
SESSION FOUR



Practicing the Spirit-Empowered Life

THE CHARISMATIC TRADITION

THE FOOTPRINTS OF GOD

After a few minutes of silent prayer, open with a time of sharing that the leader begins by reading this opening paragraph and answering the question posed.

At our last meeting each of us agreed to try one of the exercises in the Holiness Tradition. Let's share our experiences by answering the following question:

What did you learn about God and about yourself while doing the exercise?

JESUS AND THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED LIFE

Gospel Passage: John 14:15–17, 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–15

When everyone has had a chance to respond, ask a member to read this Scripture passage.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 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. . . .

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 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. . . .

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. . . .

"I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and

righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Have you ever had an advocate, someone who pleaded your case before an arbitrator or a referee—or a parent or a teacher? What did he or she do for you?

Reflection Question

THINKING IT THROUGH

The above paragraphs from the Gospel of John are known by biblical scholars as the five Paraclete sayings. The word translated "advocate" that Jesus uses to describe the Holy Spirit in these verses is from the Greek word *paraclete*. It originally meant "advocate" in the legal sense—one who pleads a client's case before a court. The root of the word means "to call alongside," which denotes the helping character of the Holy Spirit.

After a brief discussion, choose someone to read this section.

When Jesus tells his disciples that he must leave them, he directs them not to worry or to be afraid, because he is going to ask the Father to send the Spirit to be their advocate, their helper. These verses describe the origin, character, and work of the Holy Spirit. Looking closely at this passage, we begin to understand the nature and effect of the Holy Spirit in the life of every Christian.

First, we see that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He affirms what is good and pure and true and holy. However, the world—all those systems and people who base their beliefs on what can be measured and observed—cannot see the Spirit, so it doubts his existence. The invisible nature and work of the Holy Spirit makes it hard for people to believe he is real. But believers welcome the Spirit because he lives within them.

Second, the Holy Spirit functions as a teacher: he teaches believers "everything." We learn to pray with the help of the Holy Spirit. He helps us discern our spiritual gifts and then guides us in their proper use. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and more come into our lives through the Holy Spirit's teaching. Like our earthly teachers, the Spirit reminds us and corrects us.

Third, the Holy Spirit functions as a witness who "testifies" about Jesus Christ. When we hear the gospel, the "good news" that Jesus Christ was born, lived, died, and rose from the dead, the Holy Spirit witnesses to our spirit that the good news is true and prompts us to accept it.

Fourth, in addition to being an advocate who defends believers, the Holy Spirit is a prosecutor who will “prove the world wrong” about its relationship to God—particularly about “sin and righteousness and judgment.” We must always remember that it is the Spirit’s task to convict, not ours.

Fifth, the Holy Spirit does not speak on his own but only “whatever he hears” from the Father. He speaks of what is to come, gives honor to the Son, and passes on the things of Christ and God to the believer: “He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine.”

These passages provide a clear picture of the role and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The departure of Christ meant sorrow for the disciples, but Jesus pointed out to them, “It is to your advantage that I go away.” His departure meant that now, by the work of the Holy Spirit, all believers could have individual union with Christ. By this work each believer becomes a member of Christ’s spiritual body.

What’s more, the Spirit is now given to empower us in our ministry. The Spirit provides us with the ability to experience the abiding presence of God, receive all truth, hear the testimony concerning Christ, convict the world of its sin, and have authority over the fallen world. Though Christ’s departure grieved his disciples, it was necessary in order for the Holy Spirit to come and begin a new stage in the work of God.

Reflection Question

How do you understand the Holy Spirit’s work in your own life?

Have one member of the group read this entire section.

GOD AND THE CHARISMATIC TRADITION

The Holy Spirit has been called the forgotten person of the Trinity. Since its beginning on the day of Pentecost, the Church has believed in one God comprising three persons—“God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit”—but the Holy Spirit, an equal in the Trinity, is often neglected. We pray to God the Father in the name and authority of Jesus, the Son, and often forget the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

This is tragic. From the standpoint of God (as seen through the words of Jesus), the Holy Spirit *is* God—in particular, God at work in the Christian. What God the Father and God the Son began, God the Spirit continues and completes. In Michelangelo’s famous painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, God is reaching out his life-giving hand to Adam and Adam is extending his hand in response. However, their fingers never quite touch. The Holy Spirit is this missing touch of God. The distance between God and his people is bridged by the Holy Spirit so that we actually become one with God.

