



By Reverend John Blanksby

COME, HOLY SPIRIT

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Introduction

“Come, Holy Spirit” is a series of 7 studies designed to help us reflect on some of the Scriptures set for consideration in Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary for the 7 Sundays beginning on Trinity Sunday.

The material contains helpful suggestions for individual reflection. It could also form the basis for discussions in small groups over 7 weeks. The studies could be used in parallel with a 7 week preaching series by congregations who follow the lectionary.

I am nearly 80 years old and for at least the first 40 of those years I had a very limited appreciation of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. But that all changed when I yielded control of my life to the Holy Spirit and developed a close personal relationship with him. In preparing these studies, the challenge for me has been to curb my enthusiasm and limit the studies to manageable proportions.

I greatly appreciate those who have encouraged me and prayed for me during the preparation of the studies. I acknowledge the support of Rev David Hoffman. I appreciate the invaluable work of Lara Apollonio in formatting the text and her wonderful artwork. Thank you also to Laurena Apollonio for her editorial support. I have especially valued the constructive suggestions of my dear wife Helen.

I encourage you to pray as you begin each study that you will be open to whatever the Holy Spirit has for you.

John Blanksby // Winter 2020

One: Person of the Holy Spirit

Last year, I went on a tour of Parliament House on North Terrace in Adelaide. We were shown around by our local member. She spent 2 or 3 hours with us showing us the buildings. She explained the processes of how the Lower House and the Upper House worked. She responded warmly to our individual questions. I came home that day feeling that she is no longer a remote figure whose face I had seen on election posters. I felt that I knew her as a person. I could comfortably talk to her about issues that were important to me.

In days gone by, the Holy Spirit was usually referred to as the Holy Ghost—a title which suggests mystery and remoteness. The aim of this study is to help us to realise that the Holy Spirit is a person who is around us and dwells within us—someone with whom we can have an intimate relationship.

- What was your earliest impression of who the Holy Spirit is?
- How has that understanding changed over time?
- In what way is it helpful to think of the Holy Spirit as a person?

The Trinity

God is three persons. In the first centuries of the Christian Church, there were long discussions in the Councils of the Church about the way God is revealed in three persons.

Our God is one God. But God is revealed in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

They are three different expressions of the one God. Various attempts have been made to illustrate this each with its own insights and its own drawbacks.

For example: Ice, liquid water and steam are 3 different forms of the one substance. We can experience a candle in 3 ways— a waxy solid, something which gives out light, and something which gives out heat. Perhaps you know of a different illustration.

The Father is God.

The Son is God.

The Holy Spirit is God.

One God, three persons.

Ultimately this became known as the doctrine of the Trinity.



Q How would you explain the Trinity to someone who asked you?

Q Which of the above illustrations do you find most helpful

The Baptism of Jesus

Read Matthew 3: 13 to 17.

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’

In this passage, all three persons of the Trinity are present and active.

God the Father speaks.

God the Son is baptized.

God the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus.

God is one, yet in three persons. This is an amazing mystery.

The Holy Spirit as Counsellor

Michael wanted to be a lawyer.

He was nearing the end of Year 11 at School, and needed some advice about what would be the subjects he should choose for Year 12 to put him in the best position to undertake a university course in law. Michael made an appointment to see the student counsellor at the school to discuss the matter.

Q Have you ever had to consult a counsellor about anything? (e.g. employment, your health, relationship issues). What do you remember about the experience?

Q Did you find it helpful

On the night before he died, Jesus told his disciples that he would ask his Father to send the Holy Spirit as Counsellor.

“If you love me you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever- the Spirit of Truth.” (John 14:15-17a).

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14: 25-26).

The Greek word which has been translated Counsellor is Parakletos which literally means “one called alongside to help in times of need”.

Q How does it feel for you to know that God the Holy Spirit- not just a vague force, but a person with whom you can have an intimate relationship-is available to you 24/7 to support and strengthen and help you?

Q Can you think of a recent occasion when you have experienced the Holy Spirit as Counsellor?

The Great Commission

Q What is the toughest thing you have had to face this year?

Q How did you work through it?

Q What help did you draw on?

In the final verses of Matthew's Gospel, we find Jesus sending his disciples out into the world to pass on the good news and to disciple others. These verses are often called "The Great Commission".

Jesus said to them:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
(Matthew 28: 18b-20)

But with the assignment comes an incredible promise

"and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age".

Q What is your role in making disciples?

Q To whom is Jesus sending you?

Reflection

Set aside an hour in the coming week when you can sit in a quiet place to reflect on your understanding of the Holy Spirit as a person.

What changes might you want to make

- In the way you pray
- In the way you listen to the Spirit?

Q How can you discern who the Spirit is sending you to? Maybe you already have such a person on your heart.

Two: The Work of the Holy Spirit

Sometimes we feel totally overwhelmed by things happening around us.

It was a particularly rough plane flight. Mary became very airsick. She slumped forward, holding the brown paper bag to her mouth in readiness. The steward came to her aid. He brought a warm flannel to wipe her face and a glass of water. He offered her words of encouragement. He helped her sit upright in her seat. He gave her some gum to chew. And before long she was feeling much better.

