

FLYING CLOSER TO THE FLAME

STUDY TWO

The Main Agenda of God's Spirit: Transformation

Selected Scriptures

The same transforming power that changed the apostles is still available to God's people. What a wonderful hope!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ON the night of His betrayal and arrest, Jesus told His disciples that He would leave them soon. His words set off a tidal wave of emotion that washed over them.

- They were deeply *troubled* (John 14:1).
- They were *confused* (14:5; 16:17–18).
- They felt *abandoned* (14:18).
- They felt *afraid* (14:27).

The disciples exhibited ordinary human frailties. They vacillated between courage and cowardice, faith and doubt. In the upper room, they vowed they would die with Jesus (Matthew 26:35), but when Jesus was arrested in the garden, they all fled (26:56). Even after Jesus' resurrection, they struggled to wrap their minds around God's bigger plan: "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?" (Acts 1:6).



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Intimidated, insecure, and bewildered—such was the condition of the disciples *before* Pentecost. *After* Pentecost, however, these frightened sheep suddenly transformed into lionhearted witnesses! The coming of the Holy Spirit marked a dramatic change in the disciples' lives. Let's draw from what happened a bold, post-Pentecost picture of Jesus' Spirit-filled followers—a picture that includes all believers who live in the power of the Spirit.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The before-and-after portraits of the early disciples illustrate what can transpire when we yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit's control. Ask the Lord to reveal the areas in your life that need His transforming touch as you open His Word.

Father, bring to life the events of Pentecost as if I were there when Your Spirit filled the believers on the day the church was born. Transform my life with Your power as You see fit. Stir in me a deeper love for You and a Spirit-empowered courage to boldly proclaim Christ in my world. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Let's pick up the action on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish festival that occurred fifty days after Passover. For Pentecost, pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem to present to God the first fruit of their harvest. This year, a new kind of spiritual harvest would be offered to the Lord: the believers who represented the first fruit of Christ's Spirit-empowered church!



Observation: A Survey of Personal Transformation

A helpful practice in the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures* is to put yourself in the scene. Imagine joining the believers who, for weeks, had avoided the authorities and kept to themselves for fear of being arrested. In the large upper room, shafts of light filtered through open windows as people milled around the room talking in hushed voices. Then, *suddenly* . . .



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Human Frailties Transformed—Acts 2:1–12; 3:1–10

If you had been present, what would you have heard, seen, and experienced, according to Luke's account in *Acts 2:1–4*?

The sound was like the fury of a hurricane, only with no wind, and the fiery appearance of the Holy Spirit was like the fire of God settling on the ancient tabernacle (Exodus 40:38), only on each individual. What supernatural ability did the Spirit give the believers? What do you observe about the Jews outside the room who heard the noise—their ethnicities and how they responded in *Acts 2:5–12*?

Later, Peter and John displayed another Spirit-empowered ability at the temple. What were they able to do in Christ's name, according to *3:1–10*?



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Summarize the contrast you see in the disciples' *abilities* before and after the Spirit came upon them?

*If we had observed them two days before this event, we would have seen one kind of people.
Two days after this event, we would have wondered if they were the same individuals.
Absolutely transformed!—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Fearful Reluctance Transformed—Acts 2:36–41; 4:13

All at once, the Spirit-empowered believers burst out of their safe enclave, boldly declaring the wonderful things God had done (Acts 2:10). According to [Acts 2:36–41](#), what boldness do you observe in Peter—the same man who only weeks earlier denied Jesus with a curse?

The apostles' stunning transformation wasn't lost on the Jewish authorities. What did they see in Peter and John, according to [4:13](#)?



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Summarize the contrast you see in the disciples' *confidence* before and after the Spirit came upon them.

These were the same disciples who only days before were reluctant to talk to anyone. Now they were out in the streets boldly proclaiming Jesus Christ without fear.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Feelings of Intimidation Transformed—Acts 4:1–12; 5:27–32

How did the priests and religious authorities attempt to intimidate Peter and John to stop preaching, according to [Acts 4:1–7](#)?

