

GATECITY CHURCH
THE BOOK OF ACTS, PT. 12
WHEN GOD MOVES - ACTS 19 & 20
APRIL 6, 2025 - DUSTIN PENNINGTON

Introduction

We are longing for more than emotional experiences. We are longing for seasons where the word of God prevails, cultures are transformed, and lives are radically changed. Modern History gives us examples like the First and Second Great Awakenings, the Welsh Revival, and many others.

Beyond modern history, the Bible gives us a profound example of such a season in Acts 19, during Paul's time in Ephesus. The region of Asia Minor experienced a spiritual breakthrough so profound that Luke summed it up this way: *"So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed"* (Acts 19:20).

Here are four outstanding characteristics of such a move of God:

I. Dedication to the Teaching of God's Word

Acts 19:8-10 – *"And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."*

A. Paul knew Ephesus was a strategic city that he had a heart for.

1. At the end of his second missionary journey, Paul makes a quick stop there on his way back to Jerusalem and Antioch.
2. Luke emphasizes that Paul begins his third missionary journey in Ephesus where he remained for three years. This was the place where he stayed the longest.
3. He began by guiding a small group of John's disciples into salvation and encounter with the Holy Spirit.
4. Next, Paul wisely went to the synagogue, as was his practice, to make a connection to fellow Jews and God-fearing gentiles for three months.

B. After their hearts were hardened and Paul was driven out, he transitioned to a secular teaching venue.

1. He taught here daily for two years, which likely meant 3 to 5 hours a day, six days a week.
2. Scholars believe it was between 11am-4pm, which was their "siesta" time.
3. Even if he only taught 3 hours a day, six days a week, for two years, that would potentially be about 2,000 hours of teaching.
4. He would have taught right through the Tanakh (Law, Prophet, Writings).

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5. This wasn't flashy or sensational. It was steady, deep discipleship in the Word. Paul was doing what he wrote about in Ephesians 4, equipping the saints for ministry.
6. The result was that the entire region of Asia heard the Word. Not that everyone attended the school, but that the Gospel was being spread through those that did.
7. The whole atmosphere was being influenced by what was taking place through the Word and the Spirit.

II. Demonstration of Unusual Miracles

Acts 19:11-12 – *“Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.”*

A. These “unusual miracles” were extraordinary signs of God's power.

B. Sweat cloths from Paul's work as a tentmaker were healing the sick.

1. Paul was working during this time, and on his breaks he would come and teach and then get back to work for two years.
 - a. Acts 20:33–35 - *“I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.”*
2. It was a strange thing to happen, maybe driven by a superstitious idea, but out of mercy, God honored their faith. Similar to the woman with the bleeding issues in Matthew 9 touching the hem of Jesus' garment.
3. God is completely ok with doing unusual things, which trips up the overly religious and honors immature faith. However, we are not to assume the more bizarre or weird something is, the more God it is.

C. God sometimes uses unusual methods to stir faith, not for spectacle, but for transformation.

1. The Welsh Revival: Miners couldn't work because their speech was so purified that their pit ponies didn't recognize commands anymore, so production went down for a season. Stolen tools were being returned by shipyard workers to the degree the management asked them to stop returning them.

D. A move of God brings tangible, life-altering transformation, not just emotional hype.

1. The greatest miracle is always a transformed life.

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III. Engagement in Spiritual Warfare

Acts 19:13-16 – *“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, we exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches. Also, there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you? Then the man in whom the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”*

- A. Luke draws our attention to a reality that, when God is moving, the spiritual realm gets stirred, and it is noteworthy that Paul’s premier teaching on spiritual warfare occurs in his letter back to the Ephesian church.
 - 1. Ephesians 6:12 *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*
- B. A contrast is drawn between Jewish exorcists and where real authority is derived. These itinerant exorcists would use religious ceremonies to deal with the demonic.
- C. The enemy recognizes those who have real authority in Christ. These seven sons were basing their authority on being tangentially connected to Jesus
- D. Power in ministry comes not by association, but by direct intimacy with Jesus.
- E. A move of God exposes false authority and demands real spiritual engagement.