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is sometimes called “The Helper”, “The Counsellor” “The Comforter”. “The Comforter” means one who makes us strong. These are different translations of the Greek word *parakletos*, which as we saw in study 1 literally means “one called alongside to help in times of need”.

Q Can you recall an occasion recently when you felt “swamped” and in need of help?

Q Since last week, have you recalled any other occasions when you have experienced the Holy Spirit as “one called alongside to help”?

This week we undertake a systematic study of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Transformation of the Spirit

Michael Green tells the story of a man who visited a paper factory in England which produced the finest stationery in the world. He was shown a huge pile of old rags and told that they were to be converted into quality writing paper. He struggled to believe it. But a few weeks later, he received in the mail a package of the most handsome paper with his initials embossed on it. On the top piece were written the words “Dirty rags transformed”.

Our conversion is a spiritual experience in which the dirty rags of our lives are transformed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus talks about this as an experience of being born again.

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again"
(John 3:3)

- Some people can identify a precise moment when this occurred. (e.g. in a church service, at an Easter Camp, or at a Billy Graham crusade.
- For others the transformation took place gradually over a period of time, even many years.
- Yet others may regard themselves as spiritually seeking

Q What was your experience like?

Convicts Us of Sin

The Holy Spirit knows us better than we know ourselves. He shows us our lostness and brings us to repentance.

Has the Holy Spirit convicted you of sin in your life recently, and shown you areas of your life which Jesus wants you to yield to his control.

Softens the Heart

The Holy Spirit lives within the believer, enabling us to live the life for which we were created (Ezekiel 36: 26-27).

The Holy Spirit softens our heart.

Assurance of Belonging to God

The Holy Spirit gives us the assurance that we belong to God

(Romans 8: 14-16). *"The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children".*
(Verse 16)

Some people use the words of a song when they need to remind themselves that they are a child of God and very precious to him.

For example:

"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine:

O what a foretaste of glory divine.

Heir of salvation, purchase of God;

Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood" (Frances van Alstyne)

Q When you are facing a difficult time, how do you remind yourself that you are a child of God?

Q Is there a particular song or Bible verse which you would find helpful?

Strength

The Holy Spirit strengthens us. (Ephesians 3: 16)

He empowers and equips us for the whole of life.

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being”

Malcolm was in his first year of teaching in a big high school. At a school assembly, the principal made a statement about school policy which ran quite contrary to Malcolm's Christian beliefs. He felt prompted to challenge the principal but he was very nervous. He confided in another teacher who he knew was a Christian. They prayed together about it. Then Malcolm went and shared his concern with the principal.

Q Can you think of an occasion when the Holy Spirit has given you the courage to speak out?

The Holy Spirit illuminates truth (John 16:12 to 15).

The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible (2 Timothy 3: 16-17).

The Holy Spirit shows us what the Bible means.

i.e. The Holy Spirit applies Scripture personally to our lives.

Can you recall an occasion when you were reading the Bible and the Holy Spirit spoke to you?

Sometimes the Holy Spirit gives to the church a new vision or a new prophetic word. This vision or prophetic word must never contradict the written word of Scripture, but it may be God's way of helping the church to understand God's calling in a new way.

Some years ago, St Matthew's Church set aside a team of people who were committed to listening prayer to meet monthly to wait on God to seek God's vision for their church. In the silence the Holy Spirit would reveal to the Visioning Team an image, a scripture or a prophetic word for St Mathews. The team would pass on what they had perceived to the church leadership for testing and implementation.

Q Has your church ever received a vision or a prophetic word like this?

Q How was it received?

Q How was it tested by the leadership of the church?

Revelation and Inspiration

The Holy Spirit reveals Christ. (John 15: 26 and John 16: 14)

The Spirit teaches us about Jesus and brings to our remembrance what Jesus said and did.

The Holy Spirit inspires prayer. (Romans 8: 26-27)

The Holy Spirit helps us to pray because he understands our weakness.

"In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (verse 26)

Tom's friend Miles was seriously ill. But Miles was overseas and Tom could not visit him. He promised Miles over the phone that he would pray for him. When Tom came to do this, he could not find words that seemed right. As he sat pondering in silence, the Holy Spirit prompted him to visualize Miles in a wheelchair which he found himself pushing into the presence of Jesus. And as he watched, Jesus reached out, placed his hand on Miles' shoulder, and blessed him.

Q Have you been conscious of the work of the Spirit in your prayer life?

Q Have you ever allowed the Holy Spirit to help you to pray in a creative way when words fail you?

Reflection

Try to set aside some quiet time on your own to reflect on the things that this study raises about the work of the Holy Spirit.

Q Is there one aspect of the work of the Spirit which has given you significant new insights?

Q What changes might this lead to in your life? If appropriate, find someone to share with.

Three: The Fruit of the Spirit

In this study we are thinking about living fruitful lives.

The Town Hall was packed for a symphony concert. A distinguished overseas conductor was leading the orchestra with great gusto. After several minutes of the orchestra playing loudly and enthusiastically, there came a point where the score called for several bars of silence. And in that silence the audience clearly heard someone say to their neighbour: "We had oysters for lunch".

