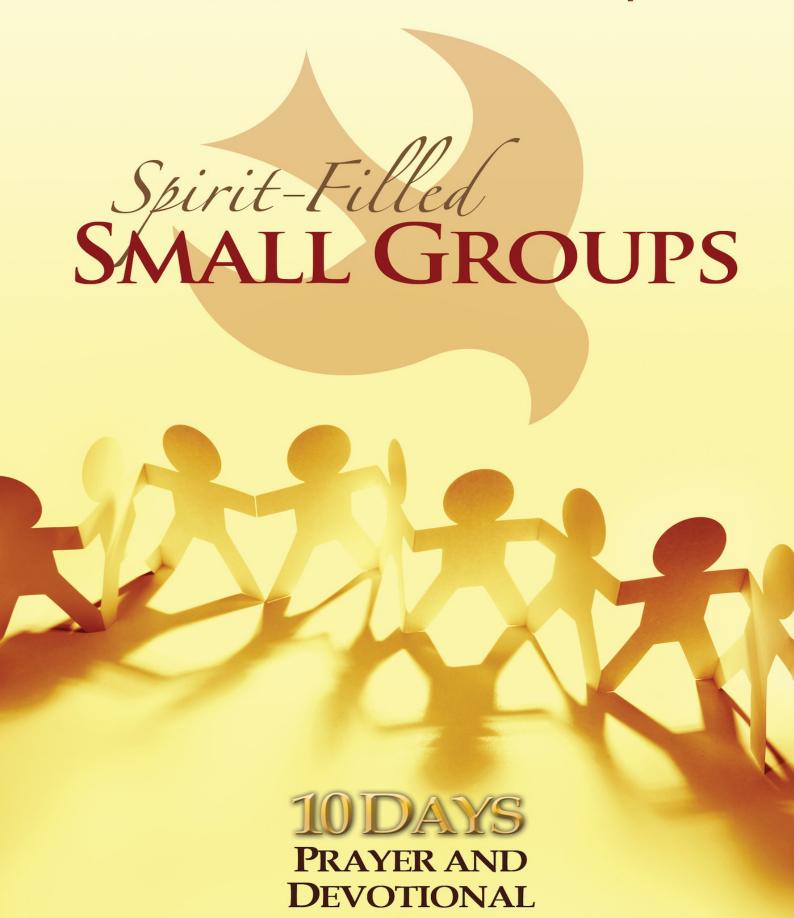
Experience the Amazing Joy of Genuine Christian Fellowship!



DENNIS SMITH

10 Days

Prayers and Devotions to Experience Revival and fellowship In Spirit Filled Small Groups

Dennis Smith

Do you want to experience the amazing joy & fulfillment of genuine Christian fellowship?

Do you want the Christian experience the believers had following the day of Pentecost?

Learn how to experience revival and keep the flame of revival burning in your life and church.

"Putting new wine in new wineskins"

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First Printing: 2014 by Dennis Smith

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Printed in the USA

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Cover design by ChristianDesign.com

ISBN: 978-0-9841085-8-9

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Introduction

My journey to better understand the biblical teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit began in the fall of 1999 when the Lord led my wife, Patty, and me to begin studying this subject. Since then many facets of this marvelous biblical teaching have been revealed.

We have come to understand that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience necessary for the Christian to become truly like Jesus in life and ministry. Through Holy Spirit baptism Jesus lives most fully in the believer. As a result of this intimate connection with Jesus, the believer will begin experiencing his greatest victories over sin and will develop the most meaningful relationship possible with his Savior. In my 10 Days devotional book on the baptism of the Holy Spirit I present the biblical teaching on this subject as well as presenting what the believer will experience when he seeks the Spirit's infilling.

Next the Lord led to the biblical study of the relationship revival and witnessing for Christ has to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, closely examining Christ's method of evangelism. In my 40 Days Book 1, published by the *Review & Herald Publishing Association*, I explore this subject along with the problems last day Laodicean Christians face and the solution to those problems. In addition, I present the biblical meaning of intercessory prayer for the unsaved along with addressing the pertinent question: "Why does God need our prayers?"

Next the Lord led me to better understand the relationship between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and genuine Christian fellowship. I have come to understand that even though we may receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we will not grow spiritually as God intends without a meaningful, mutually dependent fellowship with other Spirit filled believers. To become Spirit filled, and remain somewhat isolated and independent of other Spirit filled Christians will not only hinder our spiritual growth, but may lead to the loss of the fullness of the Spirit's presence in our life.

It is urgent that every Spirit filled believer understands the genuine Christian fellowship into which God desires to lead us. The goal of this book is to clearly show the connection between Spirit baptism and fellowship, and to define what kind of fellowship God desires for His children.

This study has caused me to experience a "paradigm" shift in my thinking about what "church" really is meant to be. I am by nature an introvert and can be very satisfied avoiding fellowship. However, what I present in this book has challenged me to move forward in personal fellowship with other Spirit filled believers. This has resulted in a much deeper and richer experience in the Lord, and has led to stronger bonds of Christian love with fellow believers.

I became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian in 1966. I made my decision to join the church because of the clear biblical teachings held by Seventh-day Adventists. Having served the Lord as an active layman and as a pastor for many years, I have encountered many opposing arguments to the teachings of our church. I have personally found that every argument can be clearly refuted by systematic Bible study. The pillars of our faith are biblically sound.

However, I have also discovered through the years that Seventh-day Adventists tend to be very intellectual in their religion. We know many vital truths of the Bible. Our evangelistic efforts focus on those truths that set us apart from other denominations. Hence, many who choose to become church members do so because of those truths.

One fact that has often troubled me is the general weakness of Seventh-day Adventists in the area of Christian fellowship. We are a rather independent group of believers. One has to have somewhat of an independent spirit to become a Seventh-day Adventist in the first place, for choosing to keep the seventh-day Sabbath sets us apart from the vast majority of other Christians.

I have often read the description of the believers following Pentecost where they are described thus:

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Acts 2:42

I knew as a church we were "right on" when it came to "doctrine". However, when it came to fellowship, we did not fare so well. I have observed that most Adventists are hard workers who provide for their families and do their best to attend the Sabbath morning worship service. Most church services are somewhat formal with little or no time for interaction between believers. Hence, the average fellowship consists of warm greetings before and after church. Then, most make their way home to

return the next Sabbath. Many of our churches have a mid-week prayer meeting, which usually consists of a biblical presentation by the pastor and a season of prayer. However, most of our church members feel they are too busy or too tired to attend this mid-week service. I'm sure many other denominations follow the same pattern.

I have often felt that as Seventh-day Adventist Christians fellowship should play a more important role than it does. Yet, I did not know what kind of fellowship God wanted us to have or how to achieve it.

The aim of this book is to clarify the nature of the fellowship God calls us to when we become a Christian and the way we can experience it. My prayer is that the reader will not only experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit in his/her life, but will discover the wonderful joy of genuine Christian fellowship among Spirit filled believers. Now I am convinced that it is not only necessary to be Spirit filled; but it is also essential for the believer to experience genuine Christian fellowship so that he will be able to grow to the "stature of the fullness of Christ" as individuals and as a church.

How to Use this 10 Day Devotional Study

The disciples had spent day after day with Christ for three and a half years. They sat at His feet and listened to His instruction. They saw Him heal the sick, cast out devils, feed thousands with a young boy's lunch and even raise the dead to life. They themselves had been sent out by Jesus to preach the gospel, heal the sick and cast out devils in His name. When the seventy returned they were amazed at what they had just experienced and exclaimed: "...Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." Luke 10:17.

Christ's disciples had also experienced the devastating disappointment when the mob took Jesus that Thursday night in the garden. They witnessed the mock trial and terrible crucifixion. They had also seen Jesus after He was resurrected, and spent 40 days with Him before He ascended to heaven.

Even though the disciples had experienced all these things and understood what the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was about in the plan of salvation they were not ready to take the gospel to the world as Jesus had commissioned them in Matthew 28:18-20

No, they were lacking something very important in order to truly represent Jesus to the world, and preach the gospel with power. Therefore, Jesus commanded them; "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence... But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:5, 8

Jesus told them to wait to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit before they went forth to preach the gospel and do the ministry of Jesus. So they did what Jesus said; they waited. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." Acts 1:14. They waited in fasting and prayer for ten days. Every day they met in the upper room to study, fast, pray and make all things right between one another. Ellen White described their fellowship with the following words:

"These days of preparation were days of deep heart searching. The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised." (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p.37)

At the end of the ten days an amazing event happened.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" Acts 2:1-8

From the Day of Pentecost onward under the power of the baptism of the Holy Spirit the gospel went to the then known world. The church was born at the end of a 10 day prayer meeting. On the 10th day thousands accepted Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41, 4:4), and the baptism of the Holy Spirit became available to all believers in Jesus Christ. This same Holy Spirit infilling is available to every Christian today. It is just as important today as it was 2000 years ago for the Christian to daily experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The 10 day devotional book, 10 Days – Prayers & Devotions to Experience the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, is recommended to be studied in order to better understand and most fully experience the Spirit's baptism.

The following paragraphs are adapted from the book 40 Days – Prayers & Devotions to Prepare for Christ's Second Coming, Review & Herald Publishing Association, Dennis Smith.

Jesus said, "...if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). There is great power in united prayer. There is

also encouragement and spiritual strength found in Christian fellowship. Because of these truths it is suggested that you find a prayer partner to fellowship with, and pray together with either on the phone or in person every day during the 10 days of prayer and study.

This devotional has 10 daily devotionals followed by personal reflection and discussion questions, and a prayer focus for that day. In order to get the greatest benefit from this devotional as a church I recommend that your church come together every night for 10 nights to sing, study, pray and share together using this devotional book. As mentioned above, you also need to choose one in the group to become your daily fellowship prayer partner. Each participant in the group needs to do the same in order to receive the greatest blessings during the 10 days.

Each day's prayer focus will include prayer for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and revival. Both of these spiritual experiences are greatly needed in the church today, and are necessary to be ready for Christ's soon return. Concerning this Ellen White wrote:

"A revival of true godliness among us is our greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work." (*1Selected Messages*, p.121)

She also understood the relationship between receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit and revival.

"The baptism of the Holy Ghost as on the day of Pentecost will lead to a revival of true religion and the performance of many wonderful works." (2Selected Messages, p.57)

The baptism of the Holy Spirit gives the Christian the power needed to be revived spiritually, and also power for witnessing. Jesus certainly knew the importance of what would happen when the Holy Spirit would be poured out in "early rain" power on the day of Pentecost. Speaking of this He said:

"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (NIV Luke 12:49).

What fire was Jesus speaking of? He was speaking of the fire of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16).

How does the Christian receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and experience revival? The same way believers always have – by prayerfully

claiming God's promise. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was received by the early church on the day of Pentecost as a result of them unitedly praying for ten days claiming Christ's promise (Acts 1:4-5, 8, 14). Ellen White confirmed this when she wrote: "A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer." (*1Selected Messages*, p.121) Every Christian today needs to pray the prayer of David: "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (Ps 85:6)

In the book of second Chronicles, chapter seven, verse fourteen, we read a very clear description of how revival takes place among God's people.

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

THE 10 WEEK OPTION

Some churches have chosen to use this devotional during a 10 week period of time using a week to study one day's devotional, and then come together once a week (perhaps during mid-week Prayer Meeting) to discuss the devotional study and pray together.

It is also recommended that you choose 5 individuals to pray for who are either former church members or non-members in your area. Call these individuals informing them that your church is going to conduct a 10 day prayer focus, and that you would like to pray for them for these 10 days, or 10 weeks if you and your church is using this devotional as a 10 week prayer and devotion time. Then ask them what they would like for you to include in your prayer for them.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

Prayer is the most powerful force on earth. Prayer is essential for one's own personal spiritual growth, and is the most effective means of reaching others for Christ. Concerning prayer and the Christian's spiritual growth Ellen White wrote:

"Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be substituted, and the health of the soul be preserved. Prayer brings the heart into immediate contact with the Well-spring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience. Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God. The spiritual faculties lose their vitality, the

religious experience lacks health and vigor." (*Gospel Workers*, p. 254) She also recognized the necessity of prayer in leading others to Christ.

"Through much prayer you must labor for souls, for this is the only method by which you can reach hearts. It is not your work, but the work of Christ who is by your side, that impresses hearts." (*Evangelism* p.525)

"The Lord will hear our prayers for the conversion of souls." (*Messages to Young People*, p.315)

As you prayerfully consider the suggested ways to reach out to those you are praying for you will not only be praying for them; you will also be working to bring them closer to Christ and His church. God will bless your efforts when you pray for and work for those on your prayer list. He will not only use you to win others to Christ; He will also draw you closer to Himself. Ellen White understood this double blessing when she wrote:

"As you work to answer your own prayers, you will find that God will reveal Himself unto you... Begin now to reach higher and still higher. Prize the things of heaven above earthly attractions and inducements. ... Learn how to pray; learn how to bear a clear and intelligent testimony, and God will be glorified in you." (*The Upward Look*, p.256)

"Their persevering prayers will bring souls to the cross. In cooperation with their self-sacrificing efforts Jesus will move upon hearts, working miracles in the conversion of souls." (*Testimonies*, Vol. 7, p.27)

In order to facilitate the prayer emphasis in this devotional there is a prayer focus section at the end of each day's devotional. This section gives a suggested prayer focus for the day.

By choosing to participate in the 10 days or 10 weeks of study and prayer you are entering into an amazing and blessed adventure with the Lord. You will experience a deeper relationship with Christ, and you will see the Lord use you to draw others closer to Himself in preparation for His soon return. As you fellowship with your prayer partner and the others participating you will experience a deeper Christian love and unity with your fellow believers, which will also play an important role in your personal spiritual growth.

In order to get the most from this devotional study it is recommended that this be the first thing you do in the morning. It may require rising a little earlier, but the effort will be well rewarded. If you ask the Lord to wake you so you can have some quality time with Him, He will hear and answer your prayer. Concerning Christ's devotional life Ellen White wrote:

"Daily He received a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit. In the early hours of the new day the Lord awakened Him from His slumbers, and His soul and His lips were anointed with grace, that He might impart to others. His words were given Him fresh from the heavenly courts, words that He might speak in season to the weary and oppressed." (*Christ's Object Lessons*, P.140)

Christ will do the same for you if you ask Him. He very much desires to anoint you with His Spirit in preparation for each new day. This devotional study is designed to facilitate just that; a daily anointing of God's Spirit for personal spiritual growth, and witnessing for Christ.

If you or your church uses this devotional as a 10 days devotionals study I also recommend one other important activity, which I call a Prayer Fast. In order to get the most out of the 10 days I recommend that each participant limit all secular activity as much as possible during those 10 days. For example; do not watch secular television programs, listen to secular music, play secular games, surf the internet, discuss secular subjects with friends, etc. Try to keep your focus on as many spiritual subjects and activities as possible such as spiritual music, spiritual television programs, Bible study, etc. What this does is clear one's mind so God can better communicate with us. This kind of Prayer Fast will go a long way in greatly enhancing the 10 day spiritual experience and impact on your life.

You may also want to fast from some physical food. Some individuals choose to omit one meal, omit sweets, or eat less food at each meal during the 10 days. These kinds of limitations will also enhance the spiritual impact of the 10 days.



SPIRIT BAPTISM AND FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

Before we pursue a more in-depth study of Christian fellowship groups, it is important we understand the relationship between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fellowship groups. The two go hand-in-hand. Both are necessary for the Christian to grow into the fullness of Christ. I will cover the subject of the baptism of the Holy Spirit more thoroughly in another days devotional. In this chapter we will take an overview look at its relationship to "new wineskin" fellowship groups.

IMPORTANCE OF SPIRIT BAPTISM

The baptism of the Spirit is the primary experience into which the believer must enter in order to grow fully into the image of Christ. This is because it is Spirit baptism that empowers the Christian to live the victorious life. Without the Spirit's infilling, the fruit of the Spirit will not grow to maturity in one's life. Also, the baptism of the Spirit is necessary for the gifts of the Spirit to be fully manifested.

Ellen White understood this when she wrote:

"Impress upon all the necessity of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the sanctification of the church, so that they will be living, growing, fruit-bearing trees of the Lord's planting." *Testimonies Vol. 6*, p.86

God wants His children to be "living, growing, fruit-bearing trees". In order to experience this, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is necessary. It is through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and prayer that we experience the revival that will bring us out of our "Laodicea" condition.

"The baptism of the Holy Spirit as on the day of Pentecost will lead to a revival of true religion and the performance of many wonderful works." *Selected Messages, Vol.2*, p.57

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is also an essential for the core members

of a fellowship group in order for the group to function as God intends. We see this clearly illustrated in the experience of Christ and the disciples. The twelve disciples were in a very close personal and "group" relationship with Christ and one another for three and one half years. Yet, we find them bickering among themselves on the way to the Passover supper just before Christ was to be taken by the mob and ultimately crucified. They had not yet attained the level of loving, committed fellowship with God or each other during those three and one half years. Simply being a part of a fellowship group of which Christ was the leader was not enough to bring about the changes necessary for them to grow up into the fullness of Christ. Later, we find that they were changed dramatically. What made the difference? Their receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost made the difference. From that day forward they and all others who were present entered into the genuine Christian fellowship that God desires every believer to experience.

New Wine in New Wineskins

Jesus made a significant statement one day when he said:

"Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Matthew 9:17 NIV

In this book I will use Jesus' statement about wine and wineskins to clarify what I believe is an essential relationship between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and Christian fellowship groups. First, I am going to let the "new wine" represent the believer baptized with the Holy Spirit. There is some justification for applying the scripture this way since the Bible clearly states that the "life is in the blood," (Leviticus 17:11) and Jesus used "wine" as a symbol of His shed blood. (Matthew 26:27-28) Jesus also stated that it is by "eating His flesh" and "drinking His blood" that the believer has "life" in him. (John 6:53) It is through the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Jesus most fully lives in the believer. (1John 3:24) It is through the baptism of the Spirit that the "life" (new wine) of Jesus is in the believer. Paul knew of the reality of this when he stated that "Christ liveth in me". (Galatians 2:20) This is why Paul emphatically commanded every believer to keep on being filled with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18) It is interesting that in this verse Paul admonished the believer not to be "drunk with wine". Rather, we are to be filled with the "new wine" of the Spirit,

which is the "life" of Christ. As alcoholic wine can take over the body and mind of the drunkard; so the Holy Spirit is to control the Spirit filled believer's mind and body.

Next I am going to apply the "wineskins" spoken of by Jesus to the way a Christian "does church". We will discuss the concept of church in greater detail in another days devotional so I will not elaborate on it here. I will simply state that genuine Christian fellowship by Spirit filled believers who are manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, and ministering to one another via the spiritual gifts is "true church" according to the New Testament. This "true church" way of "doing church" is what I will call the "new wineskin."

This "new wineskin" way of doing church cannot happen during the traditional Sabbath morning worship service because of the inter-relational dynamics required between Spirit filled believers. The only way the "new wineskin" church experience can happen is in small Christian fellowship groups. Many Christian writers call them "cell" groups. I will discuss the "new wineskin" church fellowship groups in greater detail later.

Also, I believe that the experience of "new wineskin" church or "genuine Christian fellowship groups" is necessary for the Spirit filled Christian to fully grow into the image of Christ.

Using this imagery, the "old wineskin" would refer to the traditional way of "doing church." Christians traditionally "do church" by going to church Sabbath morning, warmly greeting a few of their friends, listening to a sermon, and afterward returning home. Since most Christians do not attend a mid-week prayer meeting, the Sabbath service is the essence of the way they "do church." In this book, this is what I call the "old wineskin" way of doing church.

