



The Holy Spirit

GETTING TO KNOW HIM THROUGH JOHN'S GOSPEL

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Week 1 Holy Spirit and Jesus

INTRODUCTION

We're going to spend the next few weeks looking at who the Holy Spirit is, particularly focusing on what we learn about him in John's Gospel.

1. How would you describe the Holy Spirit?
2. What do you think he is like? What does he do?

LOOKING AT THE BIBLE

JOHN 1:29-34

3. What does John the Baptist say about Jesus?
4. The Jews were waiting for a promised Messiah who would fulfill God's promises. Does anyone know what Messiah actually means?

Would it surprise you to know that it means anointed one? The Messiah was one anointed with the Holy Spirit. It came to mean the expected deliverer of Israel.

Does this change how you see Jesus?

5. What did the Old Testament prophesy would happen when the Messiah came? (*note that they believed the Messiah would bring about the new covenant, which is what is referred to in Ezekiel and Joel*) Read Isaiah 11:1-2; 42:1-4; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-29
6. In the light of this, what is the significance of John the Baptist's vision?

The Greek word meno which is translated remained in John 1:32 is a special word in John. It is the word Jesus used to describe our relationship with him in verses like John 15:4-11. It is often translated abide.

7. Read John 15:4-11, taking note of all the uses of the word remain or abide. What does that tell us about the way that the Spirit was with Jesus?

John says that Jesus is one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Our word baptize comes straight from the Greek word baptizo, which literally means to dip or immerse an object.

8. What do you think it means to be immersed in the Holy Spirit?

Read Acts 1:4-8 What did Jesus say was the significance of him baptizing in the Holy Spirit?

JOHN 3:34-35

9. John the Baptist had more to say about who Jesus was. How does your translation describe how God gave him the Spirit? What did the Spirit enable him to do?

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was given in a limited way, to particular people for particular tasks, or to the whole nation of Israel in a corporate but not individual way. Jesus was the first one on whom the Spirit was given without limit.

APPLICATION

10. Did you realise that part of what Jesus came to do was to bear and release the Spirit? Does that make any difference to you?
11. What role does the Holy Spirit play in your life?

Week 2: The Life-Giving Spirit

INTRODUCTION

1. Has anything from last week's study impacted your week? What stands out to you?

LOOKING AT THE BIBLE

JOHN 3:1-8

Jesus' words – you must be born again – are familiar. However, he was probably using a play on words here. The word translated *again* has two meanings – *from above* and *again*. It is impossible to fully convey that in English – it is probably best to acknowledge both meanings – being born again from above. Jesus equates this new birth with being born of water and the Spirit.

2. What do you think this means?
3. What are the implications in Christian's lives of being *born again from above*?
4. What is the Spirit's role in this new birth?
5. The combination of water and Spirit would probably have recalled to Nicodemus a passage we looked at last week – Ezekiel 36:24-29. Does this shed any light on what being born of water and Spirit might mean?
6. Jesus links being born again from above with entering the Kingdom of God. What is God's Kingdom¹?
7. Why would the new birth be necessary to enter it?

¹ God's Kingdom is anywhere that God reigns as King. It is not limited to heaven, but exists on earth wherever people make God their king.

8. Think about natural birth, and the way that we treat a new baby. Does this tell us anything about the consequence of being born again?
9. How do you respond to John 3:8, with its description of the uncontrollable and unpredictable Spirit?

JOHN 6:60-69

This passage comes after Jesus had said some difficult things that caused many of his followers to leave.

10. What does this passage tell us about the Spirit?
11. In what way does the Spirit give life?
12. How can words be Spirit and life?
13. If Jesus' words were Spirit and life, why didn't everyone believe?

APPLICATION

14. How have you experienced the Spirit as life-giving?
15. What areas of your life still need to be born again from above?

Pray for one another

Week 3 – Living Water

INTRODUCTION

1. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase living water?
2. List some of the things that we need water for.

LOOKING AT THE BIBLE

JOHN 7:37-41

The Feast of Tabernacles was a harvest festival which also involved prayer for abundant rain for the coming year, and prayer for the promised time when Israel would live in abundance.

3. Why do you think Jesus made this offer at this feast?

Read Zechariah 14:8; Ezekiel 47:1-12, 1 Corinthians 3:16

4. How do these passages add to your understanding of what Jesus was saying?
5. Who do you think the rivers of living water were for?
6. What do you understand by verse 39? Why couldn't the Spirit be given in his fulness before Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension?

JOHN 4:7-26

There's lots you could talk about in this passage. We're going to focus on what we can learn about Holy Spirit.