The point is that the Spirit speaks to us in the silence, but often we fail to hear him because we are engrossed in the noisy din of all our busy activities.

Jesus illustrated this when he spoke about the vine and the branches.

Read John 15: 1-5

Jesus said: *"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." (verse 4)*

He went on to say:

"I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man (person) remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (verse 5)

It is through the Holy Spirit that we remain connected to the vine (Jesus).

It is through the Holy Spirit that we grow in spiritual maturity.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives so that we may bear spiritual fruit. But in order for the Spirit to do this, we need to cultivate an intimate relationship with him.

This in turn requires us to seek space in the midst of our hectic round of activities.

Q What might this look like in practical terms in your life?

The Fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit are the Christ-like qualities in us which the Holy Spirit produces. One list of these Christ-like qualities is found in **Galatians 5:22-23**, **read these verses 2 or 3 times**.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control".

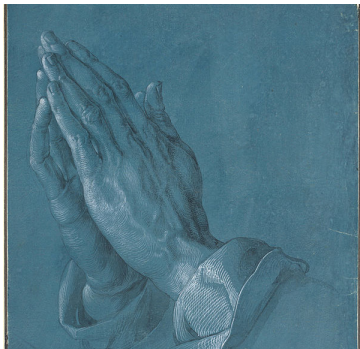
Let us consider the list in Galatians, remembering that the more we yield our lives to the control of the Holy Spirit, the more of these qualities he will produce in us.

Love

In the late 15th century, two struggling young art students, Albrecht Durer and Franz Knigstein, worked as labourers to earn money so they could continue their art studies. They worked long hours and it left them little time to study art. Finally, they decided to draw lots and let the loser support both of them while the other continued his studies. Albrecht won. He agreed, if he attained success, then he would support Franz so that he could finish his studies.

After Albrecht's success, he returned to keep his part of the bargain. He soon discovered the great sacrifice his friend had made for him. As Franz had worked at hard labour, his fingers had become twisted and stiff. His long, sensitive hands had been ruined for life. He could no longer manage the delicate brush strokes so necessary to execute fine paintings. In spite of the price he paid, Franz was not bitter. He was happy his friend Albrecht had gained success.

One day, Albrecht saw his loyal friend kneeling, his rough, gnarled hands entwined in prayer. Albrecht sketched his friend's hands. From this sketch he later completed a truly great masterpiece. He gave it the moving title "The Praying Hands".



Albrecht Dürer c. 1508.
"Praying Hands", 29.1 cm × 19.7 cm

Q The first fruit of the Spirit is the self-sacrificing servant love which Jesus showed and which ultimately took him to the cross for our sakes. Can you think of someone who has shown you this same self-sacrificing, unconditional love

Joy

The joy about which Paul writes is not a mere sense of happiness because things are going well for us. Nor is it the frothy superficial “Smile, Jesus loves you”. Rather it is the joy of Christ’s reign in our lives, which leads to a deep, abiding contentment, independent of our circumstances.

One afternoon when we were living in Murray Bridge, I was taken to hospital with intense, undiagnosed pain. I spent all night in agony, hooked up to all sorts of monitors. In the morning, our older son came into the ward. He brought a tape recorder and played me some moving Christian songs by Keith Green. Suddenly I was overwhelmed by a deep sense of joy arising out of my son’s love for me.

Q Can you recall an occasion when you faced difficult circumstances yet you experienced a deep joy whose origin was in the Spirit of God? It may have been expressed through a person or perhaps through God’s Word?

Peace

This is not the same as the absence of trouble.

It is a sense of wholeness, security and well-being in the midst of whatever is happening because our lives are in God’s hands. One helpful image is that of a bird sitting on a nest set in the rock behind a raging waterfall.

Jesus said to his disciples the night before he died:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”.

(John 14: 27)

Can you think of any other Bible verse which speaks of this peace? Or maybe a song?

“Peace, perfect peace, the future all unknown.

Jesus we know, and he is on the throne”

(Edward Bickersteth)



Patience (or long suffering)

A woman's car died at a stop sign and would not start. The driver behind her honked his horn incessantly. The lady helped him find patience by walking back to his car and saying "I can't seem to get my car started. Would you please see if you can start it while I sit here and lean on your horn?"

We need to be tolerant of each other's faults. We need to endure suffering in the way in which Christ did for us on the cross- not retaliating to insults, but loving, forbearing. *"When they hurled insults at him he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead, He entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* (1 Peter 2:23)

Kindness

When Paul speaks of kindness he means something more significant than helping old ladies across the road.

We see Christian kindness in the parables which Jesus told. (e.g. the parable of the good Samaritan. Luke 10: 25-37)

It is also seen in Jesus cutting across social customs to help outcasts such as Zacchaeus. (Luke 19: 1-10)

Q Have you experienced helping someone on the margins of society?

Goodness

Read 1 Peter 2:11-12 and see what it says about goodness.

Gentleness

This word speaks of a spirit that is submissive to God, teachable in all things, and considerate of others. The same word is used of a horse which has been tamed and brought under control. The idea is not one of weakness, but of strength which is willing to be led and directed by the Spirit.

Is this fruit of the Spirit evident in your life?

