

JACK LEVISON

SEVEN
SECRETS
OF THE
SPIRIT-FILLED
LIFE

Daily Renewal,
Purpose and Joy
When You Partner
with the
Holy Spirit

“Jack Levison has been an inspiration to me personally at a distance since I was hooked by his book *Fresh Air*. I then began to obtain all of Jack’s titles and to drink deeply from his insights on participating in the life of the triune God via the indwelling Spirit of God. His newest work, *Seven Secrets of the Spirit-Filled Life*, only adds to the appreciation I have for his profound yet accessible insights into participation in the triune life. Take the 49 chapters you now hold in your hand and let Jack be a servant of the paraclete and guide you into the flow of the Spirit’s transformative, therapeutic presence.”

Dr. Mark J. Chironna, bishop protector,
Order of St. Maximus; founding and lead pastor,
Church On The Living Edge

“With wit, insight and clarity, Jack Levison speaks to Christians young and old who yearn for a sense of connection to God. Drawing from the Bible, Christian tradition and everyday life, Levison shows us secrets that can help us kindle (or rekindle) fervor and hope in our Christian discipleship.”

Susan R. Garrett, professor of New Testament,
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

“Jack both thinks clearly and longs deeply for spirit-life. He teaches us that where there is a deep experience of the divine, the sincere pursuit of virtue and an acceleration of growth, the Spirit of God is vibrantly present. In this book Jack (and his son!) give us concrete, accessible, actionable help in the most important challenge of human living. Get ready to breathe deep.”

John Ortberg, founder, BecomeNew.Me

“Jack Levison opens secrets of the Spirit-filled life from across the pages of Scripture and gives us seven pathways for living the Spirit-filled life. What a gift! Living and breathing fully moment by moment along these pathways will open us up to the fullness of the inexhaustible secrets of God. How I wish, as a lifelong Pentecostal Christian, I had some of these perspectives long ago.”

Amos Yong, professor of theology and mission,
Fuller Seminary

“What a terrific guide for living the Spirit-filled life! Dr. Levison provides a Scripture, reflection on the Spirit’s work drawn from the text and a simple daily exercise to help readers experience the Spirit’s work in their lives. I highly recommend this book.”

Adam Hamilton, senior pastor, United Methodist
Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas; author,
Luke: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts, and Outlaws

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CONTENTS

Introduction 11

SECRET 1 **Anticipate infinitely more**

Discover the Holy Spirit in your everyday life

1. Breathe the breath of praise 18
2. Practice in secret 21
3. Be filled with the Spirit of wisdom 24
4. Say *No!* to distractions 27
5. Wait—*actively* 30
6. Ponder the vision 33
7. Reflect on the promise of infinitely more 37

SECRET 2 **Saturate yourself with Scripture**

Discover how the Bible nourishes the Spirit-filled life

8. Breathe the breath of integrity 42
9. Study with the Spirit 45
10. Drink deep of ageless visions 48
11. Remember your first faith 51
12. Learn the Bible from Jesus 54
13. Wait for the deep things of God 57
14. Reflect on the Spirit and Scripture 61

SECRET 3 Commit to community

Discover the power of the Holy Spirit alongside others

15. Breathe the breath of creation 66
16. Get ready for the promise 69
17. Lean into community life 72
18. Become a disciplined disciple 75
19. Stay together 78
20. Struggle for harmony 81
21. Reflect on staying connected 85

SECRET 4 Find the heart of the Spirit

Discover the energy of the Holy Spirit in you

22. Breathe the breath of justice 90
23. Receive the Spirit of adoption 93
24. Confess the one truth that matters 96
25. Grow in the grace of spiritual gifts 99
26. Meet one Spirit in many gifts 102
27. Cultivate the character of Christ 105
28. Reflect on the heart of the Spirit 109

SECRET 5 Go where the going gets tough

Discover the Holy Spirit in the wilderness

29. Breathe the breath of mortality 114
30. Don't be frightened of what lies ahead 117
31. Head into the desert 120
32. Follow your guide in the desert 123
33. Seek the Spirit in a world of snakes and scorpions 126
34. Stand faithful and speak faithfully 129
35. Reflect on courage in the desert 133