IV. Radical Discipleship Through Renunciation

Acts 19:17-20 – *“This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”*

- A. This whole incident with the seven sons of Sceva awakened believers to the spiritual battle and the real power found in Jesus.
- B. Perhaps before this incident, many believers were continuing to engage in things they should not be. They were convicted by the realization their ongoing activities

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were keeping doors open to the enemy and the result was confessing, repenting, renunciation.

C. This wasn't legalism, it was the joyful cost of following Jesus fully.

Application Questions for Reflection:

1. What will you renounce for the glory of Christ?
 2. Is there anything in your life or home that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to let go of?
 - a. True discipleship often involves sacrifice—but the reward is more of Jesus. Acts 19:20 - *“So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”*
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A Warning amid a Move of God

- A. **Acts 20:29-30** – *“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”*
 1. Paul is telling them as great as this move of God has been these past three years it is not automatically going to last, it would not run on cruise control.
- B. **Revelation 2:4-5** – *“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works...”*
 1. Even after all the powerful things in Acts 19, years later, Jesus says to the church at Ephesus: You've left your first love. *They had the truth, the power, the battle, the sacrifice but they lost their intimacy with Jesus.*
- C. Action Steps:
 1. Go back to the first love.
 2. Dedicate yourself again to the Word.
 3. Seek God for transformation.
 4. Fight the battle in the Spirit.
 5. Renounce anything that hinders.

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Additional Thoughts

I. Paul in Corinth - Approximately 18 months

- A. Meets Aquila and Priscilla; works and ministers with them
- B. Preaches to Jews, then turns to Gentiles after opposition
- C. Vision from the Lord encourages him to stay and preach boldly
- D. Gallio, Roman proconsul, dismisses charges against Paul
- E. Time marker: Paul remains in Corinth for a year and a half (v.11)

II. Travel to Ephesus & Return to Antioch

- A. Brief stop in Ephesus; promises to return
- B. Sails to Caesarea, visits Jerusalem (likely), then to Antioch, and he ends his second missionary journey

III. Third Journey Begins

- A. After “some time” (unspecified, but likely months), Paul departs again.
- B. Strengthens churches in Galatia and Phrygia—travel likely spans weeks to months

IV. Apollos in Ephesus

- A. Arrives during Paul's Absence
- B. Taught more accurately by Priscilla and Aquila
- C. Travels to Corinth (Achaia) to minister

V. Transition to Acts 19

- A. Likely 1–2 years pass between Paul's arrival in Corinth (Acts 18:1) and his return to Ephesus (Acts 19:1).
- B. Acts 19 opens with Paul returning to Ephesus, fulfilling his promise.
- C. He encounters disciples of John, laying the foundation for powerful ministry and Holy Spirit outpouring.
- D. Paul is in Ephesus for 3 years.

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I. The Holy Spirit in Ephesus

Acts 19:1-6 – *“And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ So they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”*

A. They Were First Saved, then had a Holy Spirit Encounter

Acts 19:5-6 – *“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied”*

1. After they were baptized into Christ (indicating salvation), Paul lays hands on them for the Holy Spirit to come upon them.
2. The language is deliberate: “came upon them” this is empowerment, not regeneration.
3. This Greek phrase (ἦλθεν...ἐπ’ αὐτούς) carries the clear meaning of a sudden, distinct experience where the Holy Spirit came upon them from the outside, not as part of conversion, but as an empowering visitation
4. They spoke in tongues and prophesied which are signs of Spirit-empowered ministry.

II. Dealing with the Demonic

Acts 19:11-20 – *“Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.’ Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’ Then the man in whom the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many who had believed came confessing*

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and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”

A. Who Were These People?

Acts 19:13 – *“Some itinerant Jewish exorcists attempted to cast out demons by invoking the name of Jesus, whom Paul preached.”*

1. These were Jewish exorcists who traveled from place to place, performing exorcisms through ritualistic formulas and incantations.
2. They saw the miracles Paul was performing in Jesus' name and tried to replicate his authority without knowing Christ personally.
3. The problem: They treated the name of Jesus like a magical incantation rather than a name backed by true spiritual authority.