As believers, we are temples in whom the Holy Spirit dwells (see 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16). We are empowered by the Spirit to share the gospel that convicts and converts, to bear the fruit of the gospel in our lives (Gal. 5:22), and to exercise special gifts that enable us to build up the Church (1 Cor. 12:1–11).

God has chosen to empower those who witness about Christ, and to convict and convince those who listen to them. He has chosen to endow men and women with specific and necessary abilities that build the body of Christ, or his Church.

Most of all, he has chosen to cultivate the gospel soil of people's lives so that they bear spiritual fruit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22). Without the fruit of the Spirit, the special gifts are like a "clanging cymbal" that makes noise but has no value (1 Cor. 13:1). God lives with his people through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit empowers believers. God, as Spirit, dwells in each of us. It is our job to surrender ourselves to the awesome work of the Holy Spirit and to engage in activities that enable the Spirit to equip and empower us.

Of the Holy Spirit's fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control), which has grown and matured in your life? Which has yet to bloom and grow?

Reflection Question

Allow each person a few moments to respond to this question.

WHAT IS THE CHARISMATIC TRADITION?

Without the Holy Spirit it would be impossible to practice the Six Traditions. As we have seen above, God works in the believer through the person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit spurs the believer to pray and meditate (the focus of the Contemplative Tradition); to seek a virtuous life (the Holiness Tradition); to exercise mercy and compassion to one another (the Social Justice Tradition); to proclaim the gospel as found in the Scriptures (the Evangelical Tradition), and to promote harmony between our faith and our work (the Incarnational Tradition). However, many of us try to become faithful disciples on our own, without the power of the Holy Spirit. The vital, exciting, electrifying work of the Holy Spirit is missing in our lives. Much of our struggle with temptation and sin, along with much of our failure to live joyful, whole lives, can be traced to our unwillingness to welcome the Holy Spirit.

The Charismatic Tradition reminds us that the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential in the Christian life. The word "charismatic" comes from the Greek word *charism*, which means "gift." Charismatic movements have always demonstrated the active work of God in people's lives in ways that make others envious or distrustful. It is here that we should note that the Charismatic Tradition (like the other Traditions) is often characterized by excess and sham. This has led many in the Church to split away and form groups that fit their particular beliefs concerning which gifts are still exercised. This is a shame.

The truth of the matter is this: God wants to be active in our lives; to endow us with supernatural abilities; to see us live with love, joy, peace, and

As before, have a member read this entire section.

so on. Jesus made it clear that the Holy Spirit would be sent so that he might live within us, uniting us in his body. All of us should be able to give testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives—not just those who are “charismatic” or “pentecostal.” Our present task is to find ways to open ourselves to the energizing work of the living God.

Reflection Question

Give each member a chance to respond to this question if he or she wishes.

Which of the following best describes the work of the Spirit in your life? Explain your selection.

- The Spirit has not been a major part of my spiritual life.
- I am beginning to see signs of the Spirit's presence in my life.
- The Spirit is an integral part of my spiritual life.

Again, choose a member to read these paragraphs.

PRACTICING THE CHARISMATIC TRADITION

The Holy Spirit is received, not grasped. Neither can we coerce or bribe the Holy Spirit. In fact, many of our efforts only impede the work of the Spirit. In this sense, practicing the disciplines of the Charismatic Tradition is different from practicing those of the other five Traditions. But there are things we can do, activities that God expects us to undertake, so that the Spirit can mold and shape our lives.

To experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we begin by doing two things. First, we ask for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). God waits for us to pray for the Spirit before he sends the One whose presence is a gift to those who simply ask. Second, we practice the discipline of waiting (Ps. 40:1). When we pray for the Spirit, we are not praying for an answer; we are asking God to enter us, to fill us with his presence, his thoughts, his words. This requires the kind of passion that takes the form of patient waiting.

What kinds of things can we expect when the Holy Spirit begins to work in our lives? While it is true that the Lord works in mysterious ways, the Bible notes several distinct ways the Spirit will work in our hearts and minds and in the lives of other people. The Holy Spirit . . .

