



# Released from Uncertainty

## *A Spirit-Led Heart Is Confident*

A change in your perspective can allow you to embrace  
a change in your position.

Lynn Cowell, *Make Your Move*

The small church was nestled along a busy highway. Inside, rafters dipped as if in surrender. An altar, worn by tears and generations of prayers, graced the front. I was seventeen years old. I don't remember much of what the speaker said that night. I do recall stumbling to the altar and finding a place by myself at the end. My tears traveled the grooves formed by those who came before me.

*I wasn't sure if I could do it.*

I loved God as much as I could at this point. I'd only been a believer for about a year, and I wasn't as spiritually savvy as those around me. My Bible wasn't earmarked and highlighted like it is today.

I was trying.

I showed up at church. I went to small groups. I was learning about him and what it meant to be a believer. That didn't mean I didn't have a thousand questions.

Grace seemed like a beautiful concept, but I wasn't sure how to offer it to others, much less myself. I didn't know what it meant to carry my cross. I didn't have a clue whether God could use me, because I was still trying to figure out what his love looked like.

I wept that day as I knelt at the altar because I wanted faith to be less difficult and my understanding to be greater. I wept because life was hard and I often felt isolated. I wept because I longed to know him more and to discover who I was to him.

I needed help.

As I prayed, a tap on my shoulder caused me to look up.

"It's really late," the pastor said. "You'll need to go home soon. We'll give you a ride if you need one."

I considered the face of the kind older man kneeling beside me. Not far away, his wife sat quietly on a pew.

"I just started praying," I said.

"No, honey, you've been here for a couple of hours. You've been praying intensely. We saw the Holy Spirit doing a work in you, so we waited."

As I looked around, it had to be true. The building was almost empty. Once-crowded pews held only remnants of tissues and scrawled notes.

The last thing I remembered was kneeling and whispering my request through tears.

*"Can you help me?"*

To this day, I can't tell you exactly what took place in those two hours, but when I stood up, I felt different. I had asked for help, and help arrived. Something miraculous began inside my hungry, hurting heart. My legs were rubbery from sitting in the same position for so long, and I stumbled to my car.

I drove home to the same old circumstances.

I was the same girl, now with swollen eyes and a cheek temporarily marked by a rugged altar, but confidence bubbled inside of me like holy water.

Nothing outwardly changed, but the Helper had arrived.

### **The Early Church: When Confidence Feels Wrecked**

I grew into my faith and found my place in the body of Christ as a follower and believer. I discovered that God loves me even when I'm a mess. I peeled away the meaning of grace as his mercy rescued me daily. Somehow that uncertain teenager who lived in a mostly unchurched environment became a Bible teacher. A mom. A wife. A woman who longs to make a difference with her faith.

Yet there are still moments I find myself in a confidence crisis.

As I write these words, our world is in upheaval. It's turbulent, at best. People are at odds, including believers. Our world creaks with tragedy. Television and the internet flash images of mamas holding desperately to their children as they flee war-torn countries. It's almost become commonplace to hear of unexplainable and violent incidents taking place in crowded malls and subways. We live in a nation where racial wounds continue to cause pain.

There are days our confidence is shaken and it has nothing to do with the state of the world. Our confidence is shaken as we pray, yet we are unsure of when the answer is coming. Our confidence is rattled when a dream is burning inside of us, and we don't know how to take the next step—or when that dream finally arrives and it seems way too big.

Our confidence is shaken when a close relationship is struggling, or when we say the wrong thing and try to make it right. A confidence crisis the size of Texas can rattle us when a child throws three tantrums before breakfast and we want to throw our own in response.

The root of any confidence crisis is fear. Fear of failure. Fear of not being able to fix it. Fear that we aren't enough. Fear that things are never going to change. Fear of the unknown.

The early church understood fear. . . .

After the crucifixion, believers hide behind barred doors. Is it possible they celebrated a Passover meal with Jesus just days ago?

He had washed their feet. They laughed. They ate. They went deep in conversation. It was a lot like my friends and me around my own table, except for the foot-washing part.

Now everything has changed.

Judas Iscariot had led soldiers into the garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. They had thought he was a friend! Peter—the guy who said he would never let Jesus down—had betrayed Jesus publicly. Soldiers now search from house to house, their swords drawn and ready. The disciples don't know whom to trust. They don't know what to do.

If we were to describe the overall morale of these believers, it would be confused and afraid. We aren't privy to their conversations, but it's not hard to imagine that they questioned whether they had heard Jesus correctly. They had thought they were building a kingdom, not preparing for a funeral. They scrutinize each other because, after all, one of their own has betrayed them. Their love for Jesus hasn't gone anywhere, but their confidence?

*Wrecked.*

Then one day three women trudge to a tomb. Their souls are heavy because Jesus's body rests inside. When they arrive, they are greeted by a yawning open cave and a blinding light. Two angels share the news that Jesus has risen. The women rush back to their friends to share the report.

The tomb is empty!

The disciples race to verify it for themselves. They huddle around an open tomb and examine the evidence. End of story, right? Fear conquered! All is well!

It doesn't work that way.

They go right back to their hiding hole. Still behind locked doors. Still bound in uncertainty. It would seem that an empty tomb would be enough to ease their confidence crisis, but let's put ourselves in their shoes.

This could be a trick. It could be the work of their adversaries. They want to believe, but what if they get their hopes up, only to be let down again?

Even great news seems suspicious when confidence is at an all-time low and fear is at an all-time high.

