

Good Soil



A place for growth and nurture

from the East Mercia Methodist Circuit

Session 2.1: CONNECTING WITH GOD'S SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION: THINKING ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

In this series of Good Soil sessions, we will be thinking about how we grow with God. Later, we will be looking at the ways God gives us to draw closer and grow in our faith and relationship with God (sometimes called the 'means of grace'). The first three sessions will be exploring the theme of the Holy Spirit, so that's where we start.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned in the Old Testament, sometimes called the 'Spirit of God'. The Hebrew word used is '*Ruach*', which can mean spirit, wind or breath. The '*Ruach of God*' is present at the very beginning (Genesis chapter 1: verse 2) when the mysterious spirit or wind moves over the face of the waters. In Genesis 2.7, God breathes into the first human the 'breath of life' (or spirit of life).

From the beginning, there was an intimate connection between God the creator and human beings who are made to bear God's image. When that connection was broken or damaged, the work of the Spirit in the world seemed to be limited to special people at special times.

Certain kings of Israel were anointed with the Spirit. But while the Spirit was given for a purpose, it could also be taken away. For example, King Saul, was blessed with the Spirit (in 1 Samuel chapter 10) but the Spirit left him many years later when it was clear he was not ruling in God's way. At that time, David was anointed to replace him as king (1 Samuel 16).

The Spirit also enabled the prophets to speak God's word. In one famous chapter, the prophet Joel told of a time when (following a time of devastation and restoration) God's Spirit would be made available to all people:

Then afterwards

*I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.*

*Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (Joel 2: 28-29)*

These words were echoed by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts chapter 2), seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus. Peter made it clear that the arrival of the Holy Spirit was very much connected to salvation being offered to all people, thanks to the Messiah, who was Jesus the crucified and risen one. The effect of the Spirit coming on the disciples that day was to enable them to speak in other languages to share the good news with everyone in Jerusalem. The result was that 3,000 new followers were baptized and became Christians. They followed Peter's instructions to repent – to turn back to God – and to be baptized as one of Christ's people, and they too received the Holy Spirit.

There is a clear link between living up to our potential as human beings – in the image of God – and the breath of the Holy Spirit given to us through Jesus. Once, it was just available for certain people at certain times. Thanks to Jesus opening it up to the whole world, it can be for us here and now.

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION (before you arrive)

Is the Holy Spirit something you give much thought to?

Would you say the Holy Spirit is an important part of your life?

What would you like to know more about the Spirit? Think of some questions to bring to your group.

Pray for understanding and a sense of God's presence.

Group leaders: There is nothing in extra needed for this session!

STARTING THE SESSION: FINDING OUR ROOTS

Share with your group or just think by yourself:

When do you feel at your most 'spiritual'?

Would you say you've experienced the Holy Spirit? Can you describe it? Has it felt different at different times?

What qualities or sensations do you think the Holy Spirit gives us?

What questions do you have about the subject? Be honest about your questions, knowing you can raise them in this safe space.

A PRAYER

Holy God,

You call us to be your holy people:

bearing your image, a light to the world,
showing your creative love and healing grace.

Give us the help of your Holy Spirit, we pray.

Because we surely can't do it on our own.

And bless us in this time together, by the same Spirit:
be our comforter and guide. Amen.

REFLECTING ON ART:

Look at the piece of art on the next page, think about this in silence for a while, and then perhaps share with the group what you notice, or what this says to you about the Holy Spirit.

