

ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Dr. George O. Wood

That's a profound question. It's a question we ought to ask ourselves periodically with the Lord: Are you satisfied with your experience? As Pentecostal or charismatic people we place a great deal of stress on experience. We believe that God wants us to know more about himself than just facts or data or theology. That God wants us to experience him. Frequently God even brings us into an experience with himself before we know all the facts that there is to know about him, before we even know the Bible well we might already have an experience with God.

Moses had an experience with God before he could have talked much about the theology of the Pentateuch. And certainly Paul had an experience with God on the Damascus road before he could have passed an examination on the relationship of law to grace. God wants us to have an experience with him. The experience if it's a genuine experience from God it will always line up with the scripture. Some people wrongly think you've got to have a systematic theology first then you go out and get an experience. God is free and God gives us experiences with himself. One of the purposes of the Holy Spirit is give us experiences with God. To give us a relationship, something that we know in our own way of life, in our own experience that we have met God.

I want to share with you from the scripture at least five different ways that the Holy Spirit intersects our life. And I want to ask you in regard to each of these ways are you satisfied with that experience?

The first encounter with the Holy Spirit is at conversion.

The Holy Spirit comes and dwells in our life when we confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. Go with me for a moment to a room. It is a room in which disciples are met in hiding. It is the first evening of the Christian era. Jesus is risen from the dead. He comes through closed doors, materializes. Stands in that room and confronts his disciples. One of the first things he says to them is "He breathed upon them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

I get a picture of that as putting something in the disciples. He's putting wind in them. He's putting the Spirit in them. I think on Jesus' part it is the deliberate recreation of the scene of the creation where God bends over the clay form of man and breathes into him the breath of life. Now Jesus re-enacts that. On a spiritual level he's come back from the grave with everlasting life and he breathes that new order of life into the disciples that are gathered together. That in-breathing, that indwelling of the eternal spiritual of God and they come to life eternally. That has to be the new birth experience. It's different from Acts 2, a subsequent experience with the Spirit. It's what Jesus was talking about in John 3:5. Unless one is born of water and of the Spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God. While I would have liked to have been in that room on that first Christian evening, liked to have been one of those disciples. I'm sure if you'd have asked one of them in that moment when Jesus breathed upon them his resurrected life, breathed into them the Spirit, are you satisfied with your experience? You know what the answer would be. There has never been anything like this!

Let's never downplay conversion. Some people think that Pentecostals or charismatics get saved in order to hurry up and do something deeper like get the baptism of the Spirit or go on to

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spiritual gifts. That's not the truth, friends. Conversion is that great moment when the life of God in the Spirit enters us.

Have you been converted? If you've not been converted God wants you to start there because the eternal Spirit of God wants to enter your life and dwell in you and make your life a confession of Jesus as Lord.

A second moment where the Spirit is experienced. You'd have to go with me to another room. It's an upper room. 120 are gathered on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit descends upon them and they are all filled with the Spirit, Acts 2:4, and begin to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance.

I'm fascinated with that word "utterance." I did a word study on the usage of the word in the original in the New Testament. And parallel words in the Hebrew in the Old Testament. That word "utterance" when it is used, stands for rather bold and even loud address. When it is used in connection with speaking with other tongues in Acts 2 it signifies that those who are filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost are speaking forth the wonders of God, the magnificence of God in languages they do not understand and they're declaring that in a rather significant way. They are giving utterance to the wonderful magnificent person and character and works of God. If I understand anything about speaking to the Lord in an unknown tongue it's not gibberish, it's not something I do in an ecstatic experience where I'm not in control of my mind. What it is is releasing from my heart a gushing artesian well of praise and release unto God, which is if I could only understand it. But since it is unlearned by me I do not. But it is understood by God himself. For when I speak to God in that fashion I am not only cleansing my soul and something powerful and deep psychologically, emotionally and spiritually is happening in me. But I am also declaring to God his magnificence, his wonderful works, his character, things I could never quite get to in English because I'm not sharp enough to understand all there is to know about the grand and magnificent character of God almighty. I'm suddenly releasing that to God. No wonder that experience is such a joyful experience.

People today in our culture, a lot of people run around depressed. I get depressed. I'm not one of these persons who is 100% every moment. But we get depressed, we get down. What an antidote the Holy Spirit is that. Nobody's depressed on the day of Pentecost. They are so filled with joy that people mistake their joy for inebriation. They think they're drunk at 9:00 in the morning. We need a good shot of joy.

