

INTERCESSORY PRAYER GUIDE

MAY 2017

Dear partners in prayer,

We just finished a Sunday series we called 'Leading a Questionable Life.' I hope you were there and hope you found it encouraging and helpful in living your life a follower of Jesus. So this month I would like to focus our times of prayer on the person and work of that 3rd part of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit. So strap in, hold on and let's pray and see what gets shaken!

Martin

May 1 – Read Genesis 1:2.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

What the Spirit of God did at the world's creation – He does in the new creation. He enters what is formless, empty and dark.

And works there.

Works to fill, bring order and shine light.

In a word the Spirit moves from hovering to fashioning. His effort and energy are to form things into what the Father desires and calls them to be. What the Spirit does in Genesis in the old creation – He does in an even more amazing way in the New Testament's new creation. He enters into lives and churches to work to fill, shape, form and shine light. And just like in Genesis – when that happens, as the work makes progress and the darkness gets dispelled, that which was empty gets filled; and what was formless and out of place and distorted gets fashioned to what the Father desires -the Father's response is the same. 'That is good, really good.'

So today look about. Take the mile high view. How do things look? See any places of darkness needing some light? Notice any chaos that could use some loving, Spirit-directed reordering? Any empty places longing for a rich, God-sent filling? May I suggest you swing open the door wide to the Spirit's work? The Spirit is God – all powerful and all knowing. Quite capable and perfectly wise. But the Spirit is also God – a servant. He goes at the Father's bidding – but enters only with our permission. The Father has already commissioned the Spirit's coming (Acts 2). So if the work isn't happening what may be missing is your receiving.

So today if there is work to be done may I suggest you give the Spirit of God the green light to move from hovering over your life to diving into it to fashion, form, fill and bring light. Pray about that today – from that high vantage point simply note the places and give the invite. Or if you trust God's work – just give Him full reign over your life and trust Him to make it completely the way He wants it. Now that would be not just good, but very good. Pray today for the church around the world – ask God to pour out His Spirit to build, fashion, fill and form His church into the full goodness of His design. Let there be light!

May 2 – Read Numbers 14:24

But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it

When the Spirit creates a new heart, it is whole. Half-hearted. Faint-hearted. Hard-hearted. Cold-hearted...and the like – those things exist, but they are not of the Spirit. The Spirit-formed heart is whole-hearted. Unified. True. Trustworthy. Whole-hearted in its devotion to God. Whole-hearted in its loyalty and service to God and His church.

I've recently decided to stop watching the news. In part because of the time – I'm going for less screen time and more living time! And in part because of the tone – it has, in my opinion, become about 80% hype and 20% news and I think I'm being generous. I don't watch it - But I still read it. And, for the most part, the news consists of the amazing and heart rending capacity of human beings when they live life and interact in Half-hearted, Faint-hearted, Hard-hearted, Cold-hearted ways. It is truly astounding. But I have noted that news reports also, on occasion, include stories of whole-hearted living. And they, in a completely different way, are just as astounding. It's a different spirit. And it is one that God honors and mightily blesses.

So today would you pray for the spirit of Caleb in your own life - a whole-hearted devotion to following God? Don't know if you will make the nightly news – but I can guarantee you will find yourself among the honored guests at a great heavenly celebration. Today maybe you can pray the Scripture from Psalm 86 to God - ***Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. ¹² I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.***

May 3 – Read Judges 11:9

Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.

Jephthah was a stud!! But not always. He was driven out of his family. The illegitimate son of a prostitute. He had no inheritance. His friends - the bible outright labels as 'scoundrels.' He only got in this fight because the leaders at the time didn't know how to fight and he was fairly skilled at it – even though his skill was used against God's people not for them. So they asked, and he cut a deal. And btw made a stupid and rash vow to the Lord. But the scoundrel turned stud A+ when the Spirit of the Lord landed on him. 60 miles plus - across dry, desert, mountainous terrain. And all of that just to get to the fight!! There he wiped out 20 towns and surrounding vicinities. Israel was once again secure.

