

How can you tell when the Holy Spirit is alive and well, and working in the lives of people? There are many ways – many *correct* ways – to answer that question. That’s because the Holy Spirit shows Himself in various ways, including ways we’ve been observing in our study of Acts.

For example, the Holy Spirit manifested Himself through the sights and sounds of Pentecost, through the powerful preaching of Peter, by healings through the apostles, and through a great number of conversions, including many at one time (as the three thousand on Pentecost), or incrementally, as suggested by...

Read 2:47b

*** ⁴⁷ ... And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.**

Some of those manifestations may leave us wondering, *“Yea, that’s great, but what about somebody like me? I’m not Peter or John. I don’t have the gift of healing. I don’t preach – at all – and if I did, I don’t think I’d see thousands of people coming to Jesus.”*

As mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in various ways – including in more subtle ways. For example, Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit produces fruit in the form of virtue and character. After describing fruit produced by our fallen humanity, Paul says...

Read Galatians 5:22,23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Maybe these are not spectacular, but such manifestations provide significant evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a follower of Jesus.

But we’ve also seen evidence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Christian community as a whole, not just in their conversion, but how they lived. Remember the first summary statement by Luke? It followed his record of the supernatural happenings on Pentecost and the conversion of three thousand souls:

Read 2:41-47

⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

How did the Holy Spirit impact these early believers? * They were devoted to the truth of God (the apostles’ teaching) and to the people of God (fellowship through the breaking of bread and through prayer), additionally expressed through generously sharing, regularly gathering, and joyfully praising together, resulting in favor in the community and growth in the church. And the good news is that the Holy Spirit is *still* making His presence felt in the same way today.

This morning we come to the second major summary statement in Acts, which affirms and amplifies the first one, giving further evidence of how the Holy Spirit impacts the lives of everyday believers like us – even today.

[Turn to Acts 4]

After being threatened by the Jewish leadership council for preaching the good news about Jesus, Peter and John returned to the fellowship of believers where they reported on what had just happened, and then engaged in prayer. What was the result of their praying?

Read v.31

***³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.**

Clearly the Holy Spirit was at work, as v.31 attests. But we also see His work through the summary statement that follows, which at the risk of oversimplification, we can capture in several key words: Unity, Power, Grace, and Generosity. Unity is reflected in v.23:

Read v.32a

* ³² **And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.**

We've seen an emphasis so far in Acts on the unity that characterized these early believers. Here Luke tells us they **were of one heart and soul**. And in chapter 1, after Jesus ascended, we read this about the first 120 followers of Jesus:

Read 1:14a

* ¹⁴ **These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer...**

And then again in the first summary statement:

Read 2:46a

* ⁴⁶ **Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple...**

Whether the description of them is being of **one mind** or **of one heart and soul**, the picture is basically the same: that of a unified family of disciples of Jesus.

In Ephesians, Paul encourages believers to preserve the unity that they were granted by virtue of their common relationship with Jesus:

Read Ephesians 4:3--6

* ³ **being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** ⁴ ***There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;*** ⁵ ***one Lord, one faith, one baptism,*** ⁶ ***one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.***

Because we share the same Father, Lord, and Holy Spirit by whom we were baptized into one body, sharing the same hope, it's incumbent upon us to preserve the unity into which God has placed us. And these early believers in Acts were off to a good start.

Not only did they share **one heart and soul**, but they also shared their possessions:

Read v.32b

* ³² **... and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.**

We were already alerted to this expression of unity in the first summary statement:

Read 2:44,45

* ⁴⁴ **And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;** ⁴⁵ **and they *began* selling their property and**

possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

We'll talk more about this sharing of their resources in a few moments, but it's clear that v.32 stresses * the unity that was a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives.

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus prayed that His followers (current *and* future) would be marked by unity, which would enhance their witness and reveal God's work in their lives.

