

The Holy Spirit

Contents

Study 1: The Holy Spirit in Trinity

Page 3

Study 2: The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

Page 8

Study 3: The Holy Spirit and Jesus

Page 14

Introduction

Christians have always had a bit of a funny relationship with the Holy Spirit. In the first place, we are Trinitarian; we confess belief in one God, three persons. In the Nicene Creed, Christians in church say *“And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.”* And yet, at the same time, we’re not sure what we ought to think. Is the Spirit a full person of God (like the Son), or is the Spirit less personal and more like a “force”? We are much better at describing what the Spirit does than who the Spirit is. One Christian scholar even said that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been a Cinderella of theology, being neglected at the expense of a focus on the two other members of the household.¹

Over this short series, our hope is that you can come to have a deeper love for our great God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jen Wilkin, a Christian author, writes *“The heart cannot love what the mind does not know.”*² As we grow in our knowledge of the God we worship, our prayer is that you will grow in your love for him and delight in him.

*Oh blessed Spirit, to whom I owe such unspeakable mercies, let me, Lord, contemplate you today as the gracious, kind, compassionate Comforter.*³

¹ Arthur Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, cited in Allison, G. R. and Köstenberger, A.J. *The Holy Spirit* ed. Dockery, Finn and Morgan, Theology for the People of God Series. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020; 226.

² Jen Wilkin, *Women of the Word*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014: 31.

³ Robert Hawker, “The Blessed Work of the Spirit,” in *Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans*, ed. Robert Elmer (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 100.

Study 1

The Holy Spirit in Trinity

1. If you were going to introduce God to someone who had never heard of him (or Christianity in general), how would you do it? What would you say?

2. When you think of the Holy Spirit, what comes to mind?

Going wide

Spend some time in Acts 2:42-47 ...

To help us see how God is one God, and yet three persons, we're going to read a few passages. *Don't spend too long on any of these - they're here to help give a big picture view.*

Passage	What this Passage says about God
Genesis 1:1-2	
Deuteronomy 6:4-5	

Passage	What this Passage says about God
Psalm 86:8-10	
Matthew 28:19	
John 1:1-5	
John 14:26	
John 17:1-5, 20-23	
Romans 8:14-17	
1 Corinthians 8:4-6	
2 Corinthians 13:14	
Hebrews 1:1-3	
Jude 20-21	

3. Was there anything in any of these passages that jumped out or was surprising to you?

4. Pulling all of that together, what does the Bible seem to say about God (especially since the word “trinity” doesn’t actually appear in any of these passages)?

Going deep

Now that we’ve got the big picture from the Bible, let’s narrow our focus onto one passage to help tie some of this together.

Read John 15:26-16:15

5. What is the relationship that Jesus discusses between God the Father, himself and the Holy Spirit?

6. Surely evangelism would be easier if we could just say “There’s Jesus - right over there! He’s been alive for almost 2000 years since he was crucified and then resurrected.” Why is it better for us that Jesus *isn’t* here anymore, but instead we have the Holy Spirit?

7. Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit has a number of particular jobs he works to accomplish in the world. What roles does he have?

8. A Jehovah’s Witness who’s going past your door one day, Arianne Hysme, tells you that there is only God the Father; that Jesus and the Holy Spirit aren’t God. How would you respond to Arianne based on what you’ve read across the Bible?

9. What have you learned about our God? How might this prompt your worship and adoration of him even more?

Pray

In the Nicene Creed, we say “*And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.*” For us to worship and glorify the Spirit, we need to understand what he’s come to do. Take some time now to pray to God, thanking him for the Holy Spirit, and asking his help in getting to know the Holy Spirit even better. Here’s a prayer written by Robert Hawker (1753–1827),⁴ in which he reflects on the Holy Spirit in John 15–16. As a group or on your own, read through this prayer, making it your own prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Oh blessed Spirit, to whom I owe such unspeakable mercies, let me, Lord, contemplate you today as the gracious, kind, compassionate Comforter.

For you are the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. And with mercy you sympathize with all the followers of Jesus in our afflictions, both of soul and body.

How tenderly you show us our sins, and lead us to the blood of Jesus to wash them away.

How sweetly you visit, encourage, strengthen, instruct, lead, and guide us into all truth.

And how powerfully at times, by your restraining grace, you enable us to put to death the deeds of the body, that we may live.

Holy, blessed, almighty Comforter! Continue your visits to us. Come, Lord, and abide with me, and be with me forever. Prove that you are the Sent of the Father, and of the Son, by coming to me in the name of Jesus, by teaching me all the precious things concerning Jesus, and by acting as the one who reminds us of Jesus.

In you and by your blessed work, I may know and live in the sweet enjoyment of fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, through the influence of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. Amen.

