

May 15, 2011 by Steve Brandon



Installation Service - Leaders, We Need the Holy Spirit

Acts

Before Charles Spurgeon would ascend the steps into his pulpit to preach, he would often pray to himself at each step, "I believe in the Holy Spirit ... I believe in the Holy Spirit ... I believe in the Holy Spirit ... I believe in the Holy Spirit." Why such a prayer? It's not because Spurgeon was nervous. No. It's because Spurgeon knew well that he was powerless in the pulpit apart from the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who hear.

The Bible is clear: "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). But, when the Holy Spirit comes, "we may know the things freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12). Charles Spurgeon knew this. And so, he prayed, trusting his ministry to the Spirit.

And on this day in the life of Rock Valley Bible Church, when we are installing three new leaders into their official capacity (two as elders and one as a deacon). I want to remind us all of the crucial role of the Holy Spirit, especially as it comes to Spiritual Leadership. J. Oswald Sanders said it this way, "Spiritual leadership can be exercised only by Spirit-filled men. Other qualifications for spiritual leadership are desirable. To be Spirit-filled is indispensable." [\[1\]](#)

So, please open your Bibles to the book of Acts. It has been said that "The Acts of the Apostles" has been wrongly named. Instead, it should be called, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." Nowhere does this demonstrate itself more than when He guided and directed the leaders of the early church. In my study this week, I have been amazed at the role of the Holy Spirit in the leading of the early church. Just as He led the early church, so He must lead our church.

And so, future leaders, I want to tell all of you one thing: "We need the Holy Spirit." That is the title of my message this morning: "Leaders, We Need the Holy Spirit." In Acts, chapter 1, we find the apostles with Jesus for forty days, learning about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). And so, they ask (in verse 6), ...

Acts 1:6

"Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

In other words, "Jesus, you have been talking a lot about the kingdom. You have been talking about it with us for 40 days. Are you now going to restore the kingdom to Israel." Jesus said (in verse 7), ...

Acts 1:7-8

"It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

So, picture this. It's the disciples with Jesus. He said that the Holy Spirit is going to come and give you power to accomplish the great commission of making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). Notice that they couldn't do it on their own. They needed the Holy Spirit. "We need the Holy Spirit."

We see the Holy Spirit come in Acts, chapter 2. They were all together in one place, and the Holy Spirit came. Let's pick it up in verse 2, ...

Acts 2:2-4

And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

The Holy Spirit came and gave them miraculous speech. They spoke languages that they never knew before. Normally, it takes you several years to learn a foreign language. But, within a matter of moments, these believers were enabled to speak in languages unknown to them, so that the foreigners from all around heard them speak in their own language (Acts 2:9-11). And they weren't merely speaking anything. No, they were speaking of the mighty deeds of God. Look at verse 11, ...

Acts 2:11

We hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.

Such an occurrence gave Peter an audience to proclaim the gospel, and three thousand were saved. Acts 2:41 says, "so then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." But, I want for you to see that it was the Holy Spirit that brought all of this about. It wasn't John's great plan. It wasn't Peter's great plan. It wasn't Andrew's great plan. None of them said, "Hey, I've got an idea! Let's all get up and speak in languages unknown to us. Surely, this will attract the attention of the crowds. Then, we can tell them about Jesus." No, that wasn't in their plans. But it was God's plans. The Holy Spirit came and worked all of this according to His plan.

Leaders in the church, "we need the Holy Spirit" to accomplish His agenda here at Rock Valley Bible Church. His ideas will be much better than our ideas ever could be.

Well, as you work through Acts, you see in chapter 3 that the healing of the lame man gave Peter another opportunity to preach the gospel, where another 2,000 men (at least) believed (Acts 4:4). But, with such success came some hardship as well: Peter was arrested and set before the most powerful religious leaders of the day, the same leaders who had orchestrated the killing of Jesus. When they asked him, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" Peter responded by boldly declaring that it all was in the power of the name of Jesus Christ, whom they had rejected (Acts 4:11). But, (for our purposes this morning), I want for you to look at verse 8.

Acts 4:8

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said to them.

Think about what this means. On the day of Pentecost, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. And now, he is again identified as being "filled with the Holy Spirit."