Ask the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, Are you satisfied with your experience? And they'd say, Yes!

Are you satisfied with your experience? Have you found an experienced God unlocking streams in your life that need to be unlocked. Having access to inner rooms of your personality that he needs to have access to so that from you might come a release of your life to him.

Third moment of the Holy Spirit meeting us in the every day ordinary life that we live. There the Holy Spirit is present as well.

Paul writing in Ephesians 5:19-20 says "Do not be drunk with wine wherein is excess. But be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things under God and

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the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then he goes on to develop some other characteristics of the Spirit filled life.

What Paul is teaching here is that there is a work of the Spirit in our experience that is every moment, every day and that it manifests itself in a number of ways. A life of praise, a life of thanksgiving, and a life lived with right relationships. He goes on to talk about in Ephesians 5 relationship of wives to husbands, and husbands to wives, parents to children and vice versa and employees to employers. All of that flow in life comes out of the stream of the Spirit, which is operative in our life.

If we want the Spirit’s presence in every day experience then we need to just begin opening ourselves on our own initiative to begin to praise God and to sing to God and let us create and opportunity then for the Spirit to begin to minister in our lives. It is incorrect theologically although we do it, to ask somebody, Were you one time filled with the Spirit? That’s not the question of the New Testament. The question of the New Testament is, Are you filled – present tense. The Spirit is sort of like air. If you let air in a balloon too long it all goes away if you don’t keep putting more in. That’s the same with the Spirit in our life. There’s an everyday filling of the Spirit that God calls us to have.

There’s a fourth point in which the Spirit is involved in our experience. I want to take a little more time on this point because it’s the one especially the Holy Spirit has impressed upon my heart for today. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives when we are in what I would call *stretch moments*. Or in crisis moments. Moments that are stretching us in ways we’ve never been stretched before.

There are three scriptures which show us the presence of the Holy Spirit in that manner.

One is Acts 4:8 For the first time Peter, after the resurrection of Jesus Christ is on trial before the Sanhedrin. The crime: healing a lame man. Peter has always fled from pressure. Somehow Peter has a hang-up with authority. He has problems facing people who are in position. Never before has he faced a person in a position. Never before has he been on trial. He’d run at Gethsemane. Now he is there and what happens? It’s a new stretch for him. He’s facing something that he’s never been able to face before. There’s going to be more stamina needed, more strength needed, more presence of mind needed than you’ve ever needed before because this situation has created that. It’s stretched him.

So what do we read in Acts 4:8 “But Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said....” Was Peter filled with the Spirit. John 20, when Jesus breathed open him at conversion, yes, Peter had that experience. Wasn’t he filled with the Spirit in Acts 2:4 because he was part of the 120? Sure he was. But here was a new experience, a new stretch in his life, a new measure, a new quantity, a new availability of the Spirit to match the new demand that is placed upon Peter.

Stephen has a similar experience. Acts 7:55. He had finished his address before the Sanhedrin. They now gnashed their teeth at him. They are so angry with him. But it says, Stephen filled with the Holy Spirit said... Wasn’t Stephen filled with the Spirit before? Yes, in Acts 6:3, he was a deacon. That was one of the qualifications to be a deacon. He had to be filled with the Spirit. But Stephen had never faced martyrdom. He was the first person in the Christian era to ever face martyrdom. It was a new stretch, a new demand in his life and he needed a new

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availability of the Holy Spirit to meet that demand. The Spirit was here in that stretch experience.

Acts 13:9 a third incident. Paul was at the beginning of his missionary journey and the very first crack out he is witnessing to a Roman proconsul on the island of Cyprus, it's his very first encounter with a non Christian governmental ruler or non Christian audience. There is the magician, a sorcerer by the name of Elymas who stands there to withstand his testimony. The scripture says "But Paul filled with the Spirit said, 'You child of the devil.'" And proceeded then to put blindness for a time on Elymas. Was Paul filled with the Spirit? Oh, yes. Ananias had laid hands on him in Acts 9 to receive the Spirit. But here was a new stretch. The gospel was going into areas before something had to come upon Paul that he had never had before. We never read of Paul ever doing a miracle in his life before that. But by the power of the Spirit, now for the first time.

Interesting sidelight: Paul knew that God got his attention by blinding him on the road Damascus so Paul must have thought that was the only way God worked. So the first miracle was a miracle of blindness. Fortunately he didn't keep repeating that for people.

We are capable of receiving more. We think we have gone to our full level of our ability to maintain something or contain something. But the Spirit of God is infinite. He is inexhaustible. We are expandable. We can stretch. There is more of him to be given and there's more of us to receive him with. We ought always to be in the process of being filled with the Spirit.