Further Reading

There are plenty more passages we could turn to and study! Read and reflect on some of the following passages over the week ahead.

Psalm 104:27–30

Mark 12:28–33

Colossians 1:15–20

⁴ Robert Hawker, “The Blessed Work of the Spirit,” 100.

Study 2

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

1. Think of shows and movies you've watched. Has there ever been a cameo performer (or easter-egg type reference) that stole the show for you, or that you were excited to look out for?

2. What do you think is the difference between how the Holy Spirit acted in the Old Testament and today?

Going wide

To help us see the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, we're going to read a few passages. *Don't spend too long on any of these - they're here to help give a big picture view.*

Passage	What this Passage says about the Holy Spirit
Genesis 1:1-2	
Exodus 35:30-36:1	

Passage	What this Passage says about the Holy Spirit
Numbers 11:16-17, 24-30	
Judges 14:5-7, 19; 15:11-15	
1 Samuel 16:13-14	
Psalm 51:10-12	
Isaiah 11:1-3	
Ezekiel 36:24-28	
Joel 2:28-32	

3. Was there anything in any of these passages that jumped out or was surprising to you?

4. What different works did the Holy Spirit do in the Old Testament? Who received him?

5. What expectations should we leave the Old Testament with as far as the Holy Spirit's future actions are concerned?

Going deep

Now that we've got the big picture from the Bible, let's narrow our focus.

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14

6. As a group, grab a white board, or a sheet of butcher's paper, or simply just some paper in pairs, and draw out the account here (as a six-panel comic if you're able to).

7. At this point in Israel's history, they look down for the count. The Northern tribes were all but destroyed by Assyria in 722BC, and the Southern kingdom (Judah) was overthrown by Babylon, with survivors (like Ezekiel) deported to Babylon. How is this illustrated by Ezekiel's experience?

8. What promise does God make for the people of Israel in their future? Think back to Ezekiel 36:24-28, which you looked at above. What does God's Spirit do in the people of Israel?

9. A visitor to church from interstate, Moe Dhalest, shares with you after church one day, "We don't need to worry about God's laws as Christians anymore because Jesus came and died, and now we get the Holy Spirit! Besides, it was only the grumpy Father God who cared about laws in the Old Testament." How would you respond to Moe?

10. Throughout the Old Testament we see that the Holy Spirit empowered some of God's people some of the time. There was no permanence, and the Spirit tended to be poured out on individuals for particular purposes. But Jesus assured his followers in John 14:16-17,

¹⁶...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth...he lives with you and will be in you.

For those who are in Jesus, the Holy Spirit remains within us forever. While some of the ways the Spirit empowers God's people today may look similar to the Old Testament, he is with us in it all. When we struggle to pray, we have someone who intercedes on our behalf (Romans 8:26-27). When we struggle to comprehend God's words, we have someone who makes them knowable to us (1 Corinthians 2:10b-16). When our bodies think to obey sin and give into temptation, the Spirit frees us from giving in (Romans 8:1-13). The Holy Spirit works in us in a way that God's people in the Old Testament could only dream of. Isn't that such a joy and privilege? Reflect: what does it mean for you for the Spirit to live in you *all the time*? Are there areas above which you could live more consciously of?

Pray

Once again, in the Nicene Creed we say *"And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets."* The Holy Spirit is the one through whom God gives us life; from the first page of the Bible it's made clear that life comes by God's Spirit. And, as we've looked at in Ezekiel (and the Old Testament as a whole), the Spirit gives life. Do you have this life - the new birth that Jesus spoke about in John 3, or that Ezekiel spoke about here? Pray together as a group now, thanking God for the life he gives us through the Holy Spirit.

Here's a prayer, called a litany, which is found in the Australian Prayer Book. Get half your group to say the normal words, and the other half to say the bold words.

Come, Holy Spirit, creator, and renew the face of the earth.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, counsellor and advocate. Touch our lips that we may pray aright and proclaim your word.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, power from on high, make us agents of peace and ministers of wholeness.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Holy Spirit, giver of life, breathe on your Church and make us a living people, holy and free.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.
Come, Holy Spirit, bond of love, pour your love into our hearts that we may serve you with joy.

Further Reading

There are plenty more passages we could turn to and study! Read and reflect on some of the following passages over the week ahead.

1 Samuel 10:1, 6, 9-10

Isaiah 42:1-7

Isaiah 61:1-3

Isaiah 63:7-14

Zechariah 7:7-12

Study 3

The Holy Spirit and Jesus

1. Comic book movies have taken over the entertainment world! Which gives us a chance to ask a pressing question: what superpowers would you want to have if you could have any?