Then Jesus steps into their uncertainty.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

John 20:19

For the next forty days, Jesus soothes and loves and challenges his followers. He strolls with two men on the road to Emmaus to ease their discouragement (Luke 24:13–32). He kneels beside Peter to remind him that he is a "rock" (Matthew 16:18). He invites Thomas to put fingers in his wounds to relieve his doubt (John 20:27).

Can you imagine the deep breath they all took? Everything is right again. Jesus is back at the helm, right where he belongs. The world is moving in the right direction once again . . . until Jesus drops this truth bomb on them.

*You are now the church.*

He tells them to take everything he's taught them and live it. He tells them they'll share the gospel at home and far away. He tells them that he has confidence in them, but he has to go away.

*Wait.*

*No, Jesus.*

If the root of a confidence crisis is fear, this root goes as deep as the ocean. Following Jesus was never easy, but Jesus led the way. If they had a question, they knew where to go. If a problem seemed too big to solve, they put it in his lap. Sure, he challenged them, but it's a lot easier to jump out of an airplane tandem than it is to jump solo.

*Um, Jesus. I was the one who blew it. Are you sure you got the right person here?*

*I've witnessed your miracles, Jesus, but I'm not you.*

*What if I mess this up?*

That third question is a familiar one for me. Our natural reaction to fear is doubt, and the longer it lingers the more it hinders. It can cause us to run the other direction when Jesus has so much more for us. We may choose inaction over doing it badly or falling on our face. We tell the world that God has a plan for us, but doubt it privately. This is where we might lose our way. We are so busy mulling over our fears or doubts that we fail to understand that God sees it differently.



The longer  
doubt lingers,  
the more it  
hinders.

Jesus had shown his followers how to pray. He taught them how to love people. They stood next to him as lepers were healed, demons were cast out, and people condemned for their sins were restored. While they loiter in doubt, Jesus is already envisioning the eternal mark his believers will leave on the world.

Many times our confidence is waylaid by doubt when our Savior is cheering us on, already seeing us cross the finish line.

Fear clouds vision, but faith shows us the next step. Even as our human imperfections tend to march front and center, God places his trust in us. None of our doubts disqualify his belief in us. He is asking not for perfection, but for a partnership.

These truths are displayed as Jesus remains with his followers for forty days.

When it's time for him to return to the Father, the promise he made earlier is their anchor.

And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised.  
But stay here in the city *until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power* from heaven.

Luke 24:49 NLT

Jesus places his hands on them and blesses them. In the midst of that oh-so-personal moment, Jesus is taken into heaven. The

disciples can't help but praise God, with wonder on their faces and in their hearts.

Did they totally understand the promise?

Not yet, but they believed that what he spoke was true, and that was enough.

### **Your Promise: You Are Loved, Rescued, and Empowered**

The Holy Spirit is introduced in Genesis 1:2 and weaves throughout Scripture. Jesus introduces him in a fresh new way to the early church. The Holy Spirit had been *with* God's people for generations, but now he will be *in* them.

Jesus instructed the disciples to "go" in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The Holy Spirit isn't elevated above the Father or the Son, nor beneath, but seen as coming alongside. He plays a specific role in our faith. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a theologian and teacher, described the Holy Spirit's role this way:

The Father is all the fulness of the Godhead invisible, without form, 'whom no man hath seen, nor can see' (1 Tim. 6:16); that is the Father. The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead manifested visibly, 'For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily' (Col. 2:9); that is the Son. . . . And the Spirit is all the fulness of the Godhead acting immediately upon the creature.<sup>1</sup>

Maybe like me, the first time you read this, you had to go back and reread it. May I simplify it?

- We were created, and we are loved by our heavenly Father.
- We were rescued by our Savior.
- We are empowered to live our faith through the Holy Spirit.

Let's take this a little deeper:

- Our heavenly Father is invisible to the naked eye, though his love is vast.
- The Son of God made the Father's love visible to a desperate world.
- The Holy Spirit helps us live our salvation so that a lost world sees God more clearly.

Isn't that beautiful? This is our faith! The Trinity reveals how God loves, seeks, and helps us in every part of our relationship with him. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the Helper. He ignites our faith. He understands the heart of the Father over us.

When we talk about the Holy Spirit, we often refer to him as "it." The Holy Spirit is more than a feeling, a gift, or an influence. He's not limited to his gifts.

Can we just be honest about the fact that we sometimes shy away from the Holy Spirit? We may be so unsure of his role (or that he exists) that we eliminate him from our faithview altogether. Is it possible that we've overlooked or discounted this stunning promise made by Jesus himself?

Let's crack open our faithview to include this truth.

We are loved by the Father and saved by the Son, and we have a Helper—right now, always, in every situation.

How exciting is that?

### **Your Invitation: Integrate the Holy Spirit into Your Faithview**

Fear is the root of most confidence crises, but our faith is the target. Our faith in God. Faith in who we are to him. Faith that trusts that he is sovereign, and at work even when we don't see it. Faith that we might have a role to play in changing the world.

I stumbled upon a conversational thread in a social media post not too long ago. Years ago, my husband, Richard, and I opened our home to college students. We played marathon games of Nertz

and ate a ton of chicken enchiladas. We loved each student, which is why my heart sank as I read the conversation. It was from one of those individuals, now a young father and husband.

Our friend: *I don't know about my faith anymore.*

A stranger: *Me either.*

Our friend: *Man, I look around and I'm not sure that the church is relevant.*

Another stranger: *Yeah, they are all after something.*

The conversation spiraled.

