

He prayed that God would either lift the sense of the call or confirm it. Then he prayed that having done that, God would never release me from it. He urged the Lord to melt any disobedience on my part with unmitigated force on His part. "Break him, bend him, take everything he holds dear," he prayed, "until he obeys the call and claim on his life in Jesus' name, Amen."

Such ruthlessness in prayer was remarkable to my conservative, Methodist heart. It made an indelible impression on me and frightened me more than a little at the moment.

I was compelled toward the Methodist ministry: First, an unquestionable call of God. I could not hope to understand it. I did not pretend to particularly like it. Yet I could not deny it. At times (many times, if I am honest). I was more assured of my call to preach than of my salvation. Second, a growing conviction in the truth of evangelical theology. Based more upon experience and vaguely remembered sermons from my youth in Florida than upon up-to-date reality in my own personal relationship with God, this conviction was at the core of my life at that time.

I knew that salvation was by faith in the atoning work of Christ. I knew that the mushy liberalism and social-gospel message that seemed to engulf the Methodism of the late 60's and early 70's were insufficient. That I knew for sure. What I did not know was power in my own life.

During my ministry I had doubts of my salvation, suicidal thoughts, depression, and anger issues just to name a few. I had preached against the Holy Spirit, but my life was about to change. God moved on the heart of Dr. Boleyn, my senior minister, along with a handful of other Spirit-filled pastors, to put together a conference on the Holy Spirit. Directing it totally toward ministers and importing speakers from out of the area, they found an amazing response. One hundred and fifty pastors registered. But not I.

The very title of the conference irritated me - "Conference on Power for Ministry Today." I did not know what a conference on the Holy Spirit was, but I did not like the sound of it. I told Dr. Boleyn I could not attend because of a shortage of funds. He paid my way!

At the conference Ralph Wilkerson looked me hard in my eyes and then spoke with a fatherly love. "You're a Christian. I perceive that you've prayed the sinner's prayer until you're sick of it. You just have no power. Don't you want to receive the Holy Spirit?"

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Yet when I spoke, I heard myself say, "Yes! Oh, God, yes. Please help me to know this power. I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit." I knew my spirit had finally answered instead of my prideful, egotistical intellect. I was broken in my brokenness and the shattered pieces were finally at the feet of the Master.

Wilkerson led me in a simple prayer of full devotion. Something like, "Jesus, be my Lord. I give You everything-- My house, My family, My possessions." I repeated each phrase without hesitation until he prayed, "And I give You my ministry and my future. Send me anywhere."

That stuck in my throat. I knew that was very near the heart of my sin; even more than the immorality in my life. It had always been "my ministry" and "my future." If I truly gave it to Jesus, I might spend the next forty years in some nine-point charge in South Alabama, labeled as the "conference nut." I sensed intuitively that I was tottering on the brink of kissing my chances of being elected bishop good-bye.

The Lord gave grace and somehow I knew that 40 years in a nine-point charge with the peace of God would be infinitely better than the high-steepled hell I was in. Just as I finished that prayer, Dr. Ralph Wilkerson reached out his hands and laying them on my head, he said with authority, "Now, receive the Holy Spirit."

In that very second, the Lord Jesus Christ poured His sanctifying grace into me in a visitation of divine presence I had scarcely ever dreamed of. I was, in that very moment, literally immersed, drenched, filled, baptized in the Holy Spirit I had blasphemed in my ignorant pride. Oh, glory to God! There was no tingling, no sense of electric current, no "waves of liquid love," just the most exultant in-rush of peace, forgiveness, grace, and power I had ever known.

The first person I ever heard speak in tongues was me. Wilkerson said, "Open your mouth and praise God." When I did, out poured a heavenly language that astonished me. The delightful reality made me laugh out loud, even in my tears. God had given me the gift I used to preach against! I knew the Comforter had come. The sweet Holy Spirit of Jesus had taken up residence. Baptized with the Holy Spirit? I was! I surely was.

Since that December 5, 1975, God has shown me miracles, gifts, signs, and wonders. Six weeks later, my wife surrendered her skepticism and sought the infilling of the Holy Spirit at the altar of Oak Grove Church. The immediate transformation of our home life was a daily miracle. My parents were soon filled with the Spirit.

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