“What Does It Mean to be Filled With the Spirit?”

I need some clarification! What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? I believe that it happens at the point of salvation, but many times in scripture it talks about people who are “full of the Spirit.” Is this filling a one time deal or something that can happen many times. I know that in Old Testament times the Spirit came and went upon certain people. But in our times (and since Pentecost), how would you explain this. Thanks so much for your time, wisdom, and ministry.

The best explanation I have seen (and which has worked for me experientially for many years) is that being filled with the Spirit means yielding to Him (the Holy Spirit) in full dependence so that we are out of the way and He can do His thing through us and in us. The verb tense in Ephesians 5:18 means “be continually being filled,” so it’s not a one-time event. It’s an ongoing discipline of submission.

I love the analogy of taking a hard, dried-up sponge and plunging it into a sink full of water. The sponge softens and soaks up the water until it is super-saturated. It is “filled with” water, right? But of course, a sponge can’t choose to jump into the sink like we can choose to open ourselves to the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. And this choice is a matter of will, not of emotion; the difference between operating in the flesh (our own power apart from God) and being filled with the Spirit is a simple choice to ask, “Holy Spirit, please fill me” with a submissive, humble heart. It doesn’t LOOK any different to someone else and it usually doesn’t FEEL any different to us, but it’s a real event. It can happen many times throughout the day. (I have shared this concept with my MOPS [Mothers of Preschoolers] group, and suggested they draw a line in the carpet with their shoe or draw an imaginary line across the kitchen floor, and step

across the line to signify that they are moving from self-dependence to Christ-dependence and filling. One girl told me, “Sue, you should see my house! There are lines all OVER the place!”)

The problem is that we default to the flesh; we keep gravitating toward doing things on our own and either rebelling against God or passively ignoring Him. We wake up “reset” to the flesh every morning. So we need to be filled again and again and again. Sort of like eating. We need to do it again and again and again!

I hope this helps.

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