In Galatians 5: 25, Paul writes *"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"* Imagine soldiers marching, keeping in step with a drum.

Reflection

Perhaps in the coming week you can make time to think about the remaining two fruits of the Spirit that we have not yet considered.

Faithfulness

Read Matthew 25: 14-20

God gives each of us tasks to do. If we are reliable and trustworthy in the small things, he will trust us with greater responsibilities. On the last day, we will all be called upon to give an account of our faithfulness.

Self-Control

Read 1 Corinthians 9: 24-27

Paul likens self-control to an athlete's discipline of his body.

Self-control is not control by self but control of self by the Holy Spirit.

Q In conclusion, you might like to reflect on which of the nine fruit of the Spirit others would see most in you. Which would they see least?

Four: The Gifts of the Spirit

When did someone last give you a gift?

How did you feel about receiving it?

Can you recall ever sitting around the Christmas tree with your family as members opened their presents? Did you ever feel jealous that someone else received a present which you thought was better than yours?

Our study this week is not about material gifts but about spiritual gifts.

One person has defined spiritual gifts in this way

“Spiritual gifts are special abilities distributed by the Holy Spirit to every believer according to God’s design and grace for the common good of the body of Christ (i.e. the church).”

Read John 15: 1-5

There are 4 New Testament passages which contain the principal listings of spiritual gifts.

Romans 12: 6-8, which lists

Prophecy	Serving	Teaching
Encouraging	Giving	Leadership
Mercy		

1 Corinthians 12: 8-10

Wisdom	Knowledge	Faith
Healing	Miracles	Prophecy
Distinguishing between spirits	Speaking in tongues	
Interpretation of tongues		

Ephesians 4: 11

Apostleship	Prophecy	Evangelism
Pastoring	Teaching	

1 Peter 4: 11

Speaking	Serving
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In the young church in Corinth, the issue of spiritual gifts had become very divisive. Some people were flaunting their particular spiritual gifts, and looking down on others who they considered had lesser gifts. Paul tackles this issue in chapters 12, 13, and 14 of 1 Corinthians.

Basic Principles about Spiritual Gifts

Let us consider some fundamental principles about spiritual gifts.

The Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual gifts. *“All these (i.e. spiritual gifts) are the work of one and the same Spirit”. (1 Corinthians 12: 11a)*

Every Christian has at least one gift. But we each have different gifts. *“And he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12: 11b).*

Spiritual gifts are not given for our own glory. They are freely given, not something we have earned or achieved.

Spiritual gifts are given to equip us for service and to build up the church. After listing five spiritual gifts, Paul says that these gifts are given: *“to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”(Ephesians 4: 12)*

No spiritual gift is more important than any other. We ought not covet each other’s gifts.

“So, there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Corinthians 12: 25)

Spiritual gifts are of no value unless they are exercised in love. This is the whole thrust of 1 Corinthians chapter 13, which begins:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have the faith to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” (verses 1 and 2)

The fruit of the Spirit take priority over spiritual gifts. The fruit is the best evidence of a Spirit-filled life. All the fruit should be growing in every Christian, but the spiritual gifts are shared among the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are not the same as natural abilities. Natural abilities are given to each of us at birth. Spiritual gifts are given as we yield our lives to the control of the Holy Spirit. Yet the two can be related. For example:

In all her years growing up, Mary had been recognized as a good singer. But at an Easter Camp, Mary had given her life to the Jesus and had experienced an infilling of the Holy Spirit. Now when she stood up to lead worship, her whole face lit up, and people could feel God’s love radiating from her. Her singing had been transformed into a spiritual gift.

We need each other’s help to identify our spiritual gifts. Words of encouragement can be part of this. Sometimes we may choose to ask one or two mature Christians who know us well to tell us about any spiritual gifts they see in us.

A List of Spiritual Gifts

Different people have looked at the Bible and tried to come up with a list of spiritual gifts. It is probably best if we treat any list as representative rather than exhaustive. Here is one such list, together with appropriate Bible references, which you can look up at your leisure.

Administration The divine ability to create and implement effective plans and steer the body towards God-given goals. (1 Corinthians 12:28, Acts 6: 1-7).

Apostleship Sent forth by the Spirit to new frontiers to begin and oversee the development of new churches. (Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12: 28)

Craftsmanship The divine enablement to creatively design or construct items to be used in ministry (Exodus 31:3)

Creative Communication The Spirit inspired ability to communicate God's message through music, art, drama etc. (Psalm 150:3-5)

Discernment The capacity to distinguish the source of a spiritual manifestation-whether it comes from a good or evil spirit. (1 Corinthians 12: 10, Acts 16: 16-18)

Encouragement The ability to motivate Christians to patient endurance, brotherly love and good works. (Romans 12:8, Acts 11;19-30)

Evangelism Communicating the gospel to unbelievers so that they respond in faith and move towards discipleship. (Ephesians 4:11, Acts 8: 5-8)

Faith All Christians have saving faith. The faith referred to here is a strong confidence in God's promises that can overcome obstacles and move mountains. (1 Corinthians 12:9, Acts 27: 21-26)