What qualities did Peter display in [Acts 4:8–12](#)? Don't miss the source of Peter's calm boldness in 4:8.



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Released with a warning, the apostles went right on preaching “the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31) and were arrested again. The high priest shook his finger at them: “We gave you strict orders never again to teach in [Jesus’] name!” (5:28). Standing tall and unintimidated, what did Peter say in response in 5:29–32? Notice the roles of all three members of the Trinity.

Summarize the contrast you see in the disciples’ *sense of invincibility* before and after the Spirit came upon them.

Peter and John had courage they never had before. Why? The intimate Spirit of God had come into their lives and freed them from their fears. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Feelings of Abandonment Transformed—Acts 5:40–42

Although the disciples may have felt like orphans when Jesus left them, the Holy Spirit transformed their feelings of abandonment into rock-solid security in the face of persecution. What emotions did Peter and John display in [Acts 5:40–42](#)?



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Summarize the contrast you see in the disciples' *perseverance* before and after the Spirit came upon them.

What an honor to bear in our bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Baptism and Filling of the Spirit

Two key words in the New Testament describe the actions of the Holy Spirit: *baptize* and *fill*. Jesus had promised the disciples, “In just a few days you will be *baptized* with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5, emphasis added). In addition, when the Spirit came, “Everyone present was *filled* with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability” (2:4, emphasis added). The Spirit performed both functions on the day of Pentecost. Let's look closer at what these words mean.

Paul helps us interpret the first word. How did Paul describe the baptism by the Holy Spirit in [1 Corinthians 12:13](#)? Who is baptized by the Spirit? Into what are they baptized? What is the result?

As a result of the baptism by the Holy Spirit, we all have been “joined with Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:3), and we possess spiritual gifts from the Spirit, who determines “which gift each person should have” (1 Corinthians 12:11).



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The Holy Spirit also *fills* believers to enable them for certain tasks. According to *Acts 4:8–10, 31; 13:9–11, 49–52*, what tasks did the Spirit enable?

We're never commanded in Scripture to be baptized by the Spirit, but we are commanded to "be filled" (Ephesians 5:18). In the fourth study of this series, we'll take a deeper look at the filling of the Spirit, and specifically, how we can be filled on a daily basis. For now, write down what you understand baptism and filling of the Spirit to mean. Don't forget to consult your Bible study resources, or, for a free online resource, check out *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.



Correlation: Spirit of Power

Through their baptism and filling, the apostles and early Christians did things in the power of the Spirit they could never have done in their own strength. The Holy Spirit had transformed their human frailties into supernatural abilities, their fearful reluctance into bold confidence, their posture of intimidation into a sense of invincibility, and their feelings of abandonment into joyful perseverance.



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Decades later, according to *2 Timothy 1:6–8*, what did Paul say to encourage Timothy—who represented the next generation of believers?

Paul's challenge echoes through time to our generation as well. The same transforming power is still available to God's people today!



Application: Probing Questions

Through the lens of Scripture, we saw up close the remarkable transformation of the early Christians. The Spirit's flame that ignited the hearts of the believers would spread through the whole world, and He even came to live in you the moment you placed your faith in Jesus. How have you seen His transformative power in your life?

Review the four areas in which the early believers experienced transformation—namely, regarding their *abilities*, *confidence*, *sense of invincibility*, and *perseverance*. Which area would you like the Spirit to strengthen and, specifically, for what purpose?



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As you close this study, ask the Lord to reveal your own before-and-after portrait. He lives in you, and He can fill you with His power to boldly transform your fear into active, courageous faith.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may the Holy Spirit make a difference in me so that I might experience transformation like the early Christians experienced. Give me the courage to step out in faith, speak up with confidence, and depend on You for the results. In Jesus' name, amen.

