

ALIVE
in
the Spirit



EXPERIENCING THE
PRESENCE AND POWER OF GOD



A.W. TOZER

COMPILED AND EDITED BY JAMES L. SNYDER



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Introduction

The subject of this book, *Alive in the Spirit*, is a very crucial theme for the day in which we live. No other subject could be as controversial as dealing with the Holy Spirit.

One of the things that impressed me as I collected A.W. Tozer's sermons in preparation for this book is that Tozer says the evangelical church of his day treated the Holy Spirit as the liberal modernistic church did the person of Jesus Christ.

The liberals did not deny Jesus; they more or less ignored him. And the evangelicals in Tozer's day did not deny the Holy Spirit; they more or less ignored Him and His rightful position in the church. His observations are still true today.

Tozer implies that the evangelical church is going down the same path that the liberal churches did. That being said, he offers a possible solution to bring our churches back under the authority of the Holy Spirit.

The authority of the Holy Spirit must begin with the individual Christian and then flow over into the local congregation.

Our strategies are backward. Local church leaders and even denominational leaders are trying to set the tone for the congregations to follow. They have boiled it down to a despicable term (from Tozer's perspective)—a *formula*. All you need is the right formula and everything will be all right.

The focus in this book is on the individual. Yes, there are some encouragements for local assemblies, but the emphasis is on the individual Christian. The local church comprises individual Christians, and as those individual Christians go, so goes the local church.

This was Tozer's passion and it is shown here in this book. He bemoans the fact that the evangelical church has been so divided that it has lost its influence in the culture. Instead of the church influencing the culture, culture is not only influencing the church, it is taking over the church. Tozer declares that what we find in the world we also find in the local church. This ought not to be so.

Tozer's presentation does not go to extremes. The problem is that one group goes to a far extreme and another group goes to the opposite far extreme—the exhibitionists on one end and the cessationists on the other. This has done critical damage in the church, as Tozer notes. The only way to remedy this is to put the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in its proper perspective. That is what this book does.

In one chapter, he talks about his love of great paintings and says that a painting is not comprised of just one brushstroke, but of many. When you look at that painting you are not conscious of one brushstroke. When you become conscious of one brushstroke, you lose the picture altogether. This, Tozer says, is what has happened concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

To understand the Holy Spirit and His rightful place of authority in the life of the believer, and then in the life of the congregation, we have to surrender personal opinions and prejudices. It is critical to check everything with the Word of God.

Tozer often proposes that people can take a verse of Scripture out of context and make it say anything they want it to say. But each verse must be read in the context of the entire Bible. It takes all the Bible to make the whole Bible. When we splinter the text, pulling out a single brushstroke, we lose what it is all about.

His view on the gifts of the Spirit is that they are not to promote any one person. When one person or even one gift is exalted in a congregation, it is probably not the work of the Holy Spirit. This sounds harsh, but we need to get serious about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the life and ministry of the local congregation.

Tozer is very careful not to attack individuals or even denominations, but he does attack errors of doctrine. As a man of God called to do the work of God, he felt an obligation to speak out against the spiritual errors of his day. The thing that is most amazing to me is that the sermons forming the basis of this book were preached in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I have to remind myself that Dr. Tozer died in 1963. What he said then is true today and even more so. The warnings he gave then apply to our situation today.

I believe that if a person takes this book seriously, it will deeply affect their spiritual life. The end goal is to become *Alive in the Spirit*.

According to Tozer, one of the things that has replaced the work of the Holy Spirit in the local church is entertainment.

Our society is obsessed with entertainment, and this has come into the church of Jesus Christ. Tozer objects to this. Worship and entertainment are opposites and cannot be mixed. It is either one or the other.

The problem Tozer had with entertainment is that it always promotes a person. Even though that person may mention Jesus or God and claim to be a Christian, the focus is really not on God but on the person and the performance.

I chuckled when I heard Tozer tell the story of a person who wrote to him explaining that singing a hymn was a form of entertainment. He said, “If that’s entertainment, then I’m an entertainer.” But he quickly followed by saying, “It’s not and I’m not.”

He went on to explain that his top priority in life was to be a worshiper. It was the purpose and focus of the Holy Spirit in his life to exalt Jesus Christ and to bring into his life the spirit of worship. The same should be true of us today. Worship is critical, and for Tozer, worship could not be man-induced. Worship that does not start with the Holy Spirit is not true worship.

Tozer suggests that our worship services today are man-centered and man-promoted as a result of neglecting the authority of the Holy Spirit in our congregations. As such, they cannot exalt Jesus Christ.

Throughout this book, he says that people can do good works, but they are not the kind of works that promote and accomplish the holy work of God. Only the Holy Spirit can do the holy work of God. It begins with the Holy Spirit and it ends with the Holy Spirit.

This book reflects the passion Tozer had for the body of Christ.

Throughout the book, I've tried to capture Tozer's tone, which is conversational. In some sermons, I discovered him sharing his testimony, and I thought that was very good to include here. He is not talking about something that he heard about or read about, but rather something he experienced personally. His testimony both of being born again and being filled with the Holy Spirit lays the foundation for what Tozer says throughout this book. I found the influence of the Holy Spirit in his life and his daily walk fascinating.