SECRET 6 Break out of the familiar

Discover how the Holy Spirit transforms our world

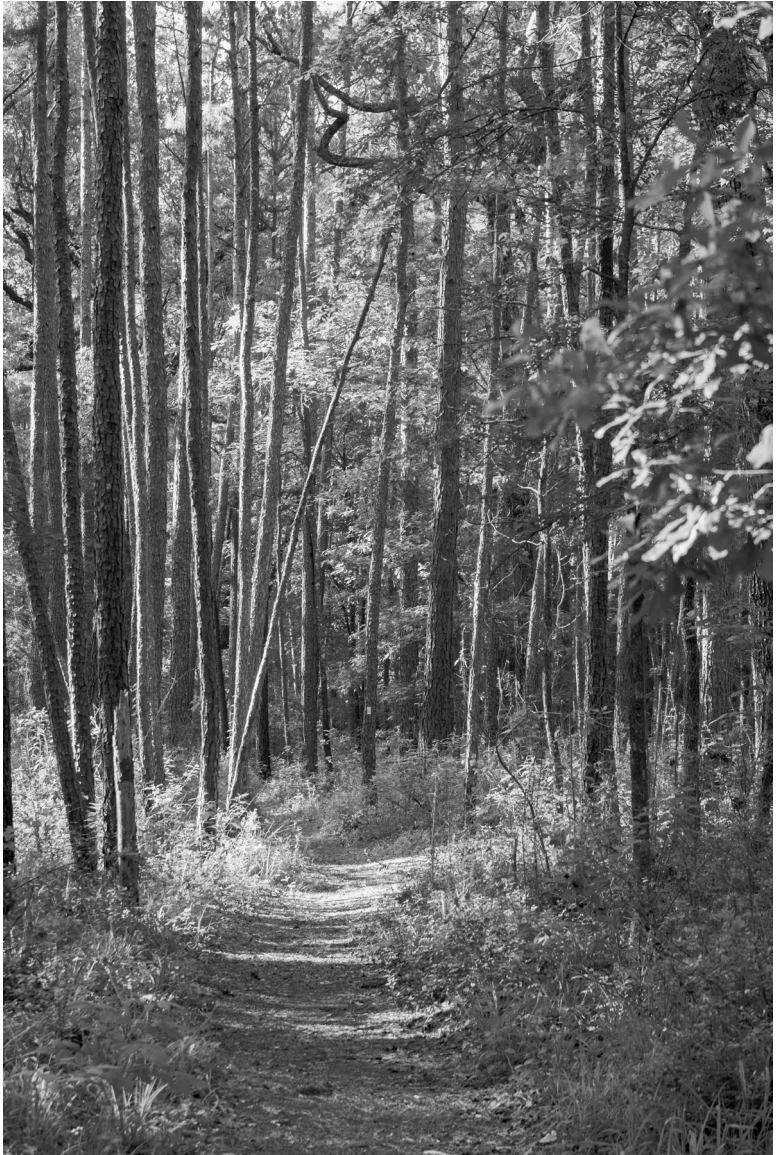
- 36. Breathe the breath of courage 138
- 37. Find the Spirit among the unexpected 141
- 38. Bring justice to the nations 144
- 39. Lavish blessings on the poor 147
- 40. Follow the Spirit to strangers 150
- 41. Discover the Spirit in difference 153
- 42. Reflect on the risk of reaching out 157

SECRET 7 Leave a spiritual legacy

Discover how to help others experience the Holy Spirit

- 43. Breathe the breath of intimacy 162
- 44. Teach and trust others 165
- 45. Learn to share responsibilities 168
- 46. Become a mentor 171
- 47. Put your protégé to the test 174
- 48. Encourage the next generation 177
- 49. Reflect on your spiritual legacy 181

Acknowledgments 185



INTRODUCTION

On my first day of college, I trekked up three flights of stairs in Wheaton College's Blanchard Hall. I sat down with 34 other students and waited—until a red-haired, middle-aged man in tortoiseshell glasses and a three-piece gray wool suit walked in, set his briefcase on the desk, opened it, turned without a word to the chalkboard and wrote something in Greek on it. Then he turned toward the class, and with a sheepish grin and playful eyes, asked, “Who knows what this means?” Well, it was the first day of Greek class, and none of us could read a word of what he'd written. So he said, “This is Philippians 4:13. Who knows what it says?” Because this was Wheaton College, nearly every student in the class raised a hand. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” we said in near unison.