Sometimes the Spirit stirs in our life to empower us to pick a fight. Sometimes the Spirit's power in our lives comes to move us across great distances to face long overlooked enemies and threats. Of course, it may be that the terrain can be measured in miles and yards and filled with valleys and mountains. But more often it is likely measured in years and months – and filled with memories and experiences.

But the reason is usually the same as here – the enemy has been around a long time – but ignored. Like the Ammonites maybe you already whipped that enemy into shape – a long time ago. But now its power is rising and the threat increasing.

Or maybe you have always known it was there but have adjusted your life to accommodate it namely because the journey to face it down seems too complicated, dangerous and wearisome. Or perhaps you know the danger is there, the threat is real – but you have never felt you had the ability, the resources, the strength, the know-how, etc., to defeat it – so you have just tolerated it.

The Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah.....and he advanced against the Ammonites.

Sometimes the Spirit of God moves in our lives to pick a fight against an old, familiar enemy.

Got any of those around?

Maybe the threatening enemy is a lingering bad attitude, a destructive habit, a hurtful anger... maybe the enemy is a nasty tongue or uncontrollable urge, or deceitful character... Or better yet – has the Spirit of God been coming 'at you' to move you into a battle you have long been avoiding?

Pray about that today – trust God’s wisdom, timing and ability – **for it is not by our might or our power, but by His Spirit** that God’s work gets done. And that is always sufficient horsepower for the job.

Tonight is our First Wednesday Praise service. Pray God pour out blessing and unveil glory for us tonight as we lift our hearts, voices and, if you like, your hands to offer Him the sacrifice of praise. And if you can, make room to be a part of it!

May 4 – Read Psalm 139:7-8

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

Consider the question for a moment. ***Where can you go from God’s Spirit? Even if you wanted to where can you evade God’s presence?*** Walk through your day: is He there when you are at work? Having breakfast? Showering? Is He in the car when you are stuck in traffic, at Walmart when you are trapped in the slow checkout lane? Is He there when you talk to your spouse, talk about your boss and, if it’s your habit, talk to Him in prayer? Is He there when you need Him? What about when you don’t want Him there? Is He there when you retreat into your inmost fears, inner conversations, under your breath mutterings?

Where can you go to get away from God’s Spirit? Psalmist knows the truth – from time of conception to point of death – the answer is ... nowhere. The Spirit is with you, p-e-r-i-o-d. And that would be very creepy and is - until you understand the Spirit is FOR you. So reality is that you have only two choices – you can acknowledge the Spirit’s presence in your daily life. Or you can ignore it. But you can’t change it.

So instead of asking God to show up – or hoping God would go away – what would it change if you simply started acknowledging and accepting His presence with you – always? What if on the way to work, in a tough conversation, in the moment of a hurt, in the place of confusion, when something goes your way, in the musings of your mind, when you walk in your front door, and when you purview the inner desires of your heart – you simply acknowledged reality? Spirit of God, I know you are here. I know you are for me. So help me to see what you want me to see, be the person you desire me to be and do whatever it is you would have me do in this moment, right now.

If you do start doing that, your whole understanding might change from thinking God is in your life primarily just to keep an eye on you and keep you in line – to understanding that He is, in fact, with you to give you life – abundantly!

Pray about that today. Consider the reality. Maybe review your past few days – perhaps you might realize that you are moving through a great portion of your life, blind and living an illusion – actually thinking God is not close and is not interested. So let today be God’s wake-up call – to a whole new level of awareness and a launch into a whole new expanse of living!?

Think about it – you can’t change the reality. You are not alone. So might as well learn to enjoy it, right?

Pray today also for our worship gatherings – ask God – not to be there – that is already promised and guaranteed – ask God to help us to see Him and hear Him. And that requires our attentiveness.