Hence, Jesus' statement that "new wine" must be put into "new wineskins" is a very important statement concerning the Spirit baptized believer. If the Christian who is filled with the Spirit simply continues to "do church" in the "old wineskin" way of doing church, he will not be able to grow spiritually as God desires him to grow. In fact, many times he will find himself frustrated. Therefore, instead of doing church the old wineskin way, it is essential the "new wine", Spirit filled Christian do church the "new wineskin" way.

I have come to strongly believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and

genuine Christian fellowship in small groups go hand-in- hand. They are both necessary for the believer to "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:" (Ephesians 4:13)

Two Illustrations

The importance of Spirit filled believers fellowshipping together via "new wineskin" groups is demonstrated by two illustrations. Paul gives us one illustration of the necessity of a continued living connection between believers in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter twelve. He uses the analogy of the human body to describe the church and its members. He points out how necessary it is for each body part to minister to the body. Spirit filled believers need one another. They are to minister to one another just as your "heart, right hand, eyes, etc." minister to the other parts of your body. From this analogy, it is also evident that it is necessary for each body part to remain in "close, living connection" with the other body parts. For example, if my right hand is cut off from my body, that hand will not survive for very long. The right hand needs the body to minister to it in order to keep healthy and function effectively. It is the "new wineskin" fellowship groups that enable the Spirit baptized believer to keep a "close, living connection" with the body of Christ.

Another illustration of the importance of "new wineskin" fellowship groups can be seen around any camp fire. Think for a moment of a time when you were sitting around a camp fire and watching the embers burn. In order to keep the fire going, it was important that you kept the embers close together and occasionally put on new wood. If a burning ember became separated from the other burning embers it would soon lose its fire and go out. This clearly illustrates the importance of "new wineskin" fellowship groups. In order for the Spirit baptized believer to keep the "fire" from going out in his life, he needs not only to continually ask God for the Spirit's infilling (Ephesians 5:18), but he must also continually keep in fellowship with other Spirit filled believers. If he chooses to isolate himself from such fellowship he will be like the burning ember that becomes separated in the camp fire. His "fire" will burn lower and perhaps eventually go out.

We can also see from the camp fire illustration the effect the burning embers will have on "new wood" that is placed in their midst. The new wood will catch on fire as a result of being placed in the midst of the burning embers. When a visitor (seeker) visits the "new wineskin"

fellowship group, there is a good chance that he will catch the "fire." God will use the group to begin ministering to him through the fruit and gifts of the Spirit manifested in the lives of the Spirit filled believers in the group.

OLD WINE IN NEW WINESKIN

There is another important lesson taught in the statement Christ made about the wine and wineskins. Many churches have tried to establish small fellowship groups over the years. Such efforts come and go in many local congregations. I personally believe that the reason many times these efforts to establish small groups fail is because one is trying to put "old wine" in "new wineskins". The "old wine" Christian who is not Spirit filled will not "pour" well into the "new wineskin". The reason for this is that the fruit and gifts of the Spirit are not able to be fully manifested in him due to the lack of Holy Spirit infilling. Hence, the necessary loving, accepting relationships have difficulty developing. For the same reason, it is difficult to establish a mutual, spiritual gift ministry toward one another. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the fruit and gifts of the Spirit to be fully manifested in the believer. These fruit and gifts of the Spirit are necessary for the "new wineskin" Christian fellowship group to function effectively. When they are missing the fellowship group will fall short of achieving its goal to provide an environment in which the participants mutually minister to one another, enabling them to grow "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

The aim of this book is to help Spirit filled Christians realize the necessity of being involved in "new wineskin" fellowship groups. Both the "new wine" (Spirit filled experience) and the "new wineskin" fellowship groups are necessary. The believer must experience both for optimal spiritual growth. If either one is missing our growth to maturity in Christ will be hindered. I am not saying we will be eternally lost without these; however, if the believer wants the fullness of Christ living in him with the fruit and gifts of the Spirit being fully manifested, both experiences are necessary. Spirit baptism in the believer's life and "new wineskin" fellowship are both essential for him to experience and keep the flame of revival burning.

In this book we will study in some detail the role the fruit and gifts of the Spirit play in making these new wineskin fellowship groups effective. We will see that the fruit of the Spirit create a healing, redemptive group

environment. The fruit of the Spirit will also be used by God to minister to the participants. The gifts of the Spirit play a significant role as well. They will be used by God to bring the participants to the point where they will "no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:14-16) My prayer is that this will be the experience of all who read this 10 days devotional book.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Why is the baptism of the Holy Spirit necessary for the Christian to enter into genuine fellowship with other Spirit filled Christians?
- 2. What do the expressions "new wine" and "new wineskin" refer to in today's devotional study?
- 3. How do the two examples of the body analogy Paul uses and the burning ember in the fire illustrate the importance of the Spirit filled Christian being a part of a Spirit filled fellowship group?
- 4. Why is it impossible for a Christian who is not Spirit filled to truly experience the fellowship described in today's devotional study?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray for:
 - The Baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to lead you to understand the relationship between baptism of the Holy Spirit and new wineskin fellowship groups
 - Those on your prayer list



THE CHURCH

Have you ever wondered what the word "church" means in the New Testament? As might be expected, being a pastor for many years I have reflected on the meaning of church many times. I thought I had a fairly good concept of what the church was to be, but I have discovered that my concept of church was not complete. As I began to understand the concepts presented in this devotional, some of my previous ideas about church began to be challenged. As a result, I was forced to do a paradigm shift in my thinking about church.

CONCEPT OF CHURCH BASED UPON COMMON DOCTRINAL BELIEFS

The Greek word used in the New Testament for church is "ekklesia," which means "called out ones." When men and women respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction to accept Christ as their Savior, they become part of "ekklesia," the called out ones.

When we study the New Testament, we discover that there are two very important aspects of church. Those who are "called out" are called to believe the teachings of the Bible. Paul describes the church with these words:

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." *1 Timothy 3:15*

Here Paul calls the church the "pillar and ground of the truth." Those called out are to believe, live and teach the truths of God's word.

The teachings of the Word of God are very important.

"And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." *2 Timothy 3:15-17*

These verses clearly tell us that it is in God's Word that we find the truth of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Bible reveals God's will for us. God will correct and instruct us in His ways through the Word.

Hence, the Bible is held to be true by the "called out" ones. God used the truths of His Word to call them out of the world, and lead them to accept Christ as their Savior.

I became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian because of the teachings of the Adventist church. I felt the Adventist church followed the Bible teachings more closely than any other church. I still feel that way and this is why I remain a Seventh-day Adventist. The pillars of our faith are based solidly on the Bible.

I am sure the majority of Seventh-day Adventists have become members of the church for the same reason. Bible doctrine is very important to Seventh-day Adventists. Because of this, when I considered the concept of church, I concluded that the church was in essence a group of Christians who hold a common set of beliefs to be true. This definition is correct, but does not go far enough.

THE FELLOWSHIP ASPECT OF CHURCH

There is another very important aspect of church that I did not clearly understand for many years even though I was a pastor for most of my adult life. This second aspect of church is revealed in John's first letter:

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." *I John 1:3*

This second vital aspect of church is what the New Testament calls "fellowship." In the simplest sense, "fellowship" is certainly not a new concept. In fact, we fellowship when we worship at church on Sabbath or when we attended a church social together. However, recently the Lord has challenged me to look again at the New Testament meaning of the word "fellowship."

The Greek word translated fellowship is "koinonia." The noun form of this term means to share in, participate in, or to be actively involved in. The verb form means to communicate, distribute and impart. Hence, to "koinonia" together means much more than simply sitting together in the sanctuary for Sabbath worship or playing games together at a social. The New Testament meaning of fellowship goes much deeper. In essence, it means ministering to one another. It is not simply knowing one another's names, knowing where we live and warmly greeting one another at church Sabbath morning. It means sharing one another's hopes, dreams, struggles and pains. It means allowing God to use us to minister to one another. This aspect of "koinonia" fellowship is discussed in great detail in the day's devotionals on the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.

Thus, the Lord has led me to broaden my definition of church fellowship. According to the New Testament, a church fellowship is an assembly of individuals called out of the world by God to become a community with common biblical beliefs, and who actively communicate, distribute impart, and minister to one another.

Hence, a New Testament Christian is more than an individual who believes a set of Bible doctrines and goes to church. A New Testament Christian also has meaningful, close fellowship with God and his fellow believers. We see this kind of Christian described in the book of Acts:

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." *Acts 2:42*

Three of the four things listed describing these early Christians are the group activities of fellowship, breaking of bread (eating together) and prayers. Prayer is both an individual and group activity. In the context of Acts 2:42 group prayer is most likely being described.

When we consider the meaning of "koinonia" and read the description of the early church, it becomes clear that involvement in genuine fellowship is necessary if one is a Christian in the truest New Testament sense. God's design is that the church be a caring fellowship where people actively minister to one another. If this is not happening in a church, then that group of believers is not truly a church. Rather, they are a group of independent individuals believing a common set of doctrines. That description could describe a wide variety of clubs and organizations in our society. God established His church to be much more than that.

Some of the values of western culture can create a mindset that can inhibit this kind of fellowship from taking place. In America we are taught that rugged individualism is highly valued. The ideal person is strong and

independent. To be dependent on others is often considered a weakness. The evidence that this concept has affected the thinking of most Christians is revealed in surveys that show that 80% of American Christians believe they can be good Christians without being involved in a church. This concept is totally unbiblical.

The purpose of this devotional is to show biblically and historically that it is necessary for a church to be an active fellowship. God's intent for Christians is to minister to one another. We are to be mutually dependent on one another. God created mankind this way in the beginning, and established His church for this purpose.

TRIUNE GOD OF FELLOWSHIP

With this in mind, we will next consider what the Bible say about God Himself. God has revealed Himself as the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Throughout the scriptures we see the Godhead working in perfect harmony. At the creation we see the presence of the Holy Spirit. (Genesis 1:2) In the New Testament we learn that Christ created all things. (John 1:1-3, 14; Colossians 1:16-17) When creating man God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness". (Genesis 1:26) No member of the Godhead ever works independently of the other two. They act in perfect harmony. The Godhead is a perfect fellowship. They not only act together, but they also glorify one another. The Father glorifies the Son and the Son glorifies the Father. (John 17:22, 4) The Holy Spirit speaks not of Himself, but only of the Son. (John 16:13-14)

Mankind Created For Fellowship

God created mankind to be very much like Himself. (Genesis 1:26) Man was created to be in perfect harmony or fellowship with God and one another. Mankind was created to act together for the mutual benefit of one another. This is why God said "it is not good for man to be alone." (Genesis 2:18) The Hebrew word translated "good" is "tov," which means pleasant, joyful or fruitful. What God is saying is that man would not achieve the joyfulness or fruitfulness God intended if man were alone, not in fellowship. In order for God's image to be seen in mankind and fulfill the purpose for which man was made, mankind had to be created as a "fellowship" or community. The goal was that mankind would be in perfect harmony meeting one another's needs.

In chapter three of Genesis we read that Adam and Eve chose to sin.

Once this happened, their perfect fellowship was broken. Their fellowship with God was severed. We read that they "hid" themselves from God. (Genesis 3:8) We also read that they began accusing one another and God for the problem. (Genesis 3:12-13) Sin destroyed fellowship.

The goal of redemption is to restore this broken fellowship. Sinful man does not have the ability to bring about this restoration by himself. First, it is not in his sinful nature to do so. Sinful man is extremely selfish. (Romans 8:7) True fellowship is impossible without God intervening in one's life and giving him a new nature – God's nature. (2Peter 1:4) True fellowship can only happen by the Spirit of God restoring man to the image of God. (2Corinthians 3:18) This was the promise God gave to mankind when He spoke to the serpent:

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." *Genesis 3:15*

God's promise is to restore "fellowship" between man and Himself and between the "seed of the woman," believers. Hence, when God calls us out of the world He calls us to fellowship with Himself, and with one another. This fellowship is necessary in order for the image of God to be restored in fallen man. This is why fellowship is at the heart of being a Christian. In fact, real church happens only when this kind of genuine Christian fellowship takes place. It is in the context of genuine Christian fellowship that our relationship with God and with one another grows, and the healing of our brokenness takes place. If we isolate ourselves from such fellowship, we will not experience the restoration that God desires for us.

THE SABBATH AND FELLOWSHIP

When Seventh-day Adventists think of church, they think of the Sabbath. The seventh-day Sabbath is when they go to church or "do church." In the light of our discussion about fellowship, I will ask the following questions: What does fellowship have to do with the Sabbath? Why did God create the Sabbath?

The Sabbath was the last thing God created. (Genesis 2:1-3) The first day of man's existence occurred on the Sabbath. God has given us instruction about how to keep the Sabbath day holy. (Exodus 20:8-11) We are commanded to "rest" on that day. When we look at the context of the creation of the Sabbath, we are forced to conclude that the word "rest"

cannot mean to simply stop working and rest as the result of our tiredness. God was not tired from creating. Yet Scripture says He "rested." On that first Sabbath Adam was not tired from having worked since it was the first day of his existence. The concept of rest is to stop the activity you are doing and do something else. In the case of the Sabbath, God stopped His creative activity in order to enter into fellowship with Adam. The Sabbath was created for fellowship: fellowship between God and man as well as mankind with mankind.

Today the Sabbath has the same purpose. It is a special time to stop our ordinary activity and enter into an even closer relationship with God than on other days. If we do this it will strengthen our relationship with Him during the days that follow.

The Sabbath is also a time for closer fellowship with one another. If we are not in close, meaningful fellowship with other believers on the Sabbath then we are actually ignoring the purpose of the Sabbath. If we try to keep the Sabbath alone we are not really keeping the Sabbath.

I have known of individuals who would come to church and say little or nothing to fellow believers. They worked hard at keeping focused on reading their Bible and listening to the sermon. Reading our Bible and listening to the sermon are good church activities on the Sabbath. However, if we neglect entering into close fellowship with fellow believers, we are not truly keeping the Sabbath.

Fellowship with God and fellow believers plays a major role in the restoration of God's image in us. The Sabbath is an island in time that God has given us to stop our normal daily activities. It provides a wonderful opportunity for this process of restoration to continue in our lives.

In the Old Testament the Sabbath is called a "holy convocation." (Leviticus 23:3) The Hebrew word translated "convocation" is "miqra." It means a "calling together." On the Sabbath God calls us "together." He does not call us "together" to be separated from one another, but for fellowship with Him and one another for the purpose of restoration.

A CHALLENGING QUESTION

The question with which God has challenged me is: "Can this kind of close, interdependent fellowship happen the way we "do church" today? I am forced to say no. I have come to the conclusion that we must change the way we interrelate with one another as Christians if the restoration God

desires for us is to happen in our lives. We must find a way to create an environment for genuine Christian fellowship to occur. In this devotional I call that kind of fellowship "new wineskin" fellowship. My personal conclusion is that this "new wineskin" fellowship will happen most readily in small group fellowship; preferably home fellowship groups.

In the following day's devotionals we will look at the concept of church both biblically and historically. We will study what the early church was like and how these early Christians fellowshipped together. We will see historically how the church "fell away" from God's original plan for her. We will also study how the fruit and gifts of the Spirit are to function in the setting of "new wineskin" fellowship groups.

I am strongly convicted that God is calling us away from the way we have been "doing church." Instead He is calling us to the original New Testament Christian fellowship He intended for His church. The baptism of the Holy Spirit in the individual believer's life is an essential ingredient for this kind of fellowship to occur.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. According to the New Testament, what does the word translated "church" mean?
- 2. According to the New Testament, what two aspects define what church is?

(see 2 Timothy 3:15-17, 1 John 1:3)

- 3. In Acts 2:42 what activities did the early Christians participate in?
- 4. The Greek word translated "fellowship" is "koinoia". What does koinoia mean?
- 5. What does fellowship have to do with restoring the image of God in mankind?
- 6. How is the Sabbath an koinoia related?
- 7. What do you think is the best environment for genuine Christian fellowship to take place?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray For:
 - The Baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to lead you to understand the biblical meaning of church, and to experience genuine "koinoia" fellowship
 - Those on your prayer list



THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The understanding of the subject of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an essential background for grasping the concepts taught in this book. In these pages I am applying the "new wine" of Christ's parable to the experience of Spirit baptism. (Matthew 9:17) Because of the significance of this subject, I have included this chapter.

The subject of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is covered in much greater detail in my book entitled, *The Baptism of the Holy Spirit*. I would refer the reader to that book for a more complete discussion.

In this book, I contend that the baptism of the Holy Spirit (the "new wine") and "new wineskin" fellowship are equally necessary in order for us to grow into the fullness of Christ and be ready to meet our Lord when He comes. Hence, it is vital for us to understand the biblical teaching on Holy Spirit baptism.

SATAN'S EFFORTS TO CONFUSE

Satan has done much to confuse and mislead concerning this very important biblical teaching. Ellen White was aware of Satan's devices to hinder God's people from receiving this Gift:

"Since the ministry of the Holy Spirit is of vital importance to the church of Christ, it is one of the devices of Satan, through the errors of extremists and fanatics, to cast contempt upon the work of the Spirit, and cause the people of God to neglect this source of strength which our Lord Himself has provided." *Australian Signs of the Times*, July 24, 1911

The baptism of the Holy Spirit simply describes a special infilling of the Holy Spirit into the life of the believer. This baptism is also called "infilling" and "anointing", and has been available to Christians since the day of Pentecost two thousand years ago. Peter associated the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit with the "early rain" prophecy of Joel. (Acts 2:16-

JESUS' PROMISE AND EXAMPLE

Jesus promised that the Father would give the Spirit if man asked for it. (Luke 11:13) Paul tells us we receive this gift by faith. (Gal. 3:14) The reception of this Gift is so important that Paul commands us to keep on being "filled with the Spirit". (Eph. 5:18) It is not simply an option, but it is a necessity if the believer is earnest about experiencing the full deliverance offered by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is our example in all things. In His life we see the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a special, separate event following His water baptism. This event equipped Him for victory over Satan and for His ministry. His experience is a divine model for every Christian. Christ was "begotten" of the Spirit. (Luke 1:35) He was led by the Spirit in his childhood and early manhood. (Luke 2:52) He received water baptism, followed by baptism in the Spirit, for which He had prayed. (Luke 3:21-22) From that point on He was filled with the Spirit. (Luke 4:1) After this experience of Spirit baptism (infilling or anointing), He was prepared to confront Satan and gain His great victories over this enemy. (Luke 4:2-13) From that day forward, He went forth to minister in the power of the Spirit. (Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38)

The experience of every believer is to follow Christ's example. The Christian is first born of the Spirit and baptized. (John 3:5-8) However, water baptism is not enough. It is only the beginning, for the believer must also be baptized by the Holy Spirit. (Luke 3:16) This Spirit baptism has been available since the day of Pentecost. This infilling of the Spirit is necessary for the believer to have the power to live a victorious life and successfully witness for Christ. (Acts 1:8)

The fulfillment of Jesus' promise was seen on the day of Pentecost and thereafter. The gospel was preached, souls were won, unity and joy were seen in the believers, and the sick were healed. (Acts 2:46-47; 5:15-16) This was the same type of ministry as that practiced by Jesus.