Even more playfully, yet with a more serious look, too, the professor asked us, “Is this true? Can you do all things through Christ who strengthens you? Can you pass a chemistry exam without studying because Christ strengthens you? Can you run a mile without training because Christ strengthens you?” No, suggested Dr. Gerald Hawthorne, you can’t, try as you might. But you can “face all things through the One who gives you power.” *That* we can do.

Jerry went on to explain different philosophies of translation—literal versus dynamic equivalent, the difference between translating words versus translating concepts, and of course, the difference between translations like the New International Version, in which the class had memorized Philippians 4:13 (I can *do* all this), and the translation he had done from the original Greek (I can *face* all things). I’m beginning with this recollection because of how powerfully Jerry reframed, refreshed and revitalized the meaning of a Bible verse I thought I knew and had taken to heart.

This is what I crave for you as you read, study and pray through this book: that sense of refreshment I felt on that autumn day in 1974. It’s what I’ve hoped and dreamed and worked for through decades of college and seminary teaching. There is so much insight to be gotten from the Bible, some of it supporting what we already believe but much of it upending what we already believe. You’ll find both sorts of insight in the days ahead, and I hope you’ll be open to new insight each day.

Now for some advice about how to use this book. For starters, it contains 49 short chapters because the Jewish feast of Pentecost occurs fifty days after Passover. It would be very easy to read one chapter a day for 49 days. Why is that important? The earliest followers of Jesus, Luke tells us in the New Testament book of Acts, were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. So the day after you complete the 49th chapter can be *your* Pentecost.

But don't feel obligated to finish this book in 49 days. The purpose of this book is renewal, purpose and joy. In fact, instead of working through *Seven Secrets of the Spirit-filled Life* in 49 days, you may want to go through it in about a year. That's one chapter a week. This works well because the applications aren't always easy, and you may want to practice one application for a week so it becomes a regular part of your spiritual life.

There are seven sections in this book, each highlighting one secret of Spirit-filled living. Notice that chapters for each secret have their own rhythm.

- In the first chapter of every section—chapters 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 36 and 43—you'll be asked to breathe. That's because the Hebrew word translated in the Old Testament as Spirit is *ruach*, which often means breath. But not just breath. Never *just* breath. Breath—a steady pulse, lungs rising and falling,

as we'll see—is the bedrock of the Spirit-filled life. When we breathe, we make room for renewal, we make space for discovery of purpose, we experience the respite of joy.

- The second through sixth chapters of each section contain writing on a given secret. There's a progression to these seven secrets. They begin with your individual experience of the Spirit-filled life, branch out to include the Christians around you and the world God wants to transform through you, and end with the legacy you can leave to the next generation. Yet this progression doesn't mean you need to read these in order. Feel free to dip in anywhere; I hope any chapter in any order will offer you plenty of insight to experience renewal, purpose and joy.
- On the last chapter of every section—days 7, 14, 21, 28, 35, 42 and 49—we'll reflect on a photograph rather than a biblical passage. Take your time with these photos. They are beautiful, yes, but they also capture the meaning of the previous chapters in that section. Think of this last chapter of each section as a breather—matching the first chapter of each section, when you'll actually take time to breathe—a chance to imagine a Spirit-filled life rich with renewal, purpose and joy.

The photograph at the start of this introduction—there will be seven more—represents the path you are about to take. Picture yourself standing at the start. Take whatever you need—a bottle of water, an energy bar, insect repellent (mosquitos swarmed Jeremy as he took photographs on this path!)—or more practical for your setting, no doubt, a pen, a journal, a cup of tea or coffee, a friend. Before you take a step, smell the fresh scent of the forest. Listen for birdsong. Then walk slowly. Think of the path as what I've put into this book—Bible passages, inspirational words, applications and prayers. But look, too, beyond the path to what you may discover there, outside of what I've written, because the Holy Spirit is all around, often in unexpected and unfamiliar places.

As you read, finally, I pray the Holy Spirit will transport you far beyond your expectations to a world in which you can face anything through the One who strengthens you.

