

# THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

a study in john 14 - 16

## Questions for Personal Study

Read John 13 - 16 a few times this week, and simply soak in Jesus' words. Specifically look at John 14.15-24. Who does Jesus say the Spirit is? What roles does Jesus say the Spirit will fulfill in this section? Have you experienced the Holy Spirit in these ways? How might the Spirit be doing these things without your awareness? Spend time as necessary repenting for diminishing or ignoring the Spirit.

## Questions for Study in Community

When you think of the Holy Spirit, what images come to mind? What experiences shape your thinking on the person and role of the Spirit? Read John 13.31-35. How are you all loving one another & washing feet? What is the role of the Spirit in producing this kind of love for one another? Read John 14.15-24. Discuss the interplay of love, obedience, & the Spirit.

## Questions for Staying on Mission

Is God's presence among you as a missional community obvious & tangible? How can you be a more Spirit-dependent community together? Take time together to repent of diminishing or ignoring the Holy Spirit.

## Practical Thoughts on Welcoming the Spirit

1. Repent for diminishing and ignoring the third Person of the Trinity. Repent for sinful self-reliance and fear-motivated neglect of the Holy Spirit. Mortify the sin that has been an obstacle to your knowing and walking with the Spirit. Receive God's gracious forgiveness in Jesus and rejoice that the Spirit is in you!

2. Begin addressing the Holy Spirit in prayer every day. Talk to him as a Person; don't ignore him as an energy force. Ask him for filling and direction for your entire day. Ask him to guide your decision-making, to direct your thoughts, and to fill your heart with affection for Jesus.

3. Read the Bible with a Holy Spirit lens. Look for him in the Bible and ask yourself: "Who does this text tell me the Spirit is?" Then, refine the way you relate to him. It's like getting to know your wife, the more you study her the better you can love her. (via Jonathon Dodson at [creationproject.wordpress.com](http://creationproject.wordpress.com))

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## The Holy What?

When you think of the Holy Spirit, what images come to mind? What church experiences have shaped your knowledge and understanding of the Holy Spirit? Are you familiar with his role in bringing you to faith in Jesus, in helping you become more like Jesus, and empowering you to live to make disciples of Jesus? Professor and author Richard Lovelace has said, "The typical relationship between believers and the Holy Spirit in today's church is too often like that between the husband and wife in a bad marriage. They live under the same roof, and the husband makes constant use of his wife's services, but he fails to communicate with her, recognize her presence and celebrate their relationship with her." Does that describe you at all?

My hope over the next 5 weeks is to bring some much needed adjustment to our lives in this area. We (that's right, this is *our* problem) have not done a good job highlighting the person and work of the Holy Spirit in our church. We have, like Lovelace said, failed to acknowledge the Spirit's presence, his power, and his work in shaping us into a community on mission. I am repenting and learning all over again how to rely on him, surrender to him, and allow him to lead me, and I want to invite you to be a part of this process.

## Comfortable and Distracted

As Americans, we have many things against us in this journey. Francis Chan, in his book "Forgotten God," highlights two main enemies. First, we are comfortable. We have too much, so we aren't desperate or dependent on the Spirit. When it comes down to it, we want God for our own selfish purposes. We want him to bless our lives and bring us joy, but we don't want him to have complete control. We don't want to hear him beckoning us away from the safety and comfort of our American middle class lives, into the dangerous mission of Jesus, where we are helpless and powerless apart from the Spirit.

Second, we are distracted. There is too much white noise in our lives to even begin to be aware that God has come to dwell in us by his Spirit. We are numb to this most comforting and energizing reality because we simply have too

many distractions. Our cell phones ring, our ipods blare in our ears, Facebook needs to be updated, emails need to be sent, bills need to be paid, football is on TV, the kids need to be bathed, and clothed, and fed, and run to soccer practice (and basketball, and piano, and...). Of course, none of these things are *wrong*, per se. We can justify them all, and they all likely have their time and place. But if this describes our lives, is it any wonder that we aren't more familiar with the Holy Spirit? We don't have time for him, or space to hear from him, because we have too many options.

### **Rediscovery**

In addition to being comfortable and distracted, we have another problem: bad theology. Is the Holy Spirit (or should I say the Holy Ghost?) a "he" or an "it"? Is it a force, or power, that comes from God? Or is He God? And should I talk to him/it, or just to Jesus and the Father? And what is all this about speaking in tongues and foretelling the future - do I have to do that, too? And if I have spoken in tongues or prophesied, does that mean I am "Spirit-filled" now, unlike all those other Christians without the Spirit? Yikes!

First of all, calm down! This study won't freak you out or make you unnecessarily uncomfortable. It won't be an extended seance, where we try to get the Ghost to show up and freak everybody out. Our primary goal is to get to know God more deeply and more intimately. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Above all else, the Spirit wants us to be more captivated by Jesus, to see the beauty of the Gospel, and to bring us more deeply into fellowship with our Father.

It is time for us to engage the Scriptures together and learn - rediscover - the great gift God has given us in sending his Spirit. So put aside your fears, your hesitations, and your previous experiences, and assume the posture of a humble learner. Even right now, stop and invite God to show you all he has given you in his Spirit. Open your life unreservedly to be changed by the Spirit.

### **The Presence of God**

John 14-16 records some of Jesus final words to his disciples before his death. After sharing a meal together and washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus begins to give the disciples instructions on how to be his people after he is gone. He instructs them to love one another radically and sacrificially, and to continue doing the works they've seen him doing. The disciples grow increasingly anxious. They are fearful of what it means for them if Jesus is no longer with them. How will they go on loving, serving, and doing his work?

In the midst of their anxiety, Jesus speaks these words: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever..." Jesus promises "another" will come, who will be Jesus, and yet not be Jesus. Later he says that he and his Father will come to make their home in those who love Jesus. All of this is the work of the Holy Spirit. After Jesus returns to his Father, he sends his Spirit (Acts 1-2).

The word translated "Helper" could also be translated Counselor or Comforter. The Greek word simply means "one who comes alongside," though Jesus makes it clear that this Helper is not just alongside, but also taking up residence in us. Jesus says that the Father will give us "another" Helper, making it clear to these anxious disciples that everything they have had in flesh in blood Jesus will now continue to be present to them in the Spirit. Theologian Gordon Fee says, "The Spirit is none other than God himself resident in our present human life." The Spirit is God, and God has come to rest in us!

Above all else, the Holy Spirit's role in our lives, individually and corporately, is to bring us the great assurance that we belong to God. We are not orphans; we are adopted sons, and the Spirit is the downpayment and guarantee of our full adoption when Christ returns. The Spirit assures us that we are beloved!

### **Repenting and Welcoming**

Over the next month, I want to invite you to journey together as we explore the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of your church experience, try to study and reflect on Jesus' teaching about the Spirit. Resist the urge to interpret what Jesus says in light of your previous experience. Though the Spirit's work in our lives is personal and experiential, we need to have our minds and hearts formed by right Biblical teaching on this important subject.

In particular, we need to see the Spirit as God's Empowering Presence. This is who he is (God!), how we experience him (God's Presence!), and his purpose in our lives (Empowering!). The Spirit of God has come to take up residence in the Church, making the presence of God a living reality among us as His Family, and empowering us to be disciple-making Missionaries in our city.

These three truths about the Spirit, and the context in which we learn them (John 14-16), will guide our time together over the next month. There will be plenty of opportunities for you to learn and ask questions. We'll create space to pray together, and wait on the Spirit corporately. We'll ask that He be among us all that he is, and we'll try to get out of his way! Come, Holy Spirit.