RECEIVING THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AFTER PENTECOST

Not every believer was present at Pentecost. A practical question might be; "How did believers receive the baptism of the Spirit after Pentecost?" The answer is found in the book of Acts. On a couple of occasions the Spirit fell on a group while Peter spoke to them. (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15-17) It also

appears that God led the church to receive the baptism of the Spirit in a more orderly way by the laying on of hands. (Acts 8:12-17; 19:1-6) Note in Acts chapter eight how the individuals of Samaria were led by the Spirit to accept Christ and be baptized. Yet they had not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Peter and John came to them from Jerusalem for the specific purpose of laying hands on them and pray for the baptism of the Spirit to come upon them. This is a clear indication that water baptism and Spirit baptism are two separate experiences. The Spirit leads an individual to accept Christ and be baptized in water. This is a different work than the baptism of the Spirit, which must be sought separately when one becomes aware and convicted of the importance of it. We see in Acts that Paul also received the baptism of the Spirit by the laying on of hands and prayer. (Acts 9:17) The one performing this prayer with laying on of hands should be a believer who has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit himself.

A believer desiring the baptism of the Holy Spirit does not necessarily have to have someone pray for him by laying hands on him. When I first began sharing this teaching with our church, one of the members decided that very evening to seek the baptism of the Spirit. She earnestly prayed for God to fill her with His Spirit. She said later that she felt come over her the greatest peace that she had ever felt. God has not limited Himself to only one method of receiving the baptism of the Spirit. I do believe that the special ceremony of praying with laying on of hands is a wonderful way to seek the infilling of the Spirit. It is always a special blessing to share in this sacred experience with a fellow believer.

Ellen White stated many years ago:

"What we need is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Without this, we are no more fitted to go forth to the world than were the disciples after the crucifixion of their Lord." *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 18, 1890

"Impress upon all the necessity of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the sanctification of the church, so that they will be living, growing, fruit-bearing trees of the Lord's planting." *Testimonies Vol.* 6, p.86

When one reads Ellen White's statements on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it is clear that she saw its importance and urged every believer to seek it. It was clear to her that the baptism of the Spirit was essential for God's work to be finished in the lives of His people and in this earth. Finally, if the baptized believer automatically received the baptism of the

Holy Spirit at water baptism, she would not counsel baptized believers to seek it.

In the spring of 1928, God sought to again draw the attention of Adventists to this very important experience, when Elder LeRoy Froom was inspired to present this subject to delegates and workers at the quadrennial ministerial institutes held in conjunction with the union conference sessions. The book, The Coming of the Comforter, resulted from these presentations.

LeRoy Froom states the following in reference to our failure to understand and receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

"I am persuaded that this is our colossal blunder. I confess it has been mine. We are not to 'go' until we are endued... All true service begins at our personal Pentecost." *The Coming of the Comforter*, p.94.

Froom continues:

"For there is an experience beyond and above the initial step by which the Holy Spirit first reveals sin, and begets a new life in the soul, and that is to be filled with the Spirit. For the lack of this, one's testimony is feeble and the spiritual life but partial.

"Alas, many today have gone as far as the baptism of repentance, but no farther." *Ibid.* 142-143

Froom's study led him to believe that the Spirit's infilling is necessary in order for the believer to be victorious through the time of trouble unto Christ's coming.

"It is a relationship into which we may or may not enter, though we are exhorted, yea divinely commanded to, in Ephesians 5; and in order to abide through the time when there will be no high priestly intercession, when mercy ceases and forgiveness for transgressions is ended, we must enter." *Ibid.* 170

There has been much misinformation and confusion about what happens when a person receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Satan fears this experience in the believer more than any other. He knows that the baptism of the Holy Spirit will break his power in the believer's life, and the resulting powerful witness for Jesus Christ will bring Satan's work to an end on planet earth. For this reason, he has done everything he can to confuse this teaching and cause many sincere Christians to misunderstand it and even be suspicious of it.

"There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out His Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation. When the way is prepared for the Spirit of God, the blessing will come." *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, March 22, 1887

EXPERIENCES OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

There are numerous records of Christians who have sought and experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Douglas Cooper in his book, *Living in Our Finest Hour*, relates a few of these experiences.

About John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, he states:

"Fearful at his own spiritual weakness, disillusioned and dejected, be became acquainted with a group of Spirit-filled Christians who helped him to change his life remarkably. ...

"Wesley decided to seek the filling of the Spirit for himself. At another meeting he heard a statement read from Luther describing the inner change the Spirit can work on the heart of the believer. At this meeting John Wesley was baptized with the Spirit. He tells of experiencing what was a new dimension of spiritual life. 'I felt my heart strangely warmed,' he said.

"Wesley came away with a new vision, a new passion, new power. Virtually unheard of before this time, his preaching went on to shake three nations." *Living in Our Finest Hour*, P. 76-77

Charles G. Finney stated:

"'Christians are as guilty for not being filled with the Spirit as sinners are for not repenting. They are even more so, as they have more light, they are so much the more guilty." *Ibid.* 78

Dwight L Moody

"After he had been filled with the Spirit, Dwight L. Moody wrote: 'In some sense and to some extent the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer, but there is another gift which may be called the gift of the Holy Spirit for service. This gift, it strikes me, is entirely distinct and separate from conversion and assurance." *Ibid.* 87

As can be seen from the examples related above, the baptism of the Spirit does not necessarily involve a highly emotional experience. One may or may not feel something at the time of seeking the infilling of the Spirit. However, the Spirit will make Himself known to the one in whom He dwells. His presence will begin changing the believer's life from within. A new power for victory and service will be manifested.

God desires to give His children this wonderful experience of Spirit baptism, but in order to receive it we must ask in faith believing He will bestow it. Secondly, we must be willing to give ourselves completely to God.

"The heart must be emptied of every defilement and cleansed for the indwelling of the Spirit. It was by the confession and forsaking of sin, by earnest prayer and consecration of themselves to God, that the early disciples prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost." *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 507

SEEK THE BAPTISM EVERY DAY

Another very important point is that we must renew this infilling every day. Paul said, "I die daily". (1Cor. 15:31) The dying to self and infilling of the Spirit is a daily experience. It is not a "once and for ever" experience. Paul tells us that the "inward man is renewed day by day". (2Cor. 4:16) We need the renewing of the Spirit every day of our life. Also Paul commands us to "be filled with the Spirit". (Eph. 5:18) In the Greek the verb "be filled" is a continuous action verb meaning we are to "keep on being filled" with the Spirit daily. This infilling of the Spirit results in the believer being led by the Spirit. Paul writes of how important it is to experience this daily:

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." *Romans 8:14*

Again the verb form in the Greek implies continuous action. Paul is actually saying "as many as are continuing to be led daily by the Spirit of God". Hence, we must continually receive the Spirit to be led by Him everyday.

Christ is our example in all things. Note what Ellen White writes about the baptism of the Spirit in Christ's daily life:

"Daily He received a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit. In the early hours of the new day the Lord awakened Him from His slumbers, and His soul and His lips were anointed with grace, that He might impart to

BENEFITS OF RECEIVING THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The baptism of the Holy Spirit gives power to our witness and brings forth the fruit of Christ's character in the life. Paul speaks of this when he writes:

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Cor. 3:18

God's glory is His character. (Ex. 33:18-19) Paul states here that the believer will be growing in Christ's character, "from glory to glory", by the Spirit of the Lord that dwells in him.

The infilling of the Spirit of God will "make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever". (Heb. 13:21)

The baptism of the Holy Spirit will allow God to manifest the fruit and gifts of the Spirit through us. As we fellowship with other believers, God will minister to them through us so that they may be edified and grow in the Lord. This is the "new wineskin" fellowship God desires us to enter into.

Ellen White reaffirms how the person who receives the infilling of the Spirit develops character when she writes;

"When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven." *Desire of Ages*, p.173

WE CAN GRIEVE THE SPIRIT

There are things we can do that will grieve the Spirit. (Eph. 4:30) If we do not daily seek Him and cooperate in following where He leads, His power will wane and our Christian experience will weaken.

God does not force. When we receive the baptism of the Spirit, He will have a greater impact in our lives. We will feel His prompting more strongly. He will be daily putting the desire in our hearts to obey God. He will call us to study God's Word and to spend more time in prayer. The Spirit will cause us to begin loving righteousness and hating sin. However, we are always free to disregard His prompting. When we do this, we begin

the process of "grieving" or "quenching" the Spirit. Paul gives very practical advice in many passages of Scripture on how to avoid doing this. The practical counsels Paul gives to the believer on living the Christian life are aimed at helping us maintain the fullness of the Spirit in our lives. Two examples of such counsel are found in Ephesians 4:25-32 and 1Thessalonians 5:14-19.

The majority of Christians who read these letters in Paul's day were fellowshipping in small groups. This was very practical counsel on how to relate to one another in the intimate relationships the small groups provided.

Paul knew that the Spirit of God dwelling in the believer would prompt him to do the things he listed. If however, man refuses to yield to His promptings he will be in danger of "grieving" and "quenching" the Spirit.

If you find that you have grieved the Spirit, don't get discouraged. Instead, ask God to forgive you, and He will. (1John 1:9) Then ask God to fill you anew with His Spirit and He will. (Luke 11:13) Ask Him in faith, and you will receive. (Gal. 3:14)

David knew God's mercy. He had committed the sins of adultery and murder. He had walked away from the prompting of God's Spirit in his life when he committed these terrible acts. Yet, when the Spirit convicted him of his sin, he turned to God in prayer, as recorded in Psalm 51:

"Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit." *Ps.* 51:9-12

When we find that we have been slipping away from God, we must not let another moment go by without confessing our sin, accepting God's forgiveness, and claiming the promise of the renewing of the Spirit in our life as David did. Then the "inner" man will once again be strengthened and become victorious over Satan. (Eph. 3:16-19)

We serve a wonderful God. When we have failed Him, let us remember:

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from

the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." *Ps. 103:8-14*

WE MUST EXPERIENCE THE EARLY RAIN TO RECEIVE THE LATTER RAIN OF THE SPIRIT

It is time for the "latter rain" to fall. If we do not experience the infilling of the Spirit, which is the "early rain" (Joel 2:23), we will not be prepared to receive and participate in the work of the latter rain. I believe God is moving among His people today and leading them into this wonderful experience.

If you have not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit don't delay another day. His reception should be first and foremost in our lives. For this Gift will bring all other gifts to us. The Spirit's infilling will change our lethargy to excitement, our weakness to strength, and our witness will be with a power not seen since the day of Pentecost.

NEW WINE IN NEW WINESKINS

Receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the first step for the believer to take in order to grow into the fullness of Christ. The second step is to become actively involved in a "new wineskin" fellowship. These two experiences go hand-in-hand. The "new wine" Spirit baptized believer must participate in the "new wineskin" fellowship. These two experiences taken together are God's ordained means by which to prepare the last generation of Christians to finish His work in His power, and be ready for Christ's second coming.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. How does Satan work to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit?
- 2. What other terms apply to the baptism of the Holy Spirit experience?
- 3. When did the baptism of the Holy Spirit become available to Christians?
- 4. Is the baptism of the Holy Spirit an option for the believer or a necessity?
- 5. What one thing does the baptism of the Holy Spirit do for the believer? 1 John 3:24
- 6. What works did Jesus say His followers would do? John 14:12

- 7. List some of the works Jesus did that were done by the apostles Acts 2:46-47; 5:15-16
- 8. Did the Samaritan believers, Saul and the Ephesian believers automatically receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit when they were baptized in water?

Acts 8:12-17; 9:17-18, 19:1-6

9. What was a common method used to enable believers to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit after the day of Pentecost?

Acts 8:12-17; 9:17-18, 19:1-6

- 10. Is water baptism and Spirit baptism two separate experiences?
- 11. Is laying on of hands always necessary for an individual to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
- 12. How important did Ellen White say the baptism of the Holy Spirit is?
- 13. What did LeRoy Froom say in 1928 about our neglect of understanding and experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a denomination?
- 14. According to Froom why is the baptism of the Holy Spirit necessary for last day Christians?
- 15. What is one of Satan's greatest fears?
- 16. What must we do to be able to receive the baptism of the Spirit?
- 17. How often should we seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Ephesians 5:18
- 18. What are the benefits of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
- 19. If we find that we have grieved the Holy Spirit what should we do? 1 John 1:9
- 20. Why is it important a Spirit baptized Christian enter into new wineskin fellowship?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray for:
 - The Baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to lead you to experience new wineskin fellowship
 - Those on your prayer list



THE FAMILY HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

In the beginning man was created to be a part of God's family. He was created in God's "image" for "fellowship" with Him. The very first day of man's existence, God ceased His work of creation in order to enter into a special relationship with newly created man. (Genesis 2:1-3)

BELIEVERS BECOME MEMBERS OF GOD'S FAMILY

This family relationship between God and man was meant to bring mutual joy. Of the redeemed we are told:

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." *Zephaniah 3:17*

Sin broke apart the family of God. The plan of redemption was established to restore this family. In this day's devotional we will look at the New Testament concept of family. From the perspective of the family, we will consider the relationship the redeemed are to have with God and one another.

Paul addresses those who have responded to God's call in their life in the following way:

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;" *Ephesians 2:19*

The Greek word translated "household" is "oikeios." When we become a believer in Jesus Christ, we become a member of God's household. We become a member of His family. Our behavior as family members is important:

"...if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." *1 Timothy 3:15 (NIV)*

A family is a small unit of society, but it is the foundational unit (of

society). Strong families make for a strong society. The same is true of God's family. The stronger the "household" of God, the stronger the larger corporate church will be.

Traditionally, we tend to think of church in a larger sense, the corporate or congregational aspect. We do not tend to think of church in terms of a smaller family. However, as we will see in a future day's devotional that discusses the early church from the biblical and historical perspective, the early church was made up of small home fellowships. These fellowship groups functioned as "family."

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILY

When he describes his own feelings toward the Thessalonian family of God, Paul expresses the relationship that is to be experienced in the family of God.

"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." *1 Thessalonians 2:8*

These kinds of endearing relationships cannot happen in the larger congregational setting. If our church activities consist primarily of coming to church on Sabbath morning, greeting our friends, and then returning home, we cannot possibly achieve this level of "family" relationship. For example, what if you heard about a family that remained separated from one another during the week and then came together once a week for an hour or two, briefly greeted one another, then sat in rows and heard someone give a lecture. Afterward they went their separate ways until seven days later when they returned to participate "together" by again greeting one another, sitting in rows and listening to another lecture. What would you think about that family's togetherness? I think you would question if they were really a family. Most would certainly conclude that their style of family togetherness had much room for improvement. Amazing and yet sadly, most Christians seek to be a church family using this pattern of family.

In a healthy family the members know each other intimately. They know one another's fears, hopes, dreams, frustrations and struggles. In a loving, caring family the members are there to encourage one another with words and actions.

The family of God is to function in the same way. However, God's family has one significant advantage over the average family in the world. God's

family experiences the fruit and gifts of the Spirit functioning in their midst. God, Himself, is the one ministering to the family members. He does this through each member of the family as they continue to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The intimate relationship with God this daily baptism brings allows Christ to live in and minister through each believer. Remember Paul's words:

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." *Galatians* 2:20

The Spirit filled believer has Christ living in him. (1John 3:24) In God's church family Jesus will minister to each family member by living in those members and manifesting the fruit and gifts of the Spirit in their lives.

Through the prophet Isaiah God described the work His people were to perform:

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" *Isaiah* 58:6-7

It is significant to note that this is the very work Christ came to do when He walked this earth. In His first sermon he quoted Isaiah and said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." *Luke 4:18-19*

From an evangelistic perspective, which will be discussed in another day's devotional, it is important to note that Isaiah states what will happen when God's family is ministering to one another and reaching out to others with such loving care.

"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily...Then shall thou call, and the LORD shall answer; ... then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually...And they that

shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in." *Isaiah* 58:8-12

The last generation of believers will be Spirit filled Christians, who truly become "family," and allow God to minister through them via the fruit and gifts of the Spirit. These will be the "repairer of the breach," a phrase which applies to the restoration of God's holy seventh-day Sabbath to its rightful place.

A HEALING FAMILY

This is the work Christ did 2000 years ago. This is the same work He wants to do through His followers as He lives in them through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is in the context of the church family that this kind of ministry will happen. Only as we know one another by way of "new wineskin" fellowship will we be effective in ministering to one another in this manner; for it is in the context of such fellowship that the fruit and gifts of the Spirit are manifested by God for complete restoration of those in fellowship. God's family is to be a healing environment because God Himself is in their midst through the Holy Spirit. Ellen White points out the healing power when God's Spirit is present:

"The influence of the Spirit of God is the very best medicine that can be received by a sick man or woman. Heaven is all health, and the more deeply the heavenly influences are realized, the more sure will be the recovery of the believing invalid." *Medical Ministry*, p. 12

The Holy Spirit will have a powerful influence for spiritual, emotional and physical healing. This divine presence will be most strongly experienced when Spirit filled believers gather together in "new wineskin" fellowship as the family of God.

A GENEROUS FAMILY

We clearly see the family dynamic in the early church. These early Christians were so close and committed to one another that it is recorded:

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness

of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

Acts 4:31-35

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." *Acts* 2:44-45

The small family fellowship setting is clearly seen in the verse quoted above. These family members prayed together, were filled with God's Spirit and freely gave of what they had for the good of needy family members.

A NURTURING FAMILY

Another Greek word associated with the word "oikos" or family is "oikonomos." This word often refers to a household slave who was in charge of his master's goods. Joseph in the Old Testament was this type of slave in Potiphar's house in Egypt. Joseph stated that his master had "committed all that he hath to my hand." (Genesis 39:8) The function of the household slave was to be a proper steward of the master's goods and distribute them as necessary for the care of the family. He was to manage the goods as his master directed.

Jesus uses this concept when describing those who are ready for His second advent.

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant (oikonomos), whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?" *Matthew 24:45*

It is significant to note that only the wise "oikonomos" servants who have used the gifts of his master as directed will be ready for the master's return. Being filled with God's Spirit and allowing God to minister through us using the gifts of the Spirit in new wineskin fellowship play an essential role in our being ready for Christ's second coming.

You and I are "oikonomos" members of God's family. God entrusts His gifts and goods to our care. We are to use them as He directs for the benefit of the other family members. God's gifts are given to each one of us through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is why Paul commands us to "keep on

being filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18)

Our continued infilling of the Spirit will enable us to be used by God in the ministry of spiritual gifts in the family of God. Again, Paul clearly states the purpose of these gifts with the words:

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." *1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV)*

A FAMILY WHO NEEDS ONE ANOTHER

The fact is, I need God to minister to me using your gifts, and you need God to minister to you using my gifts. We need one another. This mutual benefit derived from one another through spiritual gifts is expressed by Paul in his letter to the Romans:

"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." *Romans 14:19 (NIV)*

In reference to the gift of prophecy, Paul offers this same concept regarding spiritual gifts ministering to the church members:

"But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort." *I Corinthinians 14:3 (NIV)*

"Oikodomeo" is another Greek word associated with "oikos." "Oikodomeo" is often translated "edification" and "to build up." This Greek word is used several times in the following text:

"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds." *I Corinthians 3:10*

Paul here uses the imagery of building God's house. We are each builders of God's house. Christ is the foundation. Each individual who responds to God's call to come out of the world becomes what Peter calls "lively stones" and are "built up a spiritual house." (1Peter 2:5)

In Ephesians Paul describes God's house in the following way:

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are build upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." *Ephesians*

You and I are members of God's family. We are builders of God's house. The gifts of the Spirit are the tools God uses by ministering through us to strengthen the family members and build His house. These gifts will build and strengthen God's house in two ways. The individual members will be spiritually strengthened as they allow God to minister through them to one another. Also, God's house and family will grow in number as we allow God to minister through us to unbelievers.