Words heaped upon words. Some of those commenting hadn't experienced Christ, but they were happy to share their opinions on Christianity. Some had once attended church, but they walked away disillusioned with organized religion. Some comments were reactionary and volatile. Many were painfully honest, rife with longing.

My heart hurt, but I know that it's important to give space to anyone (ourselves included) asking hard questions about faith. Social media might not seem like sacred space, but in this instance, it's where our friend's search landed. As I listened in on this conversation, his faith crisis hit me in the feelers too. I wandered back to those beautiful, fun, messy moments. I remembered the times we knelt with college students, much like that pastor knelt beside me when I was weeping at the altar. I thought about those crazy Nertz games and baking mass quantities of food. We laughed a lot. We held long conversations about faith. We listened when they shared their mistakes and sins, and held them close as we walked into Jesus's love. We piled in airplanes to travel to poverty-torn nations to build churches and share the gospel. It was hard work, but we loved it.



*Though fear  
is the root of  
most confidence  
crises, our faith  
is the target.*

When someone we care about is questioning their faith or saying that the church is no longer viable, it can rattle us. It might make us wonder whether we did something wrong. It might make us itch to fix something or someone and make it all right again. We might wonder if our efforts were in vain. We can get drawn into the conversation in a negative way as we try to make them see it our way. All of these responses are human, but they take our eyes off the true battleground.

- The truth is that we have an enemy who desires to distort faith, and he is hard at work.
- The truth is that the church is made up of people, and that can be messy.
- The truth is that we are only asked to do the best we know as a parent, as a friend, or in ministry, and we don't get to stake a claim in a person's personal relationship with God, no matter what that looks like.

My friend needed to ask his questions, and those questions didn't nullify who God is. The real battleground in that conversation was my friend's faith.

He was in a confidence crisis.

Jesus reminded the disciples to be direct with God when they needed help. That's just as true when someone we care about is in a confidence crisis.

Don't bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This is not a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we're in. If your little boy asks for a serving of fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate? If your little girl asks for an egg, do you trick her with a spider? As bad as you are, you wouldn't think of such a thing—you're at least decent to your own children. And don't you think the Father who conceived you in love will *give the Holy Spirit when you ask him*?

Luke 11:10–13 MESSAGE

It wasn't my job to make it all go away. I'm not big enough, and it's not what he was asking for. Instead of letting my emotions dictate, I asked the Holy Spirit for help.

For him.

For those who were commenting.

For me, as the enemy tried to erode my confidence in the ministry we had been so privileged to partner in.

Are you in a confidence crisis as a loved one struggles with faith? Let's pause and ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to help. The good news is that he's right there, inside of you already. You don't have to carry this burden alone.

*Father, I need help. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who helps me do what you've asked me to do. Who shows me what is mine to address and what to place in your hands. You are a good Father, and you give good gifts—and I receive this gift. Thank you for renewed confidence in this area, not in the circumstance or even in what I can or cannot do, but in your love for this one.*

Don't be afraid to ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you might not see. Ask for guidance. Ask him to speak to that person in ways that he or she will understand. If you feel him leading you to act or say something, write that down. Pray for direction and wisdom as you follow that leading.

Write down this person's name. Write down today's date, for you are releasing him or her to God's capable hands. Write down anything you sense the Holy Spirit whispering inside of you. That's not saying you are giving up or don't care, but that you are partnering with God in all your next steps.

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We can be assured of this as we battle for a loved one.

- God loves them.
- Jesus waits to rescue them.
- The Holy Spirit will show them the way home.

So what about my friend?

I did exactly what I just asked you to do. I asked for help. I sensed that I was supposed to let him know that I care. I sent a private message saying that I believed in him and that I was available, if needed. Then it was his turn, if he so desired.

We talked briefly. I gave him room to share some of the hard questions he was asking. It wasn't my job to resolve his doubt, for that is the work of the Holy Spirit. My role was to let him know that Richard and I were available as sounding boards.

It wasn't my job to fix his confidence crisis, but I could pray. I could respond to his questions with truth and gentleness. The rest was up to the Holy Spirit. Just as he lives in me, he lives in my friend. He sees the scope of the battle. He sees what I do not. He knows that God loves him more than I ever could and is reaching for him.

Several weeks later, my old friend sent a message.

"I'm finding my way back," he said.

His faith is in the process of restoration. He is moving away from defining faith by people or a tradition or a doctrine. He is placing his trust in a God who loves him and a Savior who rescued him rather than defining his faith by politics or the actions of a handful of work-in-progress individuals—or even by his doubts. His standard is Christ. The Holy Spirit is helping him rediscover what faith looks like, and how to live it intimately.

If your confidence crisis is wrapped around a loved one's decisions or a loss of faith, it's likely rooted in fear. The Helper eases into that confidence crisis to remind you of what you can and cannot do on your own. He frees you to bring that loved one to

our heavenly Father in prayer. He releases the need to control the outcome, allowing you instead to be open to play a part as the Holy Spirit leads, or to trust as God works behind the scenes.

Someone else's confidence crisis can have the power to drain life from our faith. We become so busy trying to repair, foster, and manage what is beyond our ability that we live in defeat or continual frustration. But God's plan for that person does not hinge on your efforts.

*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.*

Romans 8:11

It's based on what has already been done on the cross.

