

Dependent on the Holy Spirit

St Paul's Tervuren Small Group Leaders' Notes

These notes have been written for small group leaders to help facilitate discussion time.

Do feel free to use them as seems best to you. You and your group know what works for you. Each section includes readings from scripture, discussion questions and prayers. You do not need to use all the material – in fact, there is probably more than you need. Feel free to pick the readings and questions you feel drawn to, and if there is a good discussion going, there is no need to cut it short in order to get through all the questions.

Our prayer is simply that you enjoy and grow in your time together going deeper with God.

Introduction

Why a series on the Holy Spirit?

Last year, Nathan, seeking God's guidance for where we as a church should put our focus for this time, was drawn to three specific themes: dependency on the Holy Spirit, leaning to the lost, and raising up leaders. Some of you might also remember that when Simon retired, he courageously shared that he wished he had given more time to dwelling in and trusting the Holy Spirit. As a church, we want to see more of the Holy Spirit at work in our church, in our lives, in our wider communities and in the world.

Lent is traditionally a time for going deeper with God. For turning from (or doing less of) things that distract us or draw us away from God, and for spending time doing (more of) things that draw us closer to God, as we prepare to walk the way of the cross with Jesus during Holy Week to the Passion of Good Friday, the emptiness of Holy Saturday and the resurrection joy of Easter Day. This Lent, we are going deeper with God as a church community by exploring four themes to develop our understanding about, and our openness to, the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's work in the world.

The three themes are:

- Who is the Holy Spirit?
- Hearing God's Voice (with teaching from Mark Aldridge from the New Wine Network)
- Empowered by the Holy Spirit

We also have a Bible verse to journey with throughout this month:

John 14:16

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, to be with you for ever.

Session 1 – Who is the Holy Spirit? *Genesis 1:1-5; John 14:15-31*

- **What are some of the words used to describe the Holy Spirit?**

Some words that might come up: Advocate; Comforter; Helper; Spirit of Truth; Breath of God (the Hebrew word *ruach* translated as Spirit in Genesis 1 also means breath or wind)...

- **Why might we say that the Holy Spirit is a Person?**

The Bible describes the Holy Spirit in words that have *agency* – they describe actions that a *person* would do (rather than a “force”) – like “help”, “teach”, “remind”...

- **What else does the Spirit do? How does the Bible speak about the Spirit or the Spirit’s work?**

Some words/ideas that might come up: fire, power, peace, fruit, guidance, sanctifier, conceiver of Christ in Mary, raiser of Christ from the dead, Jesus breathing the Spirit / sending the Spirit, directing the apostles for acts of mission... *John 16:7-15; John 20:19-22; Luke 1:35; Rom. 8:11; Rom. 8:15-17*

- **What do we say in church about the Holy Spirit? “We believe in the Holy Spirit...”**

One of the affirmations of faith we use in church is the Nicene Creed, said by Christians all over the world, including Anglicans, Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox Christians. It was agreed in 325AD as a statement of faith, with the simple words “*we believe in the Holy Spirit*”. In 381AD, words were added to state explicitly what Christians already believed about the Spirit: “... *the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.*”¹ We can think about the Spirit as a person of the Trinity like this:

- God the Father – the Creator – creation comes from God as a free, unnecessary act
- God the Son – the Redeemer – God comes to creation in a saving movement
- God the Spirit – the Sanctifier – God responds within us to enable us – the Church – to respond – to enable creation to come back to God.

The Spirit is the one who enlightens us, who gives us the desire to worship God, who helps us to recognise Jesus for who he is. Or, as St Basil the Great put it in the 4th century, the one who sanctifies, who perfects, who brings us to how we were made to be.

- **What does the Holy Spirit mean to you? Encourage people to tell their stories.**
- **Do we sometimes neglect the Holy Spirit? Why might that be? What might that tell us?**

British theologian Colin Gunton described the Spirit as “self-effacing” – the Spirit is always pointing to Christ, not to the Spirit’s self. It is the Spirit who enables us to cry, “Abba, Father”.

We are enabled *by the Spirit* to stand in relation to the Father as the Son stands there by nature. That is, we are drawn into Christ to use the word for Father that Jesus does. Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington, says it like this: the Spirit gives us a new appreciation of the Father and the Son, and by the Spirit we begin to participate in the love between them and for the world. Only God can draw us into God. The Spirit is thus also divine, and therefore to be worshipped and glorified.

¹ In the Middle Ages, churches in Western Europe began to say “proceeds from the Father and the Son”. We also use that when we say the creed. The Eastern Orthodox churches, e.g. in Greece, Romania and Russia did not add “and the Son”. Some Church Fathers talk about the Spirit proceeding from the Father *through* the Son.

A Contemplation on the Holy Spirit



Charlie Mackesy's sculpture of the Prodigal Son. In the contemplation below, Graham Tomlin imagines the image not just as a picture of the Prodigal Son being embraced by his Father, but also as a window into the Trinity. If you find pictures helpful, use the picture when you think about the reflection below. If you prefer to reflect on your response to the Bible passage itself, you can find it in Luke 15: 11-32.

