



COUNTDOWN

PREPARING FOR
THE CHURCH'S BIRTHDAY

MATT LEROY

SEEDBED SHORTS

Kingdom Treasure for Your Reading Pleasure

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INTRODUCTION

What's the biggest day in the history of history? Christmas Day? Good Friday? Easter Sunday? These are monumental days that won our salvation and continue to transform the world. But how about the Day of Pentecost? Let's not forget about Pentecost, the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the birthday of the Church. Think about it. If not for the Day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit we would have no Church. Without the Church, we would not know Jesus. And without Jesus, we would be lost and without hope.

Interestingly, the Day of Pentecost, one of the biggest days in the history of history (so far), is also one of the most under-celebrated days of the present age. It's time to change that. *COUNTDOWN*, a small step in that direction, is an effort to gather, connect and resource the followers of Jesus Christ to celebrate this most significant occasion. The birthday of the Church Jesus came to establish, against which the gates of Hell will never prevail, calls for solemn preparation and robust celebration. *COUNTDOWN* aims

to guide us on a shared nine day journey between the Day of the Ascension of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

Each day begins with a short text from Scripture, followed by a brief reflection and closing with a prayer to the Holy Spirit. As we prepare to enter in, let us get in step with the Spirit through sharing in this ancient prayer:

*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and
kindle in them the fire of your love.*

*Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created; and
you shall renew the face of the Earth.*

*O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,
did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by
the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever
enjoy His consolations through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.*

DAY 1

Read

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”

Acts 1:1-3 NIV

Reflect

At his ascension, Jesus pointed ahead to the arrival of the Holy Spirit. And we brace ourselves.

As if his plain words about the transforming power of the Spirit were not clear enough, the book of Acts gives us another warning. It tells us, "After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

Forty. Noah and Moses tell us to take note of that description, and got ready. David reminds us that

Goliath taunted the army of Yahweh for forty days. Jesus points us back to his fasting in the desert prior to his ministry. Layered throughout the Scripture narrative, forty is a sign of preparation for a new and miraculous move of God.

Jesus just spent forty days preparing his disciples for what's next. Brace yourself for what's coming.

Pray

COME HOLY SPIRIT. Prepare our hearts and souls for what is coming.

DAY 2

Read

“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”

Acts 1:4-7 NIV

Reflect

Fresh off of his resurrection and his victory over sin and death, Jesus gives his apostles the clear strategy for how he will change the world. And what a strange strategy it is.

He doesn't plan to storm the Roman Governor's palace, showing up in Pilate's court to overthrow the empire. He doesn't suggest appearing in blaze and glory at the Temple, proving to the religious elite that he was, in fact, who he claimed to be. He doesn't

reprise his triumphal entry, marching through the heart of the city, taking his rightful place as King.

Instead, his counterintuitive strategy is this:
Wait on the Holy Spirit.

Pray

COME HOLY SPIRIT, yet teach us to wait.

DAY 3

Read

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.””

Luke 24:45-49 NIV

Reflect

Do you dream of living in the book of Acts? I do. I ache for it. I want to be so filled with the Spirit that I walk in step with the Spirit, speak in the anointing of the Spirit, and move in the power of the Spirit. I long to see the same kind of spiritual renewal, social reform, and cultural renaissance in my community, in our day. Miraculous transformation. Kingdom reality.

But it strikes me that the book begins with waiting. Before we see the 'Acts of the Apostles' we are commanded to 'wait on the Holy Spirit.'

We all want to hear from God. But are we listening?

We all want to see God move. But what if He won't move until we stop moving?

What if He is waiting on us to wait on Him?

Pray

COME HOLY SPIRIT. We surrender and pause and wait to hear from you.

DAY 4

Read

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8 NIV

Reflect

Jesus promised, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

Put that in the context of those first disciples, eagerly waiting for the fulfillment of that word. It must have been such an encouraging thought to a tiny, eclectic band of outsiders with little influence.

But it's wasn't the kind of power they imagined. Not positional or political. But the kind of power that came from outside of their own strength and welled up from inside their very souls. This would be a grassroots, underground, radical kind of movement that would push them to the margins and cost them everything. This power would generate courageous generosity for their neighbor and holy love for their enemies. This power would teach them to

sing in prison, to rejoice in chains, he would sustain them through persecution, keep them in death. He empowered them to live as both protest against the empire and prophetic vision of the Kingdom.

Pray

COME HOLY SPIRIT. May we be marked by your power again.