B. The seven sons of Sceva

1. Sceva is called a Jewish chief priest, though he is not listed among the high priests of Israel. He may have been a leader of a local priestly family or a self-proclaimed spiritual leader.
2. His sons practiced exorcism, likely using traditional Jewish methods, and attempted to wield the name of Jesus without submission to Him.
3. Demonic forces recognize true spiritual authority. These men were not submitted to Jesus, so their command had no power.

III. Verses validating the reality of the spiritual Battle

Ephesians 6:12 *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*

1 Peter 5:8-9 - *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”*

Luke 4:33-36 - *“Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him!’ And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt*

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him. Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, 'What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.'"

IV. Demons Recognize True Authority

Acts 19:15 – *"And the evil spirit answered and said, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?'"*

Mark 16:17 – *"And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues."*

Luke 10:17-20 – *"Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.' And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.'"*

V. The Danger of Demonic Overpowering

Acts 19:16 – *"Then the man in whom the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."*

Matthew 12:43-45 – *"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."*

VI. Walking in Freedom from Demonic Activity

A. Submit to God and Resist the Devil

James 4:7 - *"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."*

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B. Renounce Agreements with Darkness

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 – *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”*

C. Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 5:18 – *“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”*

D. Put on the Full Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10-18 – *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having belted your waist with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having strapped on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With every prayer and request, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be alert with all perseverance and every request for all the saints.”*

VII. Standing in Victory

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 – *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”*

Revelation 12:11 – *“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”*

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VIII. The Word of God Prevails

Acts 19:20 – *“So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”*

1 John 4:4 – *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”*

IX. Summary of Acts 20

As Paul continued his journey, he moved with urgency and affection, knowing his time was short. After encouraging the believers in Macedonia and Greece, he turned back, avoiding a plot against him. In Troas, he preached late into the night—so long, in fact, that a young man named Eutychus dozed off and fell from a third-story window! But Paul, full of faith, raised him back to life, and the gathering turned from mourning to joy. From there, Paul journeyed toward Jerusalem, choosing to bypass Ephesus but asking the elders to meet him in Miletus. There, with tears and conviction, he poured out his heart—reminding them of his faithful service, warning of coming wolves, and entrusting them to God's grace. They wept, knowing they would see his face no more, and walked him to the ship, hearts heavy but strengthened.

Additional Information:

I. Jewish Exorcism

A. Origins

1. Old Testament Roots – While direct exorcisms are not described in the Old Testament, there is an understanding that evil spirits can afflict people (1 Samuel 16:14-23, where David's music soothes Saul's torment by an evil spirit).
2. Second Temple Period (Intertestamental Era) – Jewish literature (Book of Tobit and Dead Sea Scrolls) mentions exorcisms using prayers, rituals, and invoking divine names.
3. Rabbinic Tradition – Later Jewish texts (Talmud) reference exorcisms performed by rabbis using the divine name of God (YHWH), Psalms, and physical objects like rings or roots.

B. Methods

1. Use of Divine Names – Calling on YHWH or angelic names.

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2. Rituals & Incantations – Specific prayers, gestures, and sometimes writing divine names on amulets.
3. Physical Items – Herbs, rings, or other sacred objects believed to have power.
4. Songs & Scripture – Reciting Psalms or other texts.

C. Success Rate

1. Sometimes effective – Josephus, a 1st-century Jewish historian, claims he saw exorcisms work using Solomon's name and methods.
2. Limited authority – The sons of Sceva failed because they tried using Jesus' name without true faith, showing that power over demons depends on divine authority, not just formulas.

II. Demonic Activity in Acts

A. Peter's Healing Ministry in Jerusalem (Acts 5:12–16)

1. Context: The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people in Jerusalem.
2. Demonic Encounter: People brought the sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.
3. Key Verse: "Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed" (Acts 5:16).
4. Application: Demonstrates the apostles' authority over evil spirits and the comprehensive nature of God's healing power.

