The Christian faith contains a powerful treatment for sadness and stress. The Holy Spirit is God’s antidote to gloom and doom. When the Spirit arrived on the day of Pentecost, she empowered the disciples of Jesus. That same Spirit is still present in the life of the church today. We don’t have to feel like Armageddon. We are being led by the Spirit into a better future, God’s promised future.

Acts tells us that when the day of Pentecost had come, the apostles were all together in Jerusalem. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples had no one to guide them. The future was uncertain, and it was anything but bright. As he ascended, Jesus promised them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Then, “suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind,” like the wind from God that swept over the face of the waters on the first day of creation. “Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them,” like the fire that marked the presence of God on Mount Sinai. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:2-4).

Pentecost is about power, but not the sort of power that pressures doom-spenders until they feel trapped in a pattern of excessive consumerism. The Greek word for “power” is a common one throughout the book of Acts. The word is *dunamis*, from which comes our word “dynamite.” Dynamite is destructive by its very nature, but the distinctive Pentecost version of power (*dunamis*) is creative and life-giving.

Which may make it more accurate to speak not of the *power* of Pentecost, but the *empowerment* of Pentecost. The confused, dispirited band of disciples was elated by Jesus’ resurrection, but ever since his ascension they do not seem to know what to do with their lives. On Pentecost, they were rocked by the mighty wind and dazzled by the tongues of fire, but that awesome Holy Spirit power does not harm them. Quite the opposite, it *empowers* them. Suddenly they find they can do amazing things, like speaking other languages so they can share the good news about Jesus. This happens “as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:4). This is an enabling power, a gift the disciples are offered and gratefully receive. God’s Pentecost power becomes their own.

God knew the apostles were feeling gloomy, so God sent the Holy Spirit in a burst of Pentecost power, creating a new future for them. The fire of God was in the room. The peace of God was in the room. The power of God was in the room. The disciples received the gift of other languages, so they could speak to all manner of people about “God’s deeds of power” (v. 11). The future was no longer dark; but bright, with purpose and possibility.

God’s antidote to sadness and stress continues to come to us today. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul tells us that “all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Romans 8:14). Because we are led by the Spirit, we are never alone in our struggles. Almighty God is always right beside us as a Comforting Parent, a Guiding Presence, and a Protecting Spirit. We do not have to “fall back into fear,” says Paul, because God gives us “a spirit of adoption” (Romans 8:15). This adoption means we are chosen by God, hand-picked for ministry, and grafted into God’s family for all eternity.

But there’s more! As part of God’s family, we are eligible to receive an inheritance. This is very good news, especially when we are feeling gloomy about the future. Paul says, “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:15-17).

Suddenly, the doom and gloom of the future begins to fade. We can see ourselves as children of God, beneficiaries of God’s grace, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. With the Holy Spirit in our life, we are assured that God is our *Abba*-Father, and that all the riches of life with God are going to be ours. There will undoubtedly be struggles along the way, but Paul assures us that if we suffer with and for Jesus now, then we will “also be glorified with him” in the future (Romans 8:17).

The promise of life in God’s family is that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). That is the future given to us by the Holy Spirit of God. There is nothing gloomy about that future.

But how does the power of Pentecost reveal itself in our daily life? In the novel *War Bug*, Pastor Harley Camden preaches a sermon to his dwindling congregation at Riverside Methodist Church. It comes after a very traumatic week in the life of their tiny Virginia town, one in which the pastor’s own life is threatened. “God does not care about the survival of the fittest,” says Harley. “God is concerned only with the survival of *the faithful*.” A loud “Amen!” comes from a man in the choir loft, followed by “Amens!” from people throughout the congregation. Everyone smiles, including Harley, since an “Amen Chorus” has never been heard in the traditional worship of Riverside Methodist Church. The Spirit is alive and well in that Sunday morning service.