Your faith is not limited by your friend's struggle, but rather, your faith is empowered as you invite the Holy Spirit into *your* confidence crisis. When you ask the Holy Spirit to join you, confidence swings to the truth that God loves that person and is at work.

### ***What if it's you asking the hard questions?***

You may feel shut down or guilty for having uncertainties about your faith. Your doubts don't turn God away. You don't have to be afraid to say how you feel, because he already knows. As you ask him to meet you in your confidence crisis, the Holy Spirit will remind you of who you are (Romans 8:16).

We all have doubts. Every one of us, even that woman sitting in the pew across from you who seems to have it all together struggles with confidence.

A couple of years ago I received a message from a reader through my blog. She was a praying, in-love-with-Jesus believer. She was also in a confidence crisis. I had written a twenty-one-day series about moving past what you cannot change. That day I expressed that we all doubt from time to time.

She responded that when she felt doubt, she also felt shame. This made her more frustrated, because someone once told her that Christians don't have confidence issues. It only made her doubt herself more.

I was thankful that she bravely asked her question, but it made my heart heavy. If doubting makes you a “bad Christian,” then that disqualifies most of us, including many great biblical women and men of faith. When the Lord spoke to Moses and spelled out his plan for him (Exodus 3:1–12), Moses's knees started knocking. He didn't feel like the right guy for the job, and he told God that he stuttered (Exodus 4:10–11). Even as God expressed confidence, Moses pointed out his own inadequacies. His greatest, he said, was that he stuttered. For a long time, I thought Moses's stuttering was literal—until I read this verse:

Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

Acts 7:22

When we study further, we discover that Moses was educated by the best of the best. He lived as an adoptive grandson of Pharaoh. Everyone, including God, recognized Moses as a born leader long before he stood at the burning bush.

We know the end of the story. Moses went on to lead a nation. He parted the Red Sea with his staff. He led an army across dry ground. Biblical history labels him one of the greatest leaders ever.

The root of his confidence crisis was fear, but the target was his faith.

There are other examples of confidence crises. Paul the apostle was passionate about sharing the good news, but he was criticized for his public speaking. That critical word from listeners had the power to plant doubt and make him give up. Can you imagine speaking to a crowd, only to hear feedback that you are “unimpressive” and your speaking “amounts to nothing” (2 Corinthians 10:10)?

Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!

Thank you very much. Exit stage right. I'm never coming back again!

Yet Paul planted churches. He witnessed miracles and was instrumental in many of them. He is considered the greatest evangelist of all time. God used him to spread the church to the Gentile nations. Maybe he wasn't the best speaker, but he was anointed, and that was better than a perfect three-point sermon.

As we follow Jesus, we won't have a doubt-free walk. Our Spirit-led heart will lead us to a dependent walk instead. The woman who so courageously sent her question was not a "bad" Christian, but rather an ordinary Christ follower like most of us. As we follow Jesus, we will see how human we are. It will lead either to comparison or to placing our confidence in him. When we stop gazing at our own inadequacies, we are free to celebrate that God uses us despite them.

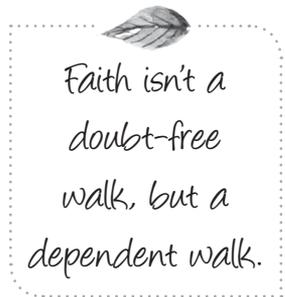
Consider your doubt in a whole new way.

Yes, you doubted, but you believed.

Yes, you doubted, but you asked the Holy Spirit to step into those doubts.

Yes, you doubted, but you acted anyway.

That's faith! Instead of beating ourselves up over doubts, let's throw our hands in the air and rejoice that faith leads ordinary people like you and me to be used in powerful ways—because our confidence is established in him.



### **Spirit-Led Confidence without Borders**

The promise arrived just as Jesus said it would (Acts 2:1–4).

About 120 Jesus followers were in the upper room. They had prayed for ten days. Suddenly a wind blew through and tongues of fire settled on each person. Their voices rose like thunder, carrying to the streets below, where thousands observed the Day of Pentecost, a major religious festival held fifty days after Passover.

The people in the street stopped what they were doing. They gazed at the upper room.

Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

Acts 2:7–12

The 120 in the upper room were speaking in different languages, but it’s their message that captured attention. These same believers were trapped in fear just a few weeks earlier. They trembled at Jesus’s instruction to go into the world. Now they shouted at the top of their voices about God’s goodness.

Their circumstances hadn’t changed, but their faith was empowered.

Their confidence crisis shifted from fear to faith. Their attention was squarely on what was possible, rather than tangled in doubt over the future.

This is Spirit-led confidence without borders. We aren’t blind. We see what is happening in the world. We know what we are facing. We understand the obstacles. Fear or uncertainty should be our cry; instead, our confidence is in God’s goodness. It spills out in our message. It pours over our everyday life. His goodness is written into our worldview. We are assured that we have a role to play—as a friend, as a single woman or single mom, as a wife, as a grandmother, as a daughter of a Most High God. We stand shoulder to shoulder with other ordinary women of faith, and our hearts and lives reflect his goodness.

The Holy Spirit activates our confidence in God rather than in ourselves or in our circumstances. We spill that news of goodness

in our homes. In our nation. In our relationships. In our churches. Across the world.

