrant expression which draws worshippers into the presence of God and the atmosphere of Heaven. *"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."* John 4:24

TEACHING

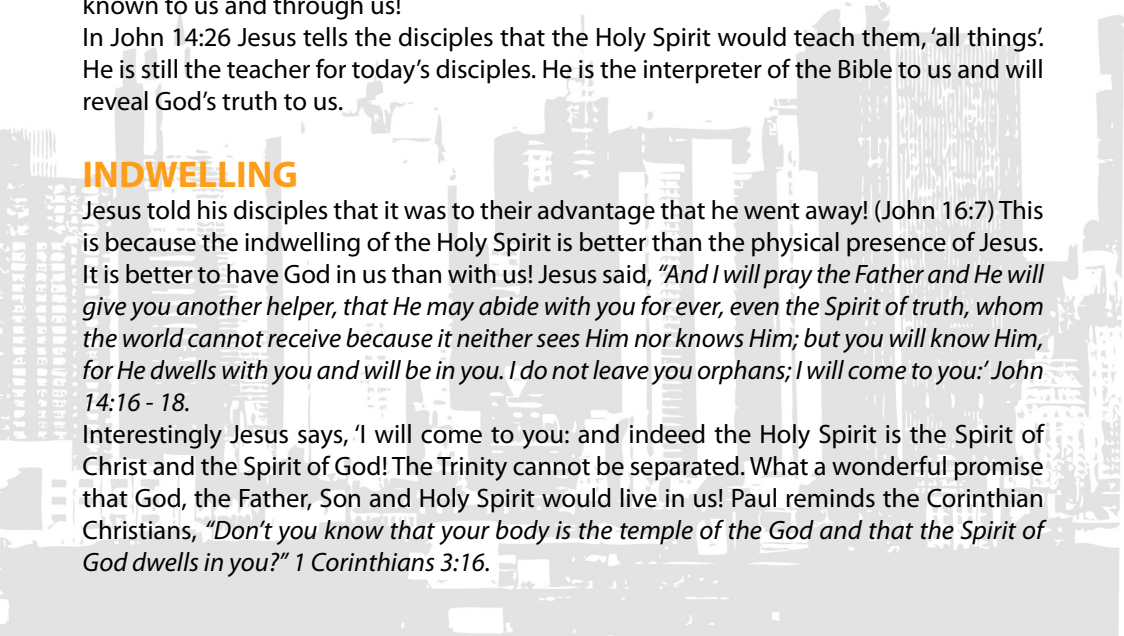
John 16:14 goes on to say, *"He will take of what is mine and declare it to you."* The next verse repeats this and also states that, all things that the Father has belong to Jesus too. In other words the Holy Spirit will make known to us those things that belong to God, both Father and Son! What is this? The list is endless and awesome: it includes His majesty, His love, His power, His grace, His wisdom - but first and foremost His Gospel. The fact that through God's love Jesus came and died in our place and because of this our sins can be forgiven. And that we can be sons of God with everlasting and abundant life because Jesus rose from the dead. It glorifies God when the Holy Spirit makes this known to us and through us!

In John 14:26 Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them, 'all things'. He is still the teacher for today's disciples. He is the interpreter of the Bible to us and will reveal God's truth to us.

INDWELLING

Jesus told his disciples that it was to their advantage that he went away! (John 16:7) This is because the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is better than the physical presence of Jesus. It is better to have God in us than with us! Jesus said, *"And I will pray the Father and He will give you another helper, that He may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you will know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I do not leave you orphans; I will come to you."* John 14:16 - 18.

Interestingly Jesus says, 'I will come to you: and indeed the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God! The Trinity cannot be separated. What a wonderful promise that God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit would live in us! Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians, *"Don't you know that your body is the temple of the God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"* 1 Corinthians 3:16.



This does not mean that God is in everybody. Jesus said, “the world cannot receive (the Holy Spirit) because it neither sees Him nor knows Him”: But those who are born again and disciples of Jesus can receive him! Paul said to the leaders of the Church at Ephesus, *“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”* (Acts 19:2). They replied that they didn’t even know that there was a Holy Spirit! When they heard about him (it is right to say ‘him’ and not ‘it’ because the Holy Spirit is a person) they wanted him and so the Holy Spirit came into them. *“And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”* Acts 19:6

EMPOWERING

When we receive the Holy Spirit into our lives we get a source of power that we never had before. The word for this power in Greek is *dunamis*. This is where we get our words dynamic, dynamo and dynamite from! Some people say that the Christian life is impossible to live – it is. With our own will power we fail miserably. But God has made a way for us to have another source of strength that makes it doable - the Holy Spirit living in us. When this first happened, to the disciples on the day of Pentecost, it turned a bunch of frightened men into world changers (Acts 2). The “fiery flames” on their head represented the fire that was coming into their hearts! They found that there were many things that they were able to do now that they had not been able to do before, (e.g. face an angry crowd, preach, speak in the heavenly language)

When we receive the Holy Spirit we experience the same empowering. Not only does he give us new skills but he helps our character become more like Jesus. These things are called gifts and fruit: we study them in another session.