“Now of course there are only two persons in the picture – the Father and the Son, which leaves the question: **where is the Holy Spirit?** There is no visible depiction of the Spirit in the sculpture, but the way in which the image affects the observer hints at the role of the Spirit within it. That second level, **the way in which many people have found themselves drawn into the image and begin to identify with the son, held and embraced by the father, is a sign of the place and work of the Spirit.** If it were just a picture of a father and son embracing, it would simply be an interesting portrait of what might even be a self-enclosed exclusive love. Yet it is not. We are invited, welcomed into the picture – even into the very embrace between the Father and the Son, so that we begin to experience that same loving welcome, the same life-giving embrace of the Father for the Son. The Spirit is this invisible dimension of the sculpture – the invitation to become part of the embrace between the Father and the Son, to know and experience the love that pulses between the Son and the Father.”

Songs (some suggestions for you if you like to use music in your group): *Holy Spirit* (Francesca Battistelli); *Way Maker* (Leeland); *Come Holy Spirit* (New Wine); *Spirit Break Out* (Kim Walker Smith).

Prayers

Pray for peace, and for individuals and their needs. It is good to pray together for greater knowledge of and dependency on the Holy Spirit. In particular, you may also like to pray for the following: for people to seek (or who are seeking) baptism and confirmation; those serving through leadership; those looking for forgiveness; those misled by the false gods of this present age; for all who are hungry. Pray the simple, ancient prayer of the Church: *Come, Holy Spirit.*

Hearing God's Voice

1. When you spend time with God, do you spend more time talking or listening? Why?
2. What things in our lives distract us from hearing the voice of God?
3. Would you say you have 'heard God speak to you'? Give an example of how it happened, was it an audible voice? How did you know it was God?
4. Read 1 Samuel 3.1-11

As a figure of speech, "Before the Lamp of God went out" simply means "before dawn," it was a lamp in the tabernacle but can also suggest dark spiritual times.

5. What circumstances helped Samuel to hear God's voice, even though he had never heard God speak to him before?
6. Why do you think Samuel did not recognize God's voice?
7. Who has been an Eli to you in your life—someone that has helped you hear the voice of God more clearly?
8. Hearing a God speak does not have to be an audible voice, people in the group may have already described other ways God has spoken to them. Have a look through these passages (you probably won't manage to get through all of them), how does God speak in these? Would you say that this is a way we can expect to hear God today? (of course any of it is possible, he has done it once!!)

Numbers 22:28 (Balaam's Donkey)

Judges 6:37-40 (Gideon through a fleece)

Ex. 3:1-4 (Moses & burning bush)

Luke 1:26 (Gabriel visits Mary)

Luke 1:39-45 (Holy Spirit through Elizabeth to Mary)

Romans 1:20 (God's power revealed through creation)

2 Tim. 3:16 (All scripture is useful for..)

Heb. 4:12 (God's word is living and active- he can draw our attention to a specific part of scripture)

Act 2:14-18 (Peter quotes Joel scripture that old men will...)

Revelation 1:1-3,10-11 (Vision)

Genesis 41: 25-32 God reveals plans through Pharaoh's dreams -Joseph interprets.

1 Kings 19:11-13 (Elijah whisper)

2 Samuel 22:14 (Voice of LORD thundered, according to David)

Hebrews 1:1-2 Through Jesus

9. Which of these ways would you find it most helpful to hear God?

10. If we think we have heard God speak, how do we know if it is God? (*is it supported by scripture or contradict scripture? God will never do that. What do other mature Christians who know you think about what you heard?*)

11. Do you feel encouraged about hearing God's voice? Discouraged? Afraid? Excited? Why? Pray for one another as you do, leave a time to listen to see if God gives anyone a scripture, a picture, a word of encouragement for someone else (Be bold, go for it, it is a safe environment, we are learning together. Therefore, only share things that will build one another up and encourage one another, anything that is shared could well be God but could also be our imagination or own thoughts, therefore it is to be tested and not just accepted).

Empowered by the Spirit

Read the verses below, perhaps with a moment of silence in between. And pray the ancient prayer of the Church: *Come, Holy Spirit.*

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

Acts 2: 1-4 *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

Ephesians 3:20-21 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

In this session, we suggest thinking about:

- What does it mean to be empowered by the Holy Spirit?
- For what purpose are we empowered?
- How can we be empowered?

Scriptures to ponder, questions to discuss, things to share...

- Read Ephesians 1:15-22. What strikes you or jumps out at you from the passage?
- If we are not empowered by the Spirit, does that mean we are attempting to do things in our own strength? Jesus says: *'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'* (John 15:5). What are the risks of trying to do things in our own strength?
- For whom and for what purpose are we given the Holy Spirit? For us, or for others? For the church, or for those outside the church?
- [Read Acts 8: 14-17 and Acts 19: 1-7.] Do you recall an experience of being filled with the Spirit, receiving the Spirit in a special kind of way? Encourage people to share.
- [Read 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11 and 1 Corinthians 14: 1-5.] In what specific ways does the Spirit empower us? What experience of these kinds of gifts do we have?
- Paul says we should eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:1). What do we desire?

Prayer

Spend some time praying for one another, either as the whole group, or in pairs.

- You may like to pray for specific situations, for the power and wisdom of the Spirit. Building on last week's session, you may like to listen to see if God gives someone a scripture, picture or word of encouragement, and to share it and test or reflect on it.
- Does someone in the group long to be filled with the Holy Spirit or desire gifts? Pray for them.
- Pray for the Church, that we would be empowered by the Holy Spirit. That God in mercy and goodness would bless the Church with more of the Holy Spirit, for his kingdom and his glory.

"How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13)