NEW WINE IN THE NEW WINESKIN FELLOWSHIP FAMILY

The best environment for this to happen is in the new wineskin fellowship group. The larger Sabbath morning worship service meeting is not a setting that is conducive to such growth. If we want to experience the best that God has for us, grow spiritually as He wants us to grow, and be used effectively by God to minister to others, then we must do two things. First, we must daily seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, we must become a part of a new wineskin fellowship group. One without the other will not bring us the maximum blessing. The "new wine" must be put into the "new wineskin."

I am personally convicted that these two experiences, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and new wineskin fellowship, are necessary for us to grow into the fullness of Christ. Those ready to meet Jesus when He returns will have grown into this fullness. For those ready to meet Jesus will be "like him." (1John 3:2) This full manifestation of the sons of God is what the entire creation is waiting for. (Romans 8:19)

I want to also state that coming together to worship for Sabbath School and the church worship service is important for one's spiritual growth. God will use both the corporate church worship and the smaller new wineskin fellowship groups to prepare His people for Christ's soon return.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Why do you think man was created to have fellowship with God?
- 2. What did sin do to man's family relationship with God?
- 3. How important is the smaller family unit to society and the corporate church?
- 4. What are the characteristics of a healthy, functioning family?
- 5. What advantage does God's family have over families of the world?

- 6. God's family are to be a "h _____" family, a "g _____" family, and a "n _____" family.
- 7. How is God's family to be a healing family?
- 8. How is God's family to be a generous family?
- 9. How is God's family to be a nurturing family?
- 10. Why do the members of God's family need one another?
- 11. Why are new wineskin fellowship groups the best environment for God's children to function as God's family?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray for:
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to lead you to experience healing, generous, and nurturing fellowship
 - Those on your prayer list



FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT AND NEW WINESKIN FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

Two essential elements of effective new wineskin fellowship groups are the fruit and gifts of the Spirit manifested in the lives of the participants. There is only one way these can be present. The participants must be Spirit filled.

In today's devotional we will consider the role the fruit of the Spirit plays in the new wineskin fellowship. If the fruit of the Spirit are not present and maturing in the participants' lives, they will not receive the full benefit of the fellowship group. Also, they will not have the character necessary to minister to their fellow participants.

The fruit of the Spirit are listed in Paul's letter to the Galatians:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (*Galatians 5:22-23*)

Realizing the importance of these qualities existing in the lives of the participants of fellowship groups, let's take a closer look at each fruit and see the significant role it plays.

LOVE

The first fruit is love. The Greek word here is "agape" love, the highest form of love. It is the kind of love with which God loves us, doing what is best for the one loved. Jesus described this kind of love in the following way:

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." *Matthew 5:44*

Paul describes "agape" love with the words:

"Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him." *1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (Living Bible)*

This fruit will allow the participant of a fellowship group to manifest understanding and sensitivity to others in the group. His example will tend to quiet any harsh tones or attitudes in others. Also, he will not have a judgmental attitude when a participant shares with the group his personal struggles. Rather, the fruit of love will cause him/her to feel empathy and compassion. He will reach out to the one hurting with healing, encouraging, redemptive words.

Joy

The fruit of joy brings rejoicing and gladness to the heart. The one manifesting this fruit will "rejoice in the Lord always." (Philippians 4:4) This fruit enables the Spirit filled believer to have a positive, uplifting influence on others. He will have developed the tendency to follow Paul's counsel:

"...whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." *Philippians 4:8*

This fruit of genuine joy in the Lord is not simply forced, phony levity. It is a deep inner joy in the Lord, and will be a wonderful healing balm for the individual who is hurting. By example and admonition the joy filled Christian will have a positive influence on others.

PEACE

The fruit of peace refers to harmony among individuals. Peace in the Spirit filled believer will enable him to fellowship and work for Christ in unity with others. This fruit is clearly evident following Pentecost. (Acts 2:46-47)

The new wineskin fellowship group participant exhibiting peace will

have the attitude of being content with his lot in life. He with Paul will be able to say:

"...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." *Philippians 4:11*

This peace will be present in the life of the Spirit filled believer independent of circumstances. Jesus spoke of this peace when he said:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." *John 14:27*

It is obvious the important role this fruit plays when it is manifested by a participant in a fellowship group. What a blessing this fruit will be for the participant that is going through a trying time and is tempted to doubt God's leading and care. The one possessing this fruit will be able to share with confidence that he knows from experience God will provide for His children. Such testimonies founded in this fruit of peace will have a powerful impact for good.

This fruit also includes a state of conscious reconciliation with God. When we have received Christ as our Savior, we know we are accepted by God and have eternal life. (*1 John 5:11-13*) Often visitors will be present at the fellowship group who are just coming to know Christ as their Savior. The one manifesting this fruit of confident assurance of their salvation will be used by God to strengthen the new believer in his/her budding experience in Christ.

Longsuffering

The fruit of longsuffering causes its recipient to have forbearance and self-restraint before acting. It describes the quality of a person who is able to avenge himself when wronged, yet refrains from doing so. Jesus gave us a clear example of this when He stood before his persecutors. Peter describes Christ's attitude in 1 Peter 2:23:

"Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously:"

We all experience hurts in life. Such offences even happen in the church. Often individuals in the fellowship group will be going through painful episodes in their lives. The Spirit filled believer manifesting this fruit of patience will be a wonderful example for these hurting participants.

Because this fruit brings to the believer patient faith under the pressure of trying circumstances, the one possessing it will be used by God to help others going through difficult times in their lives. The infilling of the Spirit has led him to know God so well that he can rest assured that God will see him through the most trying situations. Such patience exhibited in a fellowship group has great healing power.

This fruit will also enable the Spirit filled participant to relate with perseverance rather than frustration when a fellow participant has a prolonged struggle in an area of his life. This patient love will give hope to the one struggling because he will see the patient love of God manifested in his fellow believer.

GENTLENESS

Gentleness is a fruit that includes the quality of kindness. It brings a mellowing of all which would be harsh. This fruit refers especially to one's disposition and not necessarily to one's actions. It gives the believer mildness of temper, a calm, quiet, yet cheerful disposition. We can clearly see the benefit this fruit would have on the fellowship group.

GOODNESS

This character trait refers to active goodness. The Spirit filled believer in whom goodness dwells will be upright in heart and life, in motive and conduct. However, he will not spare sharpness or rebuke to invoke goodness in others. Jesus manifested this quality when He cleansed the temple of the money changers. (*Matthew 21:12-13*) We also see this quality manifested in Paul when he openly rebuked Peter for showing favoritism to those of the "circumcision." (*Galatians 2:11-12*)

This aspect of the fruit of goodness will at times be needed in a fellowship group when one of the participants has acted out in a non-Christian manner. It plays a role in holding accountable the members of the new wineskin fellowship. There is a place for acceptance and understanding when a participant is struggling with temptation. However, there are also times when certain sins and lifestyles may have to be lovingly rebuked for the good of all as well as the errant individual. At such times, the Holy Spirit's presence in the fellowship group will direct. When the chastising aspect of the fruit of goodness is manifested toward an individual, he knows in what spirit it is given because the other fruit of the Spirit have been consistently manifested to him in the fellowship group.

These fruit of the Spirit have created an atmosphere where true redemptive discipline and healing can take place.

FAITH

The fruit of faith brings deep, abiding, firm conviction. It includes faithfulness and sincerity. This fruit leads the believer to avoid "double mindedness." (*James 1:8*), and will cause him to be steadfast in his conviction of God's faithfulness.

In the setting of the new wineskin fellowship group, this fruit will be used by God to strengthen the faith of others. We reap what we sow. Doubt reaps doubt, and faith reaps faith. The fruit of faith consistently manifested in the fellowship group will also inspire others to trust in God. This fruit of faith will sow the seeds of faith in all exposed to it.

MEEKNESS

The fruit of meekness brings mildness and forbearance to the Spirit filled believer. It is more of an inward grace than an outward expression. It includes calmness toward God and accepts God's dealings with us as just and fair. It will cause the believer to consider God's dealings as good believing the happenings in life enhance one's closeness with God. Meekness causes one to truly believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God." (*Romans 8:28*) Again, one can clearly see the positive effect this fruit would have on individuals going through difficult times.

Meekness may also include the expression of wrath when confronting sinful behavior and attitudes in man. We see this quality in Jesus' actions and attitude toward the hardness of heart of the Jews in *Mark 3:1-5*. It may display an active anger toward evil. It is seen in the attitude of those sealed in Ezekiel's vision when they are described as sighing and crying for the abominations done in the world. (*Ezekiel 9:4*)

This fruit of meekness stands between the two extremes of uncontrolled, unjustified anger on the one hand, and not being angry at all no matter what takes place around you on the other hand. When exhibited in fellowship groups, this fruit will help keep in balance justified anger versus ignoring a wrong that should be dealt with.

TEMPERANCE

Temperance speaks of self-control. The person who exhibits the fruit of

temperance will be moderate in all things. (*1 Corinthians 9:25*) He will have complete control over every passion and appetite. Victories will be gained over addictions such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs, pornography and food.

There will be participants in new wineskin fellowship groups that are having struggles in the area of self-control. The Spirit filled believer who has learned how to gain victories over the addictions in his life through the power of the Holy Spirit and abiding in Christ will be a great encouragement to those who are going through a time of severe struggle. The fruit of patience and love will enable him to deal with the one struggling, as Jesus did with Mary Magdalene. Many Bible scholars interpret the seven devils Jesus cast out of Mary as referring to her returning to her immoral lifestyle seven times. The reason Mary could return to Jesus again and again after such repeated sins was because of Jesus' patient love and encouraging words that she, too, could gain the victory in the area of temperance.

THE NECESSARY REQUIREMENT

These qualities which comprise the fruit of the Spirit are impossible to achieve separate from the infilling of the Spirit. This is why new wineskin fellowship groups must have Spirit filled Christians as the core participants. Then, when those young in the faith and "seekers" (non-believers) come to visit the group they will enter a Spirit filled atmosphere that can be used by God to bring healing to their lives. Such an atmosphere is vital in order for the "seeker" to find Christ.

New wine (Spirit filled) Christians are necessary if the new wineskin fellowship group is to fulfill its purpose of providing an atmosphere where all participants can grow into the fullness of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit, which is only manifest in the life of the believer by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, must be present in the lives of the core members of the fellowship group. These fruit bring the character of Christ into the group. It is through people that God loves us. So it will be through the Spirit filled Christians that God will reveal His love to all who come to the new wineskin fellowship, whether they are Christian or non-Christian.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. List the fruit of the Spirit.
- 2. Describe in your own words how the following fruit of the Spirit will be manifest in one's life.

- Love, Joy, Peace, Longsuffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, and Temperance.
- 3. Describe in your own words how these fruit of the Spirit benefit the new wineskin fellowship participants.
- 4. How, only, can these fruit of the Spirit be manifest in one's life?
- 5. Do you think the Lord wants all the fruit of the Spirit to be manifest in your life?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray For:
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to manifest all the fruit of the Spirit in your life
 - Those on your prayer list



GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT AND NEW WINESKIN FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

We have seen that there are two essential elements of effective new wineskin fellowship groups. The first is the necessity of the fruit of the Spirit being present in the participants' lives. This was discussed in some detail in yesterday's devotional. The second essential ingredient for a fellowship group to be successful is the functioning of the gifts of the Spirit in the group. Since spiritual gifts are manifested through Spirit filled believers, it is essential the participants be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Most every Christian is somewhat familiar with the concept of spiritual gifts. Through the years, many Christians have used what is called spiritual gift inventory tests to try to determine their spiritual gifts. I am not personally against such tests. However, usually what happens is that we learn something about what our spiritual gifts might be, but we are not sure how to use the information effectively in the church. I am now convinced we must become involved in a "new wineskin" fellowship group in order for God to be able to minister through us to others using the spiritual gifts He has given us. It is in the context of these fellowship groups that these gifts are most effectively manifested.

Several chapters in the New Testament discuss spiritual gifts. The most prominent scriptures concerning spiritual gifts are found in Paul's letters: *Romans 12:3-8*, *1 Corinthians 12*, *Ephesians 4:7-16*. In Romans Paul mentions: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and mercy. In his first letter to the Corinthians he lists: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostles, prophets, teachers, helps, and governments. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he lists: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

ROLE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

These gifts serve a very important role in the spiritual growth of the individual believer and the church. Paul describes this in a couple of ways. In First Corinthians chapter twelve, he uses the body analogy to demonstrate how important it is that each gift functions as God intended. Paul points out several very important aspects of these gifts of the Spirit. First, it is the Holy Spirit that manifests these gifts in the Spirit filled believer. (vs. 4, 11) The Spirit decides who gets what gift. The purpose of the gifts is for the "profit" or "common good" (NIV) of the church. (vs. 7) Using the analogy of the human body, Paul lists various body parts pointing out the importance each part plays in the functioning of the whole body. The conclusion is clear. It is necessary that every body part function effectively in order for the body as a whole to be healthy, and effective in fulfilling its mission. Every body part is important and necessary. (vs. 14-24) Hence, Paul states that "the members should have the same care one for another". (vs. 25)

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he describes how the gifts benefit the church in the following way:

"...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ." *Ephesians* 4:12-15 (NIV)

Next, Paul uses "human body" descriptive language in his portrayal of how the gifts function in the church.

"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." *Ephesians 4:16 (NIV)*

New Wineskin Fellowship Groups

It should be very clear from Paul's description that the gifts of the Spirit are necessary for the individual Christian and church to grow. Paul's statement that members should have the "same care one for another" is a clear reference to new wineskin fellowship. In order to experience a deep empathy for our fellow members we must truly know them. We must be free

to share our deepest needs, struggles, hopes and dreams in order to minister to one another. Paul is referring to the importance of ministering to one another when he writes: "bear ye one another's burdens." (*Galatians 6:2*) This kind of fellowship cannot happen by "doing church" in the traditional way. If our only 'connection" with the fellow members of our church is meeting them on Sabbath morning and giving them a warm greeting it will be impossible for the "new wineskin" fellowship to happen.

James also understood the vital importance of intimate fellowship among believers when he wrote: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." (*James 5:16*) Sinful man is in a broken condition. Sin breaks man's fellowship with God and his fellow man. As the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit are manifested among the believers in a new wineskin fellowship group, great "healing" takes place. This healing will affect the whole man: emotionally, spiritually and physically.

Satan wants to divide the believers so this will not happen. He does this either by keeping us ignorant of the importance of the new wineskin fellowship, or by creating dissention through a critical spirit. Again and again Paul admonishes believers not to allow any "schism" or divisions to come into the body. (*1 Corinthians 12:25*)

It is only in new wineskin fellowship groups, where Spirit filled believers allow God to manifest the fruit and gifts of the Spirit in their midst, that spiritual growth and healing can truly take place. Only in this kind of fellowship group will members have the power to deal with divisions in a truly New Testament manner. Only in this setting can the most effective and redemptive church discipline take place.

In yesterday's devotional, we saw how the fruit of the Spirit in the participants' lives allows them to minister to one another. Now we will consider how the spiritual gifts function in a similar manner in the new wineskin fellowship group.

JESUS AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS

I will begin by first looking at the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was the "body of Christ" when He walked this earth. That may sound like a strange thing to say, but the point I am making is that the gifts of the Spirit are to be manifested in the "body of Christ;" the church. As the "body of Christ", Jesus exhibited all the gifts in His ministry.

Jesus is called the "Apostle" of our profession. (*Hebrews 3:1*) When we read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, we see such gifts as pastor, teacher, evangelist, healings, casting out of devils, mercy, and prophecy. Jesus was baptized with the Holy Spirit when He prayed for the Spirit's infilling at His water baptism. (*Luke 3:21-22*) From that day forward the Spirit began manifesting the spiritual gifts through Him. Luke states this fact when he writes:

"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him." *Acts* 10:38

When the New Testament church was established on the day of Pentecost, the church became the "body of Christ." The church was to be a living, functioning body through which God would manifest the gifts of the Spirit in a manner similar to the way they were manifested through Christ's ministry. This could not happen until the Holy Spirit was poured out on that day. Jesus had to be filled with the Spirit in order to manifest the spiritual gifts in His ministry. Even so, the church has to become Spirit filled before spirituals gifts can be manifested through her. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out, and the believers present were baptized or filled with the Spirit.

From Pentecost onward, every believer could be baptized or filled with God's Spirit. Each believer was to continue to seek daily the Spirit's infilling. (Ephesians 5:18) The result of this daily infilling is that the Spirit would be able to manifest both the fruit and gifts of the Spirit through him. Each believer was to become as Christ to the world. Christ's ministry would be seen most fully as the church became a fellowship of Spirit filled believers. The variety of spiritual gifts would be manifested through the various members of the body. Without the Spirit's infilling the ministry of the body would be limited and have little power. This is why the baptism of the Holy Spirit is so essential if the church is truly to become the living, functioning "body of Christ" to the world manifesting all the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.

How Spiritual Gifts Function in New Wineskin Fellowship Groups

I will not attempt to list every spiritual gift and indicate how God uses them to minister to the participants of a new wineskin fellowship group. However, we will look at a few gifts to better understand the concept. I will first define the particular gift, and then present a description of how that gift can be used to minister to others in the group.

Teacher

A teacher in the New Testament is one who instructs in God's word. It is readily understood how vital it is to have this gift function in a fellowship group. The group's goal is not to become primarily a study group. There is a place for intensive Bible study. However, the main focus of the new wineskin fellowship group is worship, healing fellowship, and spiritual growth. The gift of teaching that fits into this purpose will be a great blessing to all who attend. The lessons will be generally short ones from scripture rather than a long teaching session. The emphasis will be placed on the practical application of scripture to the individual issues that arise in the group setting. For example, if an individual is experiencing a difficult time in their life God will use one or more of the participants to share a scripture that applies to the particular need of the hurting individual.

Word of Wisdom

The term "wisdom" refers to having sound judgment. When this gift is manifested in a fellowship group God will reveal how to best apply the teachings of His word to the specific needs that arise in the lives of the participants. Knowing what the Bible teaches is important. Knowing how to apply scriptural teaching to our lives in practical ways is just as important. The manifestation of this gift allows the practical application of scripture to the lives of the participants.

Prophecy

When we think of prophecy, we think of foretelling the future. As far as it goes, that definition is correct. We will see that there is a broader New Testament definition as well. When one reads what other Bible scholars have written about this gift a variety of explanations are given.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we tend to limit the gift of prophecy in these last days of earth's history to Ellen White and her ministry to the church. The gift of prophecy manifested through Ellen White has been a great blessing to our church. However, we want to be careful not to limit the manifestation of this gift only to Ellen White or to the Bible writers of past ages. The one through whom this gift is manifested will not necessarily be on the same level of ministry to the church as were the various authors in the Bible, or on the same level of influence as Ellen White. Rather, God may

choose to manifest this gift for a much more limited ministry.

Ellen White certainly had this gift manifested through her. She was called to a broad work of ministry. Many times when this gift is manifested it is for a more specific, local application. Therefore, not all that have the gift of prophecy manifested through them will be called to a church-wide ministry similar to Ellen White's. Hence, we should not limit the gift of prophecy only to a broad ministry such as Ellen White had.