B. Paul and the Fortune-Telling Slave Girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16–18)

1. Context: In Philippi, Paul and his companions encountered a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to predict the future, bringing profit to her owners.
2. Demonic Encounter: The girl followed Paul, proclaiming their divine mission. After many days, Paul, troubled by this, commanded the spirit to leave her in the name of Jesus Christ, and it did.
3. Key Verses: "She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.' She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her." (Acts 16:17–18)
4. Application: Highlights the authority of Jesus' name over demonic powers and the importance of discerning the source of spiritual proclamations.

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C. The Seven Sons of Sceva in Ephesus (Acts 19:11–20)

1. Context: In Ephesus, God performed extraordinary miracles through Paul, leading some Jewish exorcists to attempt invoking the name of Jesus over those possessed by evil spirits.
2. Demonic Encounter: Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, tried to exorcise a demon by invoking Jesus' name. The evil spirit acknowledged Jesus and Paul but questioned their authority, leading to the possessed man overpowering them.
3. Key Verses: "One day the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?' Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding" (Acts 19:15–16).
4. Application: Emphasizes the necessity of a genuine relationship with Jesus when confronting demonic forces and the dangers of using His name without true faith.

D. Paul's Ministry in Ephesus Leading to the Burning of Sorcery Scrolls (Acts 19:17–20)

1. Context: Following the incident with the sons of Sceva, the residents of Ephesus were seized with fear, and the name of Jesus was held in high honor.
2. Demonic Encounter: Many who practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly, renouncing their occult practices.
3. Key Verses: "A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas" (Acts 19:19).

III. Four Pressure Points

Key Concept: Recognize the continuous spiritual battle that involves pressures from both within and outside ourselves. Stay vigilant and armored in Christ.

- A. Your Heart's Deceptive Nature: Guard your heart, knowing it is prone to lead astray.

Jeremiah 17:9 – *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"*

Proverbs 4:23 – *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."*

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- B. Temptations of the Flesh: Be wary of the “lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” which can lead to spiritual compromise.

1 John 2:16 – *“For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.”*

- C. The Fallen World: Acknowledge the brokenness around us and its constant influence on our lives and choices.

Romans 12:2 – *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*

- D. A Real Enemy: Remember that Satan is a relentless adversary who exploits our weaknesses and pressures us continuously.

1 Peter 5:8 - *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*

IV. Biblical Vocabulary for the Holy Spirit’s Encounter with People

- A. Filled

1. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 2:4)
2. Indicates saturation, full influence: mind, will, and speech are impacted.

- B. Came Upon / Came On

1. “The Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power...” (1 Samuel 16:13)
2. Often signals empowerment for a specific task, sudden or dramatic.

- C. Rested Upon / Remained

1. “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.” (John 1:32)
2. Speaks to a continuing presence, often connected with Jesus.

- D. Baptized With

1. “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3:16)
2. Signifies an immersion, overwhelming and initiating into Spirit life.

- E. Poured Out / Poured Upon

1. “In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all people...” (Acts 2:17)
2. Language of abundance: linked to revival, prophecy and universal access.

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F. Clothed With

1. "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:49)
2. Implies being equipped, covered, or endued with the Spirit's power.

G. Anointed With

1. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power..." (Acts 10:38)
2. Designates consecration and divine empowerment for mission.

H. Sealed With

1. "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit..." (Ephesians 1:13)
2. Signifies ownership, security, and identity in Christ.

I. Led By

1. "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." (Romans 8:14)
2. Denotes ongoing direction and relational intimacy.

J. Speaks Through

1. "For it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (Matthew 10:20)
2. Expresses the Spirit's use of a person as a vessel for divine words.

K. Moved / Carried Along By

1. "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)
2. Poetic and prophetic inspiration; Spirit as the wind beneath.

L. Quenched (Negative)

1. "Do not quench the Spirit." (1 Thessalonians 5:19)
2. Warns against stifling or resisting the Spirit's work.

M. Grieved (Negative)

1. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God..." (Ephesians 4:30)
2. Indicates relational sorrow; Spirit as a person who responds emotionally.