

# SPIRIT OF PRAYER

By Rev. Will Nelken

*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, May 16, 2010*

---

Martha Garrett, of East Wenatchee, Washington, recalled: “My daughter’s station wagon coughed and choked all the way to the Christian bookstore in the mall. While we stood at the bookstore counter, Connie moaned, ‘I’m not sure we can make it home in the station wagon. If only Dave had driven the station wagon and left the Dodge Spirit for us!’

“At that moment she glanced outside the store and happened to see her husband, Dave, hurrying past the window on his way to the restaurant next door.

“‘Dave! Dave!’ she called. ‘Help! We need the Spirit.’

“The clerk came to the counter at that same moment. Thinking she had just overheard a devout and desperate prayer, her eyes opened wide—until Connie and Dave exchanged car keys.”

Our subject today is “the Spirit of prayer” — not a spirit of prayer, but *the* Spirit of prayer.

The Spirit of prayer — the Holy Spirit — awakens the human conscience, breathes faith into the human soul, builds up the human spirit, and ignites our communion with God.

## Ancient Promise

We begin today with an ancient message from God (circa 500 B.C.) delivered by Zechariah. It was a message “from the Lord, who... formed the human spirit.”

<sup>8</sup> *On that day the Lord will defend the people of Jerusalem; the weakest among them will be as mighty as King David! And the royal descendants will be like God, like the angel of the Lord who goes before them!*<sup>9</sup> *For on that day I will begin to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.* [Zechariah 12]

“That Day” (mentioned five times in chapter 12, three times in chapter 13, and seven times in chapter 14), refers to the Campaign of Armageddon, in which the armies of many nations will come together against Jerusalem to destroy the city and its people.

<sup>10</sup> *Then I will pour out **a spirit of grace and prayer** on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son.* [Zechariah 12]

Eugene Peterson’s translation:

<sup>10</sup> *I’ll pour a spirit of grace and prayer over them. They’ll then be able to recognize me as the One they so grievously wounded—that piercing spear-thrust! And they’ll weep—oh, how they’ll weep! Deep mourning as of a parent grieving the loss of the firstborn child.* [Zechariah 12 (MSG)]

In “that Day” the Spirit of grace and prayer (the Holy Spirit) will come upon the remnant of God’s chosen people — those Jewish people who truly search for Him — to awaken their conscience, give recognition of Jesus, the Savior, and release repentance and faith.

## Formed for God

God, who formed the human spirit, formed it to become the dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, as Paul described:

*Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?* [1 Corinthians 6:19]

Your body becomes the residence of God's Spirit when you entrust your life to Jesus Christ and are "born again." It is then that the Holy Spirit comes in to stay. And He who comes is the Spirit of "grace and prayer."

What is still a *future* blessing for the select remnant of Jews, is already a *present* reality for the devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

## Contemporary Parallel

When we set Zechariah's message alongside Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, this becomes clearer:

<sup>13</sup> *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.* <sup>14</sup> *Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,* <sup>15</sup> *and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.* <sup>16</sup> *In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;* <sup>17</sup> *and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,* <sup>18</sup> ***praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication*** (grace and prayer). [Ephesians 6]

Zechariah used two Hebrew words for "grace" and "prayer." Grace: (Heb) *hen*, means favor and acceptance. Prayer: (Heb) *tahanun*, means a plea for mercy.

Paul used two Greek words for "prayer" and "supplication." Prayer: (Gk) *proseuchomai*, means a conversation with God. Supplication: (Gk) *deesis*, means a plea for mercy, or a specific request.

There are parallels here that we should not ignore.

Zechariah's word for "prayer" is the equivalent of Paul's word for "supplication." Both refer to pleading for mercy, presenting one's case, making specific requests. This is an expression of prayer that many are familiar with, in terms of bringing our requests to God. This practice is enhanced when it is built on God's covenantal promises, for then we are not simply "shooting in the dark" but asking God for the very things He wants to give us.

