



The Holy Spirit

Advent Study

Lesson 1

Read: Joel 2:28-32

The Lord's Promise of the Holy Spirit

There are many prophetic utterances in the Old Testament about the coming of the Messiah, but there are just a few referring to the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. These prophetic words from the mouth of the prophet Joel must surely have envisioned the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The apostle Peter quotes this passage in Acts 2:16-21 when he is explaining the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Feast of Pentecost.

In the Old Testament, the anointing of the Spirit was limited to a few chosen people such as the patriarchs, the judges, the kings (although most seem to have ignored the power), and the prophets. However, Joel makes it clear that one day the Spirit would be available to all people who believed in the presence and power of God. In addition, he stated that in that day all who willingly called on the name of the Lord would be saved, implying that the Spirit would enable all people to open their hearts to the one true God, repent and be saved.

There are many perhaps well-meaning Christians who seem never to have grasped the fullness of faith that is available through the Holy Spirit. They minister and hope God will bless what they do rather than relying completely on the power of God to minister through them.

The reason it is so important to learn how to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to do ministry is because only in this way will God always get credit for what He manages to accomplish through us. When we think and act in this way, we can stand against the notorious sin of pride, and be humble about the way God is directing our lives.

Through this study, in the days ahead, we will see many illustrations of how the Holy Spirit works in and through God's people to do kingdom ministry to His praise and glory.

R&D How well are you doing in allowing the Holy Spirit to direct your words and actions in your ministry as a witness for Christ?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for speaking to us through the prophet Joel, and for enabling us to understand the Holy Spirit who reveals to us our ministry and promises the power to accomplish it.

Lesson 2

Read: Matthew 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; John 1:32-34

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Matthew, Mark, and John all record the same message about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In Matthew's Gospel we read these words spoken by John the Baptist, "I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I am not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Even before Jesus entered the river Jordan to receive the baptism of repentance, John had received a prophetic word from God that a baptism of the Holy Spirit was soon to be offered to the people through the anointed one, Jesus Christ, the long awaited Messiah.

Anyone who is baptized in the name of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—has been given the Spirit to dwell in us for our entire life. This means that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and therefore we are sanctified people. It also means that we are privileged people who have a power living in us that can be likened to the power that brought the universe into being. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the Holy Spirit will never force anything on us, nor will he violate our free will. But, if we learn to cooperate with his supernatural power, our lives will take on a different direction and we will find ourselves ministering to people in ways that will change their lives and ours forever.

In the late sixties and early seventies, God was pouring out His Spirit on His people in a variety of ways, and the Church of God took on an anointing that was remarkable. People were led into ministries that they had never envisioned possible, because up to that time they were operating out of their own power instead of God's power. There was a great deal of excitement in various areas of the Church and people were overwhelmed with the knowledge that God had a specific purpose for their lives. And, on top of that, He was ready, willing, and able to equip them.

For whatever reason, there seems to have been a lessening of the enthusiasm that accompanied that movement of the Spirit, and there have been less tangible signs of God's power in subsequent years. Now is the time to pray in faith for the Body of Christ, the Church, to grow in spiritual maturity so we can cooperate with the Spirit with greater wisdom and knowledge. How wonderful it would be if all those who have been baptized truly believed that the power of the Holy Spirit dwells within us and will enable us to bring the light of Christ to the world.

R&D Have you experienced the fullness of God's Spirit working in and through you? Explain.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, come, and fill our hearts with the love you willingly extend to all who ask for it; and may we learn to cooperate more and more with you in ministry to others.

Lesson 3

Read: John 3:1-8

What Does It Mean To Be Born of the Spirit?

This is a powerful passage of Scripture as it explains perfectly what it means to be born again. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to Jesus by night to ask Jesus what he came to teach the people. Jesus spoke plainly, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." Nicodemus was nonplused by this statement because he thought Jesus was describing a physical birth, and he could not comprehend such a thing as a spiritual birth.

Well, this is a problem for many people as they feel offended if you ask them this simple question about a second birth. It really is the heart of the Gospel message. If you have been born again, you would have no trouble saying something like, "Absolutely, I was given the Holy Spirit when I was baptized and I came into a full assurance of the Holy Spirit when I embraced the faith as an adult." Just because we show up in Church on a regular basis, does not mean that we have fully surrendered our lives to Jesus with the assurance of having gained the promise of eternal life. As the saying goes, "If we are born once we die twice, and if we are born twice we will only have one death."

Jesus continues in the dialogue, “Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’” It is so important to internalize this truth because without knowledge of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we are powerless for faithful service to the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

One time Corrie Ten Boom was giving a talk in a Church auditorium and she told the congregation she wanted to demonstrate the power of one small light. She had a flashlight in her hands and she asked for the lights to be turned off. She proceeded to fumble around with the flashlight for a time and spoke as if she was frustrated trying to get the light to shine. Finally she asked for the lights to be turned back on, and she said, “No wonder it didn’t work, the batteries weren’t in it.” So she put the batteries in it and asked for the lights to be turned out again. Then, of course, the light of the flashlight was seen by all. She said, “Trying to live your life without drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit is like trying to use a flashlight without any batteries.”

Truly, we have the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, but we need to learn how to draw on that power in order to allow God to direct our lives and our ministry.

R&D What would you say to someone tomorrow if he or she asked you, “Have been born again?”

Prayer: Almighty God, thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit in our baptism, help us to live our life in such a way that it is obvious that we know how to draw on his power.

