

Be being filled

Ephesians 5: 18-20

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the original Greek, the words used for "be filled" mean "keep on being filled constantly and continually." The tense of the Greek for makes clear that such a Spirit-filled condition does not stop with a single experience, but is maintained by continually being filled. To do this, we must *abide* in Christ. How do we do this? John 14 v 23 says "Anyone who loves me [Jesus] will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." If God and Jesus make their home with us, it means we are abiding with them. The key to getting them to want to abide with us is to love Jesus and obey His teaching.

Empty glass, filled from "the source" and emptied out again
Glass with "rubbish" in it, filled from "the source" – what comes out?

I currently have to keep a food diary. When I feel OK I often forget to fill it in; this is the same with prayer a lot of the time. When things are chugging along OK, I forget to chat to God about the OK-ness. It's only when a spanner gets chucked in the works that I remember to shout for help! WRONG!! This is equally true for the church as a whole. If we're chugging along and everything seems OK, we often forget to constantly seek God and make sure we're on the right path. We have been grafted into a vine/branch union, and prayer is the joint that connects the vine (Jesus) to the branch (us).

When Jesus taught us to pray "give us today our daily bread", I believe part of the meaning of that is expressing the need to come before God every day for a top-up – maybe physically – but definitely spiritually.

Kenn Gulliksen says that without prayer there is no life, let alone renewal. Prayer is the most important thing we do or fail to do. We're not pots to be filled with water only to be emptied, but more like hoses that are connected to the Source, constantly being filled, constantly full, constantly being emptied out in service.

We were created to experience an unbroken and intimate love relationship with our Father, and to live and serve from the overflow of that relationship. If we are trying to give constantly of ourselves, even with the best intentions, eventually we will be running on empty and no good to anyone.

It doesn't matter what we do – it doesn't matter how good it is in the world's eyes, unless He's in it; unless His Spirit goes ahead and opens hearts, it won't deliver the joy of the Lord that it was meant to. And that's true in everything in life! We can race ahead and think, "God will just show up." There's power in prayer – prayer is the power to change – prayer is joining hands with the Lord to do His will. If we do it Jesus' way, staying close to Him; if we honour Him; if we put God first, then we can ask for whatever we wish because He's had the chance to change our hearts. Without prayer there is no power from God. Doing things in our own strength is so inadequate, so flaky, so tiny, compared to the unimaginably great power of God. [Berni Dymet]

Kenn Gulliksen also reminds us that we can only serve from the overflow if we choose to stay connected to the Source.

Here's how:

Commit - Choose to stop making excuses. We make time for what we truly believe is important. As our model, Jesus made time each morning to meet with His Father for intimacy and to see what His Father was doing. Jesus understood He could do nothing apart from His father. He continued to abide all day. Equally it is important that we do this *together*.

Cleanse - Be honest, confess and repent of self-effort, unbelief, wrong priorities, hidden sin. Invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart, make Jesus Lord and ask Him to advance His kingdom in you. Graham Cooke said, "The soul (emotions, intellect and will) must come to the cross daily, not to be destroyed, but to give up its right to rule."

Consume - Abide in the Vine and let Him truly be the air you breathe, let His Word be your daily bread. Let His mercy and grace flood you with life, forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Contribute - If you abide, and are continually being filled, you won't be able to help giving away what you're experiencing in Christ.

Ultimately, then, prayer/abiding is our connection to the ongoing work of continual personal and corporate renewal. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, "continue to work out your salvation [that is, cultivate it, bring it to full effect, actively pursue spiritual maturity] with awe-inspired fear and trembling [using serious caution and critical self-evaluation to avoid anything that might offend God or discredit the name of Christ]. For it is [not your strength, but it is] God who is effectively at work in you, both to will and to work [that is, strengthening, energizing, and creating in you the longing and the ability to fulfill your purpose] for His good pleasure."

Ephesians 3: 16-19

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.