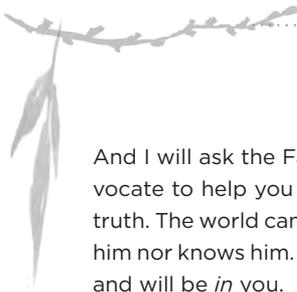
I sometimes look back at my seventeen-year-old self who knelt at an altar, so desperate for help. I was hemmed in. My borders were my home life. My lack of knowledge. My age. It felt like I'd never get there, wherever "there" might be. I asked for help, and help arrived. The physical evidence of that night was a stack of tear-saturated tissues, but the spiritual evidence remains within me today.

I didn't know what I needed, but God did. I didn't have a clue where to find confidence, but it was right inside of me all along. The borders were real, but God broke them one by one.

Spirit-led confidence impacts the world.

Sometimes the people you influence live across the street. Sometimes that growing confidence spills onto the child sitting at your feet.

Sometimes it's the woman looking back at you in the mirror.



## The Word

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be *in* you.

JOHN 14:16-17



## Your Spirit-Led Promise

God loves you.

Jesus rescued you.

The Holy Spirit helps you.



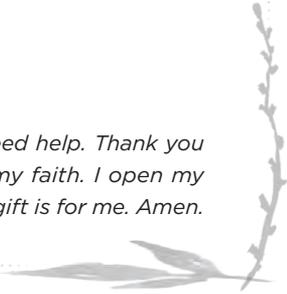
## Your Spirit-Led Invitation

Welcome the Holy Spirit into your faithview.



## Prayer

*Jesus, you promised a Helper and I need help. Thank you for offering this gift to help me live my faith. I open my heart and my life to the truth that this gift is for me. Amen.*





## Power Greater Than Our Own

### *A Spirit-Led Heart Is Empowered*

An encounter with Jesus was an encounter with God for the disciples. In the same way an encounter with the Holy Spirit is an encounter with God for you.

Henry Blackaby, *Experiencing God*

Two-year-old Josiah was transitioning from his crib to a big-boy bed. Keeping him in it was a nightly effort. His mom and dad left the crib in his room for those nights when they were too exhausted to get up several times to put him back into his new bed. One night they were on a date, and I was watching Josiah and his older brother. Josiah had climbed out of bed several times and run downstairs too many times to count. I finally put him in the crib.

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

I tried to ignore the sounds, but they didn't stop, so I trudged back upstairs. I shone my smartphone light into the room and gasped at the sight before me. Josiah stood on the edge of the crib, his toes gripping the rail. His face was covered with his blue blanket. He held his arms out like a bird in flight.

I ran toward him just as he jumped off the edge of his crib into his new toddler bed.

*Thump.*

He missed the ceiling fan by less than an inch.

He pulled the blanket off his head and giggled in delight.

That's when he saw me. His smile was wide, as if to say, "Did you see that?" I gathered my grandson in my arms and gently scolded him. We piled in the rocking chair and I held him close. Within a few minutes his breathing slowed and my little guy finally fell asleep in my arms.

Josiah is an adventurer.

He walked early. He ran early. He climbs anything that can be climbed. He's athletic, surprisingly so for such a little guy. He looks for edges and high places, for that's where he is comfortable. He has a temper that flares like dynamite, though he's sorry immediately. He's tenderhearted and loves making people laugh.

Josiah is named after a king (2 Kings 22) who was eight years old when he inherited his father's corrupt kingdom. King Josiah reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years. His love for God was so strong that he banished idolatry, and he eventually turned around generations of abuse and evil.

Our Josiah came to our family through adoption. His name has significant meaning, and that will be his story to tell one day. When he was born, my husband and I were outside the room. He struggled to take his first breath. My daughter sent me a text.

*Please pray, Mom.*

We prayed.

The doctor and a flurry of nurses pounded on him until he finally sucked in enough air to let out a shriek. Josiah was on the scene! He came into the world loved and marked by God. I don't

know what his exact purpose will be. The fact that he's willing to stand on the edge of a crib with a blanket over his head and fly . . . that's going to somehow play into it. Those characteristics of adventure and fearlessness will be mighty tools in God's hands.

My prayer is that he'll be empowered to change the world, just as young King Josiah did.

Our job is to keep him safe in the meantime.

### **The Early Church: Power for a Purpose**

The Greek word for Holy Spirit power is *dynamis*, which is related to our English word *dynamite*. This isn't a small amount of power. It shakes up and tears down. It breaks down barriers.

I was at a family gathering a few years ago. The location was down a winding road, settled among hills, caves, towering trees, and winding creek beds. In the middle of our celebration, one of the guests pulled out a small cylinder.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Dynamite," he said.

*Whoa.*

I had never seen dynamite up close, and I wasn't that excited to see it now. He and some of the other men went behind a barn to light the small stick of dynamite. I remained at a distance. I questioned whether this was a good idea. Someone standing close shrugged off my question as overprotective. He told me that the guy lighting the dynamite was familiar with it.

It didn't reassure me. This was *dynamite*.

When the small stick of dynamite exploded, bystanders covered their ears. Some ran. Others whooped and hollered. Since no one was hurt, they labeled the explosion a success.

While I'm thankful no one was hurt, dynamite is no plaything. It has the power to hurt a lot of people if things go wrong.

If you've ever been abused by someone in religious power, the fact that the Holy Spirit is described as dynamite may turn you away. The last thing you want is someone else's power robbing you

of yours. You don't want to be overpowered by their personality or plans. You don't want to be hit by spiritual shrapnel when someone abuses that power. Thank goodness *dynamis* power is nothing like that. It doesn't knock someone down so that another person can rise higher. It's not abusive.

