

Seek To Be Filled With The Holy Spirit

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking the Holy Spirit to be filled with God's power, focusing on the need to surrender selfish desires and seek to be a blessing to others. It highlights the story of a pastor who had to surrender his ambitions and selfish motives to be filled with the Holy Spirit and become a blessing to those around him.

Scripture: Luke 11:13, John 7:37, Galatians 3:14, Luke 5:16

Topics: "Surrendering Selfish Desires", "Empowerment by the Holy Spirit"

Description

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Transcript

One of the things that I've been speaking about recently is when there are so many churches in the world, why do we start another one? Why not just go and join one of the existing churches? I mean, there are different churches with different doctrines. No church is perfect. Our church is certainly not perfect.

That's a very important question as to why all of you have decided to be associated with a CFC church. If it's just a matter of convenience, well, that's not good enough. Because when we look at the Gospels, we see that Jesus drove away many people.

Most of the time, he was never interested in a big crowd. It's very important to understand that. And so, today many people think that large numbers is a sign of an effective church.

Well, Jesus never had that. You would have to say that Jesus' life was a failure if you go by numbers, because at the end of three and a half years of the most powerful miraculous ministry that any person ever had, he's only able to collect 11 disciples. And even with that, after people saw him on the resurrection, only 120 waited on the day of Pentecost for what he promised to be filled with the Holy Spirit, that is to be filled with God himself.

Imagine the Lord is saying to people, a day is coming soon when you're going to be filled with God himself. And let me show you a verse in 1 Corinthians 15, just to show you how many people saw Jesus

after his resurrection. Please turn in your Bibles with me.

1 Corinthians chapter 15. I hope you all have your Bibles with you. 1 Corinthians 15.

We read in 1 Corinthians 15 about the people who saw Jesus after his resurrection. It says here in verse 6, first he appeared, verse 5, to Cephas, that's Peter, then to the 12. Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, all at one time.

You know that Jesus never appeared to any unbeliever. Very important for us to understand that. I mean, humanly speaking, we would have had a great lust to go and stand before Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod.

And, you know, Jesus could have showed himself to them and say, hey, you fellows thought you got rid of here I am resurrected from the dead. That's a carnal satisfaction. And, you know, we could have thought that would definitely make them believe.

No. The physical appearance of Jesus after the resurrection would not make Herod or Caiaphas or Pilate believe because they would not want to follow Jesus if they don't want to give up their sin. So, sooner or later they'll find some excuse not to follow the Lord.

But here it says there were 500 believers. Jesus only appeared to believers after his resurrection. Very important to understand this.

And he appeared to 500 of them together so that there's no doubt in anybody's Is this a vision or is it a real person? They could touch him. They could ask one another, are you sure this is a real person? He said, yes. And out of the 500, we read in Acts chapter 2, well, earlier on in Acts chapter 1, it says here in verse 15, 120 people gathered in the upper room.

500 people saw him and he told them the Holy Spirit's coming and you'll have power to be my witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. You ask yourself, supposing you were one of the 500, would you travel all the way to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit? When you saw Jesus, you saw him crucified, buried, and now you see him risen from the dead. You think definitely I'd go.

But these people were believers, 500 believers, it says, out of them only 120. That is one fourth, 25% of those who saw him took the trouble to go and wait for the Holy Spirit's power on the day of Pentecost. I'm sure everybody wanted it, just like a lot of believers want the power of the Holy Spirit today.

But I think 1% of believers receive the actual power because they're not willing to pay the price. And here is the first evidence of that, that 500 people saw him and only 120 went to wait for the Holy Spirit's power on the day of Pentecost. I have met people in every country who said, Brother Zach, I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And I say, do you know that God is more eager to fill you with the Holy Spirit than you are eager to be filled with the Holy Spirit? And I'll prove that to you from Scripture. A very simple thing.