7. How does this add to the picture of living water offered to believers at the feast?

4:14 paints a beautiful picture. The verb describing the welling up of the spring within the believer is the same verb used in Acts 3:8 to describe the rejoicing leaping of the crippled beggar. A spring is a precious source of water as it is always pure and it usually flows even in times of drought. Take a minute to picture that leaping, pure spring of life within you!

8. What do you think Jesus meant when he spoke about worshipping in Spirit and in Truth?

(The Samaritans were the people who had been settled into the Northern Kingdom after the ten tribes of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians. They had taken on a form of Jewish worship and considered themselves true children of Jacob (4:12), but the Jews considered them as outsiders. There was disagreement between the Jews and the Samaritans as to the correct place to worship God).

APPLICATION

9. How would you describe your experience of worshipping in Spirit and in Truth? Do you tend to focus more on Spirit or on Truth, or do you think they are the same? If you think they are different, do you think you have the balance right?
10. Can anyone share an experience where you sensed the Spirit as a spring bubbling up within you or as rivers flowing from you?
11. It's possible to slow the flow of a spring or a river by putting rocks in the way. Take a few moments to ask God to show you if there are any rocks in your life that are inhibiting the Spirit's flow within you and from you.

If you want to, share what they might be with the group.

Pray for one another

Week 4: The Paraclete

INTRODUCTION

1. Have you ever heard the word Paraclete? Do you know what it means?
2. Paraclete is a Greek word that has no real equivalent in English. Some of the translations for it include Comforter, Counsellor, Advocate, Helper, Friend. Jesus used it as a name for Holy Spirit. Which of these translations are you most drawn to? Why?

LOOKING AT THE BIBLE

As you read through these passages, take note of all the different things that the Holy Spirit will do.

JOHN 14:15-27; 15:26-27; 16:5-16

3. What is the significance of the fact that Jesus is asking the Father to send *another* Paraclete? Who was the first Paraclete?
4. The Greek word used means another of the same kind. In what ways is the Holy Spirit like the first Paraclete (Jesus)?
5. Is Holy Spirit an It or a He²? Does it matter?
6. How is having the Holy Spirit better than having Jesus in the flesh (16:7)? Think about what you know about what the disciples were like before and after Pentecost. In what ways did having Holy Spirit change them?
7. One of Holy Spirit's roles is teacher (14:26; 15:26; 16:12-15). How do you think he functions as a teacher? Have you experienced him as teacher in your own life?

² John makes it clear that Holy Spirit is a person, not just in how he speaks about him, but grammatically. In Greek, all nouns are either masculine, feminine or neuter. Pneuma -Spirit - is neuter, and so grammatically should be called it. However, John calls him he.

8. 16:8-11 is a difficult passage. What do you think the Spirit's role in convicting is? Why does the world need convicting?
9. Do you see the Trinity in these passages? How do Father, Son and Spirit relate?

APPLICATION

10. How do you think the disciples would have felt hearing Jesus promises? How do you feel about all these roles of the Holy Spirit in your life?
11. What role do you experience most strongly?
12. What role do you feel you need to experience more?

Pray for each other, that Holy Spirit would work in each one's life

Week 5: Jesus releases the Spirit

INTRODUCTION

1. What have you learned about Holy Spirit through this study?
2. Are you more aware of his activity in your life than you were before?

LOOKING AT THE BIBLE

JOHN 20:19-23

This scene occurs after Jesus death and resurrection.

In Greek, the word translated *as* in 21 is *kathos*. It means in the same way. Jesus is sending his disciples in the same way as he was sent.

3. Think back to the first week. How did God send Jesus? How did he equip him?
4. Do you believe that you are being sent in the same way as Jesus was sent? What difference would it make if you did?
5. Jesus breathes on the disciples and tells them to receive the Spirit. This is a symbolic promise of the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost. The word translated breathe is a strong word – more like blow. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament this verb is used to describe God giving life to Adam and Eve. It is also used when Elijah revives the widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24) and when Ezekiel prophesied life to the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:9-10). What do these parallels suggest to you about Jesus' act here?
6. What do you think was required of the disciples in order to receive the Spirit?

ACTS 2:1-21

Here we see the first fruit of Jesus' promises. We don't have time to properly discuss this, but just let it sink in a little.

7. What do you learn about Holy Spirit from this passage?
8. What impact did receive the Holy Spirit have on Jesus' followers?
9. What was unique about this event? What was repeatable?