What's happening here? Now, in part, I believe that it is in answer to Jesus' own words recorded in Luke 12:11-12: "When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." And here was Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit, being led in how and what he should say. And the Holy Spirit empowers him to speak the gospel clearly and powerfully, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The religious leaders had no excuse. They heard the saving message of Christ clearly and boldly proclaimed and they rejected Peter, just like they had rejected Jesus. After a bit of counsel, they were threatened and released (Acts 4:21).

There is something for us here to learn. God's ministry must be done in God's power. If we want to speak boldly, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. There is certainly a way that ministry can be done in the flesh. Judas tried this (John 18). Simon, the Magician, tried it (Acts 8). Demas tried it (2 Tim. 4:10). Mark tried it (Acts 13). But, by God's grace, let's do ministry God's way. Let us do ministry in God's power, by being full of the Holy Spirit.

Leaders in the church, "we need the Holy Spirit" to give us boldness to perform His ministry.

For the sake of time, let's move forward to Acts, chapter 6. Here we see the church in turmoil. There is dissension among the ranks. There were many needy widows among the church. So many, in fact, that some of them were being neglected. Let's read about it in verse 1, ...

Acts 6:1-2

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

Apparently, the twelve apostles were spending much time helping see that the widows were being cared for. But, at one point, the demands of the ministry became too much for them. They were being pulled from two directions. On the one hand, there were the widows, who needed help. On the other hand, the word needed to be ministered. According to verse 2, the apostles prioritized the ministry of the word of God. That's not to say that they neglected the ministry to the widows. On the contrary, they appointed men to take care of this noble task. Look at verse 3, ...

Acts 6:3-4

Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

Right here is where you see the two offices in the church begin to develop. On the one hand, you have the apostles. Their priority is prayer. Their priority is the ministry of the word. They correspond to our elders and pastors and overseers.

On the other hand, you see these seven men, who are appointed to serve the tables. Their priority is the ministries of mercy. Their priority is the helping others with the physical needs. . These men correspond to our deacons.

And as much as we can, we are trying to follow this example. The elders and pastors and overseers (all of which are synonymous terms), are to be devoted to prayer to the ministry of the word. That is, to the spiritual needs of the church body The deacons are to be devoted to helping with the physical needs of the church body. It was no accident that our future deacon presented the budget in our service this

morning. Certainly, the elders looked at the budget and approved it, but the deacons were the ones with their hands in the middle of it all. And this is how it should be.

Eugene Peterson tells the story of how he almost quit the ministry. He was so burdened with the matters of the ministry, that his five year old daughter felt very neglected in the process. On one occasion, She came to him and asked him to read a book to her. He said that he couldn't because he had a meeting at church. Exasperated, she said, "This is the thirty-eighth night in a row that you have not been home." This cry of exasperation was a wake-up call for Peterson.

Right then, he knew that he had become terribly unbalanced. And so, he turned in his resignation to his leadership team, telling them how he "had no time for close personal relationships and no time for prayer." He said that his "very capacity for love and prayer had atrophied alarmingly." He said the he "could see no way out but to get out of there and get a new start someplace else."

Wisely, his leadership asked him, "What do you want to do?" He said, "I want to study God's word long and carefully so that when I stand before you and preach and teach I will be accurate. I want to pray slowly and livingly, so that my relation with God will be inward and honest. And I want to be with you, often and leisurely, so that we can recognize each other as close companions on the way of the cross and be available for counsel and encouragement to each other." Basically, "I want to study; I want to pray; I want to be with you." What a great statement of ministry. A commitment to God's word. A commitment to prayer. A commitment to the people of God.

One elder then responded, "If that is what you want to do, why don't you do it? Nobody told you you couldn't, did they?" With a touch of anger, Peterson responded, "Because I have to run this church. Do you realize that running this church is a full-time job? There is simply no time to be a pastor?"

Another elder said, "Why don't you let us run the church?" Peterson said, "You don't know how." He said, "It sounds to me like you don't know how to be a pastor either. How about you let us learn how to run the church and we let you learn how to be a pastor?"

Peterson then remarked how from that moment on, the heavens opened and the dove descended. He was given peace. He was freed from the grinding tasks of the ministry, to devote himself to prayer and to the ministry of the word (just like Acts 6:4 says). [\[2\]](#)

This is my heart. This is my heart for any future elders, that we don't become overburdened by "running the church," that we forget to shepherd the church.