This book is not to be read in one sitting. Although it could be, you will not reap the greatest benefit by doing so. Reading a chapter at a time and then pausing and thinking about it and applying its truths to your heart is really what Tozer intended. This is not simply literature to be enjoyed, but spiritual truth to be absorbed on a personal level. Knowing *about* the Holy Spirit is different from *knowing* the Holy Spirit by personal acquaintance. That is Tozer's emphasis throughout.

Dr. James L. Snyder



My Experience With the Holy Spirit

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

—2 Corinthians 5:17

No subject could be more crucial to the church today than the Holy Spirit. I know nothing that inspires me more than meditating on the Scriptures concerning this third person of the Trinity.

I hope to cover the subject as thoroughly as possible, although I realize the limitations I have. No matter how much I know about God, there is much more I do not know. My daily passion has been to pursue God and to know Him as fully as He desires to be known.

In dealing with the subject of the Holy Spirit, I know I will interject my opinions. This is something that cannot be helped. If I do not have an opinion about the Holy Spirit, why am I talking and writing about Him?

My opinions, however, must be based on truth as revealed in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul encouraged his readers not to trust what he had to say because he was saying it, but rather to search the Scriptures to make sure he was telling the truth: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). And so, at the beginning, I want to encourage you not to trust or believe what I have to say without collaborating everything with the Word of God.

Later on I will devote a chapter to the foundation of my belief in the Holy Spirit. That is, the Scriptures, the creeds, and the hymns. These three sources together form a harmony of truth about the Holy Spirit, and my opinions need to be in line with them. If there is anything I believe about the Holy Spirit not substantiated in this trio, I need to have the intellectual and spiritual integrity to cast it aside.

Everyone has the right to give testimony of their life in the Spirit. That testimony has to be collaborated, as I have pointed out, with established truth going all the way back to apostolic days. I want to give my testimony. Sometimes I am a little awkward in sharing personal things about my spiritual life, but I think it necessary for you to understand that what I am talking about in this book is something I have experienced personally. I am not just talking theory but truth I have personally experienced.

There are several ways to deal with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The first way would be to study what the Bible has to say about the Holy Spirit, and then to read all the books written on the Holy Spirit. This is the theological aspect. I want you to understand I believe in theology. Theology is simply the study of God, and I treasure nothing more in my life than the study of God. Sometimes, our study of God is merely technical and not personal. But if it is biblical truth, it has personal application to everyday living. We must do more than just believe the truth; we must allow the truth to transform us radically into new creatures in Christ.

Certainly I want to talk about the technical aspects of the Holy Spirit and what the Bible teaches as well as the doctrine associated with this blessed third person of the Trinity. However, that is just the beginning. I have built my personal experience upon that foundation, and the Holy Spirit has been an important aspect of my life from the very beginning.

My Conversion

I was not born into a Christian family. My parents were fine people from western Pennsylvania, but they were not Christians. When I was a teenager, our family moved to Akron, Ohio, where the rubber factories were employing many people, and my sister and I got jobs there.

Just down the street from where we lived was a Methodist church. Occasionally we would visit, but not regularly. I went more than the rest of my family because I met a young lady there who later became my wife. The primary attraction at that Methodist church, I must admit, was this young lady.

I still was not a Christian, even though I listened to the sermons of the preacher. Basically all he said was that if you want to feel good, just do good, and everything will be okay. Well, that has never really resonated in my heart and soul, even today.

Looking back, I thank God for the winsome ways of the Holy Spirit in dealing with the heart of such an untaught lad as I when I was only seventeen. We had a neighbor by the name of Holman. I do not remember his first name; we just called him Mr. Holman. He lived next door and we were told he was a Christian, but he never talked to me about Christ.

One day, as I was walking up the street with this friendly neighbor, he suddenly put his hand on my shoulder and said, “I’ve been wondering about you—if you’re a Christian, if you’re converted. I just wanted a chance to talk it over with you.”

I told him I was not a Christian, and that seemed to be the end of the conversation. Perhaps the Holy Spirit planted a seed in my heart at this time.

Three years after moving to Akron, I was walking home from work when I noticed a small crowd of people on the opposite side of the street. They were gathered around an old man who seemed to be talking. At a distance I could not hear what he was saying, and so out of curiosity I walked across the street to see if I could hear what all the commotion was about.

The man had a strong German accent, and so it was hard for me to understand him. I really didn’t know what was going on. But then it dawned on me: This man was preaching right out on the street corner. I was a little amazed by this. And shocked, to be truthful. I thought, *Why doesn’t this man go to church and preach? And it isn’t even Sunday!*

However, curiosity got the best of me, and I tried to listen and understand what he was saying. Then he said something that seemed very clear to me: “If you don’t know how to be saved, just call on God, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner,’ and God will hear you.”

I heard nothing else because that phrase pierced my heart and I could not get away from it. I walked home and carefully thought about what the man had said. I had never before heard words like those. I had gone to church a few times, but never heard the gospel in such a straightforward manner.