APPLICATION

10. Reflecting on all we've learnt, why do you think Jesus sent the Holy Spirit? What do you see as his main roles in our lives?
11. There are two aspects of his role – one is to bless us, the other is to bless the world through us. Which of these do you tend to focus on?
12. How would you like Holy Spirit to move more freely in you and through you?

Spend time praying for each other.

LEADERS GUIDE

Introduction

This study is designed to help the group understand the work and person of the Holy Spirit, as described in the Gospel of John. It also encourages people to consider the work of the Spirit in their own lives. It grew out of an essay I wrote for my final Greek exegesis subject for my Master of Divinity (if you'd like a copy of the essay, go to my website bullockc.com).

Most weeks have a few Old Testament passages to read, as well as the passages from John. Jesus was speaking to a Jewish audience, who knew the Scriptures thoroughly. Many of his words have a deeper significance than many Christians realise, as they point back to passages and ideas in the Old Testament. You don't need to spend time discussing these passages – they are there to deepen your understanding of the gospel passages.

Week 1 – Holy Spirit and Jesus

This first week we consider the Holy Spirit's work in Jesus' ministry. If this is a new group, it would be a good idea to start with some icebreaking activity before starting the study. You might also like to consider making a group agreement, where you agree to things like confidentiality, speaking and listening, respect etc.

Questions 1 and 2: These questions are designed to get people thinking about who the Holy Spirit is. It is not important that these answers are 'correct'. It gives you a starting point to see where people are at.

Question 4: In the Old Testament, people were anointed for special tasks, particularly as priest, king and prophet. The anointing with oil that often occurred represented anointing with the Holy Spirit. Messiah is a Hebrew word, the Greek equivalent is Christ. When we say Jesus Christ we are not saying Jesus' full name (which would have been Jesus bar Joseph- i.e. Jesus son of Joseph) not are we

saying Jesus the saviour. We are saying Jesus the one uniquely anointed with the Holy Spirit.

Question 5: Looking back at these Old Testament prophecies helps us to understand what the Messiah really was, and what the Holy Spirit's role in Jesus' ministry was. There's no need to discuss these passages at any depth, they are just to give a sense of the Messianic expectation

Isaiah 11:1-2 – the Branch is the Messiah. The Spirit will empower him

Isaiah 42:1-4 – God promises to put his Spirit on the Messiah, which will enable him to fulfil his mission of bringing justice

Ezekiel 36:25-27 – this is describing conditions under the new covenant that the Messiah will bring about. Part of the Messiah's role was to give the Spirit to God's people.

Joel 2:28-29 – another promise that when the Messiah inaugurates the new covenant, he will pour out the Spirit on all people

When the Jews looked forward to the coming of the Messiah they weren't just expecting a saviour. They were anticipating one who would uniquely bear the Spirit, and who would pour it out on God's people.

Question 6: When John the Baptist described Jesus as one on whom the Spirit would remain and who would baptise with the Spirit, and who was the Son of God he was saying that Jesus was the Messiah.

Question 7: Meno, translated abide, remain, endure, is a significant word in John, which implies permanence in a relationship or a state of being. The Holy Spirit was with Jesus in an intimate, permanent way. Don't spend too long on John 15:4-11 – the point is just to get everyone's head around the intensity of the word remain.

Question 8: Baptizo, or baptise, was an everyday Greek word meaning to immerse or dip an object in liquid. One common use was to describe the process of dipping material in a dye. It was also used to mean wash. In Jewish practice, it had also come to have a ritual meaning, as it does for us. If a Gentile wanted to become a Jew

part of the process was being immersed in water. After they were baptized, they had the legal status of a new-born child. Previous debts and commitments were wiped away. We can see this in our use of baptism as well – it signifies a new birth.

Thus the idea of being baptised in the Holy Spirit can carry a range of meanings – being washed clean, being given new life, and being surrounded and supported by the Spirit, as you would be by the water in a pool.

In Acts, Jesus equates being baptised with the Spirit with the Spirit coming upon them, being given power, and being witnesses.

Question 9: Jesus is described as being given the Spirit without measure or limit, as contrasted to all who went before, who had the Spirit for a limited season or purpose, and this leads to a perfect ability to speak God's words. In Jesus' time, it was commonly accepted that the Holy Spirit had withdrawn from Israel, as evidenced by the lack of prophesy. This was then worked in reverse – the evidence of the Holy Spirit was prophesy, so Jesus' ability to speak the words of God perfectly was a sign of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Week 2: The Life-Giving Spirit

This week we look at the Spirit as the giver of life.