Read John 17:20-23

* ²⁰ **"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;** ²¹ **that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.** ²² **"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;** ²³ **I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.**

Two more words come to mind as the passage continues: Power and Grace:

Read v.33

* ³³ **And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.**

The spiritual and material unity that marked the early church provided an attractive backdrop against which the gospel was preached. It gave appealing, demonstrative support to the miracles and preaching taking place through the apostles.

Luke says * **"with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."** I'm not certain what Luke had in mind when he says they were giving testimony to the resurrection of Jesus **with great power**. Maybe one, some, or all of the following possibilities are what Luke has in mind. He may mean **great power** in the sense of accompanying miracles, which display God's power. Or, he may mean **great power** in terms of the powerful impact of their preaching – it continued to lead to conversions. Or, he may have in mind **great power** in terms of the apostles' boldness. In any case, the Spirit's presence was evident in great power.

Key to their preaching * was **the resurrection of the Lord Jesus**. That's clear from Peter very first sermon:

Read 2:23,24

* ²³ **this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.** ²⁴ **"But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.**

And then again...

Read 2:32

* ³¹ **he [David] looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.** ³² **"This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.** ³³ **"Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.** ³⁴ **"For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, ³⁵ UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'"** ³⁶ **"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified."**

The preaching of the resurrection of Jesus was important for many reasons: it showed that Jesus conquered sin and death, it showed that prophecy was fulfilled, it showed that Jesus was vindicated by God, it enabled Jesus to ascend to a place of rule, it allowed Jesus to send the promised Holy Spirit, and it was proof that those who rejected Jesus made a big mistake – and needed to repent.

Not only was God's power evident, but so was His grace: *** and abundant grace was upon them all**. Like the phrase **great power**, it's not clear to me specifically what he has in mind when he says **abundant grace was upon them all**. He may have in mind **abundant grace** in terms of favor, similar to what he said in Acts 2:47: **"...having favor ["grace" in 4:33] with all the people**. Or, he may mean God's **abundant grace** that lead to them being blessed with great power. Or, he may mean God's

abundant grace that enabled the needs of those in poverty to be met, as is evident in the verse that follow. Since God's grace is so abundant, it's difficult to limit it to any one of those possibilities!

Luke returns to the unity expressed in the meeting of needs. A word that comes to mind here is Generosity:

Read vs.34,35

* ³⁴ **For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales ³⁵ and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.**

When Luke says **all who were owners of land or houses would see them**, he's using hyperbole, for as we'll see, there were still believers in Jerusalem who continued to own homes (Acts 12:12). Luke's point is that many were giving generously so that the needs of God's people were met. As Ben Witherington III notes (p.208): *"...the basis of the distribution was not some ethic that all should have exactly the same amount of goods or money but that no believer should be in need."*

James would later promote this same spirit of generosity springing out of love, when he wrote:

Read James 2:16

* ¹⁵ **If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?**

And John would also stress the importance of such expressions of love:

Read I John 3:16-18

* ¹⁶ **We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.** ¹⁷ **But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?** ¹⁸ **Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.**

Aren't you glad that God has used others at times in your life to meet your needs? And aren't you glad that He has also used you to meet the needs of others? What a wonderful privilege

it is – to show the love of Christ in tangible ways!

* At this time the apostles appear to be the point men for the collection and distribution of the gifts that were given. They were the obvious leaders, and well respected and trusted by their fellow believers. As we'll see in chapter 6, they would soon pass on the oversight of the distribution of these funds to others.

Luke then proceeds to give us an example of someone who gave generously to see that the needs of others were met:

Read vs.36,37

* ³⁶ Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Joseph was not a Palestinian Jew, but traced his roots to Cyprus, and would have been quite familiar with Greek language and culture. Either he or his family had been born there. He was a Levite, but not a priest. Levites in Jerusalem often served as Temple police or scribes. Under Mosaic Law, Levites were not supposed to own land (Num.18:20,24; Deut.10:9), but that seems not to have been followed in the days of the prophets nor in Jesus' day, as in the case of Joseph, who owned land, either in Cyprus or in Jerusalem.