Anyway, I digress. Because, my point is actually in verse 3. Notice the kind of men that should be placed in the role of overseeing the care of the widows.

Acts 6:3

Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

Future deacons, you need the Holy Spirit. You need to be like these men. Verse 5, ...

Acts 6:5

The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

Again, we are reminded of the importance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the leaders of the church.

In verse 6, we see their installation: "And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them." We will do this at the end of our service. We will lay our hands upon the future leaders, seeking the Lord's blessing upon their lives as they serve this church. We will lay hands upon them as a sign of affirmation as we seek the favor of the Lord.

Well, let's move on. As we continue our work through the book of Acts, I want to go through a few Scriptures that shows the Holy Spirit actively involved in ministry. We're going to go through some verses pretty quickly. As we go through them, I want for us to realize how we need the Holy Spirit to guide the ministry at Rock Valley Bible Church. So, turn over to chapter 8.

Here we see the Philip (one of the seven men chosen to serve tables) being led by the Spirit. He was on his way back to Jerusalem from Samaria (Acts 8:25). But an angel of the Lord spoke to him and directed him to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza. And as he was on that road to Gaza: "The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join this chariot'" (Acts 8:29).

In the chariot, Philip encountered the Ethiopian eunuch, who was ripe for evangelism. Philip reached Jesus to him. The eunuch came to faith through Philip's words (Acts 8:36-40). This would never have happened apart from the role of the Holy Spirit to guide Philip.

Turn over to Acts, chapter 10. The chapter opens with Cornelius being told in a vision to "dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter" (Acts 10:5). While the men are on the way, Peter was praying on the rooftop. While praying, he had a strange vision of a sheet coming down from heaven with all sorts of unclean animals in it. Then, he heard a voice telling him to eat. But, Peter refused, because he had never eaten anything unclean in all his life. Now, look down at verse 19, ...

Acts 10:19-20

While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go

downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.

The Spirit was involved in sending the men from the house of Cornelius. The Spirit was involved in telling Peter to follow these men. And thus, the door was opened for the Gentiles to believe in Christ!

Turn over to Acts 13. Again, we see the Holy Spirit prompting the spiritual leaders of the early church in the ways of evangelism. The first two verses of the chapter make it very clear.

Acts 13:1-2

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said [to the leaders of the church in Antioch], "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

And thus began the missions movement. Barnabas and Saul set out on their first missionary journey, to bring the gospel to ends of the earth. Please notice that it was the moving of the Spirit of God that launched these men into the world. Indeed, that's what we read in verse 4, "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus."

There's no doubt in my mind that the Holy Spirit guided them each step of the way. Turn over to Acts 16. Here, Paul is on his second missionary journey. Look at verses 6 and 7 and see the role of the Holy Spirit in their travels.

Acts 16:6-7

They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;

For reasons only known to the mind of God, the Holy Spirit prohibited them from traveling to Asia. The Holy Spirit (called the Spirit of Jesus) also prohibited them from travelling to Bithynia. Instead, the Spirit directed them through a vision to go to Macedonia through a vision in the night (Acts 16:9-10).

Do you see how important the role of the Holy Spirit is in ministry? We need Him to guide us and direct us in all that we do. Now, I don't believe that the Holy Spirit today speaks like He spoke to those in the Bible. They heard audible words. But, I do believe that the Holy Spirit guides us in our paths. "The mind of a man plans his way. But the Lord directs his steps" (Prov. 16:9). And when we walk down the paths of ministry, the Holy Spirit will open and shut doors before us. We need to be attentive to His leading.

Let's go to one last passage: Acts 20. This is one of the most tender passages in all of the Bible. Paul is on his third missionary journey, and is on his way back to Jerusalem. He desperately wants to get back to Jerusalem before Pentecost. And yet, passing by Ephesus, he wants to see the people that he loves and the church in Ephesus. But, Paul well knew that he couldn't do both. Any visit to the city, would certainly turn into a long visit. So, he compromised. He stopped at the coastal town of Miletus, and sent a messenger to summon the elders of the church in Ephesus to come and meet with him there. When the elders had made the journey to see Paul, he gave them the speech recorded for us in Acts 20 (beginning in verse 18).

I want for us to spend some extra time here focusing upon Paul's words, as they are most appropriate for those who will be serving with me as elders of the church. He begins by telling them of his own ministry.