Giving Sharing what you have generously and cheerfully for the work of the Lord. (Romans 12:8, 2 Corinthians 8:1-7, 9:2, 6-8)

Healing Being an agent through whom The Spirit makes people whole, either physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. (1 Corinthians 12:9, Acts 3:1-10)

Helps The divine enablement to accomplish practical tasks to free up others for their particular ministry. (1 Corinthians 12:28, Acts 9:36)

Hospitality Caring for people by providing food and shelter. Warmly welcoming people, even strangers, into your home. (Romans 12:9-13)

Intercession Praying constantly and effectively for the needs of others. (1 Timothy 2:1-2, Colossians 1:9-12)

Interpretation Making known, in the language of the people, a message given in tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:10)

Knowledge Bringing truth through a divine insight or Scripture. (1 Corinthians 12:8, Acts 5:1-11)

Leadership To perceive visions and see goals, and to get others motivated to accomplish these goals. (Romans 12:8, Acts 15: 7-11)

Mercy A ministry of visitation, prayer, and compassion to the poor and needy. (Romans 12:8)

Miracles To be enabled by God to perform mighty deeds which witnesses acknowledge to be of supernatural origin. (1 Corinthians 12:10, Acts 9: 36-42)

Prophecy The divine enablement to reveal truth and proclaim it in a timely and relevant manner. (Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12;10,28)

Shepherding, Pastoring To be responsible for spiritually caring for, protecting, guiding and feeding a group of believers entrusted to one's care. (Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 5:1-3)

Teaching Enabling others to understand and apply God's Word. (Ephesians 4:11, Acts 18: 24-28)

Tongues The supernatural ability to speak in an unlearned language, given by the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:10, 14: 13-19, Acts 2: 1-13)

Wisdom A God-given awareness and understanding of issues, especially in the life of the church, and the sensitivity to give advice at the right time. (1 Corinthians 12:8)

Identifying our Spiritual Gifts

- Spend a few minutes prayerfully reviewing the list of spiritual gifts. Write down here any gifts you see in yourself.

- Speak to two people who know you well, and invite them to suggest what gifts they see in you. If you are doing this study with a small group, you might ask members of your small group to answer this question.

If you wish to undertake a more thorough assessment of your spiritual gifts, you might like to visit your Christian bookshop and purchase a copy of “Discovering your Spiritual Gifts the Network Way” by Bruce Bugbee.

Using our Spiritual Gifts

Bill was desperate to find work. He noticed that the local zoo was advertising that it needed help. When he arrived, he discovered that the zoo's gorilla had died, and they wanted someone to put on a costume and impersonate a gorilla. Money was tight, so he took the job. All went well for a while. He started to swing from tree to tree. But then he got too enthusiastic and went flying into the lion's den. He was terrified and started shouting “Help! Help!”. The lion leaned over and said “Stop that screaming, or we will both lose our jobs”.

Bill, in his eagerness to be gainfully employed had accepted a job for which he was not suited. And sometimes, in the life of the church, we find people accepting an invitation to serve in an area that is quite unsuited to the way God has gifted and shaped them, often with very unhappy consequences.

- Q Do you feel you are making the best use of your spiritual gifts?

Follow up

Once you have identified your spiritual gifts, it could be very helpful for you to make a time to speak to your pastor, or a mature Christian friend, about how you might best employ your gifts

Five: The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Q Think about any sports team with which you have been involved (e.g. football, tennis, basketball). What factors contribute to a team's success?

Q Think about any team with which you have been involved in some other setting (e.g. school, workplace). What factors helped to make it a good team?

There is a sense in which the local Christian congregation is a team. However, a Christian team is fundamentally different. It is a fellowship.

The New Testament Greek word which is translated "fellowship" is "koinonia". William Barclay tells us that this word "koinonia" was used in everyday Greek to denote a close and intimate relationship. For example:

- a business partnership in which there is joint ownership
- a marriage relationship in which everything is shared
- our relationship with God

In the New Testament, this same word "koinonia" is used to describe the oneness which Christians share with one another as a result of their relationship with Christ.

Christian fellowship is fundamentally different from the fraternizing and comradeship which is found in other places (e.g. the pub, the sports club, the service club).

It is different because it has a supernatural origin.

It is a gift of God's Spirit to the church.

Paul calls it the "Fellowship of the Holy Spirit". (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Christian Fellowship

Read Acts 2: 42-47

Read it again a second time, if possible using a different translation.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles”. (verses 42-43)

“Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (verse 46)

Q In what ways did the first Christians nurture their relationship with God?

Q Which of these ways should you work on to nurture your relationship with God through the Spirit?

Being Together is God’s Idea

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to everyone as he had need.” (verses 44-45)

Clearly this involved an openness to each other and a willingness to take risks in mutual caring for each other. This is a radical concept. Think about this in relation to your own Christian fellowship. Maybe it is not totally practical for you, perhaps you are a student with limited means.

Q Are there other ways you could make changes in the use of your time and resources?

We need each other to support and encourage each other. *“Therefore encourage each other and build each other up.” (Romans 12: 8)*

Sometimes this can happen in a small group. Sometimes it works well to have a mentor. What strategy would work best for you?

Accountability

Read Ephesians 4: 14-16

Again, it might be helpful to read it a second time in another translation.