Listen to what I say. If you're a child of God, God is more eager to fill you with his Holy Spirit than you are eager to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And let me show you that in Scripture, so that you get it from Jesus' own mouth.

Turn with me to Luke chapter 11. In Luke chapter 11, 11, Luke 11 verse 11, supposing one of you fathers, many of you are fathers, or even if you're not a father, you know how the father behaves, is asked by his son for a fish. Will he give him a snake instead of a fish? You know the answer, definitely not.

If he asks for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? No. In fact, before a child asks for breakfast, the father and mother give them breakfast. They don't have to ask.

How many children keep going to their mother and say, give me breakfast, give me lunch? It's the parents who are eager to feed their children. And then he says, if you, verse 13, being evil, you being evil means the best father on earth is evil compared to the goodness of God. And many fathers on earth are excellent fathers, very good, care for their children, but you take the best of the lot.

Some of you are very good fathers and mothers. You take the best of the lot, and compared to God's goodness, the best of the lot is evil. Not evil in the sense that you do bad to your children, but your standard of love, your level of love for your child is way below the level of God's love for his children.

That's the point of that. If you being evil 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? So the only difference is we give food to the children even without their asking. But God says, you receive the Holy Spirit only if you ask, and I'll tell you why.

God doesn't give us gifts to those who don't value it. For example, forgiveness of sins is the first step to being filled with the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness of sins is the most essential requirement for every human being.

The Bible says God does not want anybody to perish in 2 Peter 3. 1 Timothy 2 says God wants all human beings to be saved. Then why doesn't he forgive all their sins? Because God does not trust things upon people which they don't want. He expects them to ask for it.

But if our hands are full of other things, we cannot receive the gifts the father has for us, and that is the main reason why many children do not receive what the father wants to give them. Their hands are full of other things. They are holding on to other things very tightly, and they are saying, give me this, give me that.

That's why they're not liberated. I heard a story of a small child who put his hand inside a flower vase. It had a very narrow opening.

Once the little child put his finger inside, and he says, Mommy, I can't take it out. And the mother said, straighten your fingers, my little boy, straighten your fingers and then it will come out. And the boy says, if I straighten my fingers, I'll lose those coins that I'm holding on to inside the vase.

He's holding on to some money inside, and then the fist is closed around the money, and the hand is stuck inside the vase, inside the flower vase. That's a perfect picture of a lot of people for whom money is more important than the Holy Spirit. Of course, they'd like to have the Holy Spirit, but their hands are clutching something which they don't want to give up.

They say, Lord, free me. The Lord says, straighten out your hands, loosen your grip on those earthly things, and you'll be released pretty quickly. But they don't want to.

They say, can't I have it while holding on to these things? No. You see that Luke chapter 11, earlier on, he's speaking about this asking. How should we ask? He says here in verse 13, we must ask for the Holy Spirit.

The reason why I begin with this is because this is what changed those 120 people from ordinary people into fiery witnesses for Jesus Christ. It changed the direction of their life, and they will have no regret in eternity when they stand before the Lord, because they responded to God's call. So let me show you the illustration Jesus used as to how we should ask.

It's not just a casual asking. It's a fervent asking, and he used another illustration to illustrate that. The picture of a father giving food to a child who asks is one picture showing God's love for us.

He loves you so much, more than a father. Why won't he give you the Holy Spirit? That's one aspect of the truth, that he loves us. But there's another illustration to show us how we should ask fervently.

A child does not have to ask fervently for food. Once is enough. Sometimes it doesn't even have to ask.

But there are two aspects to this. One is where God wants, Jesus wants to show us how much the Father loves us and is eager to give us, that is to generate faith in our hearts that whoever you are, your Heavenly Father is interested in filling you with the Holy Spirit. I hope all of you will believe that and tell you that's the thing that changed those 120 people on the day of Pentecost, and that's the thing that changed my life completely.

Not some cheap Pentecostal experience. No. A genuine in-filling with the Holy Spirit.