“Yes, God is concerned only with the survival of the faithful,” Harley continues. “Consider the facts leading up to that first Easter morning: Jesus had died; Judas had betrayed; Peter had denied; the rest of the disciples had lost their nerve; and the supportive Palm Sunday crowd had ended up calling for crucifixion. No reasonable person would have said that the Jesus movement was winning the battle for survival. Am I right?”

Harley sees nods throughout the congregation. Then he says, “But in the eyes of God, faithfulness is fitness. Because Jesus was faithful, God raised him from the dead. Because the witnesses to the resurrection were faithful, God gave birth to the church. Because Riverside Methodist is faithful in the face of so many challenges today, God will give us new life as well.” I would add, because Federated Church is faithful, God will empower us for new life, too.

In a world of doom and gloom, the Holy Spirit promises that God will empower us with new life. Since “all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God,” our lives have new purpose and possibility, and the future is bright, because we are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:14, 17). Like Pastor Harley, we discover that faithfulness is the greatest form of fitness. No doom spending needed.

Clint McCalla is a financial planner who worried that his family would fall into doom spending. What saved them, he says, was “a focus on the free.” McCalla was helped by visiting community libraries, going on walks, listening to music, reading, and playing games at home. What saves us, as the family of faith, is a focus on the Holy Spirit. If we open ourselves to the power of God’s Spirit, we will discover a life of purpose and possibility, not a depressing Armageddon. If we follow the guidance of the Spirit, we will find that God has a bright and beautiful future in store for us, one that is grounded in our faithfulness, not our finances.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, I invite you to dwell within me, filling me with your light and wisdom. Guide me on my path, strengthen me in times of weakness, and empower me to overcome challenges with your divine assistance. Help me to be a vessel of your grace and love, reflecting your presence in all I do. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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**God’s Antidote to Gloom and Doom**

Sunday, June 8, 2025 [Romans 8:14-17](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+8%3a14-17&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

I learned a new term recently: “doom spending.” It’s also known as retail therapy or impulsive buying. Doom spending is when we make purchases because we are anxious or fearful about the future. Doom spending is a reaction to feeling pessimistic about the economy, politics, or personal finances. Housing costs, global instability, climate change, and family illnesses all can trigger the stress, pessimism, and sadness that lead to doom spending. Shopping sprees can provide a temporary boost in mood and offer a sense of control.

According to *Psychology Today*, we often spend when we are sad, the reasons can be very personal. “One of my parents became really sick a few years ago,” said Mykail James, “and the first thing I did was buy a professional grade stand mixer and learn how to bake.” She also bought a 25-pound flour bag and baking supplies that amounted to nearly $2,000. “I couldn’t really do anything about my parent’s health, so I started baking,” she says. “And I did all of that because I was sad.”

Such spending makes sense, emotionally, but it can be problematic. Doom spending makes it harder to achieve financial goals such as buying a house or saving for retirement. Ylva Baeckström (eel-vah BAE-k-strohm), a lecturer in finance and a former banker, calls doom spending both “unhealthy and fatalistic.” It is unhealthy because it puts a strain on personal finances. It is fatalistic because it is based on the belief that doom is inevitable. Baeckström thinks that young people are especially vulnerable to doom spending because they are frequently online and constantly receiving bad news over which they have no control. Baeckström says, “It makes them feel like Armageddon.” Young people then translate those bad feelings into destructive spending habits.

So, what is the solution? Dan Ariely, a professor of psychology and behavioral economics, believes that physical exercise can be a buffer against doom spending. “This seems simple,” he says, “but next time you reach for your phone or computer to doom shop, put the device down and exercise instead.” Lift some weights, take a walk, go on a run, mow the grass. “Exercise is an excellent reminder, viscerally, that we have control.” Ariely also recommends that people do everything they can to reduce their stress, which is a major component of impulsive behavior. How do we reduce stress? “Spending time with loved ones. Getting enough sleep. Laughter.”