Lesson 4

Read: John 4:20-26

The Holy Spirit Guides Our Worship

This dialogue Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well is fascinating from start to finish. The woman is an outcast and she comes to the well for water in the middle of the day when there wouldn’t be anyone to rebuke her. She met Jesus who surprisingly struck up a conversation with her. Very quickly, the woman begins to realize that she is in the presence of a prophet or perhaps even the Messiah, and her heart began to burn with a kind of excitement she had never experienced before.

The woman is led to ask the question, “Tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place to worship, while the Samaritans claim it is here on Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?” This is the key question for that day and Jesus launched into a teaching that the place of worship will no longer be a matter of importance. He said to the woman, “But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”

Jesus made it clear to the woman at the well, and he has made it clear to all believers throughout the centuries in the life of the Christian Church, that God is interested primarily with the love relationship we have with Him; and He wants to teach us how to draw on the Holy Spirit to direct our worship, our prayers, and our study of Scripture.

One time long ago I was privileged to sit beside a godly bishop in our Church for a worship service at a conference on the Holy Spirit, and suddenly I felt myself being drawn into the most profound sense of worship imaginable. I concluded that he was being led by the Holy Spirit in his worship posture and attitude, and I had something to learn from him right there on the spot. We need to offer our entire being to God when we worship and expect to receive the full grace of God’s offering to us in that moment.

The woman at the well was so transfixed by being in the presence of Jesus that she exclaimed, “I know that the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Jesus responded, “I am the Messiah!” The woman received the gift of faith at that moment, and her life was transformed for the better in an instant of time. Right away she returned to her village and began to tell the people what had happened to her, and undoubtedly she learned to worship Jesus in spirit and truth.

R&D How do you prepare for worship and how in tune with God are you when you enter the sanctuary for worship?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, plant in our hearts such an awareness of the Holy Spirit in our lives that we will be forever transformed just like the Samaritan woman at the well.

Lesson 5

Read: Matthew 10:16-20

The Holy Spirit Will Be Your Defender

We are living in a time of history when persecution of Christians is rampant, not only in the countries of Islam but right here in the United States. The question for us is this: Are we going to stand up for our faith and confess Christ crucified and risen from the dead or are we going to be politically correct and be silent? If we learn to invite the Holy Spirit to speak through us and give us the right words to say at those crucial times in our lives when we are being tested, then we will see positive results.

The messages from Hollywood, for example, are primarily anti-Christian; and those who report on the small number of movies that are explicitly Christian don't seem to understand the message because of their unbelief.

I was privileged to be at the premier of the movie titled “Billy, the Early Years;” as the title indicates, it was about the early life of Billy Graham. After the showing I was seated across a table from two reporters from New York. They were both extremely critical about the movie, and they didn't have a clue as to the primary message it portrayed. The more antagonistic of the two was downright angry to have wasted his time flying from New York to Nashville to view the movie. I tried to engage him in a conversation about in the reality of biblical faith portrayed in the movie, but he was decidedly uninterested. So I said a prayer and focused on the other reporter who seemed a slight bit interested. When he said he didn't have a clue what the movie was trying to portray, I said, “Are you a Christian and do you believe Christ died for your sins?” He was taken aback by my question, but he remained at least receptive and said he wasn't sure what I was talking about. Well, I said the movie is presenting the difference between a person who believes intellectually in the Christian faith and a person who has surrendered his life to Christ and believes with all his heart that Jesus is Lord.

The movie showed how a mentor and good friend of Billy Graham had decided the Bible was not trustworthy and he was going to start depending more on his mind and less on the supernatural. Billy Graham went through a crisis of faith at the same time, but through divine intervention he came to the conclusion that the Bible is indeed the inspired Word of God and it is to be trusted completely. As Dwight L. Moody once wrote, “The Bible keeps us from sin, and sin keeps us from the Bible.”

I don't know if what I said to the partially receptive reporter that day was effective, but I do know it was the Holy Spirit who gave me the words to say.

R&D *Can you remember a time when the Holy Spirit gave you the right words to say at a time when your faith was being tested? Share that moment with someone.*

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, enlighten our minds, quicken our spirits, infuse our lives with your love, and use us as ambassadors for the building up of God's kingdom here on earth.*

Lesson 6

Read: John 7:37-39

Rivers of Living Water

Initially, Jesus told his brothers that he was not going to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles which occurs approximately six months after Pentecost. This is also referred to as the Feast of Booths, and it commemorates the days when the Israelites wandered in the desert wilderness and lived in temporary shelters. However, midway through the festival, Jesus appeared and began teaching, and he explained how his message was not his own but it came straight from God. Also, he explained that he had been sent from God and his testimony was true and would be for all time.

On the last day of the festival, the people were in the custom of going in procession from the Pool of Siloam up to the Temple Mount carrying water from the pool to be poured into the basin for ritual cleansing. When they poured the water into the basin there was to be a strict silence and a hush would come over the crowd as they were taught to expect the appearance of the Messiah at that point. This is when Jesus stepped out of the crowd and said, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" Then the passage goes on to explain that when Jesus spoke of living water, he was speaking of the Holy Spirit. He made it clear that the Spirit would be given to everyone believing in him.

Remember what Jesus said the woman at the well in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me and I would give you living water." Surely Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit who would so transform our lives that we would learn how to be channels of God's unconditional love for all the people of the world. When we learn how to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit, everything changes in our thinking and in our expressions of love and concern for others.