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ.” (verse 15)

David and Michael attended the same Church and lived only two doors apart. Michael had just flown home from the United States and was meant to be in 2 weeks self-quarantine because of the corona virus. However, after a couple of days, David noticed that Michael was ignoring some of the restrictions he should have been observing. David felt he needed to challenge his friend.

Q How could David “speak the truth in love” to Michael?

Q Can you recall an occasion when you felt you should “speak the truth in love” to someone? How did you feel?

Q Thinking about it now, is there some further action you need to take?
(For example, to talk to your pastor, or a mature Christian friend.)

Clearly there is an accountability element to the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

“From him (i.e. Christ) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (verse 16)”

A few years ago, when I was isolated at home because of the side effects of rigorous chemotherapy that I had been undergoing, two delightful young adults from my church rang up and made a time to come and visit me. They took every precaution to make sure that they were not bringing an infection. They brought thoughtful gifts. They prayed for me in a most moving way. I felt greatly blessed and cared for.”

Q This was a wonderful example of members of the body of Christ building me up in love. Can you think of an example from your experience, either when you received care like this, or when you sought to offer such care?

You may know a song which speaks of the body building itself up in love.
For example:

*“Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.”*

Q Does any other song spring to mind?

Read Philippians 2: 1-4

“If you have any encouragement from being united to Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Read this passage a second time using a different translation.

In this passage, Paul is writing to address issues of disunity which have begun to creep into the Philippian Church. The cure for disunity, Paul declares, lies in humility: “humbly consider others better than yourselves”.

A very learned professor went to consult with a guru about Zen Buddhism. The guru offered the professor a cup of tea, and when the professor held out his cup, the guru poured the tea and went on pouring long after the cup was full. When the embarrassed professor eventually said, “Look here, the cup is full”, the guru said, “So are you. You’re full to overflowing with your own ideas, your own preconceptions, your own self. I can do nothing until you learn to empty yourself”.

Q What does this story bring to mind? For example, a person who talks too much and fails to listen.

Paul says, “humbly consider others better than yourselves”. In the “Fellowship of the Holy Spirit”, the Holy Spirit binds us to God and to one another in humility.

Q Do you need to learn to empty yourself?

Q What might this involve in practice?

Meditation

Our humility is to be modelled on the humility of Christ, which Paul goes on to describe in Philippians 2:5-11. You might like to read this passage slowly and prayerfully.

Meditate on it for 10 minutes allowing it to speak into your life. Perhaps you could then write down any insights that have come to you.

Six: The Guidance of the Holy Spirit

“During the Apollo missions to the moon, the spaceships were off course more than 90% of the time. Yet through continual communication with Mission Control, they were able to make the necessary corrections.”

In our journey through life, we are often off course. By staying in constant contact with God, we can correct our course, stay headed in the right direction, and succeed in our mission. God guides us through his Holy Spirit.

God’s guidance is recorded and promised in the Bible.

In the Old Testament, we read how the Israelite nation was guided through leaders and prophets. For example, Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:4-10).

In the gospels, we are told that Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness where he was tempted. See Luke 4:1

Jesus promised his disciples that after he had gone away, the Spirit would come, and “guide them in all truth”. (John 16:13)

In the book of Acts, we see how this promise was fulfilled in the life of the early church. Time and again we read how they were led by the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of this study is to discover in what ways that same promise can be fulfilled in our lives. We look at four possibilities.

The Spirit guides us through the Bible

“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119: 105)

The Bible shows us God’s law. e.g. the Ten Commandments”. (Exodus 20:1-17)

The Bible shows us God’s Son. We can read about Jesus life and ask:

“What would Jesus say?” or “What would Jesus do?”

Through our study of the Bible, either individually or in a small group, God may speak to a need in our life.

“For some time, I had been struggling with the notion that God might be calling me to become an ordained minister. I argued with God about many aspects of the role of a minister. I told God how much I cringed from being asked to do hospital visiting. The thought of conducting a funeral terrified me. I had a long list of excuses. But then God spoke to me from his Word. The Holy Spirit drew me to the verse which says:

‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’.
I claimed this promise and offered as a candidate.”



Q Can you recall an occasion when you were reading the Bible and the Holy Spirit brought it alive and spoke very clearly to you? Write a sentence which reminds you of that event.

The Lord is more likely to be able to speak to us from the Bible if we invite the Holy Spirit to prepare our hearts before we come to open the Word. Write a one sentence prayer that you could offer each day before you open God's Word.

The Spirit guides us through the body of Christ (i.e. the church).

There are a number of ways in which we can receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit through God's people.

(a) This can happen in a worship setting.

Read Acts 13:1-3 "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said: 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'." (verse 2)

Sometimes the lyrics of a song may speak to us. I know of a person who was very moved while he was singing these words to the song "Trust and obey":

*"What he says we will do, where he sends we will go,
Never fear, only trust and obey"*

He felt in them a confirmation of God's call to accept a teaching appointment in the Northern Territory..

(b) It can happen through the councils of the church.

