

God's Spirit Poured Out

Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:29)

Scripture: Joel 2:28–32

Song: “Shine, Jesus, Shine”

The Great Awakening was a period of revival in the American church of the early eighteenth century, associated with preachers like George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards. Edwards wrote of those days: “The Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in, and wonderfully to work amongst us. . . . The work of conversion increased more and more. Souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ.” It was evident to Edwards that this was the Holy Spirit at work—a true “revival” in every sense.

The Great Awakening is one example of God's Spirit at work. The prophet Joel foretold of the expansive outpouring of God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit would come to young and old, male and female—all believers would be included. They would prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions. All who called on the name of the Lord on that day would be saved!

These prophesied events were fulfilled after Jesus' resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2. Since then, we believers now have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, guiding and directing us as we read God's Word. What a difference this makes as we seek to follow Jesus!

Father, help me to be sensitive to Your Holy Spirit as I follow You in faith and obedience. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

October 20–26. **Laura N. Sweet** is a wife, mother, grandmother, and former Christian school teacher who writes from her home in Midland, Michigan.

The Heart's Condition

I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)

Scripture: Ezekiel 36:25–35

Song: “His Mercy Is More”

When the doctor discovered I had a heart murmur, he ordered an ultrasound to make sure my heart was performing normally. As I watched the images on the screen, I couldn't make sense of them. What a mysterious view of my own heart—it seemed I didn't know it at all! I was grateful when the tests revealed a healthy heart, and I was humbled by my own inability to diagnose myself.

Ezekiel shared about the “heart condition” of God's people. The news wasn't good; they all needed heart transplants! Jerusalem, their beloved city, had fallen to the enemy, and the people were exiles in foreign lands. God made it clear that this was because of their own iniquity, but He mercifully promised to cleanse them of their sin. He would remove their hearts of stone and replace them with hearts of flesh. With God's Spirit within them, the people would be capable of keeping God's ways. God promised to restore them to their homes and to rebuild what was destroyed.

We all need new hearts, but no one can perform their own heart transplant! This is a work of God's Spirit, to cleanse us and lead us to faith and to life in His Son. God's mercy shows His love for us and His power over sin.

Father, thank You for changing my heart of stone into a heart that can love and obey You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Fear the Lord Your God

Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. (Deuteronomy 10:20)

Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:12–21

Song: “Here I Am to Worship”

Our car was totaled, but my husband, my daughter, and I walked away from the accident with only minor bruising. We praised God for His protection! Still, it took some time for me to be comfortable in the passenger seat again—particularly when we drove through the same intersection. Past trauma makes us wary of similar danger as we move forward in our lives.

The people of God were moving forward in this passage in Deuteronomy. For 40 years, their parents had wandered in the wilderness, denied entrance into the promised land because of their hardened hearts. Now a new generation was poised to enter the land. But how could they avoid the same catastrophe of their parents’ unbelief? Moses reminded them that all God required of them was to love and fear Him and to obey His commands! God would provide all things for them. He had already performed great and awesome wonders and had multiplied the people. They needed to hold fast to Him and praise Him for all He had done.

“Circumcise your hearts,” Moses instructs them (v. 16). The people needed to be fully committed to their God. Their consecration had to come from the heart—even as it does for us today. Our obedience to the Lord can only come from hearts filled with love and reverence for Him.

Father, fill my heart with love and reverence for You and for Your Son. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Letters of Recommendation

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. (2 Corinthians 3:2)

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:1–6

Song: “Blessed Assurance”

Imagine this scenario: your house is on fire, you’re trapped on the second floor, and a firefighter climbs up a ladder to rescue you. As he reaches out to carry you to safety, you say, “Excuse me, but before we go, do you have any letters of recommendation?” How absurd! After he saves you, you can write your own letter of recommendation!

Some of the Corinthian believers were almost that ridiculous. How could they question Paul’s credentials as an apostle after he had shared the gospel with them—the gospel that had brought them salvation in Jesus Christ? Paul wrote that he and his fellow missionaries didn’t need to commend themselves because the Corinthians were their “letters.” These believers could testify to their competence and their ministry among them. God had made Paul a minister of a new covenant, which is of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit gives life. The true proof of Paul’s ministry was the work of the Spirit within them.