- Gives us a sense of our unity with Christ
- Leads us into all truth
- Helps us worship God
- Guides our decision-making
- Illuminates our Bible study
- Motivates us to action
- Gives us the right words as we share our faith with others
- Softens the minds and hearts of those with whom we share our faith

These are works of the Spirit all of us can expect to see as we open ourselves to him. As you do your chosen exercise this week, be sensitive to the

inner attitudes, thoughts, and feelings you are experiencing. You most likely will see God at work in ways you have never noticed before. One final caution: do not expect dramatic results or instant change. While there are many genuine works of the Holy Spirit that are immediate and life-changing, these experiences are the exception, not the rule. The Spirit works primarily by shaping the way we think, and this takes time. For example, I may pray, "Lord, give me patience—and give it to me now!" While I may desperately want to be patient, it will take time for this fruit of the Spirit to blossom and grow in my life. The fact that I desire to have more patience shows me that the Spirit is already at work, and it is my task to begin doing things that will develop the fruit. Genuine change takes time.

EXERCISES IN THE CHARISMATIC TRADITION

1. *Yield to the work of the Spirit.*

Spend one hour in prayer this week specifically asking for the Spirit to begin working in your life in a new and powerful way. Remember, you are seeking God. Make no demands; have no expectations. Your only task is to surrender yourself to God, to open the door so that the Spirit can come in and begin changing the way you think and live. This may lead to a time of confession.

2. *Nurture the fruit of the Spirit.*

Galatians 5:22 lists nine virtues called the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. They are listed in contrast with the "works of the flesh": fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, and so on (Gal. 5:19–21). While the fruit of the Spirit slips in unawares, Paul says we are responsible for living by the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit, which helps the fruit grow (Gal. 5:25).

Set aside fifteen minutes a day to meditate on the fruit of the Spirit. Ask God to show you which virtue needs to be more evident in your life. Then ask the Holy Spirit to begin working in your mind and heart, knowing that change will come through sustained communion with God.

3. *Discover your spiritual gifts.*

First Corinthians 12:8–10 lists nine gifts of the Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. Some people have argued that some of these particular gifts are no longer needed in the Church, but most feel that the Church still needs them. Explore these gifts through prayer, asking God to guide you to a gift (or perhaps more than one) that may be neglected and needs to be stirred up in your life or the life of your church fellowship (1 Tim. 4:14).

Have each member read over the exercises silently, or have members read them aloud, one at a time. Spend a few moments considering them as each person chooses the exercise he or she will do before the next meeting.

Read the Scriptures that refer to spiritual gifts, beginning with Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12–14:25, and Ephesians 4:11–13. Donald Gee's book *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* is an excellent, balanced introduction to the gifts of the Spirit. Stay open to God's desire to build up, heal, and minister to the Church in all her expressions.

4. *Read the Scriptures with the Holy Spirit.*
The Holy Spirit opens our mind when we read the Bible, making us receptive to its message. More specifically, the Spirit helps us understand what the text is saying to us personally and applies its message to our particular situation. Select a passage from the Bible to reflect on. As you read, ask the Holy Spirit to highlight a verse or word that is specifically meant for you to hear. When you have discovered what God wants you to hear, spend ten to fifteen minutes reflecting on why that verse or word impressed you and what lesson you need to learn from it.
5. *Listen to the Advocate when making decisions.*
One of the most important and basic ministries of the Holy Spirit is to provide guidance (Rom. 8:14, Gal. 5:25). Do you need to make an important decision? Seek the Spirit—your Advocate—to help you. Here's how: take your concern to God in prayer. Ask God to give you direction, insight, leading. That direction may take the form of an intuitive sense; it may be a friend's advice that you sense comes from God; or it may be a door of opportunity opening or closing. In all decisions, test the Spirit by examining the Scriptures. The Spirit of God will never lead you into a decision that is contrary to the principles and commandments found in the Bible.

ENDING AND BEGINNING

Allow each member time to share which of the above exercises he or she plans to do during the week. Encourage each other in this venture. After everyone has shared, join hands in a circle and pray the Lord's Prayer aloud and in unison.

Ask for a volunteer to lead the next meeting.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.