Instead, it is power that ignites from within. It is power that is greater than our own. Jesus described it as being "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

*Dynamis* power was displayed when Jesus touched or prayed with people. It was often described as power emanating from him, like when the woman with the issue of blood was healed (Luke 8:43–48). *Dynamis* power showed up in Jesus's actions and also his words as he sent demons running to the hillside (Luke 8:26–39). Jesus told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit. They emerged from the upper room with *dynamis* power flowing through their spiritual veins.

Fast-forward thirty years.

In Acts 3, Peter and John are on the way to the temple to teach. A man is being carried by family members to the main gate. He has been lame since birth. Begging for alms is his only means of survival. As the apostles approach, the lame man asks for money.

Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Acts 3:4–6

The beggar is miraculously healed. He leaps to his feet! There is nothing the apostles could have given the man on their own, but that's what is so beautiful about this story.

This is *dynamis* power in action.

It's greater than Peter or John. It's greater than what the man expects to receive. The crowd is so inspired by this miracle and

Peter's ensuing message that the number of believers swells to five thousand, not including women or children.

This is power for a purpose. A man is healed, but a city is awakened.

What I love most about this story is the timeline. Peter and John are thirty years older than they were when they received this power. It's as fresh now as it was then. They are now leaders, but their power source is the Holy Spirit within. *Dynamis* power fuels the faith of the apostles. It empowers the faith of the family members who carry a lame man to the gate. It triggers the prayer that heals his legs. It stuns a crowd who believes a coin is the best (or only) option for a hungry, despairing man.



This scene would make a great ending for a movie, if not for what happens next. The healing is good news to everybody except those in charge. They seize Peter and John and arrest them. Because it's late in the day, the courts are closed. Peter and John have to remain in jail overnight. The next day, rulers, elders, and teachers of the law meet to talk about these two crazy troublemakers. They haul them out of jail and demand to know by what power the lame man was healed.

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’”*

Acts 4:8–11

Imagine sitting in a dungeon-like cell all night long. Imagine that you did nothing wrong. Imagine that your faith-filled response

freed a man from a lifetime of poverty and pain. Imagine that the people standing before you have the power to throw you in jail.

Peter and John should have been intimidated.

They should have been discouraged. They should have been dismayed by the authorities' attempts to stop their good works.

*Dynamis* power shatters the “shoulds” in this story.

Instead, Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks to the authorities. This word *filled* describes immediate, sudden inspiration. Peter is given wisdom, courage, and the words needed at the time. As he speaks, the religious rulers can't help but notice that a couple of former fishermen are trumping earthly, abusive power with uncanny humility and wisdom.

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, *they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*

Acts 4:13

Let's stay here just for a moment. I don't want us to rush past this remarkable statement.

The apostles are marked by their relationship with Jesus.

This is the purpose. It's what *dynamis* power does. It's what it did for Peter and John, and it's what it does in us. This power points to Jesus. It's the opposite of what earthly power does, because we are not front and center.

The needs that are on our Father's heart are front and center. God's love for the world is front and center.

When the religious rulers and authority look at these Jesus followers, they see him in them. They comprehend power that comes through position, but this power? They don't grasp it at all.

They resort to threats, warning Peter and John to never publicly speak the name of Jesus again.

It's almost laughable.

These followers of Christ have been at this for thirty years. Their pattern is as familiar as the sun rising. They will follow the call on

their lives to share and live the gospel, no matter where that leads. The apostles leave the presence of the authorities and immediately begin to seek the presence of God. This leads to one of the most powerful prayers recorded in Scripture:

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit* and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 4:29–31

When the disciples finish praying, they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Unlike in the upper room, there is no wind or tongues of fire. Yet the Holy Spirit makes himself known. The house is shaken. They are filled and immediately begin to speak boldly, despite the threats just levied against them.

### **Your Promise: You Are Filled and Refilled**

The apostles prayed and were filled. The word *filled* might seem confusing. After all, the disciples were already filled with the Holy Spirit. Acts 4:31 describes them as being filled again. We find this in several instances throughout Scripture. For example, the disciples walk away from a difficult ministry trip, and they are filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52). There are times that they pray and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

The word *fill* seems like a one-time event, yet we fill ourselves continually with a lot of things. We fill ourselves with food, and then we eat again a few hours later. We fill our calendars and lives with activities, knowing that next month we’ll do the same.

Some of the things we fill ourselves with have value, others not as much.

What if we are filled with the Holy Spirit over and over again? Different from an earthly filling, the Source is within. It's an abundance of the Holy Spirit as we offer our life as a spiritual receptacle.

We are consistently emptied as we live our faith. We are consistently filled as we live our faith. Paul reminds the church in Ephesians 5:18, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." We tend to place the emphasis on the wine or drunkenness in this passage and miss the promise. The Holy Spirit is not a one-time encounter.

We reach for the Holy Spirit when we feel overwhelmed, small, or overpowered—and we are filled.

We reach for the Holy Spirit when we are hurt—and we are filled.

We reach for the Holy Spirit when life isn't working out the way we think it should—and we are filled.

We reach for the Holy Spirit when we've poured out and poured out—and we are filled.

A Spirit-led heart goes through a continual process of emptying and refilling. When Peter and John prayed their prayer (along with other believers), they were reaching for all that Jesus promised.

Let's break down that prayer and discover how this plays out in our own lives.