And here are we how you should ask. Luke 11 verse 5. He said to them, supposing one of you goes to a friend and says to him, friend lend me three loaves because a friend of mine has come from a journey and I have nothing to set before him. Now what do you see here? You see here a person who loves this friend who visited his house at midnight.

Now usually if somebody comes to your house at midnight and you don't have any food in the house, you will not ask him, have you eaten? Because he may say yes and then you'll be stuck. So what this man asked, he was so, he loved him so much that he said, have you eaten? And that man said, no I haven't. Okay, I don't have any food here but I'll go and get you some.

And he goes to his neighbor's house and knocks there and says, give me three loaves. And listen to this. From inside his neighbor's house, the neighbor says in verse 7, Luke 11 7, don't bother me.

The door is shut and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything. See we ourselves would be embarrassed to go.

Even if a friendly neighbor to wake him up at midnight and especially if he says, don't disturb me. My children are in bed. Please go away.

We quietly go away. But here it says, this man says he wouldn't go. That's a very rare type of person who will not go because he loves his friend so much you see.

He says, I've got to feed him. And so he keeps on bothering. And this man says in but he says he keeps on knocking until he gets what he wants.

And it says in verse 8, even if that neighbor does not give him what he wants because he's his friend, yet because of his persistence. Do you see that word in your Bible? Read it and be gripped by verse 8. Persistence. He will get up and give him, listen to this word, as much as he needs.

That means whatever you need is as much as he needs. To me that's a wonderful word. It's referring to asking for the Holy Spirit.

Remember, there's some things I learned from this story. You know, God has made this world in such a way, the human race, that none of us are supposed to live for ourselves. The fundamental problem with man is everybody wants to live for himself.

I, me, and my family. That's it. As long as you live by this principle of I, me, and my family, I think you might as well forget about being a Christian.

You might as well join another religion. Because Christianity is not I, me, and my family. It's God first.

And he calls us, he blesses us. You know what he told Abraham? I will bless you and you will be a blessing to others. In another place, Jesus said, if you thirst and come to me and drink, what will happen? John 7, 37.

When you drink, rivers of living water will flow out from you. So it's not just to satisfy your thirst, but your life will be, rivers means what? Rivers of to bless other people. And we see the same thing here.

Here's a man who's concerned about blessing his neighbor. I'll tell you, when I began to seek God earnestly for the fullness of the Holy Spirit and prayed and fasted and prayed with other people, my main reason was not just to overcome sin in my life, but I said, Lord, I want to be an effective witness for you by my life and my words. You know, Jesus said, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, Acts 1A, you shall be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Be my witnesses, not bear witness, which is with words. Be my witness. So I said, that's what I want.

I don't seem to have the power to be a witness. I'm so shy withdrawn. It's very difficult for me to share the word with others.

And even though I've been a Christian for so long, I know what I need. I need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And you said rivers of living water will come out through me.

But when I looked at my life at that time, this is about 44 years ago or 45 years ago, there were no rivers coming out of me. There's just a trickle of water. And that also with great effort.

You know, there are some places where there's no running water. You go to the village, some villages in India, there's a hand pump. There'd be one or two hand pumps in the village.

And the women in the village go there and pump and pump and pump and get a bucket of water. I found my Christian life was somewhat like that. The lot of struggle and a few drops of water would come out.

I said, this is not the Christian life. You said about rivers of living water flowing that not only keeps me fresh, that makes other people I contact fresh as well. Do you know that's God's will for you, my brother, sister? It's not God's will that you should live a boring, discouraged life.

Never. God wants to bless you in such a way that blessing will overflow from your life. It doesn't matter who you are, even a young boy or girl, to other people.

And that's what we see in this parable of asking for the Holy Spirit. This man went to his neighbor's house to get bread, not for himself. Did you get that? He did not ask for anything for himself.