It is on this basis that Jesus urged His disciples (and us) to pray persistently:

*One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should **always pray and never give up.*** [Luke 18:1]

The other parallel is also instructive. Zechariah's word for grace and Paul's word for prayer are also similar. *Proseuchomai* is a two-part word that describes a face-to-face exchange, implying favor and acceptance. This is a general term for prayer, as an interaction with God. This type of prayer does not have a specific agenda or a desired end beyond communion. It is a conversation with God, in which

feelings and thoughts may be exchanged as relationship is built. It is this kind of prayer — simply and openly talking with God — that Paul said should “never cease.”

## Praying in the Spirit

Jude also urged us to practice this most valuable kind of prayer:

*<sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and **praying in the Holy Spirit**, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. [Jude 20-21]*

According to Jude, this kind of communing prayer builds one’s faith in God, experiences His love, and breeds confident patience.

Jude’s words also clarify that the Spirit of prayer is not a “feeling of prayer” but a Person who helps us pray — especially when the feeling has left us or not yet arrived!

Paul concurs:

*<sup>26</sup> And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with **groanings that cannot be expressed in words**. <sup>27</sup> 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. [Romans 8]*

The Holy Spirit is your Friend! He is your Teacher and He is your Helper. A Christian who is not familiar with the Holy Spirit — or is familiar only in theory but not by experience — is a cripple, who is attempting to walk with a severe limp.

The Holy Spirit is able to give expression to your inmost thoughts and motivations, beyond your natural abilities to articulate. And He always communicates for us in accord with the Father’s will. This is the nearest thing there is to perfect prayer — uncluttered by human theory or desire, unhindered by human weakness.

Many of you will recognize this as a reference to speaking in unlearned languages by the power of the Holy Spirit — the mark and grace of the baptism with the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised.

If you have considered that “speaking in tongues” (as we commonly call it) is peripheral to your Christian life, an addendum for the more extreme Christian, or an optional gift for those who are so inclined, STOP, and read again this entire passage, from verse 26 to the end of the chapter.

*<sup>26</sup> And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. <sup>29</sup> For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. [Romans 8]*

Remember that this type of prayer — face-to-face communion and conversation with God — is the kind that Paul says we should exercise “without ceasing.”

Now, here, he adds that this is prayer that is “according to the will of God.” John assures us (1 John 5:14-15) that such prayer receives a positive answer.

Furthermore, Paul links this kind of prayer with the assurance that God is in all things working for our good. No matter what the immediate feeling or effect, God has an overriding purpose for your life that He is intent on achieving: to make you like His Son, Jesus. And it is this kind of praying that brings it to pass.

It is to this end that He has given you His glory — His Spirit.

### **No Mere Token**

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a token of Pentecostalism; it is the core of New Testament Christianity.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not peripheral to your Christian life; it is the heart of deep and enduring fellowship with Almighty God.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not an addendum for extreme Christians. Extremism is a feature of unrestrained human nature, not of Holy Spirit influence. Bizarre behavior can only be attributed to the Holy Spirit in the same way that sinful behavior is excused by saying, “The devil made me do it.” Nonsense.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not an option for those Christians who are so inclined; it was the normal experience of First Century believers and it should be normative today.

Jesus Christ is still the One who baptizes with the fiery Holy Spirit. His fire will burn away the garbage from your past, reduce godless self-will to ashes, and ignite a passion in you for God, for His Word, for His way, for His purpose.

You need to be in the *center* of His plan for your life, not the sidelines. You cannot do this on your own. You require the power of the Holy Spirit to become what God created you to be and to do what God designed you to do. So, put yourself into His hands today.

Tell Him, “No more what I want, but what You want. Let Your will be done in me. And let it be done in Your way.”

This Spirit of prayer — the Holy Spirit — will awaken your conscience, breathe faith into your soul, build up your spirit, and ignite your communion with God.