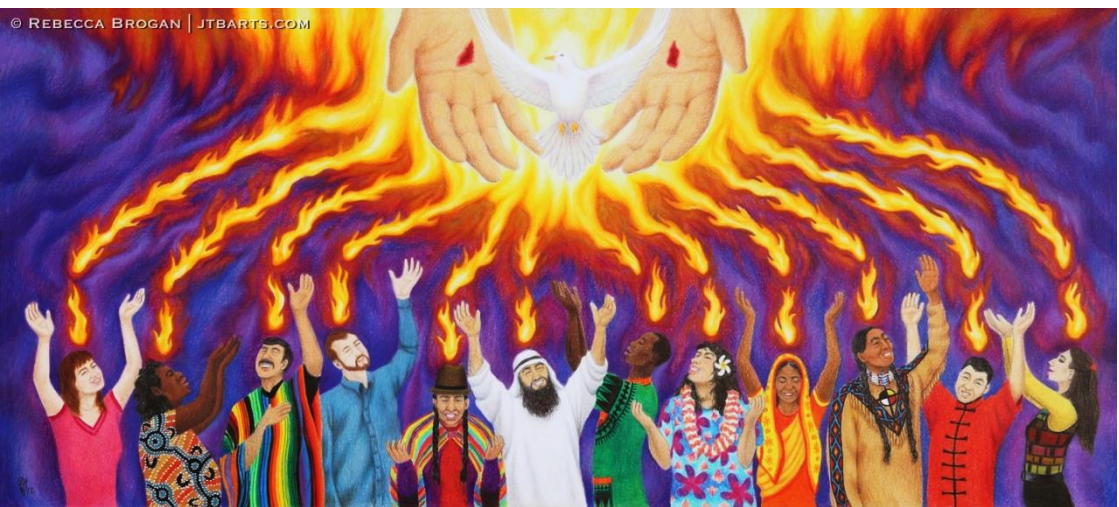
***PENTECOST:
True Unity and Spiritual Fellowship in the Holy Spirit***

Artist: Rebecca Brogan

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Website link: <https://jtbarts.com/product/pentecost-true-spiritual-unity-and-fellowship-in-the-holy-spirit-jtba1/>

READING THE SCRIPTURES

In the early days, the disciples had seen the Holy Spirit come down 'like a dove' and rest on Jesus when he was baptized. At the same time, they heard the affirming voice of God, saying, "This is my beloved Son; I am well-pleased with him" (Matthew 3:13-17).

While Jesus was with the disciples, they sometimes struggled to understand God's way, or fully comprehend what Jesus was doing. But, when he knew the time was coming when he wouldn't be around in the same way, he promised them some help...

John 14: verses 15-27 (New Revised Standard Version)

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸ 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.' ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?' ²³ Jesus answered him, 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵ 'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have

said to you. ²⁷ *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

DIGGING DEEPER

This version of the Bible (New Revised Standard Version) translates the word '**Advocate**'. In the original Greek it is '*Paracletos*' or Paraclete. Different other versions translate it as: **Counsellor**, **Comforter**, **Helper** and **Companion**. *Which of these do you find most helpful? What do these words suggest about the Holy Spirit?*

Jesus also calls the Holy Spirit the '**Spirit of Truth**'. *What does this mean to you? How does the Spirit enable truth?*

From this passage we can learn the following things (and more) about the Spirit:

- It is related to keeping (or trying to keep) the commandments;
- The Spirit is a gift from God the Father;
- The Spirit lives in the Christian person;
- He will be with us for ever;
- The Spirit teaches us and reminds us of the words of Christ;
- The Spirit brings a sense of God's peace.

What else do you know about the Holy Spirit?

At Pentecost and in the beginnings of the early church, three things were clearly linked: **repentance** (turning to God, confessing sins and starting afresh), **baptism**, and **receiving the Holy Spirit**, but not always in that order! All of these things are important – it's almost as if God is not going to make his home with us uninvited! *Would you like to talk to someone about taking any of these steps?*

The Holy Spirit is present in the lives of Christian people, active through prayer, giving wisdom, holiness, awe and understanding. It is noticeable in times of worship, prayer, communion, teaching, fellowship and bible study. *Can you think of times when you have*


noticed God's presence in a spiritual way, or found wisdom and understanding? Is the Spirit also present in ways we can't feel?

Do you think the Spirit can also be active elsewhere in the world? Can you think of examples where God has been at work through people or situations outside of 'the church'?

PRAYING TOGETHER

- Ask God to be with you in this time together;
- Bring to God any prayers for members of the group, or for others you know who are in need, or in grief;
- Pray for those who are suffering in our world or community;
- Pray for any in the group who would like to know the Holy Spirit more in their lives;
- Pray for the spiritual life of our church;
- You might like to **say the Lord's Prayer**.

SUGGESTED SONGS TO LISTEN TO (or make a different choice) – at home or in the group

Available on YouTube using the links below:  **YouTube**

Holy Spirit by Bryan & Katie Torwalt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaRH0ItRfZg>

Spirit Lead Me by Michael Ketterer & Influence Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABWnLjXer10>

COMING SOON in **GOOD SOIL**

Session 2.2: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Session 2.3: GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Session 2.4: GROWING IN PRAYER

Session 2.5: READING THE BIBLE

Session 2.6: HOLY COMMUNION