If you have time, **read about the council in Jerusalem in Acts 15:1-29**. At the end of this meeting, they were able to write about the final decision

"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (verse 28)

The youth elders of St. Matthew's church had gone away to the hills for a day for a planning retreat. One of the main issues they had to consider was forming a plan about where the Sunday evening service should be held. Some spoke in favour of staying in the church. Some argued for moving to the church hall and making the service more contemporary. A third group thought it would be best to move to the local cinema, on the grounds that it was neutral territory and might attract people who were nervous about going onto church property. Each group presented their case in a very lively discussion. But then the elders were invited to sit by themselves in silence for 15 minutes listening for the Spirit. They were then asked to write on a piece of paper without any further discussion the decision they felt the Spirit was guiding them into. When the pieces of paper were opened, they all had the same answer.

Q Have you ever been part of a group which has practised corporate discernment in this way?

Q Perhaps you belong to a group which you would like to see practise corporate discernment at times. Why not discuss it with the rest of your group?

(c) It can happen through discussion and prayer with one or more mature Christians. If we need guidance about a particular issue, we might specifically ask one or two people to pray with us and for us until we know what God wants for us. God may give his answer through one of them. Some people have a prayer partner with whom they meet regularly once a week. This provides a natural setting to seek confirmation of God's leading. Would it be helpful for you to have a prayer partner?

The Spirit guides us through circumstances

Sometimes the Holy Spirit operates in the events of our lives to guide us. Doors may open for us or close in our face. We need to be careful here, however. We ought not rush too quickly to attributing things to God. Taken alone, circumstances may not be a reliable guide. Such guidance ought to be checked by praying with one or two mature Christians...

The leading of the Spirit within us

In some situations, God's Spirit gives us an inner peace which assures us that we are on the right track.

On other occasions, the guidance of the Spirit might involve:

A spontaneous feeling or idea, an inner voice, a Scripture verse which is brought to our mind out of nowhere and impressed on our heart, a burden about someone else whose name or face keeps appearing, a mental picture, a vision or a dream.

This is often the area of the leading of the Spirit which causes people the most problems. Let us try to honestly examine some of the problems.

Problems with “inner leading”

(i) How do I know it is God’s voice, and not my own, or the devil’s?

This is a major difficulty we must learn to work through

We can begin by trying to line up our inner leading with other avenues of guidance we have spoken about above. (e.g. the Bible, the Christian community)

(ii) Why is it that God speaks to others and not me?

Perhaps God does, and we have not learned to recognize his voice.

Or perhaps he would like to, but we don’t give him the opportunity.

How much time per week do you spend on the listening side of prayer?

(iii) How can you be more open to the inner leading of the Spirit?

Mark Virkler offers 4 keys.

- Learning to recognize the sound of God’s voice. He suggests it is usually: Light and spontaneous, comes from the heart rather than the mind, comes as an intuitive flow when we are abandoned to the Lord
- Learning to be still. Seek a quiet place. Cease striving and relax. Have a note pad to deal with distracting thoughts (e.g. if we remember something important in the middle of our prayer time, write it down, and then we can be sure we won’t forget it
- Realizing that God sometimes speaks in pictures rather than words.
- Using a journal to write out our dialogue with God. This involves writing out what we want to say to the Lord, and then writing the answers we feel He is giving to us. (Warning! Such a journal is a very private document, and needs to be kept in a safe place.)

Mark Virkler’s ideas can be found in his book “Dialogue with God”

Meditation

Decide now to set aside 15 minutes on at least two occasions in the coming week when you will give undivided time to listening for God's voice.

Write down the days and times now. If you are in a small group, share your plan with the other people in your small group.

Q Is there a particular area of your life where you need the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Write it down here, and then invite 2 people to pray with you about it.

Seven: The Mission of the Holy Spirit

My first ministry placement was at Keith.

A few weeks after our arrival, Helen and I were invited to have lunch with Bob, a seasoned sheep farmer and his wife. After lunch, Bob took us out in his ute to inspect the property. Bob was a breeder of prize Border Collie sheep dogs. He had his best dog with him on the back of the ute. Bob gave us an impressive demonstration of how he used the dog to work the sheep. The dog had been wonderfully trained to do his master's bidding.

Sometimes in the church we tend to think that the ministry is ours, and treat the Holy Spirit as if he were there to do our bidding, just like Bob's sheep dog.

In the book of Acts, we find a very different understanding of ministry in the early church. The author tells story after story in which the Holy Spirit is portrayed as the principal actor, and where the apostles are invited to participate in what the Holy Spirit is already doing.

I grew up in a timber-framed asbestos house in St Marys. One Saturday afternoon, when I was about 10 or 11 years old, I came outside and found my Dad up on the roof. I asked him what he was doing. He pointed to a ladder leaning against the wall and said "Come up and see".

I was a bit nervous about climbing up on to the roof. I had never been on the roof before. But Dad stood at the top of the ladder encouraging me, so I climbed up. There was a great view from the roof. Dad said;

"This is what I am doing. I'm painting the roof. Would you like to help me?"

I was delighted about this invitation and quickly agreed.

Dad filled a container of paint for me. He gave me a brush to use which was just the right size for me to manage. He showed me the spot where he wanted me to paint... He made sure he was always close by, and that he was between the gutter and me. And I spent a very happy day working alongside my father, participating in what he was doing.