Before I entered seminary, an Anglican priest from Canada spoke on the Holy Spirit one evening when my family was in a crisis. He was so empowered by the Spirit that he opened up my eyes to understand the Holy Trinity in a way that I had previously not understood. I actually experienced the rivers of living water in a powerful way, and suddenly the full Gospel came alive in my mind and heart. Indeed the Holy Spirit is "God in action" as the catechism in the *Book of Common Prayer* states so clearly.

R&D *Have you experienced "living water" flowing in your life? Is this an occasional occurrence or an ongoing experience?*

Prayer: *Come, Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with your love and guide our minds in such a way that we will learn to think and pray as God would have us.*

Lesson 7

Read: John 14:15-21

Jesus Teaching the Disciples about the Holy Spirit

Here Jesus is speaking to his disciples about the Holy Spirit who will be their Advocate forever. He promised them that the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit would be to lead them and all believers into all truth. It would have been difficult for the disciples to understand what Jesus was telling them, but we know they held onto the promise until everything had been revealed to them. Imagine the emotions the disciples must have experienced as Jesus spoke to them. Surely they sensed the urgency of our Lord's words spoken at this time, but they had to be confused when they heard him giving them warnings of his death.

The lesson for us today is to learn how to appropriate the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. There is a raging spiritual battle going on in the Church today between the secular and the sacred. There is a dividing wall between those who believe in the promise that God still speaks to His people for guidance and those who believe they can find all the solutions in their own minds. So it behooves those of us who still seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to persevere in prayer and fasting and to speak the truth in love whenever we are presented with an opportunity.

When I first discovered the availability of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in my life, it changed everything in terms of my approach to ministry. Before I had any teaching about the Holy Spirit, I was fearful of any kind of ministry as I felt totally inadequate to function as an ambassador for Christ. Then, as mentioned in the last lesson, I had the opportunity to sit at the feet of an Anglican priest from Canada who opened up an entire new dimension of the faith by teaching on the Holy Spirit. Suddenly, I began to understand how the various people I had been reading about in the Bible could do the things asked of them by God. They had learned to expect and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

The first ministry my wife and I took on after we received this teaching was to pray daily on our knees for the healing of our niece who had been born premature and the doctors had given her no chance to live. God healed her, and we learned the meaning of supernatural faith. Since then we have endeavored to stay attuned to guidance of the Holy Spirit when he wanted to bless and heal people through prayer.

R&D Can you recount a time in your life when you were absolutely certain God worked through you by the power of the Holy Spirit? Describe how God blessed you.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, may we rely more and more on your guidance when we are given the opportunity to minister with supernatural power only you can give.

Lesson 8

Read: John 14:22-31

Do Not Be Afraid, the Holy Spirit Will Be Your Teacher

The disciples were expecting Jesus to announce his kingship to the world. Instead, he was preparing them to announce to the world that the long awaited Messiah had come. He was counting on them to take up the mantle, aided by the Holy Spirit, and tell the world about the depth of God's love for them. Jesus made it clear that anyone who loved him would be loved unconditionally by the Father, and they would learn to be obedient out of the love relationship that was going to be established for all who came to faith.

The disciples were undoubtedly becoming exceedingly nervous by this time. They could not have imagined taking up the ministry of Jesus and sharing what they had learned and experienced to the whole world. When one considers the challenges that face us in the world today with the spiritual battle raging around us, our task seems equally formidable. We have this word out of the mouth of Jesus to give us courage, “So don’t be troubled or afraid. Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am.”

What is needed in the world to today is for God’s people to be willing to speak boldly about the claims of Christ. We are being crushed by an enemy that wants us to be politically correct in all things, and the key word in the minds of many people is their need to be inclusive. They see the Christian faith as being exclusive because Jesus said such things as “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” This statement made by Jesus is true because everyone is invited into a relationship with Jesus. The only pre-requisites are honest repentance of our sins, an acceptance of God’s perfect forgiveness, and a willingness to invite Jesus into our hearts and minds. We also need to tell people we have made this decision and live into a way of life that keeps us on a spiritual journey toward maturity in the faith.

So the same commands Jesus gave to his disciples as he was preparing to go to the Cross, he gives to each and every one of us today. We are to pray daily with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and expect him to direct our paths in such a way that we will be free to speak boldly about our love for Christ and proclaim his promises from the roof tops.

R&D Think about a time when you are absolutely certain God used you to touch a life and draw that person into a new way of living. How did it make you feel?

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and guide our thoughts, our prayers, our witness, and our actions in such a way that people would see Jesus in us.

Lesson 9

Read: John 16:5-15

Jesus Explains the Ministry of the Holy Spirit

There are three important challenges placed before the disciples and each of us as well through our Scripture lesson for today. First, we are told that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin and call it to repentance. It is obvious how far we as a society has slipped into a pattern of grievous sin. Just surf the channels on your television set and see how many programs are devoted to offerings of murder, sex, and violence. The sad part about this development is that we tend to think nothing of it and conclude this is the way it is in modern day society. As Christ’s disciples in our day, we can pray for the Holy Spirit to convict people of this pattern of sin, and likewise pray for a serious revival or renewal of the full Gospel message that the world as we know it will never be the same. We can pray for the day when our television stations will report God’s miracle and drop these degrading shows that only divert our minds from the truth. My wife and I often watch Christian programs as a healthy alternative.