He said, I'm concerned about a friend who came to my house. He's hungry. I was concerned about people around me who were unsaved, about people around me who didn't know the Lord, or believers who were living in sin.

And I said, Lord, how can I help them? Now, if you don't have a concern for people around you, my brother, sister, forget about asking for the Holy Spirit. Go and do something else. That's what we see here in connection with asking for the Holy Spirit.

Am I living a self-centered life, just selfish, selfish, myself, myself, my family, that's it? Well, then you don't need the Holy Spirit. You just need some money and a job and you'll be okay. But here's a man who's concerned about someone around him who's in need, and he's concerned enough to go in.

It's a picture of a man going and asking God, Lord, knocking at God's door and saying, Lord, I don't have what it takes to help this man. See, that's the second thing we need to be aware of. Not only a concern for the people around us, but also an awareness that you don't have what it takes to meet that need.

I was very aware of that. I said, Lord, I don't have what it takes. I'm not able to share powerfully to help these people.

So you've got to do something for me. And I knocked and knocked for, I'll tell you, for a few years, but I was determined. I think God was seeing whether I'd give up after some time and run off after something else, but I didn't.

And I'm glad I didn't, because that changed my life completely. And I wish every believer would see God like that. And that's the thing we see here.

Now, if you turn to John's gospel, there are three places where Jesus spoke about water. I want you to have a look at that. John chapter three, John three and verse five.

He told Nicodemus, you must be born of water, even the spirit. That's the meaning of that word. If you want to enter into God's kingdom.

So the Holy Spirit is pictured like water. And all I have when I come to Christ initially is a cup. And I take the cup and say, fill my cup, Lord.

I lift it up. And God gives me his Holy Spirit. The moment I'm born again, his spirit comes in.

And I'm born of God. My initial need is met. My sins are forgiven.

But then I'm living a very dissatisfied life, defeated very often. And so God has to lead me further to meet that lack in my life. And so in John chapter four, you go to the next step, step two, where the Lord told the Samaritan woman in John four and verse 14, he was sitting at a well and he told the Samaritan woman, if you drink water from this well, you'll thirst again.

You're going to come back here again and again. But if you drink of the water that I'm giving you and we saw from John three, five, that's the Holy Spirit. It'll become in you a well or a spring of water always springing up to eternal life.

Eternal life is the life of God. The nature of God is not just living forever. Please know eternal life is not living forever because people who go to hell also live forever, but they don't have eternal life.

Eternal life is the quality of life, not quantity of life. It's referring to the life of God springing up within me. And you know, it's like if you have a well in your house, even if the water supply in the city is cut off, it doesn't make a difference to you because your water supply does not come from any external source.

You've got a well right in your house. And that's a picture of how the Holy Spirit satisfies us. We don't need any external stimulus.

We don't need any external help in order to rejoice or to overcome or to be free from discouragement. We have this well in our own house, inside our heart. And Jesus said, it'll be a well.

So the cup has now become a well. Initially the cup of water was just, I was born again, moved out of the devil's kingdom into God's kingdom. But now that water has become a well satisfying my personal need.

And then that's not enough. Now my need is completely satisfied. I can be perfectly happy.

But now I go to stage three where I'm concerned like this man had a concern for his friend who visited him. Now I'm concerned about other people around me. And my will is only enough to satisfy me.

What shall I do for all the other people around me whom I want to bless? And so Jesus speaks about water again a third time in John chapter seven and verse 37 where he says, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water. This is not a cup.

This is not a well. This is one river and many rivers in many directions. What's the purpose of a river? I mean, if I'm only interested in my own need, a well is enough.

But if I'm interested in blessing other people around me, then I need not only one river, but many rivers going in many directions. And that's the purpose of the Holy Spirit. And I believe that anyone who's seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit, if he's really eager for the power of the Holy Spirit to bless other people around him, he's more likely to be filled sooner than otherwise.

