

Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.
(Psalm 51:11-12)



OH, TO BE *Young* AGAIN!

For the most part this is a quiet household. Conservative, somewhat staid, and surrounded by the quietude of sylvan nature, this is a home that cherishes tranquility.

Since the older one gets, the older “old” is, Linda and I are only on the leeward side of middle-age: not yet old (at least as we define it), but a fair distance from the game sprightliness of youth. Even our “kids” are older. Donovan, the old lady of the bunch, is a healthy but arthritic fourteen; Amelia will be thirteen this year; Angel is hovering somewhere around nine years of age; and Thornton will probably be seven this year. All of us are old enough to be set in our ways—and old enough to become just a bit crotchety when inconvenienced.

Now add into this geriatric mix a rambunctious one-year-old named Jireh.

The Starving Waif

As did Angel and Thornton before her, Jireh emerged from the woods one day to discover sanctuary at our home. (Linda

swears there is a sign out in the woods pointing the way toward our house.) Like them, she arrived emaciated, starving, and generally in poor health. We brought her inside, kept her supplied with food and water, and gave her a safe place in which to rest and sleep her way back to health. And, when the time was right, we gradually, cautiously introduced her to the rest of the family.

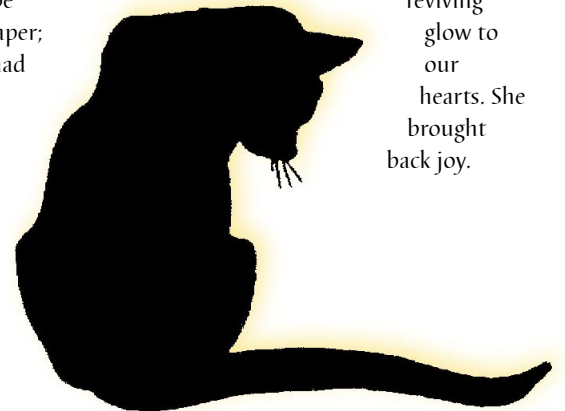
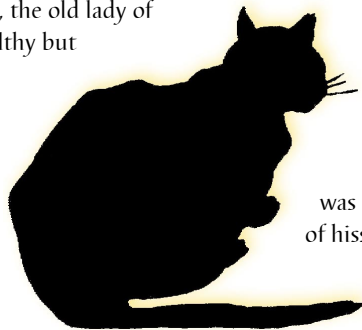
Suddenly this staid household was once again alive with the sound of hissing and spitting and growls. The rooms and stairwells became a racetrack. Toys had to be made from yarn and paper; the old scratching post had to be brought in and placed in a prominent location. Suddenly there was someone around saying, “Play with me! Play with me!” Since the venerable felines were having none of it, it fell to Linda and me to entertain the new little one.

And once again this rather quiet household was alive with the sound and activity of new life. Winter had turned to spring, and

suddenly there was someone around to remind us that life was not yet over. Now there was more laughter in the house. Now there were more unexpected events, surprises, delights. Jireh loves to tease her elders—especially Donovan. She will pounce at her, as if to attack, but stop just inches away from the older cat’s face—delighted by the reflexive hiss that tells her she has found success.

Into a somber home still grieving over the loss of Donovan’s sister, Gilhooley, new life was introduced in the gift of Jireh. The little one brought smiles to our faces, and a refreshing,

reviving glow to our hearts. She brought back joy.



A Musty Sameness

The journey of faith can be numbing. The same things that bring a maturity and depth to our relationship with God—time, repetitive study, a familiarity with the tenets of the church—can also bring a musty sameness to our walk. We grow, but we also grow old and tired. We forget what it was like to discover Jesus Christ for the first time—that exquisite clutching in the breast; the fresh sequence of release: confession – repentance – forgiveness – communion; blissful time spent with a new Friend.

The Christian walk is, in one respect at least, one of the more difficult callings to pursue, for it cuts against everything we naturally are. The tangibles of our existence—those qualities that represent the weaker aspects of humanity—are the most easily grasped: flesh, bone, hunger, aging. The intangibles—those qualities that represent the higher aspects of who we are and hope to be—are more slippery and elusive: spirit, soul, a yearning for God. It is easier for us to live with what we can see and touch, so we spend most of our time dwelling on the weakness and failings of

the flesh, and how that flesh is daily withering into something less than what it was the day before. Thus, to do so is to dwell continually on death.

Forever Young

The alternative—the bright breath of spring in a world that insists on living in winter—is to dwell, instead, on those ephemeral yet substantial qualities of our higher self. Real happiness is not a product of the flesh, but of the spirit; youthful joy is found not in the things of earth, but in the sweet communion of our spirit with God's.

Because God left us with free will, the choice is ours. We can live days of dour old age, bemoaning our degenerating physical condition, or we can inject new vitality into each day by making the conscious decision to live outside the bindings of our physical prison. The flesh will indeed wither and die—and good riddance! From the day of our birth it represents little more than molding death. But that is only one part of what we are. The soul and the spirit of the child of God are forever in His presence, forever sustained and protected by Christ—forever young.

A nurturing of
our spirit is a
nurturing of
our
connec-
tion to
God; a
nurturing
of our soul
is a preoccu-
pation with
eternal
life with
Him.



I want here boldly to assert that it is my happy belief that every Christian can have a copious outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a measure far beyond that received at conversion, and I might also say, far beyond that enjoyed by the rank and file of orthodox believers today. It is important that we get this straight, for until doubts are removed faith is impossible. God will not surprise a doubting heart with an effusion of the Holy Spirit, nor will He fill anyone who has doctrinal questions about the possibility of being filled.

Before a man can be filled with the Spirit *he must be sure he wants to be*. And let this be taken seriously. Many Christians want to be filled, but their desire is a vague romantic kind of thing hardly worthy to be called desire. They have almost no knowledge of what it will cost them to realize it.

Let us imagine that we are talking to an inquirer, some eager young Christian, let us say, who has sought us out to learn about the Spirit-filled life. As gently as possible, considering the pointed nature of the questions, we would probe his soul somewhat as follows: "Are you sure you want to be filled with a Spirit who, though He is like Jesus in His gentleness and love, will nevertheless demand to be Lord of your life? Are you willing to let your personality to be taken over by another, even if that other be the Spirit of God Himself? If the Spirit takes charge of your life He will expect unquestioning obedience in everything. He will not tolerate in you the self-sins even though they are permitted and excused by most Christians. By the self-sins I mean self-love, self-pity, self-seeking, self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-aggrandizement, self-defense. You will find the Spirit to be in sharp opposition to the easy ways of the world and of the mixed multitude within the precincts of religion. He will be jealous over you for good. He will take the direction of your life away from you. He will reserve the right to test you, to discipline you, to chasten you for your soul's sake. He may strip you of those borderline pleasures which other Christians enjoy but which are to you a source of refined evil. Through it all He will enfold you in a love so vast, so mighty, so all-embracing, so wondrous that your very losses will seem like gains and your small pains like pleasures. Yet the flesh will whimper under His yoke and cry out against it as a burden too great to bear. And you will be permitted to enjoy the solemn privilege of suffering to 'fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ' in your flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church. Now, with the conditions before you, do you still want to be filled with Holy Spirit?" (A.W. Tozer)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:12-14)

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