Secondly, we are challenged to reveal and teach a standard of righteousness for all people who are drawn into a loving relationship with God through Jesus. In Galatians 5, we are presented with two lists; one describes the sins of the flesh that we are to avoid at all costs, and the other list presents us with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In Matthew, chapters 5 through 7, we have the heart of the teaching of

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount; and in these three chapters we have enough material to lead us into righteous living.

Thirdly, we are to proclaim to the world Christ's victory over Satan, the so-called prince of this world. Jesus is the Prince of Peace; and when he willingly went to the cross to take upon himself the sins of the world, he destroyed the power of Satan once and for all. However, the evil one can still get his clutches on believers who become complacent about the need to be obedient to the teachings of God's Word. So we are challenged to develop a *rule of life* whereby we make a plan to stay connected to our Triune God that can keep us on course. The minimum standard is to pray daily, worship weekly, study the Bible regularly, and stay in fellowship with an active community of faith.

R&D Describe your basic commitment to stay the course as a follower of Jesus.

Prayer: Almighty God, grant us Your grace day by day so that we will not become fair weather Christians, and help us become true ambassadors for the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Lesson 10

Read: Matthew 12:30-37

Do Not Blaspheme the Holy Spirit

When people close their minds to the possibility that God can influence the world for good and turn their backs on God altogether, they have sinned against the Holy Spirit. If unchecked, this becomes the unforgivable sin. In Matthew's Gospel this truth is stated this way: "Every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven—except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven. Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this world or the world to come" (v.32). This appears to be unequivocal for those who read this passage and ponder its significance.

People who are active followers of Jesus Christ need not concern themselves with the unforgivable sin. Jesus is referring to those people (in his day and in our day) who are actively opposed to the spread of God's kingdom. God has given Himself to us through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and has sent His Spirit into the Body of Christ (the Christian Church) and individual Christians that His will might be done on earth. The Pharisees had blasphemed against the Spirit by attributing the power by which Jesus performed miracles to Satan (v.24) instead of the Holy Spirit. This was an unpardonable sin because it was a deliberate rejection of the Spirit working within Jesus, and that rejection of the Spirit continues in our day.

Jesus is pretty tough on those who confuse good and evil and right from wrong. He said to his listeners, "You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say." The only one who can determine what is in our heart is ourselves, and if our hearts are one with God's heart then we can be sure we are going to produce good fruit for the kingdom. It is offensive to us when we hear someone take our Lord's name in vain, but we are told this sin can be forgiven. If, however, anyone stands defiantly against the Holy Spirit, it can lead to eternal damnation. We must remember the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead dwells in us and is not to be taken lightly.

R&D Can you think of anyone who has obviously committed the unforgivable sin? What kind of results did this person produce?

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, we honor you for your willingness to guide us into all truth, and we promise to call upon you to help us conduct ourselves in such a way that people would see Jesus in us.*

Lesson 11

Read: Luke 24:49; Acts 1:1-5

Jesus Commands the Disciples to Wait for the Power

After Jesus was raised from the dead, the disciples had some decisions to make as to their next steps. Sometime between the resurrection and the ascension, Jesus made it clear to the eleven that they were to stay in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. At first they were confused, but in due time they decided to be obedient to the Master's admonition, and they decided to go to the Temple and pray at the appointed times and anticipate their next steps. They wouldn't have had to look back too many days to call to mind the teaching Jesus presented them about the Holy Spirit.

There are times when we aren't sure what God wants us to do from day to day, so the best thing to do is pray in expectation that the Holy Spirit will show up with directions just as he did on the day of Pentecost for the disciples. A fellow priest recently shared a story about a ninety-two year old woman who invited him over for a cup of tea. She said to him after they shared some small talk that she was listening to his sermons about becoming mission oriented, and she just couldn't think of anything she could do at her age to build up the kingdom. "Well," he said, "I don't have the answers, but God does, so seek Him in prayer and He will give you some orders."

A couple of weeks went by and she invited my friend over for another cup of tea. This time she was overflowing with excitement because God had given her an idea. She identified eight people in the parish who were shut in and living alone, so she took it upon herself to call each one every morning with a cheery greeting, a Scripture reading, and a prayer. Then she was led to form a visitation ministry bringing tea and scones to people (you can tell she was British) and other members of the parish were her hands and feet. Yes, the Holy Spirit showed up and this devout woman lived out her days with a sense of satisfaction that lonely people were being cared for because she received guidance from God.

R&D *Have you received marching orders from the Holy Spirit? If so, explain. If not, what is it God might be calling you to do now?*

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, may we always be ready to receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit so we can be doing those things that would be most pleasing to You.*

Lesson 12

Read: Acts 2:1-13

The Day of Pentecost

Pentecost is the third most important Feast Day in the life of the Christian Church. On Easter we celebrate the resurrection, on Christmas we celebrate the incarnation, the word becoming flesh, and on the day of Pentecost we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The disciples were rewarded for their obedience by staying in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. They were gathered in the upper room with many other believers from many different backgrounds; there was the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and those gathered saw tongues of

fire dancing above the heads of one another. People began to speak in other tongues and everyone understood God speaking in their own native language.

Some of the people gathered were amazed and they felt the power of the Spirit flowing through them and around them. However, there are always the skeptics, and they were wondering if those who received the Spirit were drunk even though it was nine o'clock in the morning. Back in the late sixties, Dennis Bennett was the rector of a Church in Van Nuys, California. He experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and he began to speak in tongues just like the early believers. However, this caused a split in the congregation and eventually Dennis was asked to leave his pastorate. He wrote a book titled *Nine O'clock in the Morning*, and it helped to open the eyes and hearts of countless Christians to this phenomenon.