When we read the scriptures we find that the gift of prophecy functions in several ways. There were prophets, such as Peter and Paul, who were inspired by God to write scriptural instruction for all generations. There were other prophets who gave broad based counsel from God to their generation similar to Ellen White's ministry. We also find mention of prophets who gave counsel from God for a limited specific need. Silas and Judas would fall into this category.

When we read the book of Acts we find that the gift of prophecy was very active in the early church. Philips four daughters prophesied. (*Acts 21:9*) Judas and Silas had this gift manifested through them. (*Acts 15:32*) We are told that Ephesus believers prophesied (*Acts 19:6*), and there were numerous prophets in Antioch (*Acts 13:1*).

In light of the above facts, it is important that we be open to the manifestation of this vital gift of prophecy. God will use it to minister to us both individually and corporately. Remember Paul's words, "Despise not prophesyings." (*1 Thessalonians 5:20*) He knew that God would minister to individuals using this gift. Hence, we need to be aware of this and be open to it.

The Bible indicates that the gift of prophecy will once again be active in God's last day remnant church. (*Revelation 12:17; 19:10*) We have seen that this gift was very active in the early church. So also will it be active in God's "remnant" church. God certainly manifested this gift through Ellen White in these last days. However, as previously stated, we should not limit this gift only to Ellen White. God may not manifest this gift in a broad manner of ministry, as He did through her. Yet, He will seek to speak through individuals words of exhortation, warning, or instruction concerning some event or issue relevant to an individual or the fellowship group. This will be for the instruction, encouragement, and strengthening of individuals and the group as a whole. This was the purpose of the gift of prophecy in the ministry of Judas and Silas:

"Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers." *Acts 15:32 (NIV)*

There are many throughout the history of the church through whom God manifested this gift for the specific benefit of the church where they fellowshipped. We see this aspect of the gift of prophecy on numerous occasions in the life and ministry of Ellen White. Many times she was impressed by God to give timely counsel to individuals and the church. This manifestation of the gift of prophecy reveals how the term applies in a broader sense. God did not intend for this aspect of the gift of prophecy to end with Ellen White. When one studies the history of our denomination, he will see God leading the church using this broader definition of the gift.

The problem is that we do not expect God to speak so directly to us today. Rather, we consider the gift of prophecy to be manifested in the past and possibly sometime in the future; but we consider it unlikely that it will happen in the present. Remember Paul's statement to the Corinthian church:

"I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that **ye** *come behind in no gift*; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." *1Corinthians 1:4-7* (emphasis added)

God's desire is the same for His church today. He wants us to "come behind in no gift." God's desire is that the gifts of the Spirit be manifested in His church. Thus we should expect the gift of prophecy to be manifested as well when new wineskin fellowship takes place. Why? Because the participants in the group are in as great a need of direction, encouragement, and strengthening concerning personal and corporate issues as Christians in the past have been.

Many times in the book of Acts we see this gift directing the church in this capacity. (*Acts 5:1-3; 11:12; 13:12; 16:6-7, 10*) In these texts we clearly see information obtained supernaturally, and direction given. This was necessary for the church to accomplish the work God called her to do. The church has the same necessity today.

Some Christian authors place the manifestation of this gift under the category of "word of knowledge." They place it there because this gift involves God giving "knowledge" to an individual that he would not be

aware of naturally. We see this aspect of the gift when Jesus said to Peter:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." *Luke 22:31-32*

In His humanity Jesus would not normally be aware of Satan's plan. However, the Holy Spirit revealed to Christ the plans Satan had for Peter. Jesus then began praying for Peter, and also revealed to him Satan's plans.

God wants to do the same thing in His church today. He will on occasion impress one believer concerning another believer's need. He may simply put on one's heart an intense desire to pray for someone in particular or merely to pray with a deep sense of concern or foreboding. It is important that we respond to these impressions from God, and pray as He impresses us to pray. The following story by Wesley Duewel, recorded in *The Praying Church Source Book*, is one example of this type of manifestation.

"'A sudden premonition of terrible danger swept over me. I began to plead God's mercy, lifting my hands in agony of prayer,' wrote Wesley Duewel. He and his wife were praying in the home of his parents while they were at a church meeting. While kneeling with his wife, he experienced that sudden feeling of urgency. 'I did not know what the danger was and thought perhaps a robber was outside our window. For ten minutes or more I could only plead the blood of Jesus and claim the name of Jesus.

"Then the burden lifted. My wife could not understand what had happened to me, and said my face was a white as a sheet. She asked me what I thought it was. I replied that I did not know, only that I was sure God had delivered from some great danger."

"Soon after, Duewel's mother returned. 'Oh, Wesley, God has been so merciful to us tonight! When Papa and I were driving home on the highway, the bright light of an oncoming car blinded our eyes. The car was coming at high speed straight at us. At the last moment it swerved and just missed us. When it was past, we realized that we were on the wrong side of the road!" *The Praying Church Source Book*, p.249

God may also give us an impression about a fellow believer concerning a particular situation. Again, it is important that we pray about it, and ask God's direction how to share what God has revealed with that individual. It is clear why the Spirit's infilling is so important for such gifts to function.

We must lay self aside and let the Spirit lead.

When we feel led by God to speak either to an individual or to the fellowship group about a matter, we may be hesitant to say anything. This is especially true if we are not familiar with how God uses this gift of the Spirit to minister to others. Again, Paul encourages us not to hold back, but rather allow God to use us in this manner.

"For ye may all prophecy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." *I Corinthians* 14:31

We see from Paul's statement that the purpose of the gift of prophecy among believers is for instruction and comfort. When an individual is struggling with some issue or problem, God will often reveal His will to that person in the fellowship group setting through this gift. He established the church as the primary means of revealing His will to His people and non-believers. The essence of church is new wineskin fellowship groups. When these groups function as God intends, the gifts of the Spirit will be effectively functioning, and all participants will be edified.

Paul also points out a very important truth about the gift of prophecy when he states: "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." (*1 Corinthians 14:32*) Whenever an individual in the fellowship group states he has an insight or directive from God, his statement must be in harmony with the teachings and principles of God's Word, the Bible.

Evangelist

When the gift of evangelist is manifested through a believer, he is given empowerment of the Holy Spirit to share the gospel with individuals in such a way that they will give their lives to Christ. When this gift is manifested in a fellowship group the "seekers" attending the group will be deeply convicted to give their lives to Christ.

Most often this gift is manifest for the broader work of evangelism throughout the denomination. Individuals with this gift will often go from place to place proclaiming the gospel. God will use them effectively in leading men and women to Christ.

Exhortation

When this gift is present God will use it to speak words of encouragement, comfort, and hope, especially to group participants that are hurting and dealing with some serious issue in their lives. The manifestation of this gift brings practical, uplifting biblical counsel to the group members.

Healings

God's desire for His children is for them to be healthy and happy. He has given us innumerable counsels in the Bible and writings of Ellen White on how we can cooperate with Him in achieving good health. God created us with an immune system to ward off disease. However, there are times we find ourselves facing health problems. In the setting of the Christian fellowship group, I have seen the gifts of healing manifested.

I have seen emotional, physical and spiritual healing take place in fellowship groups. Many times, the Lord has revealed a spiritual issue to be the root cause and this must be dealt with before healing can take place. I have seen instances where the Lord revealed that an individual was harboring anger and bitterness toward someone. I have discovered that when such serious issues are revealed, they must be dealt with. In these cases the individual was led to acknowledge his bitter feelings, and with God's help, forgave the person who hurt him. Sometimes physical healing followed immediately. In other cases, healing occurred over time. Forgiveness and healing are quite often linked in the scriptures. James draws our attention to their relationship when he writes:

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed..." *James 5:16*

For a more in depth study on the subject of healing and deliverance I recommend my book, *Spirit Baptism & Deliverance*.

Discerning of spirits

This gift is very important because God uses it to protect us from Satan's efforts to lead us astray individually or as a group. John gives us a very pertinent warning.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." *1 John 4:1*

Paul also warns of Satan's efforts to deceive us.

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." *2 Corinthinas 11:13-15*

It is very important that the gift of discerning of spirits function in the

church, for this gift will protect us. We need to learn to listen when a Spirit filled believer is impressed to give a word of warning about some teaching or individual. Many tragic deceptions could have been avoided if this gift were functioning and heeded in the past.

The individual with the gift of discernment can often tell before others, the difference between what is of God and what is not. God will use this gift to point out false teachers and unbiblical teachings. It will protect the church by enabling the one who has it to perceive hypocrisy, deceit, or phoniness.

Because of our unfamiliarity with this gift, we are usually hesitant to say anything about the impressions we are receiving about an individual. We do not want to appear to be critical or judgmental. As we become more familiar with how the Spirit works in this area, we will learn to respond when He gives us "warning" impressions. I have seen situations when some members had such impressions about an individual, but did not say anything to the church leadership. In time, their impression proved to be correct. If they had understood how this gift functions, they would have spoken up, and the church would have been protected from the damage this individual caused in the church.

As with all gifts Satan will try to counterfeit this gift. I have seen individuals in the church that claimed to have this gift, but did not. Instead of protecting the church their words created hurt and division. I have also observed that individuals who are being used by Satan in this manner usually have a pride issue. Those who are being deceived in this manner will often feel superior to their fellow believers because of their "supposed" gift of discernment. They take pleasure in rebuking someone or pointing out what they believe is error.

Faith

The gift of faith is marvelous when manifested. This gift will bring courage to all. It will lift up the discouraged and strengthen the one whose faith has been weakening. The one with this gift will exhibit great confidence in all God's promises. This gift can have a powerfully positive influence on the fellowship group. Every believer is to have faith, for it is one of the fruit of the Spirit. However, the gift of faith appears to be an even more prominent manifestation of faith in an individual's life.

The gift of faith often functions in the areas where God's word is silent. George Muller, who lived in England during the 1800's, exhibited this gift. God led Muller to provide for thousands of orphans for many years. He was

led by God to exercise complete faith in God for the necessities required to meet the needs of the orphanage. He chose not to ask anyone for money. He simply prayed to God, trusting that God would provide. It is inspiring to read how time and again God provided funds at the last minute to meet the necessities of the children. God uses this gift of faith to encourage us when we face difficulties. This gift is a great blessing to all who participate in a new wineskin fellowship group.

Mercy

The believer through whom this gift is being manifested will have great compassion toward those who are hurting. This gift will motivate the Christian to extend whatever assistance is needed to help even if the problem is the consequence of some sinful behavior. We see this gift manifested many times in Christ's ministry.

EXAMPLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

When the gifts of the Spirit are functioning, Spirit filled believers in the group will receive on occasion impressions from God about particular situations that various members of the group are struggling with. I have seen the Lord use one believer in the group to give clear counsel and direction to another member of the group. I have observed very practical and biblical counsel from the Lord concerning how a believing wife is to relate to her unbelieving husband in such areas as leadership roles, finances, and discipline of the children. I have also seen the Lord give direction concerning a business relationship in which one of the fellowship group participants was involved. The one receiving the counsel stated the timing was perfect because they had just been praying to God about the situation and some of the same thoughts had crossed their mind in recent days.

In one small fellowship setting, a married daughter had invited her mother to attend. The mother had been having a difficult time emotionally because of a wayward adult son. The situation was affecting the mother's happiness. On that occasion the Lord gave very precise insights into the situation. The one counseling the mother was able to state specific things about the son that would not have ordinarily been known. God led by having the son's attitude and actions toward his mother clearly pointed out in an effort to help the mother better understand the situation and realize that she needed to "let go" of her son to a greater degree than she had. Instead of constantly worrying about him, God clearly revealed to her that she must continue praying for him, and look to the Lord in faith that God was working

in behalf of her son.

In order for the group participants to be open to such counsel, there must be cohesiveness between them. A level of trust must have been achieved. Also, the participants need to be aware that God wants to minister to them through their brothers and sisters in the group. This awareness will cause them to take seriously any counsel given.

I have seen gifts of healing manifest within and without fellowship groups. Individuals have been emotionally healed from depression, anxiety, fear, etc. I've seen physical healings; some of which I list below.

- A lady had severe pain in her left arm and was wearing medicated patches to relieve the pain. She also suffered from severe anxiety and mild depression. She was healed physically and emotionally.
- A thirteen year old suffered from a heart ailment called tachycardia for which he was taking medication several times a day. He also suffered from asthma and allergies. He was delivered from all three.
- A lady had severe back pain and several fused vertebrae. She was completely healed of the pain.
- A lady had a very severe cold, which left her after a prayer for deliverance.
- A child had torn knee cartilage, which was healed. She was running with the other children that same afternoon.
- A lady suffered with depression and had kidney stones that caused her great pain. After prayer and learning the weapons of her warfare her depression was relieved and the pain left her.
- A young man was clinically depressed and planned to commit suicide on two occasions. He was heavily medicated for his condition, but was completely delivered from depression after prayer.
- One individual was healed of leg and neck pain.
- Two individuals were healed of severe pain for which they were taking cortisone shots. One had knee pain and the other shoulder pain.
- A lady was healed of a tumor on her lung.
- A man was healed of a heart condition that caused him to have breathing problems.
- A lady was healed of asthma

- One individual was healed of severe shoulder, back, leg pain caused by an accident years before
- Eye floaters, which were inhibiting one individual's reading ability, were removed through prayer.
- One individual suffered from stomach pain, shoulder pain, lower back pain, and her neck artery was 50% blocked. All of these health problems were healed.
- A lady was healed of severe arthritis in her back and hands
- An individual was healed within an hour of a severe bladder infection
- A man was healed of a throat problem that hindered his singing for the Lord in church
- A man's severe hip pain was healed that he had been suffering with for several months
- Another lady's blocked neck arteries were opened
- A lady was healed of celiac disease

For a more in-depth study into the subject of spiritual, emotional and physical deliverance I recommend my book, *Spirit Baptism & Deliverance*.

God's Desire for Us

This is just a sampling of how the spiritual gifts minister in new wineskin fellowship groups. Each gift could be listed and elaborated upon. However, I will leave it with the reader to prayerfully study more deeply into this aspect of the subject.

God loves us through people. My Lord has never physically sat down on the sofa beside me, put His arm around me, and said, "I love you and am concerned about what you are going through." I doubt if you have ever experienced that either. However, I have received such comforting words from fellow believers. This is what new wineskin fellowship groups are all about: God loving us and ministering to us through people. Hence, if we isolate ourselves from this kind of intimate Christian fellowship, we will be limiting the love, counsel and direction God wants to give us. If we try to live our Christian life independently, we will have cut ourselves off from the very means God has ordained to bless us. God wants us to realize that we need each another.

God's desire for us is that we open our eyes to the vital importance of

allowing the spiritual gifts to be manifested though us. Also, we must be open to being ministered to via spiritual gifts that are manifested through our fellow believers. It is in the new wineskin fellowship setting that this will most readily happen. This is why Spirit filled believers must enter into meaningful fellowship with one another. Only in fellowship with Spirit filled believers where the fruit and gifts of the Spirit are manifested will we grow into the fullness of Christ. If we choose to keep ourselves isolated and continue to "do church" the way we have in the past, we will not achieve God's plan for us of becoming "like Jesus" in every way. Hence, new wineskin fellowship groups are not an option for Spirit filled believers. They are a necessity. This is what Paul was speaking of when he wrote:

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." *Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)*

When we have Spirit filled believers uniting themselves together in new wineskin fellowship for their personal spiritual growth and the advancement of the gospel in their community, we will again see the Holy Spirit leading the church as He did in the book of Acts. Remember the illustration of the burning ember that gets separated in the camp fire. It will lose its fire and go out if it is not placed close to the other burning embers. Stay in close relationship with your fellow believers who are burning with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Become a fellowship of "holy fire" that burns brightly in your church and community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. List the gifts of the Spirit discussed in today's devotional.
- 2. Why is it necessary for the Christian to daily experience the infilling of the Spirit in order for the spiritual gifts to be manifest through him?
- 3. How does the "body" analogy illustrate how the spiritual gifts are to function in a new wineskin fellowship group?
- 4. Were spiritual gifts manifest in Jesus' life and ministry? Explain your answer.
- 5. Describe in your own words how the following gifts of the Spirit will be manifest to bless the body of Christ.

 Teacher, Word of wisdom, Prophecy, Evangelist, Exhortation, Healings,

Discerning of spirits, Faith, and Mercy.

- 6. Describe in your own words how these gifts of the Spirit benefit the new wineskin fellowship participants.
- 7. How only can these gifts of the Spirit be manifest in one's life?
- 8. Do you think the Lord wants gifts of the Spirit to be manifest in your life?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray For:
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to manifest the gifts of the Spirit in your life that He has chosen for you and that you will be willing to accept them
 - Those on your prayer list



BACK TO THE BEGINNING

It is natural for each of us to view things from our own personal experience. This may at times cause us to read into something that really is not there. I have discovered that this is what I did for years whenever I read about the church in the New Testament.

FALSE UNDERSTANDING

My experience as a Christian has always been in the traditional church setting. My church was a building where I went to worship every Sabbath morning. My church consisted of a group of fellow believers who joined me in this activity. We experienced a Sabbath School program where there was a devotional thought by the superintendent for the day, then sat in a Sabbath School class where an individual taught the day's lesson. The church service consisted of sitting in the pews and following the same format for worship week after week. There would be a couple songs, scripture reading, offering, prayer, children's story, special music by someone, and the sermon.

Whenever I read about the church in the New Testament, I visualized them meeting in a similar manner as I had for worship. I knew there was some mention of meeting in homes, but I considered that was not the norm. When I read of them fellowshipping together, I viewed that also from my personal experience in the church. I had attended numerous socials during the years and had visited in many homes. I knew we probably had some room to grow in the area of fellowship, but had no idea what the fellowship in the New Testament was really like.

GOD IS CALLING US TO RETURN TO THE BEGINNING

I personally believe the Lord is moving upon His people to look more closely at what the New Testament church was like. We as Seventh-day Adventists have viewed ourselves as God's remnant for many years. We have sought to hold true to the teachings of God's Word as the New Testament church did. I believe that now the Lord is calling us to not only

continue "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine," but also to continue steadfastly in "fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42) God is calling His children to be His remnant people just like the New Testament early church; not just in doctrine but in fellowship as well. New wineskin fellowship is an important aspect to being God's remnant people. With this in mind let's take a closer look at what God's early church was like in the New Testament.

THE EARLY CHURCH HOME FELLOWSHIP

The book of Acts tells us that the early Christians met both in the "temple" and from "house to house." (Acts 2:46) As the Christians become unwelcome in the Jewish temples, their homes became the focal point of their worship and fellowship.

The homes of the believers was the place where they met for praise, fellowship and teaching. Below is a list of many of the homes mentioned in the New Testament where the Christians met:

- Jason's house at Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-9)
- Titus Justus' home at Corinth
- Philip's house at Caesarea
- Lydia's house (Acts 16:14)
- Acquila and Priscilla's home in Corinth or Rome (1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:5)
- Stephanas' home (1 Corinthians 1:16)
- The house of Nympha (Colossians 4:15)
- The upper room of a house in Jerusalem where the Holy Spirit was first poured out on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:13)
- Paul taught both publicly and from house to house in Ephesus (Acts 20:20)

The apostles certainly understood the importance of a small home fellowship. For three and one half years they had worshipped and fellowshipped with Jesus in this manner. We can understand how natural it was for the apostles to continue this type of small group fellowship as hundreds and thousands of individuals accepted Christ. The home fellowship style of church would make it much easier to assimilate and organize the large numbers joining the church even on a daily basis. (Acts

One question might be: What was the size of these home churches? Excavation of the homes from the New Testament era reveals that most homes were small and could accommodate only 10 to 15 people at one time. As the church grew, a few buildings were built for use as a church meeting place only. Again, archeological excavation reveals they were also small, accommodating about the same number of people.