Every day, our Heavenly Father invites us to participate in the work he is doing in the world by his Holy Spirit. Every day, the Holy Spirit is at work in the world around us in the lives of those with whom we share our days. And he says to us, *"Come up, and see what I am doing! Come on up, the view is great up here! See things from my perspective! And then I want you to participate in what I am doing."*

And the Holy Spirit gives us a passion for where he wants us to serve. And he equips us with what we need to accomplish the task.

Think about your attitude to the Holy Spirit. Have you tended to look on him as spiritual lackey whose role is to assist you to do what you have decided to do, just like Bob's sheep dog? Or have you acknowledged the Holy Spirit as the one who is in charge, and who invites you to participate in His mission?

If you are in a small group, share your answer to these questions.

The Scriptures

The concept of us participating in the mission of the Holy Spirit in the world is thoroughly Biblical. It is particularly emphasized by Luke, who wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

In chapter 10 of the Gospel of Luke, we read how Jesus invited 72 of his followers to participate in his mission. He sent them out in pairs to preach, to heal and to cast out evil spirits. And they came back bursting with excitement about what they had been able to do through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the book of Acts, Luke continues the story of what the apostles did after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Again and again Luke recounts how they were invited to participate in what the Holy Spirit was already doing. Let's look at some examples.

Acts 8: 26-40 Philip and the Ethiopian

Read this passage slowly.

Q Who prompted Philip to take the Gaza road out into the desert?

Q What was the Ethiopian doing when Philip arrived?

Q What did the Holy Spirit urge Philip to do?

Q What was the outcome?

Can you see that the Holy Spirit was already at work in the life of the Ethiopian before Philip approached? Philip was invited to participate in what the Spirit was already doing.

Read Acts Chapter 10 Peter and Cornelius

In Acts 10, a Roman officer called Cornelius sends for Peter .

Although Cornelius is a Gentile, i.e. a non-Jew, Peter has been shown in a vision that it is OK for him to enter the house of Cornelius. (verses 9-16)

When Peter arrives at the house of Cornelius, he is invited to tell them all about Jesus (verse 33), which he then proceeds to do. (verses 34-43).

Peter Is amazed that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on a household of Gentiles. (verses 44-48).

The writer Luke makes it quite clear by how he tells this story that Peter has been invited to participate in what the Holy Spirit is already doing.

A few years ago, I was riding on a tram when I felt prompted to talk to the lady next to me. In a very short space of time, she shared with me that her husband had died just a few days before after a protracted illness. She was in deep grief and feeling quite lost. After this conversation, I felt led to introduce that lady to friends of mine- a fine Christian couple- who were able, in the months that followed, to offer her ongoing support:

Practical support

Emotional support

Spiritual support.

I believe that the Holy Spirit was already at work in that lady's life, preparing her for the conversation that he prompted me to initiate.

Q The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of the people with whom we share our days. Are we open to his invitation to join him in what he is doing? Do we begin each day by offering a prayer indicating that we are available to receive his prompts and to step boldly into situations into which the Spirit is inviting us?

Q Perhaps you could write here a prayer in your own words that you could use each morning to indicate that you wish to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 16: 6-15 The Macedonian Call (please do so twice)

This passage relates to the early part of Paul's second missionary journey. Twice the Holy Spirit prevented Paul and his companions from entering particular regions. Then, one night, while they were staying in the port of Troas, Paul had a vision in which he saw a man from Macedonia in Northern Greece standing before him saying: *"Come over to Macedonia and help us."*

Paul and his companions obeyed this call. They took a ship across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. They came to the major city of Philippi. There the Holy Spirit was already at work, preparing the heart of Lydia to receive the good news of Jesus. She and her husband were baptized. And Paul's obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit meant Christianity had come to Europe.

Over the years, I have known people who have experienced a "Macedonian Call" to a wide variety of adventures. These include:

A couple called to work with "Blaze Aid", an organisation which helps farmers who have suffered major property loss as a result of bush fires

A school teacher who has given up a year to train with "Youth with a Mission" in preparation to take up a call to mission service in East Timor.

Young adults who have trained to work with "Encounter Youth" during "Schoolies Week" at Victor Harbor.

A retired lady who felt called to train to become a hospital chaplain.

A person who felt a real burden to join an organisation which supports refugees.

Q Do you know a person who has taken a big step to answer a Macedonian Call". Perhaps you could send them a message of encouragement. Perhaps you could undertake to pray for them each day. Write your response here.

Q Have you ever experienced a "Macedonian Call"?

Q If you did, how would you test that call? (You may like to refer back to Study 6 and look at ideas discussed there about testing the Guidance of the Holy Spirit). With whom would you discuss your call?

A Review of the “Come Holy Spirit” Series

In the week following your completion of Study 7, you might like to spend an uninterrupted 30 minutes or so looking back over your responses to each of the studies.

What changes have you already made in your life as a result of participating in this series?

What changes in your life have you identified but not yet implemented

Are there unresolved challenges that it would be helpful to discuss with your pastor/an elder/ a mature Christian friend?

It might be helpful to conclude this time of review in prayer.

Acknowledgments

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