FOR YOU

The apostle Peter made it very clear *“For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”* Acts 2:39. Here is a verse in the Bible where you are mentioned! You are one of those who are afar off – on one of those that the Lord has called!

Indeed, Jesus said, *“You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”* Luke 11:11-13

We need to be full of the Holy Spirit so that we can be the people that God needs us to be and do his will.

Metaphor

Oil
Living Water
Dove
Fire
Wind
Wine

Symbolizing

Joy, healing & authority
Freshness & new life
Peace & purity
Presence, passion & power
Invisibility & power
Blessing

References

Hebrews 1:9, James 5:14-15, 1 Kings 1:39
John 7:38-39, John 4
John 1:32
Exodus 3, Acts 2, Matthew 3:11
John 3, Acts 2
Deuteronomy 33:28, Joel 3:18

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

When the Holy Spirit energised the early Church it saw 300 years of stunning growth. However the legalisation and institutionalisation of Christianity by the Roman emperor Constantine in 313AD heralded a decline in the authentic Church. Through the centuries there were always pockets of true believers who were filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the late 1800s something amazing began to happen people began to rediscover the 'things of the Spirit' almost simultaneously in different countries. The foremost places were in the USA and the UK. This soon spread and became a worldwide phenomenon. 1904 was a key year. Pentecostal churches began to be formed of which the Assemblies of God is the biggest.

In the 1970/80s there was another worldwide phenomenon called the Charismatic Movement. The teaching and experience of the Holy Spirit that had been exclusive to the Pentecostals began to spread to all other churches. It was not universally accepted but was so big that it changed the Church forever!

EXTRA THOUGHT

Doves are quite special birds. They mate for life and are amazingly committed to each other. They only feed in safe places but will alight on anyone who holds out their hand. They have 9 primary feathers on each wing ~ there are 9 gifts and 9 fruits of the Holy Spirit!

THE NEW YOU

When you gave your life to Jesus you were born-again. This is a phrase that Jesus captured to describe what happens to us when He comes into our lives – we are completely changed:

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Although our basic personality, that bit that makes us who we are, stays the same there is need to change a lot of things that were not so good about us. Have you ever thought of the kind of person you would like to be but never been able to achieve it. God made us with an 'ideal outcome' in mind and it seems that we crave this. The bad character traits that we have developed through life annoy us and sometimes make us dislike ourselves.

Now that the past is dealt with through salvation we have a wonderful opportunity to start again! We now have a lot more going for us than before:

We have the power to conquer sin in our lives.

We have a great motivation – to please God.

We have a band of friends to encourage us in God

We have Jesus living on the inside and permeating our whole lives.

We can have the dynamic of the Holy Spirit to turbocharge this process.

Remember the dove? It has 9 primary flight feathers on each wing. The Bible tells us that there are 9 gifts of the Holy Spirit and 9 fruit of the Holy Spirit. A dove needs both wings to fly and all the feathers to fly well. Similarly we need both gifts and fruit to be a balanced and effective Christian.

WHAT ARE THE GIFTS AND THE FRUITS?

The Gifts of the Spirit are 9 spiritual tools that help us to serve God, help one another in the Church and win others to Jesus. The Fruits are 9 character enhancers that come from the character of Jesus himself. These enable us to be more like Jesus and to have what it takes, morally and spiritually, to use the gifts of the Spirit.

Can you imagine how dangerous it would be to have the power of Jesus without the character of Jesus? We would be unbearable, unscrupulous and unfit for the task! No, both wings are needed for perfect flight.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

In Galatians 5: 20 Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit. But first he lists the “works of the flesh” i.e. what we manufacture! He then contrasts the character traits that God gives us:

LOVE – There are four kinds of love Eros, Storge, Philia & Agape. Because God is love, our driving force must be love too – agape love. “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).

JOY- One thing that makes Christianity different is the joy factor. Joy is deeper than happiness “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). (Hebrews 12:2).