May 5 – Read Ezekiel 2:2.

As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

This happens a lot. I wonder if the Spirit ever gets a sore back? Or herniates a disc? We fall down. Spirit raises us up.

I did that once – not so much a spiritual experience as a physical one. Bunch of friends were playing ‘release.’ It was dark. I loved to hide. And I hated being caught. But I was found out. So I did what anyone would do. I ran. I ran fast. I ran

all out. It was dark. I ran right into a metal pole in the ground. And it did not move. Neither did I. They tell me I was out – cold. I can't verify because I can't remember. What I do remember is someone raising me to my feet. And as the cobwebs cleared, so did my hearing and I heard whoever it was raising me up – speaking to me. And guess what – they weren't telling me how stupid I was (that came later); they were chewing me out for potentially dinging up a perfectly fine steel pole that was doing nothing wrong but standing there; they weren't giving me a better strategy for playing release, nor were they banning me from ever playing the game again. As they were raising me up and brushing me off and looking into my eyes – guess what they were speaking to me? 'Are you okay?'

Read the verse again. Sometimes we fall. Sometimes we fall out of sheer stupidity, sometimes we fall from blindly thinking we can run in the dark and get away with it, sometimes we fall cause there is an enemy who loves to push us and watch us fall, sometimes we fall because of the sheer weight and wonder of knowing God is near. But in all cases the Spirit comes to us, puts us back on our feet, looks into our eyes – not to call us stupid – even if we have been; not to give us a lesson in the stubbornness of steel poles in cement in the ground, not to kick us out of the game – but to look in our eyes, brush us off and ask 'are you okay.' Now, there may be follow up conversations about the wisdom of playing in the dark or the relative physical values of hard steel and hard heads in a collision, etc. But the Spirit longs after your well being.

The Spirit raises us when we fall – to restore us, get us back on our feet, to brush off the junk and to intervene where we need healing and, yes, to intervene where we need instruction. But first and foremost is the question – 'are you okay?'

So today, would you allow the Spirit of God to raise you to your feet – dust you off if needed and look into your eyes and deep to your heart and ask 'are you okay?'

And then, simply be honest.

It's Married Life Live tonight. Pray that God speak to marriages and bring healing and hope and build strength and perseverance into the relationships and marriages we have as a church. Ask God to help us be a people who so honor Him in our marriages and homes that the people around us would marvel and wonder and seek to know how and why we are so different from everyone else in our closest relationships.

May 6 – Read Matthew 3:1.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Imagine being in an open market or a summer fair. There is a guy with a booming voice walking around offering a handful of puffed rice cereal to any who were hungry. For free!!! But as he handed out his puffed rice he also made a declaration and said – go ahead and enjoy your puffed rice, but I am really here to let you know in a short while another is coming here and he is handing out filet mignon – with all the fixin's. All you can eat. FREE. And sure enough he does. And it is just as the first guy said – endless supply, grade A, perfectly cooked, all-you-can-stand filet mignon and sides. Free! And while you are stuffing your face – along with some others, you hear the puffed rice guy. At first, you think, poor soul – I bet business is bad. He might as well pack up his puffed rice party and go home. But you look anyway. And to your amazement He still has quite a crowd! And even if he is handing out his puffed rice, he is declaring the incomparably better deal of the filet guy. But still they come – settling for handfuls of puffed rice instead of going to the endless supply of filet mignon. Crazy right? Even if you're a vegan – the other guy still has sides worth pursuing. Reread today's verse.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Baptized with water for repentance. Puffed-rice-living. Stuck in the circle of doing wrong, feeling bad, making amends, trying harder only to do wrong again, feel bad again, say 'I'm sorry' – make promises to try harder. Only to do it again – repeat the cycle, over and over and over. About as appealing and satisfying a life as a handful of puffed rice.