WHY SMALL GROUP FELLOWSHIP?

We might ask the question: Why such small fellowship groups? The answer can be found using the mathematical equation that determines the number of relationships that are possible per number of individuals in a given group. A close, intimate relationship was important and necessary for these early Christians. They knew the importance of ministering to one another. They took seriously Paul's counsels concerning the gifts of the Spirit and that the church was to function as our bodies function: every body member ministering to the other body members. (1 Corinthians 12)

We can determine the number of relationships resulting from a group size by applying the mathematical formula, $N \times N - N = NR$, where "N" represents the number of individuals in a group, and NR represents the number of possible relationships resulting from that group size. A group of 4 will have 12 possible relationships. A group size of 8 will have 56. When the group grows to 12 the number of possible relationships grows to 132. Hence, we can see that a group size of twelve even poses a challenge if every member of the group desires to have a meaningful relationship with every other member of the group. I think we can see why the size of the home churches in the New Testament was kept at a relatively small size. Any group much larger would have defeated the goal of the close, meaningful fellowship. They knew that close, meaningful fellowship was necessary if they were to grow in Christ as God desired them to.

SUCCESSFUL AND ENDURING

These small fellowship groups served the growth of the church well. It is estimated that by the third century, 6,000,000 Christians lived in the Roman Empire. These small fellowship groups were very conducive to growth. New members were assimilated quickly and thoroughly. It would also be evident that these groups were not just to nurture, but were evangelistic in nature. As the numbers of a home church grew, participants would be forced

to divide and form a new group in another home.

This small fellowship style of "doing church" also played a significant role in enabling the church to continue to grow even during times of severe persecution. In modern times when the Christian church has come under determined persecution, the church survived by once again taking the form it did in the first few centuries of her history.

The close, intimate fellowship that results from the smaller group creates a very close bond between members of the group. Mutual encouragement more readily takes place. It is in this kind of setting that fellow believers receive strength from one another. I recall hearing several pilots interviewed who had been taken prisoner by Iraq during the Desert Storm War. All of these men were tortured during their incarceration. However, they were in close enough proximity with one another that they received strength to endure the punishment because of their fellow officers' example of determined strength and loyalty. Mankind is created to stand stronger when united with others than when alone. Christians today need the strength that comes from the close, intimate fellowship the early church experienced. As God said in the beginning, "it is not good for man to be alone." It is not good for the Christian to try to withstand the forces of Satan and the world alone

In the 1970's the Mennonite Church of America in Ethiopia numbered around 5,000. The Western missionaries returned home and left the operation of the church to the indigenous leadership. In 1982 a Communist government took control of the country. The church came under severe persecution with church properties being confiscated, church leaders imprisoned, and church members forbidden to meet. Hence, the traditional style of "doing church" was not an option. They could only meet quietly in small groups.

In 1992 the government of that country again changed. The church was allowed to come out of hiding. With a new more favorable government in place, the church leadership decided to gather together what few members they thought were left. To their surprise they discovered that the 5,000 membership had grown to over 50,000 during those 10 years of persecution.

Our denomination, along with numerous others, has faced similar times of persecution in countries hostile to Christianity. Over and over again it has been shown that the small Christian home fellowship strengthens the believer, and enables him to endure during such difficult times.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we know that a time of severe persecution will someday arise against God's remnant people. Personally, I believe that God is leading us in two very important ways to prepare us for this persecution. First, He is calling us to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, He is calling us to the "new wineskin" fellowship of the early church. Our response to these two callings by God will play a significant role in preparing us for the coming persecution, and will enable us to be ready for Christ's second coming.

SATAN CHANGED HIS STRATEGY

Satan did everything he could to destroy the early church. However, as long as the church remained a small, close, intimate fellowship, he failed again and again. This failure caused him to change his strategy.

In the year 312 AD Constantine legalized the Christian church. In time he made it the religion of the state. Things began changing rapidly. With Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire, everyone was eager to become a Christian. This had a devastating impact on the spirituality of the church. The world came into the church. As the years passed the church became a part of the world.

Satan attacked the church on many levels. As Seventh-day Adventists, we are aware that God foretold of these events. Paul wrote:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [Christ's second coming] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition..." 2 Thessalonians 2:3

We are well aware of the doctrinal fall into which the church entered. The established church turned away from many fundamental teachings of the Bible. The teachings of men were substituted for the teachings of God's Word. However, many Christians may not be as aware of another aspect of the "falling away" that occurred.

In the early church all church members were "laity," each with spiritual gifts for ministering in the church. The fallen church now established a distinction between "laity" and "clergy." The clergy became known as priests. They were put on government salary. The biblical teaching of the priesthood of all believers was abolished. (1 Peter 2:5) The church declared the priests were the only ones to minister in sacred rites. These rites became impersonal religious rituals, which became a substitute for genuine Christian fellowship.

Apostolic succession rather than personal piety became the focus for church leadership. The church leadership of priests and bishops grew in power and influence. Their decrees became church law. The teachings of the church overruled the teachings of the Bible.

The Church members were expected to come to the church to be taught by the priests rather than study the Bible for themselves. Massive churches were erected for this new kind of worship. The believers came to the church to take part in the "saving sacraments," which they believed necessary for their salvation. This large gathering style of worship replaced the small group fellowship of the early church. Church ritual replaced fellowship. The church quickly accelerated into the "Dark Ages."

William Beckham lists the changes that took place in the church in the forth century. He writes:

"Listed below are changes which occurred when the church stopped meeting in small groups and became an audience in large groups.

- The Lord's Supper changed from a common meal to a ceremony.
- Worship changed from participation to observation.
- Witness changed from relationship to salesmanship.
- Ministry changed from personal to almost exclusively social.
- Leadership changed from gifted and called servants to professionals.
- Growth changed from multiplication to addition.
- Missions changed from being to supporting missionaries.
- Confession changed from public before a small group to private in the confessional.
- Discipleship changed from on-the-job to classroom training.
- Fellowship changed from in-depth in community living to more surface in large meetings.
- Body life changed from lifestyle to membership.
- Gifts changed from edification to entertainment or extinction.
- Empowerment changed from God's power to man's ability.
- Buildings changed from functional to sacred meeting places.
- Administration changed from integrated to compartmental.

- Membership changed from producer to consumer.
- Child-care changed from parental to church responsibility.
- Bible study changed from doers of the Word to hearers of the Word.
- Evangelism changed from 'go structures' to 'come structures'."

The Second Reformation, p.49-50

Beckham goes on to conclude:

"The transition from groups to buildings completed in the fourth century changed the face of the church for the next seventeen centuries. All of the above changes have continued to impact negatively upon the church as we know it. Could the way we are the church today have more to do with what happened in the fourth century at the hand of Constantine than with what happened in the first century at the hand of Jesus? Many searching Christians are beginning to suspect just that." Ibid. 50

ARE WE STILL INFLUENCED BY CONSTANTINE?

We as Seventh-day Adventists are very aware of some of the changes that were unbiblical that Constantine and his successors brought into the church. The Sabbath is a very precious truth that was changed at that time also. Could it be that we are today unaware of the impact Constantine's changes are having on the way we do worship and fellowship? I think the answer is yes! I believe God is calling us today to continue to move away from all the counterfeits Constantine and his successors brought into the church. This includes God's call to us to return to the true Christian fellowship of the early church, the "new wineskin" fellowship described in the New Testament.

GET PREPARED

God is preparing a people for Christ's second coming. We must receive the early rain baptism of the Holy Spirit in order to receive the benefit of the latter rain outpouring of God's Spirit. As Spirit filled believers, we must also return to God's way of "doing church." We must return to the "new wineskin" fellowship of the early church. It is essential we enter into "new wineskin" fellowship settings where God is able to manifest the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit in a powerful, redemptive manner that all present will be built up into the fullness of Christ. Satan has tried to steal this wonderful blessing from God's people. He was successful for many centuries. May each of us make a firm decision to take back what is

rightfully ours as God's anointed people.

In conclusion, I want to clarify one important point. What I have presented in this chapter does not preclude corporate worship in a larger congregational setting. When we read Paul's writings, we find that he often referred to the church in specific cities. Upon reflection on these references, it appears that the smaller home fellowship churches would on occasion get together for a larger corporate worship service. Imagine the marvelous praise and worship of Jesus Christ that would take place when these small fellowship groups came together in larger gatherings. I dream of the day when we will once again become that kind of church.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. In what two locations did the early Christians meet?
- 2. List some of the homes where Christians met as described in the New Testament.
- 3. Why do you think a small, home fellowship group is more conducive for genuine Christian fellowship to take place?
- 4. Where have Christians often met when persecution has taken place in their country?
- 5. How did Satan change his strategy to destroy the Christian church during the time of Constantine?
- 6. List some of the changes that took place that negatively affected the way Christians worshipped and fellowshipped?
- 7. Do you think God's last remnant people will experience new wineskin fellowship before Jesus comes? Why?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray For:
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to lead you to become part of a new wineskin fellowship group
 - Those on your prayer list



BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY

When man was created, the very first command given to him by God was, "be fruitful and multiply." (Genesis 1:28) As pointed out in a previous day's devotional, man was created for fellowship with God and one another. God's first directive to man indicates that God's plan was for man's circle of fellowship to grow. This was important to man even in the beginning of creation because God designed that man would grow spiritually and emotionally as he participated in God's ordained fellowship. In our world of sin we can certainly see the opposite occur. Association in fellowship with those who disregard the things of God will have a detrimental effect on all who participate in that fellowship.

The same principle applies to Christians today. Fellowship of believers will play an important role in their spiritual, emotional and even physical restoration. The importance and necessity of Christian fellowship in small groups is the point of this book.

The same command given to Adam is given to the followers of Christ today, "be fruitful and multiply." Growth should and must be the goal of every Christian fellowship group. If the new wineskin fellowship group is not growing, it is not functioning in the manner God intends. Remember, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is given for both our personal spiritual growth, and for the spreading of the gospel. (Acts 1:8) Hence, non-believers or individuals who are not church members should be present.

It is essential for our own personal spiritual growth to be involved in winning others to Christ. We must personally heed God's command to be "fruitful and multiply." God could have used angels for the work of soul winning; however, He did not. Why? He knows the importance of each of us being personally involved in reaching others for Christ. Ellen White made a very significant statement concerning this.

"If you will go to work as Christ designs that His disciples shall, and win souls for Him, you will feel the need of a deeper experience and a

greater knowledge in divine things, and will hunger and thirst after righteousness. You will plead with God, and your faith will be strengthened and your soul will drink deeper drafts at the well of salvation. Encountering opposition and trials will drive you to the Bible and prayer. You will grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ and will develop a rich experience." *Steps to Christ*, p.80

The support the fellowship group gives us plays a significant role in our efforts to reach out to others. The members of the group will join in prayer for those we are reaching out to. The counsel of those more experienced in soul winning will be a great benefit to us. The spiritual fathers in the group will be used by God to assist the less experienced in leading others to Christ.

Also, the fellowship group will provide a marvelous environment for the one seeking God; for he will find loving, caring individuals who will accept him as he is. The seeker will find himself in an environment where God's Spirit can work in a powerful way for his conversion to Christ.

God will minister to both the believers and non-believers who are present in the fellowship group. He will do this by means of the fruit and gifts of the Spirit. The gift of evangelism is manifested for the very purpose of winning non-believers to Christ. God will also use many of the other gifts to bring conviction to non-believers in the fellowship group as well. Paul makes an interesting comment about the way God uses the gift of prophecy during times of fellowship in the following text:

"But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!" *I Corinthians* 14:24-25 (NIV)

It is essential for every Christian to be involved in ministry to non-believers. We can neither grow spiritually nor in discipleship if we choose not to allow God to minister through us to the world. I discuss this in greater detail in my book entitled, *Spirit Baptism & Evangelism*.

First Reason for Evangelism in New Wineskin Groups

It is important we understand the importance of evangelism in the small Christian fellowship setting. The goal of the Christian fellowship group is personal spiritual growth. One of the main purposes of our personal spiritual growth is that we represent Christ to the world. The more accurately we represent Christ, the more effective we will become in winning the lost. Remember, there are three levels of spiritual Christian maturity found in the fellowship group: little children, young men and fathers. (1John 2:12-14) The goal is that the believers in the fellowship advance from the little child stage to becoming spiritually young men and finally fathers. The young men and fathers are more effective in winning the lost to Christ than are those who are little children in a spiritual sense. The new wineskin fellowship setting is the best environment for this spiritual growth from little children to father to take place. Hence, the fellowship group will play a major role in preparing us to lead others to Christ.

Ellen White points out the importance of a Christ like character in winning others to Christ.

"It is our own character and experience that determine our influence upon others. In order to convince others of the power of Christ's grace, we must know its power in our own hearts and lives. The gospel we present for the saving of souls must be gospel by which our own souls are saved." *Ministry of Healing*, p.469

It is in the new wineskin fellowship group that our character best develops and our experience in the Lord grows. The gospel and power of Christ's grace is vividly experienced there.

SECOND REASON FOR EVANGELISM IN NEW WINESKIN GROUPS

The traditional method of doing evangelism is generally impersonal. Handbills are mailed to the community advertising the meetings. In most cases the evangelist is dependent on the handbill to bring the majority of new visitors to the meeting. Hence, when the visitor comes to the meeting, he listens to a stranger give him information about Bible teachings. Since it was the handbill that brought him, he has no personal relationship with anyone involved in the meetings. Over a period of time he may come to believe what the evangelist has taught and may begin attending church. However, usually the primary personal relationship developed is with the evangelist. When the evangelist leaves, the connection with his new found church is weak. Satan is quick to move in and bring discouragement to the new believer. If he has not developed close personal relationships with

mature members of the faith, he will be standing alone trying to cope with the struggles he is facing. Many times this is too much for the new believer; over time he loses his way, stops attending church, and may even reject the truths he has recently accepted.

The small new wineskin fellowship group completely changes this impersonal dynamic of evangelism. The very essence of the fellowship group is close, intimate interpersonal relationships. When a non-believer comes to experience Christianity and new biblical truths in the setting of this fellowship, he does so in the context of a close interpersonal relationship with a member of the group. He is placed in a redemptive environment that is conducive to his personal spiritual growth.

At the time evangelistic meetings begin, and the new believer is invited by those in his fellowship group to attend, he comes already connected. The evangelist's teachings are heard in the context of this fellowship. As questions arise his Christian friends will be able to answer him as friend to friend. He knows they care for him, so he trusts them and listens with confidence to their answers. Ellen White makes an interesting comment about friendship, small groups and evangelism:

"Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart. By being social and coming close to the people, you may turn the current of their thoughts more readily than by the most able discourse. The presentation of Christ in the family, by the fireside, and in small gatherings in private houses, is often more successful in winning souls to Jesus than are sermons delivered in the open air, to the moving throng, or even in halls or churches." *Gospel Workers*, p. 193.

Secondly, the traditional method of evangelism attracts those who are somewhat similar to us. In general attendees already have a spiritual interest. If the interest is strong enough they may respond to the handbill received in the mail and attend the meeting. Those who have much less spiritual interest will simply throw the handbill in the trash.

A personal relationship with an individual is at the heart of leading him to Christ. There are many who would never come to church or attend an evangelistic meeting through the traditional means churches use to attract them. The only way they will ever come is if a Christian befriends them. This was Christ's method of evangelism.

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me'" *Ministry of Healing*, p. 143

CHRIST'S METHOD, YOU AND FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

How can we apply all this to the Spirit filled Christian ministering in and through fellowship groups? First, pray for Christ to continue to fill you with His Spirit, and give you the passion for souls He has. Make a list of those in your circle of family and friends who you feel do not know Christ, or may be a Christian, but do not know the important message of Christ's second coming. Begin praying for these individuals every day that God would lead them to accept Christ and God's last-day message to prepare them for Christ's soon return.

Next, pray for God to provide the opportunity for you to begin coming close to them to help them in some way. We must be willing to invest the time and energy it takes to come close to people. Our interest in them must be genuine, truly caring for them and wanting to help them. When in contact with those for whom you are praying, look for the openings God gives you to share with them.

Always remember God is already seeking to draw their mind and interest to Him. In many cases, He just needs us to make ourselves available for Him to use us to speak a word of encouragement to them. God will also give you the words to speak. He knows what each person needs to hear. Holy Spirit power will attend the words you speak. You are anything but alone in your witnessing for Jesus. The Holy Spirit is going before you to prepare the way. He is going with you to enable and empower you. He will stay behind with the person to whom you have witnessed in order to continue to bring conviction to their heart.

Share with your fellowship group what is happening in your efforts to reach this individual for Christ. Have your group add his name to their prayer list. There is great power in united pray for the salvation of another. Ellen White clearly stated the importance of this when she wrote:

"In times past there were those who fastened their minds upon one soul after another, saying, 'Lord, help me to save this soul.' But now such instances are rare. How many act as if they realized the perils of

sinners?" Gospel Workers, p.65

"Let the workers grasp the promises of God, saying '...I must have this soul converted to Jesus Christ" *Medical Ministry*, p.244

In the following statement, Mrs. White points out the importance of fellowship groups functioning in this manner.

"Why do not believers feel a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are out of Christ? Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another? In our churches let companies be formed for service. Let different ones unite in labor as fishers of men. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ's love.

"The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers. If in one place there are only two or three who know the truth, let them form themselves into a band of workers. Let them keep their bond of union unbroken, pressing together in love and unity, encouraging one another to advance, each gaining courage and strength from the assistance of the others. Let them reveal Christlike forbearance and patience, speaking no hasty words, using the talent of speech to build one another up in the most holy faith. Let them labor in Christlike love for those outside the fold, forgetting self in their endeavor to help others. As they work and pray in Christ's name, their numbers will increase; for the Saviour says: 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven." Matthew 18:19 Testimonies, Vol. 7, p.21

I have found through the years that God is working in the life of those you would least expect. I remember one individual I worked with when I was not in full time ministry. He was the kind of individual that would tell you whatever he needed to in order to get your business. We would on occasion go to lunch together. He began opening up about some of the frustrations he was facing at work. I shared some ideas that I thought would help him. We became close friends. In time I shared with him some of my beliefs. In a few weeks he decided to come with my wife and me to church. In this simple way this man began to be drawn closer to Christ. Since we were not

involved in a small fellowship group at the time, the worship service was the only option we had to invite him to. As I look back, how much better it would have been if we could have brought him to a fellowship group in which we were involved. He could have developed close friendships with the members of the group. Instead, his connection with our church was through us only. Soon we moved out of the area before other relationships could be formed. The importance and necessity of fellowship groups became very clear to me. They form the best environment for evangelism to take place.

God has done everything necessary for the salvation of men and women. The price has been paid for their salvation. Holy Spirit power is working on their hearts bringing conviction. The missing ingredient is a Spirit filled man or woman through whom God can speak. Let us not be that missing man or woman. May we always make ourselves available to God to bring men and women to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In essence, God want each of us to be a "Friend for Jesus" to all who we know and meet.

New wineskin fellowship groups should also plan to reach out as a group to their community. They can become involved in such activities as health education classes, holding a block party in one of the group member's backyards, etc. As the group prayerfully seeks God's guidance, He will direct them into the outreach that is best suited for the group. It is important to remember that the goal of these activities is to come into personal contact with people who need Christ. If we let Him, God will minister to them through us. A close bond of friendship will develop and in time they may begin attending our fellowship group. They will then experience the group dynamic of having God ministering to them through the fruit and gifts of the Spirit that are being manifested in the lives of the Spirit filled believers in the group.