The best way to find this out is get over your head in song for God, that you cannot account for except God himself intervenes. I have this theory that no Christian ought to be doing everything that he can explain by means of his own talent and ability. There ought to be at least something in your life that is happening that could only be explained by the power of God in your life. If that isn't happening, get out in the deep water. Don't do something rash or imprudent. Pray about it first but get out there.

We need to take upon ourselves commitments. We need to get out on the cutting edge of where God can use us in a disciplined way. If you wait and if you're sitting say, God if you'll fill me with your Spirit I'll go out and do something for you, it's never going to happen that way. You pray about where the desires of your heart are and begin to move out and expect the Spirit of God to give you strength to do what you know God has called you to do.

Some of you are pressed against the wall – in your marriage, in your job, in your finances. It just feels like everything is coming down on you! Rather than seeing it as oppressed. Rather than seeing it as a crunch. See yourself as being stretched. You're being stretched out. Make it a point in your life to begin to seek and ask God for a fresh filling of the Spirit to fill up all the stretch that is taking place in your life. And fill you full to your level of present need. The Spirit is there to intersect our experience in those crisis moments.

God help us to be stretched as far as we can so that God can fill us to the level of our current capacity.

A fifth moment when the Holy Spirit intersects our life has not yet been experienced by anyone in this room. It's future. But I have to comment on it for just a moment. It's the Holy Spirit in resurrection. Even as the Spirit is involved in our conversion, he is also involved in our

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resurrection. A Greek word I stumbled upon recently describes the work of the Spirit that I love. It's the word that means "life" and "to create" or make. It's one word in the Greek: to make life. When used as a noun it could mean life maker. When used as a verb it means to make life. To create life. Jesus uses it of the Father and of himself in John 5:21. He says "For even as the Father raises up the dead and makes life, thus also the Son whom he will he makes life." Who makes life out of dead things? The Father and the Son.

Jesus goes on to say in John 6:63 "It is the Spirit who makes life." Life makers.

Romans 8:11 says "But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead," who raised Jesus from the dead? The Spirit. "If the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from among the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from among the dead will make life in your mortal bodies by his Spirit." The Spirit is the life maker.

On resurrection day the Spirit is going to do something that none of us have yet seen but it's going to beat anything. You talk about reducing data onto a microchip...can you imagine somebody who's been dead for a thousand years and their dust is gone, maybe it's growing flowers in China and they were raised in Africa. The winds have carried the dust of their remains. I'm foolish enough to believe that if man can store data on a microchip, God can store the whole of human life of existence on an electronic impulse if he wants to. Somehow the life maker, the Spirit of God, in one moment in the resurrection is going to gather this whole atomic structure that was us or this molecular structure that was us in the flesh and reconstitute it and make it after the very body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because he is the life maker. And asking people bursting through their graves, Are you satisfied with your experience?

Have you had an initial encounter with the Spirit of God? If not today is the day to come to Jesus Christ and to ask Jesus Christ to live in your by the power of the Spirit.

Has your life been open yet to receive the baptism in the Spirit? Where Jesus says "Out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water." If not, this moment is the moment to begin to let that be released to God.

Is your life on a daily level reflecting the presence of the Spirit? This is the moment in which the Lord is saying, I want you to reflect the spirit in your daily life.

Are you in a stretch experience? The Spirit is there to give you a new capacity equal to the stretch God is placing you in right now.

And we all look forward to that fifth moment.

Our Father, as we close in prayer today we think first of all of the many students that are here who face a new semester. Some their first experience in college who wonder if they have the ability to match what this year will require. By the power of the Spirit we pray that you will give them the capacity to meet every challenge. That you do not lead us, Lord, from defeat unto defeat. But you lead us from victory unto victory. By the power of the Spirit make us ordinary people extraordinary. Help us, Lord, to be like Saul was when he first received the kingship and the Spirit of God came upon him and he became as another person. Lord, help us in these days of challenge that are upon us to become men and women of the Spirit. And especially, Lord, we pray for us as a whole church community as we

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move into arenas and avenues of ministry that have not been open to us before. And responsibilities that we have not carried before. I personally, as I assume responsibilities, I ask that there will be for me and for this entire congregation a fresh in-filling, a fresh baptism of the Spirit upon us all. That we will have the full measure of the Spirit's love and power to go with the task we're being called to. We seek your face, Lord. And we seek these things in your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.