Joseph was given a nickname. Nicknames are usually quite revealing *and* fitting, as in the case of Jack the Ripper, Andre the Giant, Minnesota Fats, and Bozo the Clown. Joseph's nickname, **given to him by the apostles**, was **Barnabas**. The Hebrew is comes from the words "son" (bar) plus "prophet" (nabi), thus "son of a prophet/preacher." In Greek he was known as **Son of Encouragement**. He was known for offering encouragement to others. It may have been frequently with words, but not limited to words, as is the case here, where he encourages those in need through giving generously.

This is not the last time we will encounter Barnabas. He's mentioned 23 times in Acts, and with good reason. He's one special person who lived up to his nickname. He came alongside many to exhort and encourage them. As we work our way through Acts, we'll continue

painting a portrait of Barnabas – one worthy of a place of honor in God's art gallery.

The mention of Barnabas by Luke right here is significant for several reasons. It introduces us to this significant character who will prove to be blessing to the early church. The mention of Barnabas also serves to illustrate the generosity Luke is writing about – and Barnabas provides a stark contrast to the couple we're going to meet the next time we are in Acts.

I think what Paul wrote of the believer in Macedonia in II Corinthians, could also be written of Barnabas:

Read II Corinthians 8:3-5

³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave of their own accord*, ⁴ begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, ⁵ and *this*, not as we had expected, * **but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.**

Their generosity was a reflection of their deep devotion to the Lord. Paul says the Macedonians **first gave themselves to the Lord**. He uses **first** in the sense of "foremost" or "above all else." And their primary commitment **to the Lord** was reflected in their commitment to Paul and his comrades, *and* in giving generously to the needy saints in Jerusalem. Barnabas is cut from that same bolt of cloth. Because he was consecrated to God, so was everything he had, including his property and his money. He viewed himself as a steward – as one entrusted with *God's* resources.

As R. Kent Hughes put it (p.158): ***"When we know that our lives are not our own, neither will we think that our possessions are our own. It's easy to surrender part when we've already given the whole."***

Have you given yourself completely to the Lord? Martin Marty in his newsletter *Context*, quotes Halford Luccock, Yale professor and preacher, who wrote: ***"You remember that among the Franks, whole armies were sometimes given baptism at one stroke, and many warriors went into the water with their right hands held high, so that they did not get wet. Then they could say, 'This hand has never been baptized,' and they could swing their battle axes just as freely as ever. The modern counterpart of that partial baptism is seen in***

many people who have been baptized, all except their pocketbooks. They held these high out of the water.”

Does God have all of you? Do you give evidence of your conversion in all you do, including in your giving?

We often mistakenly think that blessing is obtained by getting. But F.B. Meyer hit the nail on the head when he said: ***“He is the richest man in the esteem of the world who has gotten most. He is the richest man in the esteem of heaven who has given most.”***

And that reminds me of Jesus Himself. As Paul wrote a few verses later:

Read II Corinthians 8:9

*** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.**

The Son of God is the greatest example of generosity ever. He left the splendor of heaven to sojourn on earth. The richness of the person of Christ is contrasted with humility associated with His incarnation and what followed on earth – the lowly manger, the rejection and abuse, the death on a cross. He did that so that we who are spiritually impoverished might become spiritually enriched – so that we who lack righteousness might possess His righteousness.

Have you been the recipient of the generosity of Jesus? Have you received His gracious provision of His righteousness in exchange for you sin, the guilt of which He bore on the cross? Have you confessed you sin and placed your faith in Him? The result is not only peace with God but placement into His family – the family we’ve been studying about in the book of Acts – the family that’s been characterized by unity, power, grace, and generosity – a family with a mission of testifying to the world about Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

If you are a member of His family, then show it by your commitment to Jesus and your brothers and sister in Christ. Show it in preserving the unity with other believers that you were granted by virtue of your common relationship with Jesus. Show it by your testifying to others about who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Show it be your generosity springing from your love – especially your love for fellow believers.

Maybe this week, more than ever before, you’ll experience what these early believers experienced.