Since then believers throughout Christendom have discovered the power of the Holy Spirit in a way much like the first century believers, and it has had a huge impact on the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church worldwide. However, there are other influences in the Church that have tried to strip the Church of this power, and in many instances they have prevailed. It seems we are at a crossroads in the Church in this present age, and there is a spiritual battle raging both in the Church and the world. There are those who want to water down the Gospel so it doesn't offend people who belong to other religions and there are those who are convinced that Jesus came to set the captives free and everyone would benefit by receiving the gift of salvation. We should not be reluctant to spread the Gospel because God wants it spread to the uttermost parts of the world.

R&D Where do you stand on this divide that seems to dominate discussions about a Christian's responsibility to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus into this world to redeem us from sin and set us free, and thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit in our baptism who wants to empower us for effective ministry.

Lesson 13

Read: Acts 2:14-28

Peter Begins His First Sermon

Remember how Peter conducted himself before the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was compulsive and overconfident and fearful all at the same time. One moment he was guided by the Holy Spirit to proclaim Jesus to be the Messiah and the very next he tried to take charge of Jesus' life causing Jesus to exclaim, "Get thee behind me Satan." He was slow to fathom the significance of the Transfiguration of our Lord on the holy mountain. He suggested to James and John that they should build three booths, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah in order to make the event permanent for God. However, God wanted him to ponder His voice spoken from Heaven announcing that Jesus was in fact His well-beloved Son. Then Peter denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed on the morning of the crucifixion.

Well, after he was filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost he gave his first sermon and he was guided to draw on two Old Testament prophecies. The first one was from the book of Joel when God announced He would pour out His Spirit upon all people and He promised that everyone who called upon the name of Lord would be saved. It was clear that the believers would be given the Spirit permanently, which was not the case in the Old Testament. Then he drew on Psalm 16:8-

11, a psalm of David, promising those who trusted in the Lord in all things would be led into a way of life that would grant them peace and joy forever.

Peter made it clear that the Christian faith was based on the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the empty tomb. Nothing has changed in two thousand years. Our faith is given to us by God through the same knowledge we have of the resurrection and the empty tomb. It means that the sacrifice for our sins was made once and for all when Jesus took upon himself the sins of the whole world for those who believe in his name. It means we have the promise of eternal life and a relationship with God forever. It means we alone have the privilege of experiencing the freedom that comes through knowing Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior and knowing we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us by virtue of our baptism.

R&D How has your life changed as a result of inviting Jesus into your life and relying on the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for empowering Peter to preach with such amazing authority and power soon after he received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Lesson 14

Read: Acts 2:29-42

Peter's First Sermon, Part 2

This passage in the Acts of the Apostles is amazing. Peter spoke with such authority that I am sure he even surprised himself. His closing words were, “Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, and to your children and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” Then we are told that those who believed what Peter said were baptized—3,000 in all.

Just imagine one sermon and three thousand converts all wanting to be baptized. There are probably some preachers today who have preached three thousand sermons with no converts. However, there are some preachers who are exceptionally effective in preaching the “good news” and these are the ones we want to listen to and emulate. Nothing has changed in two thousand years except the culture, and today’s culture is anti-Christian in many parts of the world and even in our country. This means we need to be more energetic than ever in proclaiming the “good news” of Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected from the dead.

The last verse in today’s reading describes the response of the early believers. The Bible describes their actions in this one verse: “All the believers devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing their meals (including the Lord’s Supper) and to prayer.” This verse will help us to establish our minimal commitment to follow Jesus Christ in our journey of faith. We are called by God to pray daily, worship weekly, study God’s Word regularly, show up for teaching on the faith, and stay in fellowship with members of our community of faith.

R&D Do you have a “Rule of Life”? If not, break out a sheet of paper and write down your willingness to make time for God in your life.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for empowering Peter to preach such a powerful message to those gathered to hear his first sermon, and may You give us more preachers who can preach in such a way that millions more will come to faith.

Lesson 15

Read: Romans 8:1-17

Life in the Spirit

The Apostle Paul was definitely caught up in the Spirit when he wrote this chapter from his Epistle to the Romans. Many of the great themes of the New Testament are touched on in these seventeen verses. When we surrender our wills to God and seek His forgiveness, we are free and there is no condemnation whatsoever. We are set free from the domination of our sinful natures and drawn into a way of life that is controlled by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us if we have been baptized. Not only that but also we are promised the gift of eternal life, as we are told the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us and he will raise us to new life in Christ forever.

There is a battle waging in the lives of everyone born into this world. The temptation to succumb to our sinful natures is a powerful force, but the influence of the Holy Spirit is much more powerful once we learn to draw on his guidance. We have to make the choice as to how we want to live. There was an Indian chief who was counseling his grandson on this conflict within us. He said, "Inside all of us there are two wolves raging in a battle; there is a good wolf and bad wolf." The grandson said, "How do we know which one wins?" The Indian chief said, "It depends on which one you feed." This is precisely the challenge of the Christian life. If we spend time focusing on our great God, reading His Word, seeking Him in prayer, worshipping Him faithfully, seeking counsel from godly people, and attending opportunities to learn and grow in the faith, we are going to experience victorious living.