Turn with me to Galatians chapter three and verse 14. Galatians 3 verse 14. First of all, verse 13, it says Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, became a curse for us.

It's amazing what the Bible says about what all Jesus became on the cross. In second Corinthians 5:21, it says he became sin. Not only he took our sin, second Corinthians 5:21 says he became sin for us on the cross.

All the sin of the universe, of the world, and all generations was saturated and put upon Christ. But not only that, he became a curse because it says, cursed are you who hangs on a tree. He was crucified and there was a curse to show that the curse which should come upon us for disobeying God's law is taken away and we are not left empty.

The curse is replaced with a blessing. Why did God Jesus remove the curse? Verse 14, so that the blessing of Abraham might come to us, Gentiles mean non-Jews, so that all through the promise of the Holy Spirit, through faith. So the Holy Spirit has come to bring to us the blessing of Abraham.

So if you turn back to Genesis in chapter 12, whenever you see something like this in scripture, don't just ignore it. If you're a careless Bible student, you will just ignore it. If you're a serious Bible student and you want to know what God is trying to say, you will go back to the Old Testament and check what is the blessing of Abraham.

I want to ask you a little question. I don't want to embarrass you and I'm not asking you to show your hands. I'm sure all of you have read Galatians 3.14 sometime or the other.

Did you ever ask yourself, what is this blessing of Abraham? Did you ever think of going back to Genesis to see what is the blessing of Abraham? That was my way and I believe the Lord is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. Most Christians are very lazy in the way they seek God, so God does not reward them. That's why the vast majority of Christians live defeated, shallow, empty lives, never filled with the Holy Spirit.

Even though they go for meetings, conferences, and attend so many things, they're never filled with the Holy Spirit. So I believe it's important for us to understand this. Genesis chapter 12.

I will bless you, verse 2, and I will make you a blessing. That is the blessing of Abraham. I will bless you and I will make you a blessing.

So, that is rivers of living water coming out of us. So that's the thing that we need to ask ourselves. Do I want this blessing of Abraham? First of all, God blesses me with power.

The cup overflows and becomes a well and then he makes me a blessing to others. That's the blessing of Abraham. It says in Galatians 3, 14, we just read, comes to us through the Holy Spirit.

So the whole New Covenant life, New Testament life, is based on being filled with the Holy Spirit. If you're not filled with the Holy Spirit, we can understand so many theories and everything else and we'll never come into that life. And that is the reason, let me tell you my dear brothers and sisters, why the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is perhaps the most controversial doctrine in Christianity today and why there are more counterfeits of the gifts of the Holy Spirit than any other thing in Christendom.

Why? Because only valuable things are counterfeited. Nobody counterfeits brown paper. They counterfeit gold, diamonds.

So if there are counterfeit gifts of the Holy Spirit, counterfeit manifestations of the Holy Spirit, you can be pretty sure of the original. Boy, it's very valuable. So I want to encourage you all to seek for that part of the Holy Spirit earnestly.

That's the most important thing. In fact, we can say the whole purpose of Jesus coming to earth was not just to forgive our sins. That's just cleaning the cup.

I mean, cleaning the cup and giving an empty cup to a child is no use. He wants to clean up our heart, fill us with the Holy Spirit so that our own life becomes an overflowing life for ourselves like a well and then overflowing in blessing to others. Now you must believe this is God's will for you.

So what I see there, you remember the word of Jesus? If you being evil 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? And my definition of faith is from that verse. Please listen. Faith is to believe that God is more eager to fill me with the Holy Spirit than I am eager to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Did you get that? You know, some of you have been praying perhaps and saying, well, God's not filling me with the Holy Spirit. And I've prayed many times. You give people the impression that you are very eager to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but somehow God is very reluctant.

That is unbelief. No wonder you never get filled with the Holy Spirit, because it's completely contrary to what Jesus says. You give the impression, even if you don't say that to others, you feel that way.