Question 2,3,4: Many scholars and theologians see being born again/from above as Spirit-empowered baptism. Others think that being born or water means natural birth (as in amniotic fluid) and being born of spirit means spiritual birth. Regardless, it clearly implies that the Spirit is involved in the act of bringing a person into God's kingdom. Just as children are dependent on their mother for natural birth, so we are dependent on the Spirit for re-birth.

Question 5: Biblically, connecting water and Spirit is reminiscent of Ezekiel 36:25-27 and 37:14a, where the combination brings new life and the ability to obey. This fits with 3:6 where that born of flesh is contrasted with that born of Spirit, like the promise in Ezekiel that God would provide a new heart and spirit. Without the new birth, one is only flesh and cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Question 6,7: God's kingdom is an important concept. Essentially, a kingdom is where a king's word is law. God's kingdom is not a place, it is wherever life is lived God's way. Entering God's kingdom means submitting to his rule, and living his way. We cannot do this in our own strength. Only with the Spirit's transformation and empowering of us can we live in God's kingdom.

Question 8: This verse is another play on words. The word translated Spirit is the same word as wind or breath (This is also true in Hebrew). The Holy Spirit cannot be controlled or manipulated, just as the wind cannot.

Question 9: In 6:63, Jesus explicitly defines the Spirit as the life-giver, linking this role with his words. He seems to be saying that the flesh, or the natural person, is unable to understand Jesus' message. But through the Spirit, "the words I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." (6:63). This verse reinforces the statement in 3:34 that Jesus "speaks the words of God". Words are important, and as we learnt from the very beginning of this Gospel, Jesus' words are vital. It is only through them that we can learn the truth of God and come to saving faith in Christ, which wells up in us to eternal life (4:14). As Peter said to Jesus, "You have the words of eternal life" (6:68). However, without the Spirit, words alone are useless. Our need of the Spirit's gift of life is on-going. We are utterly dependent on the Spirit to live a life in Christ – on our own we can do nothing.

Question 10: This reminds us that every one of us has a free choice whether to believe in Jesus or not, and whether to accept his Spirit or not.

Week 3 – Living Water

This week we will look at Jesus depiction of the Spirit as living water. This is a further illustration of his life-giving work.

Question 3: Living water was running water, as from a stream or a spring, not still water. In a world without water purification, flowing water was much more likely to be clean than standing water. Jewish purification rites (ritual washing) required living water.

The Feast of Tabernacles involved pouring water from the pool of Siloam onto the alter, to symbolise a prayer for rain but also the hope for the promised time of the new covenant when the wells of salvation would overflow with abundance. In this context, Jesus' declaration suggested a declaration of this coming time of salvation.

Question 4,5: Both these Old Testament readings refer to water flowing out of the temple to bless those outside it. Paul tells us that we are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in us. This context implies that the streams of living water are not just to bless the believer, though they are for our benefit as well. Having a stream of living water flowing from one's belly would certainly ensure that one never went thirsty!

Question 6: It is repeatedly stated in John that though the Spirit is active before Jesus death and resurrection, he can only be poured out on believers after his ascension. The price that had to be paid for the free gift of the Holy Spirit in all his fullness was Jesus' death.

Question 7: In this passage, the living water is not identified as the Holy Spirit, but because it is in chapter 7 (which we just read) and because the living water is spoken of as bringing eternal life, it is reasonable to see it that way.

Unlike the previous passage, where the living water is a stream or a river, in this passage it is described as a leaping spring. It is hard for us to really understand what the metaphor of water would have meant to people at that time. We have unlimited access to clean water simply by turning on a tap. The Samaritan woman's joy at the idea of never having to fetch water again (before she understood that Jesus was speaking allegorically) should remind us of the blessing of having the Spirit poured out on us, without limit or restriction.

Question 8: Jesus strongly links Spirit and truth. In John 14:17, 15:26 and 16:13) he describes him as the Spirit of Truth. Because God is spirit, we need the Holy Spirit to be able to worship him. In John 14:6, Jesus describes himself as the way, the truth and the life. This makes this passage very trinitarian – we need both the Holy Spirit and Jesus to worship God.

Many people also see in this linking of Spirit and truth a balancing of the more emotional responses that can be inspired by the Holy Spirit with the truth represented in the Bible – saying that we need both mind and heart engaged to worship God. Even though this may not be what it is actually saying, this could be a good topic to discuss with the group, if it seems to be a concern.

Week 4: The Paraclete

This week we start to look at some of the ways that Jesus promised that the Spirit would be with his disciples after his death.

Paraclete is a Greek word. It only occurs in one other passage in the New Testament -1 John 2:1 -where Jesus is described as our advocate with the Father. The commonest meaning in Greek literature is “advocate, professional legal advisor, defender or representative before a court”. However, the way that Jesus describes the Spirit’s role is much broader than that. There are three main themes: “a witness that vindicates and judges; a helper and aid; a counsellor and teacher”.