When we receive the Holy Spirit and acknowledge his power, then it is as if we have been adopted as God's children and we are free to call him "Abba" or "Daddy" if you like. This is an amazing promise as the Israelites were not even to mention YHWH by name as they believed it was blasphemy. Not only are we God's children, but also we are heirs of God's glory together with Christ. There is one more addition, however; we must be willing to share in Christ's suffering. There will be suffering because the enemies of Christ are setting their sights on us. But, as has been often said, we know how the Book ends and we can look forward to eternity with God.

R&D Are you sure you are living the "life of the Spirit" as described in the Epistle to the Romans? Explain.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, take charge of our lives so that we can live in the power of the resurrection offered to us through the Cross, and so we can be sure that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us and will usher us into the kingdom forever.

Lesson 16

Read: Romans 12:1-12

Natural Gifts of the Spirit

This is a very important passage of Scripture as it challenges us to seek God's grace in all things so we can be transformed into the person He wants us to be and not conformed to the behavior and customs of the world. Then we are to make an honest evaluation of ourselves so that we can discover the ways we can serve God. We do not have to have a degree in theology in order to serve God as some people think, but we are to measure ourselves by the depth of faith we have received. Each one of us in the Church is a member of the Body of Christ, and we all have God-given gifts that can be used to complete the whole to accomplish God's plan.

Paul explained that one gift may be that of service; and, if that is the case, we are to serve as well as we possibly can. If we have the gift of a teacher, then we need to step forward and offer that gift. If we have the gift of encouragement, then we are to use it in such a way that we bless others by affirming the way we see God using them. If we have the gift of generosity or the gift of leadership or the gift of showing kindness, step into those gifts and utilize them in the very best way imaginable. The most important gift is the gift of love, and if we discover God's love flowing through us, let it flow and let it bless the people God puts into our lives with His love flowing through us.

When I left the first parish I served, there was a woman who had lost her husband by suicide. Her grief was beyond explanation. She used to come to church dressed in black every Sunday for three years, sit in the back pew, and never come forward to receive communion. Fortunately, she finally worked her way through her grief and entered into communion with everyone else. She discovered she had the gift of hospitality and planted herself in the kitchen for every church function and managed the coffee station on Sunday morning. When I went back to help celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the church, she received the loudest ovation when her name was mentioned for her service in the church. Her gift was the gift of hospitality and she delighted in offering that gift every chance she had.

R&D Have you discovered your God-given gift or gifts? If so describe how you exercise your gift(s) to build up the Body of Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for gifting us with Your love and grace, and help us always to be faithful in exercising our gifts for Your glory with the guidance of Your Holy Spirit.

Lesson 17

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Supernatural Gifts of the Spirit

We serve an amazing God and there is so much to learn about the ways in which He wants us to minister to one another. The sum total of all the brokenness in the world is so great that it is beyond our imaginings. We can be sure God wants to heal each one of us, and the only way He can do it is through the commitment of members of His family of believers. In our last reading we were discussing the God-given gifts we possess because the Holy Spirit lives within us by virtue of our baptism. Today we have a list of particular, supernatural, gifts that are definitely more dramatic but equally as important. Usually these gifts are given to spiritually mature Christians in order for God to work in supernatural ways in the lives of those in need of healing or for guidance as how best to minister to someone in need.

Paul wrote, "To one person the Spirit gives wise advice, to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said."

In most mainline churches today these gifts are being glossed over as something given to the early Church alone, and they suppose they are too sophisticated to expect such gifts to be made manifest in this so-called "post-Christian era." This means, however, they have come to the

conclusion that they do not expect God to act supernaturally today. This is tragic because we know God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So these questions must be asked: Does God extend healing to people today? Does God grant supernatural faith to people today? Does God speak in unknown languages today to edify His people? The answer to these questions is absolutely and unwaveringly a “yes”. The reason we don’t see these gifts in operation today is because we don’t find many churches who think in terms of forming intentional communities where there is an expectation that God wants to act in power from day to day. However, there are such church communities where this is understood, and it would behoove us all if we looked to them for guidance and wisdom. Thereby we might also catch some of their enthusiasm for what God is doing and wants to do in our world.

R&D Are you familiar and comfortable with the supernatural gifts of the Spirit and are they being exercised in your church community? Explain.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and fill our hearts with an expectation that you want to work through us to extend God’s kingdom here on earth.

Lesson 18

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Love Is the Greatest Gift of the Spirit

Paul was definitely inspired to place this chapter about the supreme gift of love right between the two chapters devoted to the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. It is perfectly clear that the ultimate gift for all of God’s children is the supernatural gift of love, and if we do not grow in our ability to express love in our ministry, then we are doomed to a life of few meaningful relationships.

“Love is patient and kind,” wrote Paul, and we are challenged to examine our words and actions in relation to those around us. Then he wrote, “Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude,” and once again we must assess how we relate to those closest to us. He continued, “It (love) is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged,” and we try to identify if there are any resentments we might be carrying around in our hearts. Then he summarized that “Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” The amazing truth behind these love statements is that the Holy Spirit will lead us into an ability to love in such a manner.

There was an older woman I knew who was a true servant of God who willingly volunteered anywhere she thought she could be of assistance. She served on the altar guild, the church-women’s board, taught in the church school, and served on the vestry at various stages of her spiritual journey. However, when renewal came to her church she became quite upset when young women would come back from a Cursillo experience or a retreat or a parish renewal weekend and start bubbling over about their experience with the Holy Spirit. One day a young woman active in the church shared her experience with such joy and enthusiasm that the older woman kind of exploded. She said, “You seem to think you have something the rest of us don’t have, and I am tired of listening to you.”