Oh, I've been praying. I'm earnest. But like that little child whose hand was in the vase stuck holding on to some money, there may be something you haven't given up.

And you think God is reluctant. And God is not reluctant at all. How much more, he said, will your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? So faith is to believe that God is more in this connection, to believe that God is more eager to fill you with the Holy Spirit than any of you are to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

If you believe that, then you ask yourself, why are you not filled with the Holy Spirit all the time? Because you're not eager. You think you are, or you're not willing to give up something. I remember hearing the story of a pastor in an American city in the end of the 19th century.

And he was preaching in his church, but he heard there about D.L. Moody, the great American evangelist, who testified to a baptism in the Holy Spirit that changed his ministry completely. And he began to pray, Lord, I want to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

His name was Samuel Brengel in the end of the 19th century in the United States. And he surrendered everything. He said, Lord, you can have everything I have.

And he really did give everything, but nothing happened. He was not filled with the Holy Spirit. Then he said, Lord, show me, is there anything I'm not yielded? And the Lord said, yes.

You want to be a great preacher like D.L. Moody. That's why you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Give up that desire.

And he realized he was a pastor of a church and he wanted to be a very effective pastor. And he was seeking for the power of the Holy Spirit to become a great preacher. And that is a selfish reason.

God will never give us something from him to glorify ourselves, but only to glorify Christ. And when he yielded that, God filled him with the Holy Spirit immediately. And then God told him, now quit this church and go to England and join the Salvation Army under William Booth.

Now, the Salvation Army those days was about the most fiery Christian movement of that time, not like what it is today more than a hundred years later. But in those days, under William Booth, there was a mighty move of God that brought so many prostitutes, drunkards, and others to Christ. So this guy left the United States and came to England to join William Booth's Salvation Army.

And William Booth had no respect of persons. Whether you're a raw convert from the street or a famous pastor from England, if you came to join the Salvation Army, your first job was to spend one year in the basement polishing everybody's shoes. So he sent this great pastor down to the basement and said, you spend the next year polishing the shoes.

And he sat there thinking, is this why God filled me with the Holy Spirit? And the Lord said, yes, that's why I filled you with the Holy Spirit. And you know, he started there, humbled himself, and over the years grew up to be one of the mightiest men of God in the Salvation Army, bringing many people, not only to Christ, but to a holy life. When God succeeds in breaking a man and taking away all his selfish desires, and that takes time to go, in all of us, there's a great desire for honor, acceptance by others, and so many other things like this, subtly hidden here and there.

And we think we are seeking the glory of God. We are not. We're seeking glory for ourselves.

When we pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit, God has to wait. So I've never forgotten that story. You remember when Jesus healed the sick, you read that sometimes after that, in Luke chapter 5, you read it, he would go alone and pray.

Many people prayed before that meeting. Jesus would pray after the meeting. You know why? Because he wanted to give all the glory to God.

Hundreds and thousands were healed, and he'd go alone in the wilderness and say, Father, I don't want to touch that glory. It's all yours. Very few people do that.

It's one of the things the Lord's been teaching me. After you have served me, come alone with me and give all the glory to me. Don't touch it.

You will lose the anointing if you touch any of God's glory for yourself. I believe that's happened to many preachers, and you may not be a great preacher, but you seek God for power, and he does something through you, and you take the credit for it. The Holy Spirit departs, because the Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ, not to glorify you and me.

And that's the main reason why many people are not filled with the Holy Spirit. They are seeking something for themselves. So I hope that we'll start off this conference on a good note, that we want to pray that God will really fill us with the Holy Spirit.

We can understand so many doctrines and understand so many truths in these days. I'll tell you this. I've been to numerous conferences, and I've seen a lot of people go away from the conference just the way they came.

I said, why did you come then? Well, we had a good time together. Well, I'm not interested in a conference where we just have a good time together. God wants to meet our need and fill us with the Holy Spirit and change the direction of our lives and change our lives completely before we go away.

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