I must confess it awakened within me a gnawing hunger to find out if what this man was saying was true. There began within me a hunger for God that has persisted until this day.

All I can say, looking back, is that the Holy Spirit was at work in my life. I did not know the Holy Spirit at the time, and I did not know how He worked, but my ignorance of the situation did not in any way limit the Holy Spirit from working in my life.

When I got home, I went straight up to the attic, shut the door, got on my knees, and poured out my heart to God. Even to this day, I am not sure what really happened at that moment. All I can say is this: I was born again. The Holy Spirit birthed in my heart a new life I had never before experienced.

This encounter with the Holy Spirit transformed my life and started me on a path of pursuing God. I was just seventeen.

Being Filled With the Holy Spirit

I began dating the young lady I had met at the Methodist church. Her name was Ada Cecilia Pfaust. Eventually we would get married, but our relationship brought me in touch

with Ada's mother, Kate Pfaust, a deeply spiritual person and part of a Pentecostal church in the Akron area. I had no idea what a Pentecostal church was all about. To me, church was church.

She would invite me to prayer meetings at her home and have me speak, and she encouraged me in the area of ministry. I had no training, but I had plenty of help and guidance from her. I can see now that the Holy Spirit was behind this encounter.

One day Kate took me aside and had a very serious talk with me. It was concerning being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Methodist church I was going to never mentioned this at all. In fact, the Holy Spirit was rarely referred to.

I did not quite understand what she meant by being filled with the Holy Spirit. Who is this Holy Spirit? But she encouraged me and prayed with me, and then one day she said, "Young man, you must get down on your knees and die to yourself before the Holy Spirit will fill you." And she explained in great detail what this meant, as much as I could understand.

I know the Holy Spirit was working in my life because there developed within me a restlessness. I was at the place where I wanted everything God had for me, even though I did not quite understand it all. I did not understand the Holy Spirit. I did not understand what being filled with the Holy Spirit was all about. But I was open to everything God had for me, and I was not going to let my ignorance limit God's work in me.

Then it happened. I was nineteen years old when I was baptized with a mighty infusion of the Holy Spirit. Even now, it is hard to explain what happened. I have had years to think about it, study it, and meditate on it, and yet when

the Holy Spirit does something in you, it is usually beyond your ability to totally comprehend it, let alone explain it.

I know what God did for me and within me at that time. Nothing on the outside from then on had equal importance for me. In faith, I took a leap away from everything that was unimportant to that which was most important, which was to be possessed by the Spirit of the living God.

Looking back over my life, my testimony is simply that any work God has ever done through me and my ministry dates back to that moment when I was filled with the Holy Spirit. All the credit goes to the Holy Spirit. That is when I truly became alive.

Everything I endeavored to do on my own was a failure. Whenever I got out of the way and allowed the Holy Spirit to work, He did a marvelous work. The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person surrendered to Him has eternal value.

It's All About the Spirit

If anyone is going to be blessed by God and used by Him, it will begin with a mighty infilling of the Holy Spirit in their life. From that point on, they are no longer in control, but the Holy Spirit is working in and through them. This is why I am so enthusiastic about the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and the work of the Spirit, which I will explain more thoroughly in this book.

I think one of the great challenges of my life has been to step aside and allow the Holy Spirit to do His work His way. Pride sometimes gets in the way, and I begin to think that I am doing a great job. The Holy Spirit usually lets me know

it is not my doing anything, because anything I do fails most miserably. I am not in the business of promoting myself; I am in the business of surrendering to the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to do a work that only He can do.

Throughout the years, I have learned not to dictate to the Holy Spirit and try to point Him in the direction I think He should go. I must confess I do not understand all that the Holy Spirit does. Much is behind the sacred curtain of His divinity, which no man dare step through.

What the future holds for me only God the Holy Spirit knows. I do not even want to try to guess. Sure, there are things I would like to accomplish, and I believe every man is immortal until his work is done. In addition, I believe that the Holy Spirit can use me as long as I am willing to be used by the Holy Spirit. My goal is to live in the Spirit each day.

The most important thing I have learned in my experience with the Holy Spirit is to make sure it is indeed the Holy Spirit working and not me. When I have become too confident, I have made some bad mistakes. It is important for me to get alone with the Holy Spirit on a regular basis and allow Him to do His work in my life. What the Holy Spirit does *through* me is dependent upon what the Holy Spirit can do *in* me.

Not a day goes by but that I give myself completely to the Holy Spirit. I want to be very careful I am not doing something in my own strength. I will explain the difference between doing something in my own strength and something in the power of the Holy Spirit in a later chapter.

Since my conversion—which resulted in my being filled with the Holy Spirit—to this very moment, my life has all been a work of the Holy Spirit.

Nothing is more crucial to my daily pursuit of God than my commitment and surrender to the person of the Holy Spirit.

Blessed Holy Spirit, I honor Thee and bless Thee for Thy patient work in my life. Amen.

REFLECTIONS

Think about your conversion experience and what happened that day.

Can you identify with being filled with the Holy Spirit?

What has been the influence of the Holy Spirit in your life?