The young woman was flabbergasted by this outburst, and she responded by saying, “I don’t understand your reaction because all of us want to be able to express the same gift of love you have exhibited ever since we met you; you are our model and we all aspire to be more like

you.” Suddenly, the older woman was free to enter into the joy of God’s miraculous way of changing lives and began to delight in the results.

R&D Are you encouraged whenever you see someone come into an awareness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and exercise some of the gifts, especially the gift of love?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with your incredible gift of love, so that we might bless others as you have blessed us.

Lesson 19

Read: 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

The Glory of the New Covenant

It is interesting to note that when Moses came down off Mount Sinai, his face was aglow with the glory of God, and his face was so bright the Israelites could not look at him unless he covered his face with a veil. Paul is saying that the Israelites were “veiled” from understanding the references to the Messiah in the Old Testament. When anyone becomes a Christian, the veil is taken away and we are given a freedom that most of the people in the world do not know. This is why non-believers are confused by and sometimes angered when they hear us speaking of the freedom we have in Christ. God wants to turn us into people who learn to reflect God’s glory wherever we go for the benefit of all people.

The glory we are given when we receive and acknowledge the Holy Spirit empowering us for service is much more excellent than the glory that shone on the face of Moses when he came off the mountain because it never fades away as it did with Moses. So when the veil is removed a new life is born. Thus, Paul wrote, “For the Lord is Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had the veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image” (vv.17-18).

There is a prison in Louisiana called the “Angola Prison” where almost all the prisoners are there on a life sentence. God poured out His Spirit on the inmates and almost all of them have had the veil removed from their eyes. They worship together, they pray together, and they come together for Bible studies. They learn all about pastoral care, and they are given assignments to minister to the sick and the dying. They have even developed a hospice program among the inmates. They were allowed to build a chapel and they have designated a space for a cemetery. When one of the inmates dies, they come together for a resurrection liturgy and gather around as their brother is lowered into the grave. Then they put a cross with the name as a headstone.

The main blessing these inmates receive is the blessing of getting out of the hell of “self” and into the lives of those who are suffering; and it gives them the kind of joy they never knew existed.

R&D Why do you think most of the other prisons in our country fail to look at this example as a model for them?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, thank you for removing the veil from our eyes and helping us to be continually changed into your image so people who know us will find that freedom you promise.

Lesson 20

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Becoming Ambassadors for Christ

This is one of the most compelling passages of Scripture describing our responsibility to spread the “Good News” of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are told that when we belong to Christ we become new people with new hearts and a renewed mind. When we make a confession of faith and mean it, we become brand new people as we reject the old life of sin and take up the new life in Christ. We are told again and again that faith is a gift, and it is safe to say it is a supernatural gift because it can only be described as coming from the one true God.

Paul wrote, “For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us the wonderful gift of reconciliation. So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God making his appeal through us.” (vv.19-20) Just imagine what it means to be an ambassador for Christ. It is privilege and an honor to speak of Jesus in such a way that everyone knows we are promoting the most important way of life imaginable. God wants to teach us how to be reconcilers in a world where people seem to like to play the blame game rather than seeking solutions.

The highest calling of all is to be a true ambassador for Christ. What is the main challenge of an ambassador of one country to another country? It is to present the best side of one’s own country to the citizens of the country where they serve. If an ambassador thinks for one minute that the country he is sent to is a more desirable place to be than the country he represents, he can no longer be an effective ambassador. So it is with being an ambassador for Christ; we must know in our hearts that “Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through him” (John 14:6). There are many people who hear this verse from John’s Gospel who find it an exclusive statement. However, it is actually the opposite because everyone is eligible to become a member of the family of God. There are no prerequisites other than repentance, acknowledging God’s forgiveness, and asking Jesus into our lives. So we need to learn to love in such a way that people will be drawn to the love of God not only by what we say but by the way we live and express ourselves.

R&D Grade yourself on how effective an ambassador you are for Christ and describe ways you might be able to improve.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, mold us and shape us more and more into the likeness of Jesus and give us a holy boldness to be the best ambassador we can be.

Lesson 21

Read: Galatians 5:16-26

Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit

This passage of Scripture is exceptionally important for this present time. It starts off with the best opening line imaginable, “So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves.” There are forces in the world today that are parading the sinful nature and putting down the call for us to live righteous lives as pleasing to the Lord. All you have to do is surf the television channels and you will have a firsthand glance of the influence Hollywood is having on our society. Then ponder the impact this has on the way family values are being devalued and how Christianity is being attacked in our country, and you are just touching the surface of the way our sinful natures are being exploited.

Paul provides us with a list of perversions that are abhorrent to God. Then, by contrast, he lists the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul wrote, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to the Cross and crucified them there.” So if we live by the Spirit, we will take on those qualities that please God and encourage those we love to seek a closer union with God. Why would anyone in their right mind want to shun the fruit of the Spirit and embrace the perversions listed in this passage?

God wants all of us. He wants us to surrender our wills to Him and give Him absolute authority over our lives. He wants our attention when we worship, when we pray, when we read the Scriptures, and when we share our faith with believers and non-believers. I remember a time when, in a Lenten study group, one of the members came into our place of meeting and said, “I made the best decision of my entire life today. I fired myself as being in charge of my life and put God in charge.” Well, there was no doubt that she had reached a turning point in her life, and everything changed for the good in her life from that day forward.