DAY 5

Read

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8 NIV

Reflect

Jesus goes on to say that when we receive the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be his "witnesses." That is an interesting word to use. In the context of the original language, it was legal terminology. Picture a court room, not a random stranger handing you a not so clever tract about your impending eternal doom.

The Holy Spirit will empower us to be Jesus' witnesses. Not the judge delivering the verdict. Not the jury deciding someone's fate. Certainly not the prosecution. Not even the defense lawyer, tasked with swaying the entire room with your brilliant, airtight, irrefutable argument that answers every doubt and accounts for every question.

We are his witnesses. A witness simply gives an account of personal experience. A testimony. This is what I saw and heard and felt and know. Perhaps I can't explain it, but neither can I explain it away. And often, it is the personal testimony of the witness that turns the direction of the case. After all of the skilled work of the professionals, the witness becomes the most compelling source of evidence.

Pray

COME HOLY SPIRIT. Send us as your witnesses of all we've seen and heard and experienced.

DAY 6

Read

“And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”

Acts 8:1-4 NIV

Reflect

Ernest Hemingway said, “The world breaks everyone.” He was right. And we all have the scars to prove it. All around us everyday, we see and experience suffering and injustice, unmistakable signs of the sin-broken state of our world. Fractures that can be followed all the way back to the Fall.

The sharp edges of brokenness are everywhere. But that is not the whole story. Now, because the Holy Spirit lives in us, pulses in us, blazes in us, we are living and breathing demonstrations of just how

far holy love can reach. We are rising up like a tide of grace, triggered by the reality of our salvation. As we come alive in Christ, we come awake to our purpose and an ancient promise echoes in our souls. A hope, a future, a plan, a calling. The unique convergence of gifts and passions, expressing his heart through who we are. This is the genius of God, planting himself in each of us so we become an extension of his mission in the world. Everywhere we go the Kingdom rolls out beneath our feet, claiming new ground with each bold step. We are the called out ones, sent on a mission to become sparks of redemption, fighting back the shadows of the Fall wherever we find them. Sent out like signal flares against the night, let our lives burn to light the way.*

Pray

COME HOLY SPIRIT. Send us out as an extension of your mission in the world.

DAY 7

Read

“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.””

Luke 4:14-21 NIV

Reflect

In launching his public ministry, Jesus echoes the ancient words of the prophet Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me; he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.” The early Church was birthed out of and walked in this same anoint-

ing of the Spirit. As a result, he empowered them to become a source of justice and mercy in their culture. The outsiders became insiders and the forgotten were the first thought. They brought sight to the blind, release for the captives, and freedom for the oppressed.

Are you moving in step with the Spirit? Is your will aligned and surrendered to His? Here's one sure way to tell: Ask yourself, Is my life good news for the poor?

Pray

COME HOLY SPIRIT. Let our lives be good news for the poor.

DAY 8

Read

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

Galatians 5:22-25 NIV

Reflect

When we are filled with the Spirit, we receive gifts of the Spirit. These gifts are diverse and given with true power for the building of the Church and the advancement of the Kingdom. Are you operating in the supernatural gifting of the Holy Spirit? Have you discovered the unique convergence of your gifts and passions, awakened to new strength and effect through the Spirit?

When we are rooted in the Father, connected to Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul tells us that we will bear the fruit of the Spirit. The branches display the character of the tree. Paul clearly says

that we will not all receive every gift of the Spirit. But we should all expect and display every fruit of the Spirit. This is the true sign that his life pulses within us, and is making its way out of us and into the world.

Pray

COME HOLY SPIRIT. Cultivate your gifts and your fruit in our everyday lives.

DAY 9

Read

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

1 Corinthians 13:1-8 NIV

Reflect

Martin Luther defined sin as the heart turned inward on itself. John Wesley would later describe holiness as the heart turned outward toward God and others. This transformation is only possible through the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

Do you hunger for more of the Spirit? I do. I read Wesley's description of his heart being "strangely warmed," and I want more of that. I read how the old revivalists experienced what they could only describe as "waves of liquid love." I long for that. But I should never just seek an experience of the Holy Spirit for myself. I should continually be an experience of the Holy Spirit for others. His presence is alive in me and the proof of that is not in mountain top moments, but in everyday acts of love. We are monasteries, sacred spaces where we cultivate a deep well of intimacy with the Spirit. And we are missionaries, with hearts turned outward in holy love for God and others.

Pray

COME HOLY SPIRIT. Transform our hearts and turn them outward to God and others.

*Excerpt from *PARADOX: Embracing the Tension in Christianity*, by Matt LeRoy & Jeremy Summers. Available May 31 from Wesleyan Publishing House.



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