

AWAKENING YOUR DEVOTION

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Last Sunday, I described for you the Wheel of Discipleship—the essential components of the Christian life. The First Quadrant of the wheel (1-3 o'clock) represents your Spiritual or Devotional Life.

As I said, generally, this is a Pentecostal strong suit (what we typically emphasize). But that doesn't mean we're great at it, or that we have no more to learn or grow.

It is, however, the starting block for this Christian race. And today we're going to look at it again, but from a different perspective.

This month's sermon theme is, "The Holy Spirit and You." I will address how the Holy Spirit energizes our faith and urge you to permit Him to build you up in each of the four quadrants of spiritual living.

My four talks, corresponding to the four quadrants of the wheel, will be:

- Awakening Your Devotion
- Anointing Your Friendships
- Engaging With Jesus
- Taking You To The World

So, today we'll explore how the Holy Spirit is responsible for Awakening Your Devotion.

Spiritual Alarm

The most common way the Holy Spirit is recognized is as a spiritual alarm.

We refer to the positive effect of His signal as "a witness in my spirit," as in Romans 8:16 (NKJV): *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."*

The negative effect we describe as "a check (or hesitation) in my spirit." The closest thing to this in the Scriptures may be found in Isaiah 30:21 (NKJV): *"Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left."*

In such ways, the Spirit interrupts our ordinary life like an alarm clock, to signal something right or wrong, to redirect our steps. So, He awakens our sense of God and our devotion to His will.

Slumber

You should know this about our God: *“The One who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, He who watches over Israel never slumbers or sleeps”* (Psalm 121:3-4; NLT).

But in this respect, we are not naturally like Him. So, we get the Proverbs (6:9-11; MSG): *“So how long are you going to laze around doing nothing? How long before you get out of bed? A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there, sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next? Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life, poverty your permanent houseguest!”* (Repeated again in chapter 24.)

This is the first—and very natural—hindrance to our devotion to Jesus: we’re lazy, at least about the most important things. Of course, we can be *extremely busy*—doing what is exciting and what is urgent—even while we are neglecting what is truly important.

The trick is to keep the main thing the main thing. Urgent matters will interrupt, but they must not be allowed to *displace* what is truly important (and only you can protect that).

At some point, you may need to draw the line and say, “That’s all the discretionary time I have today. I cannot do one more unplanned or unexpected thing.” If you don’t, your time and energy will be hijacked until it is depleted.

Paul expressed this concern to the church in Rome (Romans 13:11-14; MSG), *“Make sure that you don’t get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can’t afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don’t loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!”*

You’ve probably heard or felt something like that in your own conscience. With so much to entertain us, to while away our time—music, movies, television, social networks, food, hobbies, shopping (and now, almost all of that can happen anywhere, anytime, on your phone!)—there will be no time left for devotion to God unless you make it a priority and pay attention to your conscience.

And this is where the Holy Spirit’s work begins.

Conscience Conformation

He informs our minds and conforms our consciences to the will of God.

Romans 8:26-27.

²⁶ *“The Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.*

²⁷ *And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will.”*

This, then, is one of the wondrous effects of praying in other tongues as the Spirit gives you the ability to do so: it embeds in our hearts the will of God. When we read the Bible we may *intellectually* discover the will of God, but it is the activity of the Holy Spirit through praying in heavenly languages that writes God’s will in our hearts and *shapes our will* to be like His. God’s Spirit trains our consciences for righteous living.

Then He stirs our hearts to remind us (because we are so easily distracted).

When you fast, you will find your sensitivity to your conscience heightened, because you have intentionally put aside one of life’s major distractions: food. We all need to eat in order to live, but we’re not above living to eat. And while we’re consuming one meal, we’re talking about the next one, or the last one we enjoyed. It doesn’t take a detective to recognize that we are a people infatuated with food.

Do we love God as much as food? Do we talk about Him as much? Think about Him as much? Read about Him as much? Share with others about Him as much? Plan our times with Him as thoroughly?

Holy Spirit, wake us up!