PEACE – Peace is so synonymous with Christianity. Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. This is not the absence of war but a condition of our heart. C.S.Lewis says that we have peace because for us the great questions of life have been answered. We must be agents of peace in the lives of others. (Rom5:1 & 15:13).

PATIENCE - really is a virtue. God is so patient with us He expects us to pass it on. Both to others and ourselves. (Colossians 1:11). (Ephesians 4:2).

KINDNESS – Jesus is the embodiment of kindness. We see it in the way he dealt with people in the Gospels. Kindness is love in action – it includes sympathy and generosity. (2 Corinthians 6:6-7).

GOODNESS – By God’s definition not ours! What does God say is good? Good works flow out of faith. Goodness and Godliness are connected (2 Thess1:11)(Ephesians 5:9).

FAITHFULNESS - Our ideal of faithfulness is that of a dog – it sticks close no matter what. God is faithful to us in a big way. He keeps His promises (Isaiah 25:1). (Ephesians 3:16-17).

MEEKNESS – Meekness doesn’t mean weakness. The best description is ‘a gentle giant’ someone who has great strength but doesn’t use it maliciously (Galatians 6:1).

SELF CONTROL – The one that everyone forgets! But how vitally important it is. It does what it says on the tin. (2 Peter 1:5-7).

These are the fruit of the SPIRIT not the fruit of us! As we are grafted into Christ the nutrients flow from Him into us and so produce His fruit in our lives. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. John 15:4

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

In 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 Paul lists the Gifts of the Spirit. They are listed within the context of Church life and therefore are meant to be a blessing to others rather than a feather in our own cap.

WISDOM - The ability to make right decisions. To see God's will in a situation and act on it. Insight in counselling or witnessing. Source = the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16)

KNOWLEDGE - The gift of revelation; to be told something that you have no other way of knowing. Insight into God's purposes & people's hearts. (Act 5:1-11)

FAITH - God's provision of extra faith for special circumstances where greater strength and trust is required (Acts 8)

HEALINGS - This gift is for the receiver rather than the user. Christians never say I am a healer. They are God's channel for this gift in circumstances where and when He leads. (Romans 15:18)

MIRACLES - Signs and wonders. Jesus calmed the storm and walked on water. In Acts we see Philip's spiritual transport, judgement falling etc. (Acts 13)

PROPHECY - Not necessarily seeing the future but guidance for the present. Includes God's word to someone in correction or encouragement. Always for building people up and in line with the scriptures. (Acts 21)

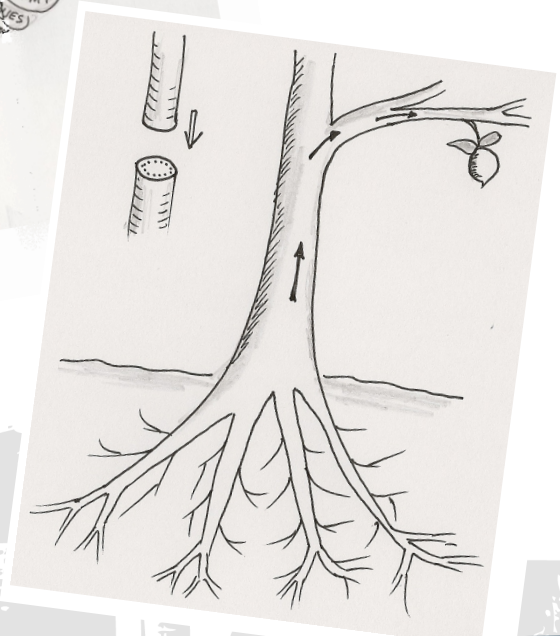
DISCERNING OF SPIRITS - The ability to know the origin of spiritual manifestations, people's motivation and standing. (Acts 13)

TONGUES - The new language given to those baptised in the Holy Spirit. To be used for personal uplifting, communication with God, worship, bringing a word from God. This gift bypasses our intellect and enables us to pray for things that we know nothing about! (Acts 2)

INTREPRETATION OF TOUNGUES - The ability to "translate" what someone else has said in tongues. Not from a knowledge of the language but by the Holy Spirit using you as a mouthpiece (1 Corinthians 14)

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are a spiritual toolbox. When confronted with a particular problem we can reach into it and use the tool for that job. This is available to all those baptised in the Holy Spirit. Some people become adept at using a particular gift and then it be-

GOD'S ILLUSTRATION IN NATURE



EXTRA THOUGHT

Since the Church became equipped with Spiritual gifts its growth world-wide as been exponential. For example Africa (the dark continent) is now home to the countries with the highest percentage of Christians!