2. What do you think is the most important miracle Jesus did (outside of death and resurrection!)?

Going wide

To help us see the Holy Spirit as he related to Jesus on Earth, we're going to read a few passages. *Don't spend too long on any of these - they're here to help give a big picture view.*

Passage	What this Passage says about the Holy Spirit and Jesus
Matthew 1:18-21	
Luke 1:31-35	

Passage	What this Passage says about the Holy Spirit and Jesus
<p>Matthew 3:16-4:4 (cf Mark 1:10-13; Luke 3:21-22, 4:1ff)</p> <p>Matthew 12:28-32</p>	
<p>Matthew 3:11 (cf Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33)</p> <p>Luke 10:21</p>	
<p>Luke 11:5-13</p>	
<p>John 3:5-8</p> <p>John 16:12-15</p>	
<p>John 20:21-23</p>	

3. Was there anything in any of these passages that jumped out or was surprising to you?

4. How do we see the Holy Spirit empowering and working in Jesus in his earthly ministry?

5. Based on what we've seen from this survey of the Gospels, what do you think blasphemy against the Spirit is (Matthew 12:31-32)?

Going deep

Now that we've got the big picture from the Gospels, let's narrow our focus.

Read Luke 4

6. Where does the Holy Spirit get mentioned? How is he relating to Jesus?

Fill out the table below from Luke 4.

	What Jesus does, being filled with the Holy Spirit
Scene 1 (vv1-13)	
Scene 2 (vv14-30)	
Scene 3 (vv31-37)	
Scene 4 (vv38-44)	

7. What does Jesus think is the most important work for him to do?
(hint: look at the Isaiah 61 passage that Jesus refers to)

8. A friend of a member of your growth group, Ada Hopted, shares with you one day after small group, *"Jesus wasn't really God - he was a normal human like us. All the miracles and stuff that he did, that was just because God had given him the Holy Spirit to make him able to do that stuff - just like God does for us."* How would you respond to Ada?

9. The most important thing Jesus told his disciples the Holy Spirit would empower them to do? Witness. Testify. Attest to the truth about Jesus. In Matthew 10:16-20 (cf Mark 13:9-11; Luke 12:11-12), Jesus tells his disciples that the Spirit will empower them with words to speak when they are on trial for being his followers (and we see this come to life in Acts, e.g. Acts 4:8-13). In John 15:26-16:15 we see that one of the primary works that the Holy Spirit will do in conjunction with Jesus' disciples is testify about him. Is to tell the world all that Jesus said and did, and invite them to worship him. And ultimately, the whole book of Acts is centred around this work (Acts 1:8).

So, bringing that home to us today. The point of the signs Jesus did *wasn't* just to heal people or to cast out demons. It was to point to him. To call people to listen up to who Jesus is. And it's the same for us today. Sometimes it can be easy to pray and ask for the Spirit to give us particular gifts as Christians. But the better prayer, the one closer to Jesus' heart, is to pray that the Spirit will give us boldness to speak words of truth about Jesus to our friends, our family, our neighbours, our colleagues. As a group, who can you be praying for opportunities to testify about Jesus to?

Pray

In the Nicene Creed we say “*And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.*” The right response to God the Father is to worship and glorify him. The right response to Jesus is to worship and glorify him. And the right response to the Holy Spirit is worship and glorification. But how? Simple: by believing what he’s telling us. The point of the spotlight isn’t to look at the light, but at what the light is pointing at. And the Holy Spirit is the biggest spotlight, and he’s pointing right at Jesus. Pray together now, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you see Jesus even more clearly.

In Luke 11:1-13, when Jesus is teaching his followers to pray, he tells us that the best gift to ask God to give us is the Holy Spirit; that God delights to give the Holy Spirit to his children. Reflecting on this (among other passages, like Hebrews 7:25), Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664)⁵ wrote this prayer which you may like to pray together.

Lord, if you give me yourself, I will have every gift. If you give me your Spirit, I will have every good thing. Come, Holy Spirit, and dwell in my soul. I know you will make the place of your feet glorious. If only I have your presence, I will be all glorious within.

Lord, I have heard that Christ is always praying for his people. May I feel the real result of his intercession. May I actually feel his prayers, and the warmth of that spiritual fire which is falling down from his prayers into my heart.

Lord, warm my spirit, and let me feel your kiss, that I may now have communion with you, your spirit upon me, and your protection over me. Seal my pardon, confirm your grace, and save my soul in the day of Jesus. Amen.

⁵ Ambrose, Isaac. “Dwell in Me, Spirit.” Page 112 in *Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans*. Edited by Robert Elmer. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019.

Further Reading

There are plenty more passages we could turn to and study! Read and reflect on some of the following passages over the week ahead.

Acts 2:1-41

Acts 4:25-31

Acts 5:1-11

Acts 10:1-11:18

Romans 8:14-17

1 Corinthians 12-14

The Holy Spirit - Recommended Resources

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