Now, you may apply those same questions to any other favorite activity of yours—watching television, golfing, or fishing (to name a few).

Generally, according to the Bible, competitively comparing yourself with others is unwise (2 Corinthians 10:12), but on one occasion (John 21:15-17) Jesus asked Peter to do something very close to that.

Do you remember that during the long night when Jesus was on trial before the Jewish leaders, Peter, who had sworn he would follow Jesus even to death if need be, three times denied that he even knew Jesus. When Jesus was crucified, Peter was ashamed to stand by Him.

But after Jesus arose from the dead three days later, He specifically asked for Peter to come, along with the others, to meet Him in Galilee.

Peter went, but not with high hopes. I don’t know how long he waited for Jesus to show up, but it couldn’t happen soon enough for Peter. Finally, he said to the others, “I’m going fishing.” They had nothing better to do, so they went with him.

They fished all night, but did not catch a single fish. At last they collected their gear and headed back. One disappointment on top of another. Their gloom was as dark as the nighttime sky.

As they neared the shore, they saw a figure on the beach preparing a fire. The man shouted to them, “Have you any fish?”

Embarrassed and dejected they hollered back, “Nope.”

The man shouted, “Cast your net on the right side and you will.”

More discouraged than tired, they must have been shaking their heads—half wondering what this man thought he knew, and half wondering why they paid him any attention—yet they threw out the net one more time and immediately felt the downward pull of a catch—a large catch.

It took all of them working together rapidly to haul in the net with over 150 large fish in it—and the net didn’t break!

It was then that they realized who they were dealing with. No wonder He had already started a fire! No wonder He knew where to throw the net! No wonder He knew they would catch fish! It was the Risen Lord Jesus!

They were in shock. They were exhilarated. They were exhausted. They were in awe.

They joined Jesus on the beach with their tremendous catch and, with joy, began to prepare breakfast. When they had finished breakfast, this conversation took place:

“¹⁵ Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these (other disciples) do?’ He replied, ‘Yes, Lord, you know I love you.’ Jesus told him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ ¹⁶ Jesus said a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He replied, ‘Yes, Lord, you know I love you.’ Jesus told him, ‘Shepherd my sheep.’ ¹⁷ Jesus said a third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was distressed that Jesus asked him a third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and said, ‘Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.’ Jesus replied, ‘Feed my sheep.’”

Peter may have been distressed by Jesus’ emphatic triple repetition of that probing question, but perhaps Jesus was offering him the opportunity to emphatically offset the three times he had recently denied even knowing Jesus.

The Holy Spirit knows our hearts and He knows what it takes to soften them without injuring us. He awakens our conscience, helping us to see ourselves more clearly, so that we may give ourselves to Christ and to the will of God more thoroughly.

What God is Doing

“Be up and awake to what God is doing!” (Romans 13:12; MSG)

Jesus said that He only did what He saw the Father doing, and only spoke what the Father gave Him to say.

What is the Father doing today? Do you know? How can we know? The answer is, through the Holy Spirit!

When Paul first visited Corinth to present the Good News about Jesus, he intentionally and carefully used very plain speech. He strictly avoided clever and persuasive words, because he wanted the results to be from the Holy Spirit’s revelation in their hearts. He knew that this method would anchor their faith in God, instead of a man or human techniques.

But after Paul left Corinth, the people began to question the value of Paul’s teaching. Others came after him with polished speeches and intricate philosophies that appeared deeper than what Paul had taught.

Their allegiance began to shift toward these new teachers, even though the new message diminished the role of Jesus.

Paul wrote to them to strongly admonish them not to be carried away by fancy stories, but to hold to the solid truth about Jesus that he had presented, and to rely on the Holy Spirit, whom God had given to them, as a sufficient source of truth regarding Christ. Here’s part of what he said (1 Corinthians 2:9-12; NLT):

⁹ That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”

¹⁰ But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets. ¹¹ No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. ¹² And we have received God’s Spirit (not the world’s spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

God does not want you to be in the dark. He wants you to know what He has given to us and recognize what He is up to. The Holy Spirit is the Revealer of such things, so how close are you with the Holy Spirit?