Acts 20:18-21

You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such was the ministry of Paul. It was a serving ministry, being with the people all the time, even in hard times. This is the spirit of Eugene Peterson's words I quoted earlier. "I want to be with you often and leisurely." Paul's ministry was also a speaking ministry, filled with encouragement to those in the church, and filled with evangelism to those outside the church. Future elders, these are good categories for you to think of as you think of your ministry: serving and speaking.

In verse 22, Paul's talk with them takes a turn, he begins to focus upon his future, which isn't so bright. Instead, it's filled with affliction and hardship.

Acts 20:22-24

And now, behold, bound by the Spirit (or bound in spirit), I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul abandoned everything in his life to serve the church, even when it meant great difficulty. Now, I want for you to notice (again) the crucial

role of the Holy Spirit in Paul's life. In verse 23, we see the Holy Spirit's testimony of Paul's future: "the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies ... that ... afflictions await me." Paul knew very well from the Lord, Himself, that the task set before Him would not be an easy task. Leadership in the church is never easy. Future elders, don't expect it to be easy. That's why we need the Holy Spirit. But, God's grace is sufficient. I have found Him to be true in my life. I know that you will find Him to be true in your life as well.

And now, in verse 25, Paul speaks of his own departure from Ephesus. He said, ...

Acts 20:25-27

And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

As he leaves the men in Ephesus, he tells them that he is "innocent" and blameless. He didn't pull any punches. Rather, he dealt straight with them in all things. He declared to them "the whole purpose of God." He didn't hide anything that God had revealed. So also, leaders, have your eye upon the day when you leave Rock Valley Bible Church (I hope that you leave at your death). But, so live and so shepherd the people of the church, that you can call yourself "blameless", that you have set before the people the entirety of the word of God.

Now, beginning in verse 28, Paul gives some counsel to the elders. It is every bit as applicable for us today as it was for them 2,000 years ago.

Acts 20:28

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Here's a call to be vigilant in your ministry. "Be on guard." Looking first to yourself, fight sin in your own heart before you ever fight it in the heart of others. Be diligent to walk blamelessly before the Lord first. Only then will you be able to guard the flock.

Paul's counsel to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16 was to "pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching." Watch (and study) your life hard. So live as to be able to say with Paul, "I am innocent of the blood of all men." Look also to "be on guard ... for all the flock" (verse 28). Why? Because of what awaits the church, ...

Acts 20:29-31

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

This is the reality of church life. People see the church as an opportunity. The same people are gathering every week to worship. It's an easy place to gain a following. People come into the church with their own agenda. People come into the church wanting others to follow them. Be on guard against them.

It's not in vain that one of the metaphors for the church is that we are a "flock" of sheep. Because, there are wolves "out there." But, know that there may also be wolves "in here." Verse 30 says that "from among your own selves men will arise." It's not just those "out there" we need to guard against. It is also those "in here" from which the danger may arise. Thus, the need to be vigilant in your shepherding work.

Let's go back to verse 28 and look at the role of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 20:28

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

We may appoint elders in the church today. We may lay hands upon men and pray for them. But, I believe that something far more significant is going on here. I believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit at this hour. He is the ultimate one who appoints leaders in the church. "The Holy Spirit has made you overseers." God is appointing you this day to be overseers in the church. An overseer is another name for an elder. An overseer is one who stands above and watches over the church. He "oversees" the church.

God is appointing you this day to do the work of "shepherding" the church. This is where we get the word, "pastor." Future elders, think of yourselves as fellow pastors with me: shepherding the church, caring for the church, feeding the church, guarding the church, guiding the church, loving the church.

This is the church that Jesus Christ died to bring into being. "He purchased [it] with His blood." Oh, may we never forget this. This isn't your church. This isn't my church. This is the church of Jesus Christ. He is the one who purchased it. He is the one who owns it. He is the one who loves it for more than we ever will. We are merely His servants, given the task of caring for it. His death upon the cross must always be foremost in our minds.

Well, I love what Paul then does in verse 32, ...

Acts 20:32-35

And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

He commends the elders to God. In many ways, that's what we doing this day. We are praying and commending you to God and to the word of His grace.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 15, 2011 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Spiritual Leadership, p. 97

[2] Eugene Peterson, "Under the Unpredictable Plant," pp. 34-39.