Even John who was doing the baptizing was aware that this was not enough! He said the other who was coming – who has now come – Jesus was serving up a whole different menu! A completely different baptism – Holy Spirit and fire!! As much as you can stomach! Paid and provided for by grace. Free for the asking! But still churches are full of religious people stuck in the same old cycle, settling for the same old menu of an empty, repetitive life-sucking cycle of sin – feel bad – ask for forgiveness – promise to try harder then repeat.... Religious living. Puffed-rice-existence. When right there is a far better and far greater offer!

John and Peter in the early days of the church were on a road trip and ran into a group of people who believed in Jesus. After a brief discussion John and Peter asked them a pointed question – ‘which baptism did you receive? The water one? Or the Holy Spirit one?’ They responded that they didn’t even know there was such a thing as the Holy Spirit. Peter, I imagine, looked at John – rubbed his hands together and said – ‘well now – no more puffed rice for you.’ They prayed over them and the Spirit filled them. And life opened up before them.

So today let me ask – which baptism did you receive – the ‘just water one?’ Or the Spirit and fire one?’ Pray about that today. If you’re not sure, allow me to give you a lens to help you discern. Do you see and look forward to your life of faith with worship, prayer, gathering with believers, hearing and obeying God’s word, building up the church, sharing Christ with others like choking down a handful of puffed rice - OR like sitting down to a full sized endless spread of filet mignon and all the fixin’s? Your answer will give you a clue.

May 7 – Read Hebrews 2:1-4.

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ² For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴ God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Salvation is a big deal. Especially if you happen to be the one needing saved! Can you imagine anyone ignoring not just salvation – but their own!! Crazy, isn’t it? Happens. A lot.

But God gets it even if we don’t – salvation is a big deal!

That’s why he goes to such measures to promote, market and validate it! Did you notice – it’s all there in the verses. Salvation is ***first announced by the Lord*** the salvation was ***confirmed by those who heard*** the Lord make the announcement. And more still – ***God then testified to this salvation by signs, wonders, various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.***

Salvation is a big deal.

But read verse 4 again – ***signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.***

Anyone remember the little Sesame Street game that had a ditty they would sing – ‘one of these things is not like the others, one of these is not the same...’ Then they would have a picture of 4 things like a banana, an apple, a pear and a crescent wrench. ‘Can you tell which thing does not belong...’ ***signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Spirit.*** Gifts of the Spirit? Really? I mean signs, wonders, miracles – those are attention getters and crowd gatherers!! Signs, wonders, miracles – those are power displays – clear evidences of an out-of-this-world presence and action. But gifts of the Spirit? Come on. Those mundane suckers. Teaching, serving, giving whoop-de-doo. Helps, administration, mercy, encouragement – that wouldn’t even get senior citizens in a home excited! And they get excited about bingo and 1000 piece puzzles! Gifts of the Spirit – really? This thing doesn’t belong here. Does it?

God thinks it does. And He plugs it in there right beside ***signs, wonders, and miracles!***

Just imagine if God's people took God at His word! Just imagine if we put as much value, attributed as much power, pursued with as much vigor and were equally amazed by Christ followers using their divinely distributed **gifts of the Holy Spirit** as we are by one pulling off a miracle or performing some sign or wonder! God puts them all together – and He assigns them all the same capacity – namely they **testify** to the amazing salvation God has announced, confirmed and made accessible to all who will believe. Imagine if we would be as excited and thrilled and expectant each time we had opportunity to exercise our Holy Spirit distributed gift as we would be if we were about to heal somebody's cancer, or just finished feeding an entire school with a single big mac and fry from McDonalds.

According to what God says here – we should be.

And the truly amazing part of this is the Holy Spirit is not stingy – He distributes those gifts according to His will – but every Christ follower gets at least one! You may not be given a God-given capability to perform signs, pull off wonders, work miracles but you are given a Spirit-given capability to testify to the good news and hope of salvation with every bit as much conviction and validation.