*Lord, consider their threats.*

The apostles faced real threats. I've experienced the rare instance when someone threatened me, and it's sobering. This was the apostles' constant reality. What threat are you facing? When you encounter obstacles, it's okay to acknowledge they are real.

- *Lord, my marriage is threatened.*
- *Father, my physical body is under siege.*
- *I'm doing all I know to do, and nothing's working.*
- *Jesus, I love you, but it's been a long time since I felt you. I feel like my faith is in a war zone.*

God doesn't balk at our honesty. We don't have to pretend that things are easier than they are. We don't have to fake it until we make it. While we see these obstacles with natural eyes, the Holy Spirit links those events with God's plan. The power we need is within us.

We are *filled* as Jesus followers.

What does that look like? It might be an appropriate or Holy Spirit-led response at the right moment. It is patience when ours is thin. It's wisdom that allows our brain to catch up with our emotions, so that we can deal with the real problem rather than create more. It is faith in an impossible situation. A Spirit-led, empowered heart believes that his power is greater than a right-now situation and right-now feelings.

*Lord, consider their threats.*

We are honest about the threat. We are honest about how challenging it is. We know where our strength comes from and where to turn.

We have a Helper. The threat is real, but so is our God.

*Give us boldness.*

If someone threatens to ruin your life if you speak the name of Jesus, it's going to give you pause. The apostles knew there was a price to pay if they disobeyed. As they spoke this prayer, it was with the knowledge that there would be consequences.

The warning was real, but so was the call on the apostles' lives.

Sometimes our struggle is a lack of faith, or trusting God. More often, it's having the boldness to do what he asks. A synonym for boldness is *chutzpah*. It's a word that means cheekiness. It is sometimes used in a negative sense, but in this instance, it means fearlessness. Fearlessness to do what Jesus asks, even when we know there's a price to pay. Fearlessness to trust that he'll show us what to do. Fearlessness to obey God regardless of the enemy's lies.

We are aware of the threat.

Fearless doesn't mean that we aren't afraid, but that fear holds less power than the joy of following a path God has carved out for us brings.

***Perform miracles and wonders in the name of Jesus.***

If the religious leaders thought they'd silence the apostles, they were sorely misinformed. If you've ever witnessed an unexpected and undeserved miracle, you can't help but tell someone about it.

Peter and John weren't trying to impress a soul. They just wanted to be a mouthpiece for the gospel. Jesus saved them. He believed in them. He was the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah. They witnessed Jesus performing miracles. Jesus often challenged them during those miracles, asking them to believe in the impossible.

I've heard many Bible-believing Christians say that miracles no longer exist. Yet how do we explain away those that occur?

We may fear asking for a miracle, that we'll look foolish if it doesn't happen the way we think it will. I believe one day we'll look back and see those scenes play out differently. We'll see miracles that dominoed for generations. We'll see miracles we took for granted. We'll look back and see a specific request denied so that a miracle with a greater eternal outcome might unfold.

Miracles reflect the Miracle Worker.

While I've not seen the Red Sea part or a dead man burst from a tomb, I know that miracles do take place. I experienced one myself nearly a quarter of a century ago. I've rarely talked about it, and those close to me have asked why. The purpose of that miracle wasn't to wrap a ministry around it. God had one person on his heart. She didn't believe in God. As a personal witness to that miracle, she confessed that there is something to this thing called faith.

It was *dynamis* power with a purpose.

My friend Jim believes in miracles. He believes that when he prays, God listens. One day he was in a coffee shop. He was introduced to a stranger by a mutual friend. As they chatted, the man explained what was going on in his family at the time. Jim gently placed his hand on the man's shoulder and said something like, "God, we need a miracle. And while you are at it, will you reveal your purpose in this?"

It was a spontaneous, drive-by prayer. It wasn't showy. It didn't draw attention to Jim, but it drew spiritual attention to the need.

It's as natural as breathing to him. If there's a need, then he's going to go to God right then. He doesn't define the miracle, but he expects something to happen.

What if we start living the same way?

We live with expectancy. We don't know the details or how it will play out. We simply ask God to show up and anticipate that he will. We believe that a miracle shines a light on our faith and on the truth that God lives. We are prepared to be a part of the miracle, if that's what God wants, but we don't look for a lead role.

Our natural inclination is to fret. We talk about the problem, person, or situation until we tie ourselves in worry. Those emotions are valid, yet we have help in the midst of them. There may be a miracle waiting, or even unfolding, that we cannot see.

Another inclination is to ignore miracles altogether until we desperately need one ourselves. At that point, we turn to God out of desperation rather than belief.

Catherine Marshall said the Holy Spirit "insists on taking us into the realm of the miraculous."<sup>1</sup>

Let's take him up on that invitation.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you believe. To notice that one who needs prayer over your pity. To turn to him daily, so that when you need a miracle, that prayer is as natural as breathing. That miracles and wonders, no matter what they look like, will draw an unbelieving world to Christ.

### **Your Invitation: Reveal You Have Been with Jesus**

I collect stories like some might collect precious stones.

These are only a few of them.

She was in jail and addicted, but she accepted God's love. Today she is a chaplain in the same prison where she was once bound. She recaptured the love of her grown children. She's the woman you see at the front of the church dancing in joy.

It's not hard to see that she has been with Jesus.

She was religious. Bored. Wondering why a God so big didn't take up much room in her life. She stepped out of tradition and into faith that challenged and astounded her. Not everyone understands her newfound excitement, but she can't wait to see what is ahead. Though she has studied the Bible for years, it now feels like a love letter.