What I have stated in this devotional does not negate the necessity of traditional public evangelistic meetings. The truth is, new wineskin fellowship groups will greatly enhance the effectiveness of traditional evangelism. They go hand-in-hand. Both are needed for the most effective outreach for Christ in our communities.

THE REASON FOR SUCCESS

The experience of two great English preachers, George Whitefield and John Wesley, of the 18th century points this out. They were both mighty men of God to their generation.

Joel Comisky relates the following about these two dedicated Christian men.

"Both dedicated themselves to God's work in the same small group (Holy club) at Oxford University. Both were excellent open-air preachers. Both witnessed thousands of conversions through their ministries. Yet John Wesley left behind a 100,000 – member church, while George Whitfield could point to little tangible fruit toward the end of his ministry. The difference? Wesley dedicated himself to training and releasing small-group leaders, while Whitefield busied himself with preaching and doing the work of ministry." *Reap the Harvest*, p.145

As we have seen, Constantine in the fourth century and his successors that followed, led the church to fall away from the New Testament way of "doing church." John Wesley was a pioneer in returning to the New Testament model of church and evangelism. Wesley put major emphasis in the area of small fellowship groups. D. Michael Henderson describes Wesley's attitude toward small group fellowship:

"Wesley was convinced that learning is expedited by group interaction, whether the content of that learning is behavioral transformation, strategic training, or social rehabilitation. It seems that he responded to every instructional need he met by establishing a group, some kind of group. He felt that his own personal growth was largely due to participation in group experiences, and he advocated them for others. Depending on the educational goal to be accomplished, the size and format of his groups varied, but there was always the people-to-people element in his solution to human problems and development." *John Wesley's Class Meetings*, p. 132

John Wesley was strongly convicted that simply giving instruction concerning the things of God without offering the opportunity for the individual to change his behavior in the small group setting was useless and might even be destructive. Note what Wesley wrote concerning this.

"That part of our economy, the private weekly meetings for prayer, examination, and particular exhortation, has been the greatest means of deepening and confirming every blessing that was received by the word preached and of diffusing it to others, who could not attend the public ministry; whereas without this religious connection and intercourse, the most ardent attempts by mere preaching have proved of no lasting use."

Works, XIII:9

Henderson states:

"Wesley's often-quoted aphorism, 'there is no holiness but social holiness' sums up his belief that Christian perfection is a group experience rather than a solitary quest." *John Wesley's Class Meetings*, p.133

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

As we have seen, it is essential that we be involved in a fellowship group to be most effective in leading men and women to Christ. Therefore, participation in a fellowship group must become a priority for us. If there is one functioning in your church, become a part of it. If there are no fellowship groups in your church, then prayerfully take the initiative to begin one. This may seem a bit overwhelming at first. But remember, it is God's will that every believer be involved in new wineskin fellowship. Such fellowship was the way Christ set up His church in the beginning. It was the manner in which the early church grew so rapidly. God has not changed through the centuries, but the church has. It is time we return to the beginning. It is time we "do church" and "evangelism" the way the early Christians did.

There are two statements by Ellen White concerning evangelism that have always intrigued me. They are:

"The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?" Testimonies, Vol. 6, p.370 (emphasis added)

"If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, *there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one*. But, though professing to be converted, we carry around with us a bundle of self that we regard as altogether too precious to be given up. It is our privilege to lay this burden at the feet of Christ and in its place take the character and similitude of Christ. *The Saviour is waiting for us to do this*." *Testimonies, Vol. 9*, p.189 (emphasis added)

There was a time when I did not know what would cause the spiritual break through necessary in our lives and church that would enable God to bring one hundred to the faith where now He only brings one. Now I know the answer. It is really quite simple. The breakthrough will come when we as God's people earnestly seek the "new wine" baptism of the Holy Spirit, and determinedly enter into the "new wineskin" fellowship of the early church; for these were the two key ingredients that enabled God to take the gospel to the world through those early Christians.

When we as Spirit filled believers begin following the New Testament model of "doing church" and "evangelism," we will begin seeing New Testament results. Individual Spirit baptism, new wineskin fellowship groups, and evangelism in the inter-relational small group setting will become the major elements in the finishing of God's work. It is in the context of these three things that the Holy Spirit is able to work in power. God calls each of us to have a part in His last great work on this earth.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Why do you think new wineskin fellowship is essential for the Christians spiritual growth?
- 2. What are the two reasons for evangelism in new wineskin fellowship groups listed in today's devotional?
- 3. What did Ellen White write about the importance of small fellowship groups and witnessing through these groups?
- 4. Why was John Wesley more successful in the long term than George Whitefield in his efforts to establish strong, lasting Christians in the faith?
- 5. Describe in some detail the method John Wesley used.

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray For:
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to lead you to become part of a new wineskin fellowship group that is both a blessing to the participants and evangelistic in sharing Christ.
 - Those on your prayer list



EARLY ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP

Men and women who became a part of the advent movement throughout the 1800's came from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds. Perhaps the one denomination that influenced the Adventist style of worship and ministry most was John Wesley's Methodist Church. Ellen White, herself, had been a Methodist. The "Camp Meeting" that has been so much a part of our Seventh-day Adventist heritage has its roots in Methodism.

We have seen in a previous day's devotional that John Wesley placed great importance on the group meeting of believers. Wesley wrote:

"That part of our economy, the private weekly meetings for prayer, examination, and particular exhortation, has been the greatest means of deepening and confirming every blessing that was received by the word preached and of diffusing it to others, who could not attend the public ministry; whereas without this religious connection and intercourse, the most ardent attempts by mere preaching have proved of no lasting use." *Works*, XIII:9

These weekly fellowship meetings played a major role in the spiritual growth of all who responded to Wesley's ministry. These meetings were occasions where the participants were encouraged to be very open with one another in sharing where they were in their walk with the Lord. As they shared their victories and short comings, their fellow members of the group would encourage them and instruct them in God's word.

When we read the early history of our Seventh-day Adventist church, we find that very similar gatherings took place among the believers. Our pioneers called their times of fellowship "social meetings." A few descriptions of these social meetings are given in the quotes that follow.

In 1865 Uriah Smith, an early Adventist pioneer, described the social meeting in this way:

"A meeting characterized by spirited and soul cheering testimonies, the

beaming eye, the voice of praise, the earnest and stirring exhortation, and often the falling tear – scenes in which faith and love flame up anew." Uriah Smith, *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, May 23, 1865

James White describes social meetings in the following words:

"Social meetings were marked with great solemnity. Sins were confessed with tears, and there was a general breaking down before God, and strong pleadings for pardon, and a fitness to meet the Lord at his coming. And the humble disciples of the Lord did not seek his face in vain. Before that meeting closed, hundreds testified with tears of joy that they had sought the Lord and found him, and had tasted the sweets of sins forgiven." James White, *Life Incidents Vol. 1*, p.167

In another article James White describes an evening social meeting that took place in 1855.

"In the evening following First-day we met for social meeting, and to break bread. There was a spirit of labor for the church, and some who had been bound in unbelief were set free and were filled with peace, joy, hope and faith. It was a glorious meeting." James White, *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald, Vol. 4*, No. 30, p.236, 1855

F.W. Morse gives his explanation of what a social meeting should be like.

"Prayer and social meetings upon the Sabbath should be sustained with spirit. A vigorous, holy energy that springs from the Christian's heart, should mark their progress. Here from week to week the consistent follower of the Lord delights to be found, punctually and faithfully at his post, cheerfully bearing his part, and from a rich fund of daily experience, he casts into the common stock his prayer of thanksgiving and supplication, word of exhortation, song of praise, all to the edifying of his brethren." F.W. Morse, *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, *Vol.22*, No.15, p.114, 1863.

A member by the name of Chapman wrote concerning the void believers felt who lived in isolated locations where they could not participate in the social meeting:

"Dear Bro. White: Could you but realize the utter loneliness of some of the scattered brethren, situated far away from those of like faith, no one with whom they can converse upon the all-absorbing subject of their afflictions; no one with whom they can confidently unite their voice in prayer, no enjoyment of social meetings of those whose hearts unite and burn within them as they meet and sing and pray, and tell of their joys, their hopes, their trials, talk of our Great High Priest, of the new heavens and the new earth, and the sweet peace afforded them in obeying all the commandments of God." A. Chapman, *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald, Vol.5*, No.11, p.87, 1854

Here are two descriptions by Ellen White of social meetings:

"We then had a social meeting. Many testimonies were borne and many confessions made well wet down with tears. It was a profitable meeting." Ellen G White, *Manuscript 29*, p.267, 1887

"The five o'clock social meeting this morning was the best we have had. Brother was on his knees confessing to brother, there were broken hearts, tears, forgiveness, and rejoicing. We expect to see more of the salvation of God ere this meeting closes." Ellen G White, The Southern California Camp Meeting, *Signs of the Times*, May 6, 1880

It should be clear from these statements that our early pioneers believed the social meeting played a very important role in the spiritual growth of God's children. It is also evident that these meetings were gatherings where intimate, close fellowship took place. The participants shared their hopes and dreams, their joys and sorrows. They were times for confession of sin and making things right with their brethren.

As the years passed the Adventist church lost this blessed type of fellowship meeting as did their predecessors, the Methodists. The Adventist social meeting where there was intimate fellowship and sharing evolved into what we now call "prayer meeting." The modern prayer meeting format is very different from the Wesley meetings and early Adventist social meetings. The prayer meeting has become a gathering where a few songs are sung, the pastor or lay leader gives a Bible presentation (which takes most of the time), and a few prayers are offered at the end.

This style of prayer meeting has not proved to be the blessing that characterized the early Adventist social meeting. In most cases, the modern prayer meeting is attended by only a handful of church members; and in some churches the prayer meeting has been cancelled altogether.

Why is this? I think what has been presented in the chapters of this devotional should give us the answer. In order for us to have life when we gather together we must have two things happen. First, we must seek the

baptism of the Holy Spirit in our life every day. (Ephesians 5:18) Secondly, we must prayerfully let God lead us to return to the "new wineskin" fellowship of the New Testament.

When this happens, our prayer meetings will not only be attended by a handful of our own church members, but those we have been reaching out to during the week will be present as well. The power of the Spirit will be experienced, and the group will grow to the point of having to divide into two groups.

All this may seem virtually impossible to those of us who have not experienced God working in this way. Let us remember, however, the New Testament clearly reveals how those early Christians fellowshipped together and how they grew exponentially in number. This can and will happen again; however, for this to happen we must go back to the beginning.

I am not indicating that a local church should eliminate their traditional prayer meeting. Such gatherings can be a great blessing. My concern is that we should also be involved in the kind of "social meetings," or new wineskin fellowship described in today's devotional.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What did John Wesley state was necessary for the preaching to have a lasting effect on the hearers?
- 2. Describe the elements of the "social meeting" described by Uriah Smith.
- 3. Describe the elements of the "social meeting" described by James White.
- 4. Describe the elements of the "social meeting" described by F.W. Morse.
- 5. Describe the elements of the "social meeting" described by Ellen White.
- 6. What concern was expressed by Mr. A. Chapman, in 1854, in the Advent Review & Sabbath Herald?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray For:
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to lead you to experience the spiritual blessing of the social meetings described by James and Ellen White and other early Adventists
 - Those on your prayer list



ESSENTIALS OF NEW WINESKIN FELLOWSHIP

In this devotional I have defined the "new wineskin" fellowship group as a gathering of Spirit baptized believers where God manifests the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit through them in order to minister to each individual in the fellowship group that they might: "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:" (Ephesians 4:13-15), and reach out to others for Christ individually and as a group.

SEEK THE BAPTISM

Hence, the first essential of becoming a new wineskin fellowship group is that each participant seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit every day. (Ephesians 5:18) For it is only through the baptism of the Spirit that the fruit and gifts of the Spirit will be manifested in our lives, which are the means God uses to minister to group participants.

PRAY FOR GOD'S GUIDANCE

Secondly, we must pray earnestly for God's guidance in establishing the fellowship group. No two situations are exactly the same. Christ is the head of His church. The Holy Spirit is directing the work of the church on earth today. Therefore, we must seek the guidance of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Lord knows how best to go about His work, and we can trust that He will direct us in establishing the kind of redemptive fellowship that He wants us to experience.

THE HOME SETTING

Experience has proven that the home setting is the most conducive venue for this kind of fellowship. The home is a warm, familiar, and relaxing environment where fellowship naturally happens. Usually, the church setting tends to be a little more formal, than and not quite as friendly as a home. Also, the home was the setting of the New Testament church.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SCRIPTURE

The book of Acts has recorded many aspects of the early Christian church. The second chapter of Acts lists four key elements of the early believers' experience in the Lord:

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." *Acts 2:42*

From this text we immediately see four essential elements of new wineskin fellowship. The first listed is doctrine. The understanding of God's Word is at the heart of one's Christian experience. Paul tells us:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works." *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

These scriptures indicate that a practical application of God's Word was a part of early Christian fellowship, and should be a part of ours. I am not speaking of a lengthy doctrinal presentation. Such teaching is important, but should take place in settings other than the fellowship group I am describing. The weekly Sabbath School class, and periodic evangelistic meetings are occasions for this kind of in-depth doctrinal study. The kind of Bible study in the fellowship group should be more of a short devotional nature giving very practical applications to the Christian's everyday life. Also, during the time of sharing in the group, God will reveal specific scriptural applications for the issues raised in the conversations that take place. The purpose of scripture in the fellowship setting is for "correction and for instruction in righteousness."

In the fellowship group the devotional can be presented by different individuals. As the gift of teaching begins to be manifested in the participants, it will become clear which individuals are best equipped to present the devotional. Remember, the new wineskin fellowship group is the setting where the gifts of the Spirit will be manifest for the edification of all present. Thus, some participants will display the gift of teaching.

FELLOWSHIP

The second activity mentioned in Acts 2:42 is "fellowship." As we have previously seen, the Greek word translated fellowship is "koinonia." The word means to communicate, distribute, and impart. Hence, "koinonia" means ministering to one another. This means not just simply knowing one another's names, but also knowing one another's hopes, dreams, struggles and pains. It implies allowing God to use us to minister to one another. It is through the fruit and gifts of the Spirit being manifested in the fellowship group that this happens. God's desire is that we care for one another and actively minister to one another in Christian love.

When Christians gather together in fellowship there seems to be a special blessing available to them. Jesus alludes to this when He said:

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." *Matthew 18:20*

In these times of fellowship Jesus is especially present to bring encouragement, strength, comfort and healing. The new wineskin fellowship is perhaps the most healing, redemptive environment on earth. We should not be surprised that Satan has worked so hard to keep us from experiencing this kind of fellowship with one another and Christ.

Often since visitors may be present at the fellowship group, leaders may be led to include what might be called an "ice breaker" activity that will help all the participants to become better acquainted with one another. This will assist in the development of the fellowship God wants us to have.

Breaking Bread Together

The third activity listed in the text in Acts is "breaking of bread."

This phrase can have two applications: it can refer to simply eating together or participating in the Lord's Supper. The early Christian small fellowship groups did both in their homes. Hence, eating together can provide a nice time of socializing during the gathering. The group may at times choose to have an actual meal or simply light, healthy refreshments.

UNITED PRAYER

The fourth element of the fellowship group listed is prayer. When we read the book of Acts we see the early Christians praying together on many occasions. Whenever they faced a problem they prayed. (Acts 4:24-31; 12:5, 12) United prayer is an essential part of new wineskin fellowship.

Jesus stated:

"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." *Matthew 18:19*

Note that this statement is in the context of small group fellowship. In new wineskin fellowship there is a power in prayer that is available nowhere else. Before the day of Pentecost the believers understood this. The scripture describes them in the following manner:

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." *Acts* 1:14

The phrase "with one accord in prayer" means that they were praying unitedly for the same thing. In this case it was for the fulfillment of Jesus promise to baptize them with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:4-5, 8) In a small fellowship the united prayer will be for the various members of the group with whom they have shared their struggles. God will hear these united prayers for one another and will answer in power. It is through such united prayer in the new wineskin fellowship groups that miracles will be seen. I believe this is the context in which the book of Acts will come alive once again in our day.

WORSHIP IN SONG

As we read the Old Testament we learn that singing played an important part in worship and individual spiritual growth. (Psalm 100) In the New Testament we read that Paul and Silas "prayed, and sang praises unto God" when they were in prison. (Acts 16:25) This is a clear indication that singing praises to God was as commonplace for them as prayer. It is easy to conclude that such singing was also an important part of the home church, small group experience of the early Christians.

Singing is a wonderful gift from God. When believers sing together their hearts and minds are lifted up to God. Singing prepares our hearts for God to speak to us. Praising God with song plays a major part in lifting the burdens of life and uplifting our spirits. Singing is an essential element of the new wineskin fellowship group.

Commenting on the importance of singing, Ellen White wrote:

"As a part of religious service, singing is as much an act of worship as

is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer. If the child is taught to realize this, he will think more of the meaning of the words he sings and will be more susceptible to their power.

"As our Redeemer leads us to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the glory of God, we may catch the themes of praise and thanksgiving from the heavenly choir round about the throne; and as the echo of the angels' song is awakened in our earthly homes, hearts will be drawn closer to the heavenly singers. Heaven's communion begins on earth. We learn here the keynote of its praise." *Education*, p. 168

FULL PARTICIPATION

Every member of the new wineskin fellowship group has something to contribute. They may not be aware of what that is at first. However, as the group dynamic develops they will begin to realize the gifts God wants to manifest through them for the benefit of the others. Ask for God's guidance on how to help those who are a bit hesitant to share and get more involved. God will direct in such matters, for it is His will that the gifts of the Spirit be manifested through each member of the body of Christ.

Paul gives us insights on this matter of involvement in a couple of his letters. Immediately after commanding the believers in Ephesus to "keep on being filled with the Spirit", he counsels them to:

"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." *Ephesians 5:19-21* (NIV)

Paul here lists a number of things the participants in the home church in Ephesus should do. The sharing that takes place in the fellowship is to be done with the attitude of submitting to one another. Remember that all of Paul's counsels on Christian behavior were given in most part to Christians who were fellowshipping with one another in the small home church setting.

In his first letter to the Corinthian believers, Paul gives a description of the kind of full participation that was to take place.

"What shall we say then brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church... Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone

who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace." *1 Corinthians* 14:26, 29-33 (NIV)

When the gifts of the Spirit are functioning as God intends, they will provide "strengthening of the church." The one through whom the gift is being manifested and the one being ministered to will both be blessed. For a more complete discussion of how the spiritual gifts operate in the fellowship group, see the daily devotion "The Gifts of the Spirit and New Wineskin Fellowship Groups."

Evangelism

This subject is covered more thoroughly in the daily devotional, "Be Fruitful and Multiply." However, it is important to again list the evangelistic aspect of the fellowship group here. If the new wineskin fellowship group is not growing it is not functioning in the manner God intends. Remember, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is given for both our personal spiritual growth, and for the spreading of the gospel. (Acts 1:8) Hence, non-believers or individuals who are not church members should be present, and the group should carry out plans to share the gospel with their community.

MULTIPLICATION AND DIVISION

Where there is life there is growth. A new wineskin fellowship with a core group of Spirit filled believers will see growth. Growth will occur by the addition of other church members and non-members to the group. When the group reaches twelve to fifteen in regular attendance the group should divide, which enables both groups to continue to grow. This is why it is important to constantly encourage participants to take leadership roles in the fellowship group. They will be preparing for the time when the Lord may call them to lead a new group.