R&D Are you totally surrendered to God by continually seeking His will for you?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to surrender our hearts, minds, and our wills over to the direction of the Holy Spirit, and may we live in such a way that we please You with our words and actions for it is in Jesus' Name we pray.

Lesson 22

Read: Ephesians 1:3-14

The Holy Spirit Guarantees Spiritual Blessings

Imagine the insights into our great God provided for us in this short passage of Scripture. We are told God knew us before the world was created and implanted in us a desire to be holy and acceptable to Him. He decided in advance to adopt us as His own to be members of His family. He wants to pour His grace into our lives, and continually woos us to accept His unconditional love and choose Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He purchased our freedom through the blood Jesus shed for us on the Cross, which implies perfect forgiveness. He promises to shower us with kindness and wisdom and understanding.

The insight that intrigues me the most during this time in the history of the world is God's plan to bring everything together in heaven and on earth under the authority of Christ Jesus. Paul unites the Jews who became the first believers to put their trust in Jesus and the Gentiles who also heard the truth and responded to Christ as well. Even today there is a movement in the Church to rethink the position of the Jewish people within the family of God. However, in the eleventh and twelfth chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul makes it clear that we Christians must learn to love one another so completely that the Jews will want to accept Jesus as their Messiah out of sheer jealousy.

The last verse in this passage of Scripture is so uplifting, “The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.” Thankfully we live in an age in the Church where the Holy Spirit is understood to be the power behind all of God's plans to restore the whole universe to perfect order. The most important commitment any of us must make is to live the rest of our lives in anticipation of the fulfillment of these promises because we don't want to miss the miraculous moment when Christ returns in glory and draws all believers into a new existence. Yes,

the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of a new life in Christ, and the spiritual blessings we receive from him are miraculous in their nature and amazing in their ability to make all things new for all believers.

R&D Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to direct your life and reveal the promises of Scripture to you from day to day? Explain how the Holy Spirit guides your life.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, fill us with an awareness of your presence in our lives and help us to be attentive to your guidance and encouragement.

Lesson 23

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

The Holy Spirit, Provider of Our Truth

Paul was a source of encouragement to the early Christians and this Epistle is a perfect example. He was always ready to tell his readers how much God loved them and how they had been chosen to be His own. Here is the key verse: “For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true.” Then he reminded them how they had received the Holy Spirit with great joy, and he wanted them to look back through the suffering they had endured and draw strength from that memory.

We should always remember the joy we experienced when we first believed. Suddenly the world seemed different and our fears drifted into the background while we anticipated a life with purpose and direction. This is why it is a good thing to tell our stories when we are asked because it stirs up our faith as well as encourages others in their faith or perhaps it will lead them to an initial faith. We can remember how the Holy Spirit prompted us to listen when we first became attuned to the Gospel and then he helped us process what we had heard.

Early on in my journey of faith, the Holy Spirit showed my wife and me his power to heal. The very day my brother’s wife gave birth to their fourth child, an Anglican priest from Canada came into our lives. This little girl weighed 2 pounds, 11 ounces and she developed the hyland membrane disease. The doctors gave her no chance to live, but this priest prayed in the Spirit for her to be healed. When my wife reminded him that the doctors had given up on her, all he said was, “That is fine so when she is healed God will get all the credit.” This kind of faith was new to us at the time, but our niece was healed and today she is bright and productive with a wonderful husband and a beautiful daughter.

When we learn to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit, we discover the promises of Scripture are true for those who believe without doubting.

R&D Are you ready, willing, and able to share your faith when prompted by the Holy Spirit to do so? Explain a time when your testimony impacted someone in a significant way.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit into the world and into my life to empower me for faithful service to Jesus, my Lord and Savior.

Lesson 24

Read: 1 John 2:24-29

The Holy Spirit Will Protect Us from All Evil

We are living in a dangerous age, and it is reassuring to be reminded that the Holy Spirit will protect us from those things that are not of God. John reminded the early Christians that there would be many people who would try to lead them astray. When anyone has been steeped in a false religion, it is not easy to talk them into a new way of living in a relationship with Jesus. Remember how the artisans who manufactured false idols to sell reacted negatively to Paul's preaching and teaching. These people created many stumbling blocks for those who were searching for the truth.

John exhorted the people in this way, "You have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true—it is not a lie." This principle applies to us today. If we hear a message that does not align itself with the Word of God, then the Holy Spirit will prompt us to stand against it and that will result in protection from the evil one, namely Satan.

One time I was asked by my bishop to minister to a family after the husband, who was the father of two girls, had taken his life. The wife and two daughters were filled with fear and the older daughter was overcome by an evil presence in her life. A spiritually mature couple, who had fasted and prayed for a week, came with me, and at their suggestion we decided to start with a service of Holy Communion before we engaged in prayers for the older daughter. After the bread and wine had been consecrated, the older daughter began to shake all over and we asked her to say the name of Jesus but she couldn't do it. We went to her room to pray and she began to shake again, but in a short time she was able to say the name of Jesus. A wonderful peace came over her, and when we went back to the table to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, she was perfectly fine. The Holy Spirit had acted miraculously in her life and she was ready to begin a journey of faith.

This is just one example how the Holy Spirit will protect us from evil if we simply say the name of Jesus and receive his blessing and peace.

R&D Have you ever been in a place where you have sensed the presence of evil and you fell into fear? Explain what happened and how you dealt with it.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, may we always be prompted to call on your name, and may we be attuned to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to seek the protection you are always ready to give us

by H. David Wilson

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