The testimony of the Corinthian people made them “living” letters, “known and read by everyone” (v. 2). Everyone could see the change God had made in their lives. We can also be like letters to be read by others as we share what God has done for us. Let’s recommend Jesus to the people around us so that they may also be saved by Him.

Father, may my testimony make me a living letter that shares Jesus with the world. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

The Surpassing Glory

For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. (2 Corinthians 3:10)

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:7–11

Song: “Heaven Came Down”

In the mid-1800s, it became popular for families to use gas to light their homes. But this method came with many downsides: choking fumes, smoke, blackened walls—even explosions! Once scientists made lighting possible with filament bulbs, electricity quickly replaced the messy (and dangerous) gas lamps. Lighting with gas seemed like a “glorious” innovation, but it was replaced by something safer, more efficient, and even brighter by far.

The old covenant, the agreement God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, was also surpassed by something much more glorious. The old covenant couldn’t bring life because it didn’t change hearts. Still, it had a glory of its own—so much so that the people couldn’t look at Moses’ face after he spoke with God. In those days, his face shone with a certain glory. Yet the new covenant, the ministry of the Spirit, is even more glorious! The old covenant’s glory was transitory. The new covenant has a glory that lasts forever, surpassing what came before it.

The new covenant, which comes by faith in Jesus Christ, has the power to make us righteous by changing our hearts. It’s the work of the Spirit of God within, making us more like Jesus, to the glory of God. That’s a glory that will last throughout eternity.

Father, may You be glorified by my life both now and throughout eternity. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

The Veil Removed

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (2 Corinthians 3:16)

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:12–17

Song: “Open Our Eyes, Lord”

Masks are often worn to hide the identity of the wearer, and this is great fun for children who are playing make-believe. But any parent can tell you that masks not only hide faces; they can obscure peripheral vision, making it difficult for the wearer to see what is above, below, or right beside them. Parents have to take extra precautions to make sure their child is safe while wearing a mask, or “fun time” can end with a painful accident.

Like masks, veils can also obscure many things, both for the wearer and those around them. When Moses spoke with God, it caused his face to shine with God’s glory. But that glory didn’t last, and Moses wore a veil so the Israelites wouldn’t see it fade away. Sometimes it’s as if that veil is still there when the old covenant is read in ignorance. But by turning to Christ and beholding His glory, the truth of Scripture is made clear. The Holy Spirit removes that veil and grants new understanding.

The Spirit allows us to contemplate Jesus’ glory and transforms us to be more like Him. He gives us the ability to understand the salvation brought to us by Jesus Christ and His ever-increasing glory that will never fade away. Let’s praise Him for the veil He has removed from us.

Father, open my eyes as I read Your Word, giving me understanding and faith in You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

The Days Are Coming

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.” (Jeremiah 31:31)

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:27–34

Song: “Soon and Very Soon”

These beautiful days of autumn that we experience now seem golden—not only in hue, but in the brevity of the season. While we may wish we could hold onto them, we know that autumn must give way to winter, just as winter gives way to spring. The old must die for the world to be reborn with new life and new beginnings. But the days are coming when all will become green and new.

Jeremiah comforted God’s people with some similar thoughts in the midst of their great suffering. Because of their sin, God allowed Judah to be conquered by the Babylonians, who took the survivors into exile from their homeland. God promised that in the future He would “replant” the kingdoms He had uprooted and destroyed in judgment. In their place, a new kingdom and a new covenant would flourish. The children would not be punished for their parents’ sin; they would be accountable for what they themselves had done. God’s new covenant would be written in His people’s hearts and minds. They would all know the Lord, from least to greatest.

This “new kingdom” with its new covenant has already begun in Jesus, and it will reach its fulfillment when Christ returns. What a great day that will be—and it’s coming!

Father, may Your kingdom come, and may Your will be done. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.