As you read through today’s passages, it might be helpful to have a whiteboard or butchers’ paper to note all the different things that the Holy Spirit will do.

Question 3,4: Jesus implies that he is also a Paraclete, as he refers to Holy Spirit as another Paraclete (14:16). The Greek word for another, *allon*, signifies another of the same kind. The Spirit mirrors Christ’s activity. When Jesus has ascended, the Spirit will take his role in the disciples’ lives, teaching, guiding correcting etc. Of course, he is not another Saviour – Jesus salvific word was unrepeatable -but he continues Jesus’ work in his followers. However, Jesus makes it clear that just as he has not spoken or acted on his own, but only in imitation of the Father (5:19-21), so too, the Spirit will proclaim the words of the Son, not his own words (16:13-15).

Question 5: Hopefully everyone will be able to see from this passage that an ‘it’ can’t be a teacher, comforter, friend etc. John makes it clear that Holy Spirit is a person, not just in how he speaks about him, but grammatically. In Greek, all nouns are either masculine,

feminine or neuter. Pneuma -Spirit – is neuter, and so grammatically should be called it. However, John calls him he.

Question 6: Most Christians would probably say that they would prefer a flesh and blood Jesus standing before them to the Holy Spirit within them. But we have only to look at the behaviour and attitudes of the disciples before and after Pentecost to see the truth of Jesus' words. For example, Peter's confusion, misunderstandings and fear before Pentecost, and his brave, insightful sermon after Pentecost.

Question 7: A primary role that the Paraclete will play in believers' lives is that of teacher. Jesus had been teaching them throughout his ministry, now another will teach them. And in some ways this teacher will be even better than Jesus, because the disciples often misunderstood Jesus, and he was not able to tell them everything that he wanted to because they couldn't bear it (16:12). But this teacher will be with them forever, and he will help them to remember everything that Jesus has said (18:26). He will also declare the things that are to come (16:13), taking what is Jesus' and telling it to them (16:14-15).

Question 8: The focus of these verses is that it is the work of the Spirit to convict the world of their need for a saviour, as Jesus had during his ministry. Just as Jesus evoked a strong response in people, leading to either faith or rejection of him, so the Spirit will evoke a response, as will Jesus' followers. It is only through the work of the Spirit of Truth that the world can come to know Jesus.

Week 5: Jesus releases the Spirit

We look at two passages today – one from John and one from Acts. They both seem to be the giving of the Holy Spirit, once by the risen but not ascended Jesus, and once at Pentecost. The first giving of the Spirit in John seems to be a first fruits, symbolic promise of the Spirit, who will be given in fullness at Pentecost.

Question 3: The final reference to the Spirit in John's Gospel tells of Jesus breathing on the disciples and commanding them to receive the Spirit, as he sends them in the same way that he himself was

sent (20:21-22). Jesus frequently referred to himself as being sent by the Father. Before his death he promised to send another to be with them forever, and now he is sending the disciples in the same way. Jesus was sent with everything that he needed to accomplish his purpose. We can assume that if he is sending his disciples in the same way, they too are fully equipped. As Jesus began his ministry bearing the Holy Spirit, so do his disciples, as Jesus breathes the Spirit into them.

Question 5: The word translate breathes is a strong word, not used elsewhere in the New Testament. It implies a forceful breath, like blowing out a candle. It is used ten times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and several of these are associated with the giving of life. This reminds us of earlier references linking the Spirit with life and new birth and forms a fitting conclusion to the discussions of new birth early in the Gospel.

Question 6: The giving of the Holy Spirit was associated with Jesus sending them as he was sent. They are commanded to receive the Holy Spirit. He is not forced on them – they have to choose to accept him.

Questions 7-9: There are lots you could discuss here. It is worth noting that the believers were actively preparing themselves to receive the Spirit. His arrival was very noticeable – roaring wind sounds and tongues of fire. There were dramatic changes in the believers – they spoke in foreign languages and appeared drunk. Peter was given courage and words to say. The Holy Spirit inspired him to apply the promise in Joel to this occasion. All the believers bore witness bravely to the Good News, after hiding away since Jesus death.

There can only be one first day – the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was unique in that sense. However, the filling of the Holy Spirit is a repeated event. We see this in Acts 4:31 and many other places. As Jesus said, the Holy Spirit is not predictable. He does what he wills. Sometimes his work is dramatic, as it was at Pentecost and in Acts 4:31, other times it is quieter.