Devotion to Jesus begins by getting well-acquainted with the Holy Spirit, because it is He who reveals Jesus’ heart and mind to us. If you know the Holy Spirit you will know

Jesus, and if you know Jesus you will know the Father. And if you know the Father you will know what to do and say as a Christian.

Spiritual Point of View

Tragically, most Christians skip the Holy Spirit and just try to know Jesus. Unfortunately, the only route left to them to know Jesus is through head knowledge. Therefore, their Christian life is largely (though never entirely, for God is gracious and mighty) propelled by self-effort—a kind of Christian legalism.

Some people erroneously suggest that pursuing an acquaintance and relationship with the Holy Spirit is tantamount to false worship or idolatry, as if the Spirit is not God Himself but some lesser creature. Nonsense!

Paul has plainly said, *“The Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”* (2 Corinthians 3:17; NLT).

Jesus said that those who had seen Him had seen the Father, for He and the Father are one. Just so, those who know the Spirit, also know Jesus, for the Spirit and the Lord are one.

So Paul concluded, *“So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now!”* (2 Corinthians 5:16; NLT).

The proper way to become acquainted with and evaluate Jesus Christ is from the Holy Spirit’s point of view and by the Holy Spirit’s power at work in your life!

Baptism with the Spirit

May I say to you right now that the baptism with the Holy Spirit was the Father’s promise and is Jesus’ predicted gift for every believer? It is so.

If you are not earnestly praying that Jesus will baptize you in the Spirit’s power—and praying intently until He does—why not?

Jesus said, *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you”* (Acts 1:8; NLT). These were His last words to His followers. His final bequest. Can you see how important this is? Jesus’ whole program for the church depends on this. His whole plan for you also rests on this. It is His departing gift to you. Weigh this very carefully.

We all are acquainted with the Holy Spirit, for if we’re not, then we don’t yet belong to Christ. Every born-again Christian has the Holy Spirit in his or her heart. Every child of God has had some experience with the Spirit of God.

This is different. The Holy Spirit is in you, but you also need Him *upon* you, as the covering garment for your life and service. This is the “whole armor of God.” Read Ephesians 6:10 and 6:18 for yourself and see. You need this.

If you are stirred to know more, I urge you to make time to attend our next FOCUS Seminar on Saturday, May 18th, when we will cover this topic in more detail.

Devotion is the Result

Devotion to Jesus is the result of the Holy Spirit’s work in your life.

Detractors suggest that emphasizing the Holy Spirit actually eclipses the pre-eminence of Jesus, and turns decent Christians into babbling fools and emotional extremists.

Such blindness causes sincere believers to fear the power of the Holy Spirit, as if He would overtake them, overthrowing sound reason and common sense. Dear friends, we are talking about the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus has *never* treated you in such a manner, and He is not about to start.

He is gracious beyond measure! He is kind, to His own hurt! He laid down His own life to show you how much He loves you! He defines goodness!

He is immensely patient! He greets you each morning with fresh mercy! He will never abandon you! He will never abuse you! You can totally trust Him. He is your Savior! He is the Holy Spirit!

Devotion to Jesus is the result of the Holy Spirit’s work in your life.

The Holy Spirit will deepen your love for and insight into the Bible. The Holy Spirit will show you the heart of Jesus through the pages of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit will cause your worship of Jesus to flower and release joy and peace in your soul. The Holy Spirit will enhance your prayer life and render your prayers more potent and effective.

The Holy Spirit will give you the supernatural equipment you need to meet the challenges of life and gain a victorious spirit in any circumstance.

The Holy Spirit will impart the likeness of Jesus more and more to your life.

The Holy Spirit will use you to release supernatural gifts of knowledge, revelation, and power in Jesus’ name.

The Holy Spirit will teach you how to win others to the faith of Jesus.

Make Him your new Friend! Talk with Him frequently. Ask Him for everything you need.

Let Him awaken for you a new season of devotion to Christ and to the Father.