It's not hard to see that she has been with Jesus!

She was the one they looked up to, but was secretly having an affair. She tired of her secret sin and the shame it brought. She confessed to her husband and to God. Today she shares her story freely. In the beginning, it was painful and she was often criticized, but she presses on. Her greatest hope is to reach women scarred by sin and show them what real love looks like.

When she kneels with sin-trapped women, they can't help but see that she has been with Jesus.

She was shy. Uncertain. She felt called to minister to women even though that seemed ridiculous. She trusted God and obeyed. Today she speaks to women across the globe and delights that God knew her well, even when she couldn't see it the same way.

Oh, the miracle of a life touched by Jesus!

When we ask to walk in the *dynamis* power of the Holy Spirit, we become witnesses of what God can do.

We begin to reflect him. His love. His eternal perspective over our limited earthly view. We reflect his touch in the broken places.

We were supposed to act one way. We were told who we were and to live within the margins of what we can do. But we opened our hearts to *dynamis* power and embraced our identity as a child of God.

This might feel intimidating to you, because we make mistakes. We stumble. We might not wake up feeling like a world changer. Our *dynamis* stories may have begun decades ago or are as fresh as this morning. It's not limited to a single moment or event, but played out repeatedly as we are filled with that power.

We are filled, and we empty out, so we hold up our lives like empty cisterns for a refill. *Dynamis* power isn't reserved for healing the lame or standing in front of a group of abusive leaders. It's ours to request as our feet hit the floor in the morning. It's

ours to reach for when our kids are on our last nerve. It's for that impossible situation or that flash of anger or anxiousness that tries to take you down a road you don't want to travel.

Just as I collect women's stories that reflect Jesus, I want to be careful to gather them in my own life. For these are often the miracles I tend to miss. If I look at the daily miracles, they look like this:

I was angry, but empowered to respond wisely.

I was hurt, but empowered as peace seeped over the source of my pain.

I felt unsure what to do, but was empowered one small step at a time.

I was guilty of losing my temper, but empowered as I accepted mercy and a fresh start.

A Spirit-led, empowered heart

- is honest about the challenge
- is unafraid to ask for help
- notices miracles great and small
- celebrates what only God can do

Have you taken the time to celebrate your *dynamis* story?

It might be your overarching story. You were addicted and now you are free. You were abandoned, but you found love and security in Christ. You were lost, and now you are found. It might be your right-now story.

Don't go one more moment without rejoicing in that miracle.

I was .....

but I was empowered and .....

Perhaps your story is unfolding and you aren't sure what to celebrate. This is your promise. You are empowered by the Holy Spirit despite that harsh word spoken over you. You are empowered

despite that mountain in your marriage or in that relationship. You are empowered as you ask for help. You are empowered by the Holy Spirit, who is in you.

Ask to be filled.

Refuse to run on empty or in your own grit-your-teeth strength.

When you wake up, reach for the promise of a Spirit-led, empowered life, believing that it's for you and for today. When you fail (because we all do), go to the Source. Talk to God about that very real hurdle you keep running into. Stop and celebrate every time he fills you and you grow through a situation.

His *dynamis* power within you is greater than your own, and that's worth celebrating, even as this new chapter is being written.

### **Spirit-Led Empowerment without Borders**

Peter and John could have tossed the man a coin and gone on their way. If they didn't have it on them, they could have found one. They gave him something greater. *Dynamis* power leaped from their prayers to his need, and that altered not only his body, but the trajectory of his life.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with *power through his Spirit in your inner being*, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Ephesians 3:16–17

This power is the same word used when the house was shaken as Peter and John prayed.

A Spirit-led, empowered heart is shaken.

We are filled, and *dynamis* power starts shaking us up. It shakes up our homes. It shakes up our closest relationships. It shakes up our ministries and our jobs and our nonprofit endeavors. It shakes up our churches. It shakes our faith that has gone stagnant.

If we are praying for a Spirit-led, empowered heart, let's not stop there.

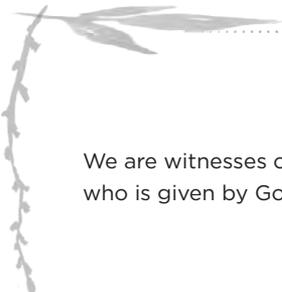
Let's ask him to shake up those thoughts that have held us captive for far too long. While you are at it, Holy Spirit, shake up our preconceptions. Shake up our limited view of who God is and what he can do. Shake our apathy. Shake the boundaries we've placed on our faith.

When we are filled daily, we become a conduit for a miracle. Our faith becomes a testimony that Jesus is more than a good story.

When people meet us, they won't see perfection, because that's not what an empowered, Spirit-led heart looks like. They aren't intimidated by our credentials. They may even see that we are works in progress.

But they'll see that we've been with Jesus.

Like my sweet adventurer Josiah, there we are, standing on the edge of our faith. We hold out our arms as we step out, knowing that Jesus meets us there.



## The Word

We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him.

ACTS 5:32 NLT



## Your Spirit-Led Promise

*Dynamis* power reflects that you have been with Jesus.



## Your Spirit-Led Invitation

Be filled (and refilled) with power for a purpose.



Prayer

*Jesus, I sometimes run on empty. I try to do things on my own. I leave you out of the equation. I open my heart to your dynamis power today, tomorrow, and all my days. As I empty out, I will run back to you to fill back up. Thank you for every miracle. Thank you for faith that changes me and the world around me.*

