

# How to explain *the infilling of the Spirit*

By DEAN MERRILL

**M**y son was about 8 or 9 when he began noticing his father's appreciation for exotic cars. He had listened to me exclaim, "Oooh, look at that Mercedes 300 SL!" enough times to learn that not all automobiles were created equal.

One day he inquired, "Dad, what's so great about a Mercedes?"

"Oh, my—they're just one of the best cars in the world, Nathan. Built in Germany—they're great."

He looked puzzled. "Do they go faster than any other car?"

"No, I don't suppose so. They're just really well made."

"Well," he said, looking out the window, "they have four wheels, doors, and windows like other cars, right? What's so great about them?"

"Uh, well . . ." It was becoming apparent that I didn't know enough about a Mercedes to state its specific merits. All I could do was spout the superlatives: "wonderful . . . terrific . . . great . . . incredible."

I thought later about that exchange with my son, and it reminded me of something similar in the spiritual world. How many of us Pentecostals can clearly explain what's so great about the infilling of the Holy Spirit? We're often enthusiastic: "Oh, it's a tremendous blessing in my life . . . a wonderful experience . . . something that just means so much to me . . . it's fantastic."

New Christians or friends from another church background are left scratching their heads thinking, *Yes, but what is it? Define what you mean. What exactly are you talking about?* We have traditionally been long on sales pitch and short on definition.

## **A word picture**

I'd like to propose an analogy I've found effective and clarifying from Robert Boyd Munger's booklet, *My Heart: Christ's Home*, in which he compares the Christian's daily life to welcoming Christ into the various rooms of a house: the dining room (appetites and desires), the workshop (talents and skills), the study (books and magazines), the family room (friendships and amusements), and even the hall closet (deep, dark secrets).

Imagine coming back to your home after a winter vacation. The rooms are cold because you turned down the thermostat before leaving; you wanted to save heat. Now you immediately turn the dial back up, and within 15 minutes or so the house will be filled with warmth.



Photo by Jim Whimer

Did you know that in the Old Testament, the word for "Spirit" is the Hebrew *ruach*—wind, breath, spirit. Sometimes the translators even have trouble knowing which to use. For example, in Genesis 1:2 should it say the "wind" of God moved upon the waters, or the "Spirit" of God? *Ruach* fits either one.

In New Testament Greek the same thing occurs. *Pneuma* means wind, breath, spirit. Thus in English if you have pneumonia, your wind isn't moving very well. Your dentist uses a pneumatic drill to work on your teeth—a drill that runs on forced air. No wonder Jesus on Easter night "breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:22, NIV).

### ***Warming the house***

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***So what is the infilling of the Spirit? It's letting the warm air of the Spirit blow through all the rooms of my house, the various roles and aspects of my life.***

all the rooms of my house, the various roles and aspects of my life. It's the Holy Spirit dispelling the cold, replacing the chill with life and warmth and movement. Instead of huddling in discomfort and apprehension, I become free to move, stretch, reach out, and create.

The furnace first kicked on in my life as a young boy on the front row of First Assembly of God, Waxahachie, Texas. I will always cherish that Tuesday night when a visiting Bible teacher named J.B. Stiles laid his hand on my head, said a few words, and I began to quietly speak in an unknown language. That was the start.

My house wasn't much to fill then. As a grade schooler I suppose you could say there was a room marked "family member" (youngest) and another room marked "student in second grade."

Since then I've added lots of rooms. The remodelers have been out on numerous occasions, adding more space for "husband, father, churchman, writer/editor, manager at the office, and citizen."

If you ask, "Dean, are you filled with the Spirit?" I could of course tell you about that night in Waxahachie, but perhaps I should instead answer in the present. What about now? That would make me face the question of whether I've allowed heating ducts to be in-

stalled in the new areas of my life, and whether the warmth of the Spirit is filling those rooms today. How do I relate to my wife and children? How do I treat my secretary? How do I talk about my coworkers or my pastor? How am I reaching out to people who don't know Jesus?

Sometimes a piece of furniture can be carelessly placed over a room's heating vent, blocking the flow of warm air. The same thing can happen spiritually, whenever I refuse to let the Spirit's breath invade a given area of my life. There's plenty of heat available—but my room remains cold.

### ***Constant air flow***

All this amounts to a definition of infilling that is dynamic rather than static. The apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:18 did not write, "Get filled with the Spirit," as if it were a one-time achievement. What he wrote, Greek scholars tell us, is, "Be always being filled." In other words, start up the furnace fan every day, every hour. The chill of the world is ever-present, wanting to freeze our relationships with God and one another. Only a constant flow of Spirit warmth will keep us healthy and limber.

What is the role of speaking in tongues? It is the whoosh of the divine Wind, the sound that accompanies the Spirit's invasion. It's not the heat itself, but rather the noise of its activity.

My family and I recently moved to the Rocky Mountain states. The chill of winter is occasionally relieved by the sudden arrival of a chinook—a warm, dry wind coming over the mountains from the west. It's also known as the snow eater, because it can melt snowbanks almost before your eyes. In Rapid City, South Dakota, a winter chinook once raised the temperatures 44 degrees in only 15 minutes.

My life—and yours—certainly needs a chinook of the Holy Spirit from time to time. What causes such an invasion? Robert Tuttle, Jr., in his book, *Someone Out There Needs Me*, writes, "Most of us know that wind blows from high pressure to low pressure, to the point of least resistance. Likewise, the Holy Spirit . . . moves from high pressure to low pressure, to the point of least resistance, to the 'I give up.'"

May the warm air flow of the Spirit move freely throughout the rooms of our lives, causing love, joy, gentleness, kindness, and all the other results listed in Galatians 5. Then we can indeed claim to be Spirit-filled—and confidently explain what it means to others. ▢



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