LOVING DISCIPLINE

We usually think of discipline as negative, but the words "discipline" and "disciple" come from the same root word. The purpose of discipline is to return an individual to discipleship with Christ and His church. Loving discipline plays an important role in maintaining the new wineskin fellowship. A brother or sister can be saved from many heartaches and difficulties by such discipline.

I think it is significant that Jesus gave instruction about how to deal with a wayward brother in the context of a small group fellowship. (Matthew 18:15-20) As we have seen in the early church, the essence of how they conducted church was via small home fellowship groups. Therefore, the church discipline took place in this small fellowship group setting. The goal of this discipline was to bring the erring believer back into this close fellowship. Those involved in this effort to turn him back to the Lord would be individuals who intimately knew him through their mutual fellowship. Discipline in this context is very different from that of the traditional church setting where often close fellowship is lacking.

The purpose of the new wineskin fellowship group is to nurture and spiritually strengthen its members. Holding one another accountable is a part of this nurture. A parent instructs and disciplines his child in the loving family setting. In the same manner, the believers must give instruction and discipline when necessary in the setting of the loving family of God. When parents love their child they will discipline them. God, as our loving parent, disciplines us also. (Hebrews 12:6-13) Loving, nurturing discipline in the new wineskin fellowship setting will prove to be one of the greatest blessings in the lives of some of the participants.

THREE SPIRITUAL LEVELS OF PARTICIPANTS

According to the New Testament, believers fall into one of three levels of spiritual maturity. John addresses these three categories of believers in his first letter: little children, young men, and fathers. (1John 2:12-14) The "little children" phrase represents the new believers who have childlike faith, but not the deep knowledge and experience in the things of God. They will have problems common to individuals young in the faith. The nurturing support of the fellowship is essential to their growth in the Lord.

John states that the "young men" have overcome the evil one because they have a deeper knowledge of the word of God. They are familiar with Satan's tactics and are not easily shaken in their faith. They are able to successfully do battle with Satan. Hence, they can be a great blessing to the "little children" in the fellowship group. Because of their experience and level of maturity, they can also be very effective in reaching out to others.

The "fathers" John refers to are those who know God best. They are very experienced in warfare with Satan. They know the ways of God, and are not shaken by whatever comes their way. They are very capable of ministering to all in the fellowship group. Being "fathers," they have "children" of faith

that have come to accept the Lord through their efforts and prayers. They can play an important role in assisting the "little children" and "young men" in their efforts to share Christ with others. One major purpose of the new wineskin fellowship group is to create a spiritual environment where all participants can move toward being "fathers" in their faith.

SUGGESTED FORMAT

God knows what the best format is for any given fellowship group. As we have seen, there are certain elements which will be common to most groups. One format could be as follows:

- Praise Singing
- Opening Prayer
- Ice Breaker Suggestions: (use one per meeting)
 - What is the most important thing that happened to you this past week?
 - Tell something about yourself that most do not know about you.
 - What one thing do you most appreciate about God?
 - Where is the favorite place you lived as a child and why?
 - Tell one unusual thing you did as a child.
- Brief Practical Biblical Devotional Suggested discussion questions (*Shepherd's Guidebook*, by Ralph Neighbour, Jr., P.175)
 - What stands out to you in this passage?
 - What is the main point?
 - Can you illustrate this truth from an example in your own life?
 - What area of your life do you struggle the most in applying this truth?
 - What is God saying to you through this Scripture?
 - Where do you need God's help right now?
 - If you could ask God for anything right now what would it be?
- Mutual Sharing:
 - Individuals share their personal victories, trials, frustrations and needs in order to receive counsel and prayer from the group.
 - Pray for each person after they have shared their need
- Evangelism Focus
 - Each participant tell of their plans to share Christ with someone
 - Stop and pray for each person after they have shared their plans and include the person they are sharing Christ with

- The group may plan joint ministry projects
- Breaking bread together: Can be at beginning or end of group meeting
 - Light refreshments

Always be seeking God's leading before and during the fellowship group meeting, and be flexible to respond to the Spirit's promptings during the meeting.

How to Get Started

From this brief study of the early Christians fellowship, we find a variety of elements present. Also, I know this is the kind of fellowship the Lord wants us to experience. As you begin praying about how you, too, can gather together a new wineskin fellowship group in the home, God will reveal to you ways to integrate the elements that best meet the needs of your group.

Whether you are a pastor or layman, I would suggest you begin in a small way. The fellowship group you initiate will develop future group facilitators and can become a model for other groups to follow. Pastor Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of the largest Christian church in the world, has very successfully led his church to follow the early Christian church model. He advises:

"Take a dozen key lay leaders and train them as cell leaders. Then have them form their own home cell meetings, and watch over them carefully for six to eight months. Once this group of cells has begun to bear fruit, it will be time to get the whole church involved." *Successful Home Cell Groups*, p.111

God's Call to His Church Today

God's plan is never complicated. The New Testament church organization was so simple that thousands could be added in a matter of days and months without creating chaos. The small home fellowship groups played a major role in their success. The new wineskin fellowship group is at the heart of God's way of "doing church." Hence, its implementation will bring God's greatest blessings in individual spiritual growth along with an expansion in the church as a whole.

God is calling His children today to experience both the "new wine" baptism of the Spirit and the "new wineskin" fellowship. Both experiences are essential. The "new wine" brings the fruit of the Spirit of Christ's character and love into the group along with the ministering gifts of the

Spirit. While the "new wineskin" fellowship group is the best environment for us to grow into the fullness of Christ and to be ready for Christ's second coming. I am convinced that those ready to meet Jesus when He returns will have experienced both to the fullest extent in their lives. The fellowship begun here on earth with God and one another will then continue into eternity. The creation will have come full circle. The fellowship mankind was created to experience, but lost due to sin, will then be fully restored. God's plan for man will be complete. And as we have seen, the new wine Spirit baptism and new wineskin fellowship experiences will have played a major role in this complete restoration.

Dear reader, I pray that you will experience to the fullest extent what the inspired writers spoke of when they wrote:

"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." *Ephesians 3:16-19*

"...that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." *1 John 1:3*

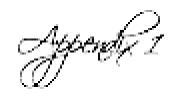
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Describe in your own words the importance of the following elements of new wineskin fellowship.
 - Baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Prayer for guidance
 - Home setting
 - Practical application of scripture
 - Fellowship
 - Breaking bread together
 - United prayer
 - Worship in Song
 - Full participation
 - Evangelism
 - Multiplication and division of the group
 - Loving discipline

- 2. Describe the three spiritual levels John lists, and give the role of each in a fellowship group.
- 3. Give what you think would be an effective format for a new wineskin fellowship group.
- 4. How do you think you would start a new wineskin fellowship group?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray For:
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - Revival for yourself and the church
 - God to lead you to begin or become part of a new wineskin fellowship group
 - Those on your prayer list



A Word of Caution and Encouragement

Satan hated Christ when He walked this earth 2000 years ago. He did everything he could to confuse individuals and hinder the ministry Jesus sought to perform. He continues this same effort today.

Satan also hates the work of the Holy Spirit. He will try to cause confusion when it comes to the ministry of the Spirit in the church today. It is therefore of vital importance we understand the work of the Spirit.

Ellen White warned us of Satan's efforts in the following manner:

"Since the ministry of the Holy Spirit is of vital importance to the church of Christ, it is one of the devices of Satan, through the errors of extremists and fanatics, to cast contempt upon the work of the Spirit, and cause the people of God to neglect this source of strength which our Lord Himself has provided." *Australian Signs of the Times*, July 24, 1911

SATAN'S TWO DECEPTIONS

There are two ways Satan tries to lead Christians astray concerning the ministry of the Spirit. One way is to create in us a narrow-minded spirit, so fearful of fanaticism that we will question anything that does not fit our conceptions of how the Spirit works. In the mid-eighteen hundreds, the church pioneers were confronted with this problem when the gift of prophecy began to be manifested through Ellen White. If we, in turn, react negatively today when the church witnesses the manifestation of gifts, we will prevent both ourselves and the church as a whole from receiving the benefit of these gifts.

Ellen White gives us very important counsel concerning this:

"We are to pray for the impartation of the Spirit as the remedy for sinsick souls. The church needs to be converted, and why should we not prostrate ourselves at the throne of grace, as representatives of the

church, and from a broken heart and contrite spirit make earnest supplication that the Holy Spirit shall be poured out upon us from on high? Let us pray that when it shall be graciously bestowed our cold hearts may be revived, and we may have discernment to understand that it is from God, and receive it with joy. Some have treated the Spirit as an unwelcome guest, refusing to receive the rich gift, refusing to acknowledge it, turning from it, and condemning it as fanaticism.

"When the Holy Spirit works the human agent, it does not ask us in what way it shall operate. Often it moves in unexpected ways. Christ did not come as the Jews expected. He did not come in a manner to glorify them as a nation...

"This is the danger to which the church is now exposed - that the inventions of finite men shall mark out the precise way for the Holy Spirit to come... The Holy Spirit flatters no man, neither does it work according to the devising of any man..." *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 64-66

She gives further counsel concerning our attitude toward the work of the Spirit in the following statements.

"The baptism of the Holy Ghost as on the day of Pentecost will lead to a revival of true religion and to the performance of many wonderful works. Heavenly intelligences will come among us and men will speak as they are moved by the Holy Spirit of God. But should the Lord work upon men as He did on and after the day of Pentecost, many who now claim to believe the truth would know so very little of the operation of the Holy Spirit that they would cry, 'Beware of fanaticism.' They would say of those who were filled with the Spirit, 'These men are full of new wine.'

"The time is not far off now when men will want a much closer relation to Christ, a much closer union with His Holy Spirit, than they have ever had, or will have, unless they give up their will and their way, and submit to God's will and God's way. The great sin of those who profess to be Christians is that they do not open the heart to receive the Holy Spirit. When souls long after Christ and seek to become one with Him, then those who are content with the form of godliness, exclaim 'Be careful, do not go to extremes.' When the angels of heaven come among us, and work through human agents, there will be solid and substantial conversions, after the order of the conversions after the day

of Pentecost.

"Now brethren, be careful and do not go into or try to create human excitement. But while we should be careful not to go into human excitement, we should not be among those who will raise inquiries and cherish doubts in reference to the work of the Spirit of God; for there will be those who will question and criticize when the Spirit of God takes possession of men and women, because their own hearts are not moved, but are cold and unimpressible. -Letter 27, 1894. *Selected Messages*, *Book* 2, p. 56-57

The second way Satan tries to hinder the work of the Spirit is to lead Christians into what we would call fanaticism. On occasion, I hear of Christians who travel far and near to find some new experience in the Spirit. There is a tendency in some to seek signs, miracles and other sensational phenomena.

Again, Ellen White gives practical counsel:

- "There is constant danger of allowing something to come into our midst that we may regard as the workings of the Holy Spirit, but that in reality is the fruit of a spirit of fanaticism.
- "...I have long known that fanaticism will be manifest again, in different ways.
- "How afraid I am to have anything of a fanatical nature brought in among our people." -Selected Messages, Book 2, p. 43-44
- "No greater harm could be done to the work of God at this time than for us to allow a spirit of fanaticism to come into our churches, accompanied by strange workings which are incorrectly supposed to be operations of the Spirit of God.
- "I have been instructed that when one offers to exhibit these peculiar manifestations (tongues), this is a decided evidence that it is not the work of God." (Parenthesis added) -Selected Messages, Book 2, p. 41-42

SEEK THE SPIRIT - NOT SIGNS

When we read the book of Acts we see certain signs, miracles and other amazing things happening under the ministry of the Holy Spirit. However, it is important to remember that our part is to seek the Spirit, not the signs. It is God's prerogative to determine which Spirit filled believer is to receive

what gift. We seek the Spirit, and God gives the gifts. I think it is very significant that Mark tells us:

"And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the work with signs following." *Mark 16:20*

Note that the "signs" followed. They did not seek the signs. They sought the Spirit. That is the example we must follow today.

God's Challenge to Us

There are things I have written about in this devotional that may seem radical in the minds of some of the readers. As I stated in the beginning of this devotional, the Lord has challenged me to look again at the kind of church He desires to have in this earth. Perhaps the biblical concepts and historical evidence has challenged you also.

I strongly believe that God wants the church today to be very similar to the church we read about in the book of Acts. I am convicted that God wants a church where He can manifest the fruit and gifts of the Spirit so that each believer can grow into the fullness of Christ. God also desires to manifest the gifts of the Spirit so that the church will be empowered, as were those early Christians, to spread the good news about Jesus and the three angels' message throughout this earth.

CALLED TO A HIGHER EXPERIENCE

In order for this to happen, understanding and experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit is essential for every Christian. Spirit baptism is a necessary experience for all who will receive the latter rain outpouring of the Spirit and are living when Jesus returns. The new wineskin fellowship groups will also play a significant role in preparing God's people for the tremendous events that are coming upon this earth.

My prayer is that all who read this devotional will seek the infilling of God's Spirit every day. (Ephesians 5:18) I also pray that we as Seventh-day Adventist Christians or any other Christian throughout this earth will allow our Lord to lead them into the new wineskin fellowship experienced by the early church. May we each allow God to manifest a true remnant people that, in a very real sense, are like the early church we read about in the book of Acts.

I challenge each of us to move forward prayerfully, determinedly, and carefully in these areas of Christian experience. Let us be careful to avoid

Satan's efforts to cause us to reject the movements of the Spirit in our personal life and in the church. Also, we must be guarded against allowing Satan to bring fanaticism into our midst. We need not fear either of these if we keep prayerfully close to God, daily seeking the Spirit's infilling and yielding to the Spirit's promptings in our life.

I know there are blessings and victories both individually and corporately just ahead for those who are willing to give themselves 100% to God. I pray that all of us will be among God's last remnant people who experience the power of God in their lives as no generation that has gone before has experienced; that remnant who will be able to meet Jesus when He returns, for they will be just like Him. (1John 3:2)

Remember how Ellen White described those who were experiencing the tribulation and ready for Christ return. She wrote:

"With shouts of triumph, jeering, and imprecation, throngs of evil men are about to rush upon their prey, when lo, a dense blackness, deeper than the darkness of the night, falls upon the earth. Then a rainbow, shining with the glory from the throne of God, spans the heavens, and seems to encircle each praying company." *The Great Controversy*, p.636

Notice that those who make it victoriously through the time of trouble (tribulation) and are ready to meet Jesus are in "praying companies." New wineskin fellowship will be essential for their victories over Satan and their preparation for Christ's glorious return.

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or websites: www.spiritbaptism.org; or www.40daysdevotional.com.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

This book presents the biblical teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the benefits of receiving this Gift in fullness, and why it is necessary for the Christian to receive this special Spirit infilling in order to become like Jesus.

Spirit Baptism & Evangelism

The relationship between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and witnessing for Christ is presented along with Christ's method of evangelism. The spiritual problems last-day Laodicean Christian's face and the solutions to those problems are discussed.

Spirit Baptism & New Wineskin Fellowship

This book gives a biblical and historical study into; how the early Christians "did church", the historical "falling away" from God's original plan for His church, the implications of how this apostasy is still influencing the church today, and why "new wineskin" fellowship is necessary for the Christian to grow into the fullness of Christ.

Spirit Baptism & Deliverance

It is God's will to deliver His children from every influence and oppression of Satan in the Christian's life; spiritually, emotionally and physically. Along with powerful testimonies of deliverance, the biblical principles of how these deliverances took place are presented in a manner that every Christian can apply to their own life.

Spirit Baptism & Prayer

Prayer is the most powerful force on earth. Prayer moves the arm of God on behalf of His people. In this book the necessity and method of intercessory prayer for the unsaved and fellow believers is unveiled. The question: "Why does God need our prayers?" is answered. What it means to pray in the Spirit, persevere, unite and fast I prayer are

presented.

Spirit Baptism & Christ's Glorious Return

This book gives the characteristics of those who are ready for Christ's return. The question is answered; what do I have to do to be among that final generation whom God is calling into existence today?

Spirit Baptism & Abiding in Christ

This book explains how the Christian is to obtain victory over every temptation and sin by allowing Christ to live out His life in and through them. When this is experienced one's life will never again be the same. Victory is no longer a struggle and joy in Christ is experienced as never before.

Spirit Baptism & Waiting on God

This book presents the biblical teaching about waiting on God for everything: prayer, guidance, service, Christ's character, and why God allows trials and difficulties to enter the Christian's life.

Spirit Baptism & the 1888 Message of Righteousness by Faith

In 1888 God brought the message of righteousness by faith to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This book presents what that message was and why it is essential we experience righteousness by faith in Christ alone today in order to be ready for His second coming.

Spirit Baptism & Earth's Final Events

This book unveils Satan's last-day prophetic deceptions, and reveals the role the baptism of the Holy Spirit and righteousness by faith plays in preparing God's people for earth's final events.

Spirit Baptism & the Latter Rain

The latter rain of the Spirit has been long prayed for and earnestly desired by Christians for centuries. This book presents what the latter rain is, why it has not been poured out in fullness, and the spiritual condition necessary for God's people to receive this powerful Holy Spirit experience.

Transformed by the Spirit

The true story of Juan Cubero, a young man who went from serving Satan in gangs, drugs and prison to being a minister for God. Juan's inspiring story will be a blessing to all who read it.

40 Days – Book 1 (English & Spanish Editions)

A 40 day study and prayer devotional focusing on the needed relationship God's people must have in order to be ready for Christ's second coming. A daily prayer focus is provided with an emphasis on reaching others for Christ. It can be used individually, in a small group or by a church. It is an excellent preparation for evangelistic meetings.

40 Days – Book 1 NKJV

This is a smaller, black and white, NKJV edition of the original, larger, full color 40 Days - Book 1.

40 Days - Book 2 (Revival),

A daily devotional focusing on revival, God's sovereignty, how God uses the difficult times in the Christian's life to bless, how God works in one's life to strengthen their relationship with Himself, and much more.

40 Days - Book 3 (Health)

A 40 day devotional focusing on God's principles to achieve spiritual, physical, and emotional health; and the role these principles play in preparing for Christ's second coming.

40 Days – Book 4 (Earth's Final Events)

A daily devotional focusing on earth's final events and the spiritual experience Gods' people must have in order to remain faithful to God through these events and be ready for Christ's return.

10 Days – to Experience the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

This 10 day devotional presents the biblical teaching on the baptism of

the Holy Spirit, the benefits of receiving this Gift in fullness, and why it is necessary for the Christian to receive this special Spirit infilling in order to become like Jesus.

10 Days – to Experience a Meaningful Prayer Life

Prayer is the most powerful force on earth. Prayer moves the arm of God on behalf of His people. In this 10 day devotional, the necessity and method of intercessory prayer for the unsaved and fellow believers is unveiled. The question: "Why does God need our prayers?" is answered. What it means to pray in the Spirit, persevere, unite and fast I prayer are presented.

10 Days – The 1888 Message of Righteousness by Faith

In 1888 God brought the message of righteousness by faith to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In a 10 day devotional format, this book presents what that message was and why it is essential we experience righteousness by faith in Christ alone, today, in order to be ready for His second coming.

10 Days – New Wineskin Fellowship

This 10 day devotional gives a biblical and historical study into; how the early Christians "did church", the historical "falling away" from God's original plan for His church, the implications of how this apostasy is still influencing the church today, and why "new wineskin" fellowship is necessary for the Christian to grow into the fullness of Christ.