SECRET 1

ANTICIPATE
INFINITELY MORE

*Discover the Holy Spirit
in your everyday life*

1

Breathe the breath of praise

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

—Psalm 33:6 NKJV

Praise is beautiful on the tongues of the upright. That's how I would translate the second line in Psalm 33:1. In *The Message*, it reads, "Right-living people sound best when praising." But praise doesn't come naturally to most of us. Most of us find it much easier to express hard-edged criticism, shrill judgments, relentless complaints. These roll easily off our tongues. But affirmation? Admiration? Acclaim? Not so much. That's why praise requires practice, and it's a practice we cultivate moment by moment, day to day.

God, in Psalm 33, gives us a model for practicing praise: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (verse 6). The word *breath* is actually the Hebrew word *ruach*, which can be translated as Spirit and wind. It’s an amazingly broad-shouldered Hebrew word that requires more than one word in English to translate it: Spirit-breath, Spirit-wind, Spirit-God. In this psalm, God created with a word when the Spirit-breath spoke life into existence, or again, in *The Message*, “The skies were made by GOD’s command; he breathed the word and the stars popped out” (verse 6).

We didn’t create the universe, but we can mirror that creative act by tracing it in praise. If God’s Spirit-breath spoke the world into being, God’s Spirit-breath within us can flow in praise for God’s creation. No, we are not the Creator, but that same Spirit-breath can roll over our tongues, too.

This sort of praise is not an end in itself. It sets God—and humans—in their proper places. The poet goes on to say that God “shoots down the world’s power-schemes” (Psalm 33:10 MESSAGE). On this, then, our first day together, we’ve learned how the Spirit-filled life begins with the praise of a powerful Creator, who puts our fragile human lives into their proper perspective.

Anticipate infinitely more

Knowing that *ruach* is Spirit-breath, God's breath in you, breathe in and out deeply for one minute, at this, the start of week one. (Set a timer, if need be.) Each time you breathe out, say simply, "I praise you, God." In this way, let words of praise roll over your tongue.

Holy Spirit,

*You breathed a word of creation through God's lips
and set the world on a solid foundation
Breathe now a word of praise through my lips
and set my world on a solid footing. Amen.*

2

Practice in secret

And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you.”

—Genesis 41:38–39 NKJV

When the most powerful man in the world called, they ran—literally hustled—Joseph out of the dungeon (Genesis 41:14). He quickly shaved, changed his clothes and appeared before the Egyptian pharaoh. Pharaoh told him some disturbing dreams that his own magicians couldn’t unravel. But Joseph could: Seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of famine. What Joseph did next

is the kicker. He told Pharaoh what to do: store up food during the fat years to distribute it during the lean years. Good, practical, healthy advice for how to run a nation.

Stunned, Pharaoh asked, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?” Then he answered his own question: “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you.” In the original Hebrew, the parallel between Pharaoh’s question and answer is unavoidable. Is there anyone with the Spirit *like him*? There is no one wise *like you*!

When he saw how Joseph possessed practical wisdom, Pharaoh grasped the connection: Joseph was wise because he had God’s Spirit in him. Spirit and practical wisdom are joined at the hip. But how? How did Joseph come to be full of God’s Spirit? By spending his life practicing, his years preparing.

In the course of his years in Egypt, Joseph had been in charge, not only of the house of Potiphar, the captain of the palace guard, but also in the prison into which he was thrown on false charges. Joseph served so well over both that neither Potiphar nor the chief jailer had to pay any attention to what lay under Joseph’s care (Genesis 39:6; 39:23). Then, at just the right moment, he applied this practical wisdom to save countless men and women from starvation.

The first secret of the Spirit-filled life is that it takes shape in those invisible, unremarkable days when the Holy Spirit seems absent. It takes shape in a home, an office cubicle,

a factory, even an Egyptian dungeon. If we want to lead a Spirit-filled life, we, like Joseph, must practice hard-won wisdom when no one is looking.

Identify one act today of practical wisdom you can do in your home or workplace or wherever you have responsibilities, knowing now that the Spirit and wisdom are joined at the hip. This might be as simple as getting in the habit of baking cookies for a neighbor in need or practicing the art of writing a note of encouragement to someone you haven't seen in ages. Whatever you do, perform that act with care and carefulness, trusting that the Holy Spirit is present and active.

Holy Spirit,

When no one is looking, through run-on days

Let me believe that practical wisdom matters

sensible skills

time-tested abilities

So that when I am called upon, I will be ready. Amen.