

Helping a Child Receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

by Dick Gruber, D.Min.

I've spent over forty years teaching and leading children into the baptism in the Holy Spirit. If there is one thing I have learned it is, "Children need God's power more than ever, right now!"

In Mark 1:8, John the Baptist states, "I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Jesus says in Acts 1:5, "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit? In order to help children understand and receive, I first talk about what this experience is not. Children more easily receive the gift of the Spirit after understanding what the baptism in the Spirit is and isn't.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is:

- Not the same as salvation. This is a separate and unique gift following conversion. (Acts 19:1–6)
- Not for adults only. This empowerment is for every believer. (Acts 2:39)
- Not natural. It is a supernatural experience. A child cannot be taught how to speak in tongues. Jesus is the baptizer. (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:4–8)
- Not just for Bible times. This experience is for today. (Acts 2:39)
- Not an experience where tongues are optional. Those baptized in the Spirit will receive power and a prayer language. Encourage them to pray for more of God. The Holy Spirit will baptize them and tongues will follow. (Acts 10:44–47)
- Not a sign that you have arrived. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a beginning. Even after the day of Pentecost, the disciples prayed more than once for more of God's Spirit. (Acts 2:4; Acts 4:31)
- Not scary. God will do nothing scary to a child. I've found that once children overcome the fear of the unknown, it is easy for them to be filled to overflowing with the Spirit. (1 John 4:16–18; 2 Timothy 1:7)

When praying with children for the baptism in the Holy Spirit:

- **Let God guide you.** It is important in any prayer service to let God be God. Do not attempt to force a move of God or raise the spiritual level in your own strength. Jesus is the baptizer; He is Lord of the response time.
- **Keep it positive!** Prayer time should be a positive experience for children, especially when praying for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Workers must be sensitive to God's leading. Oftentimes, a child will have pressing prayer requests that are more important to her than being baptized in the Spirit. Listen and pray about those felt needs first. Then pray with the child about receiving this gift.

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- **Don't force it.** Praying for the baptism in the Holy Spirit should never be forced, rushed, or confusing. When children express a desire to receive, pray. Jesus said, "Let the children come to me." He did not say, "Drag, coerce, push, force, threaten, or browbeat them to come to me." Physical contact should be limited to a hand on the shoulder, head, or back. When appropriate, a hug may be given to a child. Cry with the children. Laugh with them. Above all, enjoy the presence of God with them at the altar.
- **Let children ask.** Encourage children to ask God for His Holy Spirit. According to Luke 11:13, if earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will God, our Father in heaven, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?
- **Praise out loud.** Once a child has asked God for the baptism in the Spirit, encourage the children to praise and glorify God aloud in the language they know. God will baptize them and give them a prayer language at just the right time. I have never witnessed a child receiving this gift without first praising God out loud in his own native tongue. We know that the disciples immediately after receiving the Holy Spirit began declaring the wonders of God in the languages the Holy Spirit gave them. (Acts 2:5–11)
- **Trust God's timing.** Only God can baptize a person in His Holy Spirit. We can't yell loud enough, shake hard enough, or hype ourselves up enough to make God move any faster in a child's life. So relax. Trust that God knows exactly when the child is ready to receive. Be there to encourage and bless. There is no secret formula for receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. God is not to be boxed in. I've found that He is really good at filling a child to overflowing at the time when that child—body, soul, and spirit—is ready.
- **Avoid distractions.** If you notice anyone, child or adult, doing something that distracts other children or scares them, put a stop to this. Speak with confident authority, but with kindness. God has placed you as a leader for such a time as this. People bring their own experiences into prayer times. Some of these can be loud, obnoxious, or just plain weird. Stick with scriptural norms and pray with the children in mind.
- **Speak out in faith.** I often remind children several times during prayer that according to Luke 11:13 those who ask will receive. Encourage children to speak out by faith when the Holy Spirit even gives them a partial word to say. Oftentimes a child will receive a word or two, say the word, and immediately wonder if this is it. I tell kids to speak out whatever God is giving them and believe that He is going to help them. God will not allow children to be overcome by a fake or counterfeit response. He will baptize a child in the Holy Spirit at just the right time and they will receive a prayer language when they receive the Holy Spirit. That prayer language may not sound like any they have heard. God is so big that He can give each child his own tongue.

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- **Let tongues flow.** Once a child has received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, encourage him to pray in tongues for as long as he wishes. Let him know that he can start or stop praying in tongues at any time. Further encourage him to now pray for other children. Let every child who has been filled know that it's good to use his prayer language every day.
- **Ask, don't tell.** Never tell a child that he has received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Ask him what God is doing. Ask him if he is speaking in tongues. If the answer is yes, encourage him to continue. Too many children have left prayer times thinking that they received because an adult misinterpreted their crying or laughing in God's presence. Anyone who has been filled to overflowing with the Spirit can tell you. They will know they have been filled.
- **Encourage those not yet Baptized.** Spend some time encouraging and showing love to boys and girls who have not yet received the Spirit. It is critical that children who leave a response time after extended prayer for the baptism, yet with no apparent result, be encouraged to walk away believing they should continue seeking the Baptism until it happens (Luke 11:13). Encourage children to walk by faith, knowing that they may be baptized to overflowing at any minute. I have done this many times with great success and heard awesome testimonies.
- **Testimonies:** A boy in Seattle, Washington told me that he was walking to the restroom in the middle of the night. As he walked, the boy began praising God. Before he knew it, he was speaking in a heavenly language. A girl in one camp prayed every night. It wasn't until she was at home with her mom and dad that God allowed her to be filled to overflowing and pray in tongues. As a result, Mom and Dad were both baptized in the Spirit as the girl laid hands on them.
- **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** As leaders, it is our responsibility to provide children with regular opportunities to enter God's presence and seek the baptism in His Spirit. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading during response times. And don't forget to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life too.

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