

*“Trying to do the Lord’s work in your own strength is the most confusing, exhausting, and tedious of all work. But when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then the ministry of Jesus just flows out of you.” – Corrie Ten Boom*

In this section, we are looking at the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We are studying the Holy Spirit at this point because this is when, chronologically, the Holy Spirit was sent to guide, direct and empower the whole church. Pentecost was not the beginning of the Holy Spirit’s work, but it does mark a shift in the scope and purpose of his work. For many Christians, the Holy Spirit is the most difficult person of the Trinity to understand, and for good reason. As humans, we look for patterns and rules to govern the world and help us to make sense of it all. The Father gave us the Law, which created boundaries of behavior that taught us what was right and wrong. The Son died on the cross and laid out the path to right relationship with God through his death and resurrection. These things are clear and easy for us to articulate.

The Holy Spirit appears to be operating based on a plan that we have not been made privy to and this can be confusing and scary. Thus, people have been tempted to ignore the work of the Spirit, or worse, explain it away. There is a theological movement called cessationism that claims that most of the work of the Holy Spirit (and all the stuff that’s hard to understand) has ceased. According to cessationists, gone are prophecies, dreams, tongues and “words from the Lord”. While certainly some of these more amazing gifts have been improperly used, it is foolish to throw the baby out with the holy water. We’ll discuss these things in our section below about Spiritual Gifts.

We have covered several aspects of the Spirit in previous modules, most importantly, the deity of the Holy Spirit. Christians believe that there is one God, manifest in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Holy Spirit is fully divine and equal in every measure to the Father and the Son. This is important because the Spirit is “sent” by the Father and the Son, which could connote subservience, but it does not. The Trinity is of one heart and will, but each person has a different role to play. The primary role of the Holy Spirit is to empower and reveal. Each of these roles unfolds into several categories of work but those are the two big categories. We’ll look at each of them in turn and then turn our attention to how we hear the Holy Spirit in our daily lives.

### **The Holy Spirit Empowers for life.**

The Spirit of God is the source and sustainer of all life on Earth. Psalm 104:30 says, “When you send forth your Spirit, they are created”. And Job testifies to the Spirit’s creative work, saying, in 33:4, “The spirit of God has made me, and the breath (“ruach” in Hebrew, also translated wind or spirit) of the Almighty gives me life.” From the beginning of the scriptures, the Spirit has been the animating figure in creation. Genesis 1:1-2 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” When God’s voice spoke, the Spirit moved and created and all things came into existence. The Spirit’s empowering work didn’t end with creation though. Job 34:14-15 says, “if (God) should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.” The Spirit’s presence is required for the sustaining of life as well.

The scriptures are far more detailed about the role of the Spirit in our re-creation. The clearest testimony of this is Jesus’s interaction with Nicodemus in John 3:1-15. In this conversation, Jesus tells this religious leader, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit that causes us to be “born again”, he animates us both to life and to new life. This is no small thing. The Holy Spirit regenerates the believer, giving him Resurrection Life that allows him to be united to Christ and to live the way he was made to live.

Capping this life-giving role of the Spirit, Paul says that when Christ returns, it is the Holy Spirit who will raise us. Romans 8:11 says, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.” This is fitting closure to the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit and a reminder that we can and should pray to that the Holy Spirit would do his regenerative work in the lives of unbelieving friends and family.

### **The Holy Spirit empowers for ministry.**

Perhaps the most common way Christians think about the work of the Holy Spirit is the way he empowers people for ministry. In fact, even Jesus’ ministry was fully empowered by the Spirit

from the very outset. In John 1:32, John the Baptist says of Jesus, "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." Jesus' baptism was his commissioning for ministry and it was capped by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Shortly thereafter, Mark tells us that "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" to be tested in the Devil. Luke 4:14 describes Jesus returning from the wilderness "in the power of the Spirit", ready to begin his ministry. Jesus' first act was to go to the synagogue and read from Isaiah's scroll. He chose Isaiah 61:1-2, which begins, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."

The rest of Jesus' ministry describes this same dependence on and connection to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowered every miracle that Jesus performed and gave him every word that he spoke. This interdependent relationship not only perfectly illustrates how the Trinity relates to one another but also gives us a sense of what is available to us. At the end of Jesus' life, he promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to them. It's clear that this did not console the disciples, so Jesus added in John 16:7, "I tell you the truth; it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you." From Jesus' perspective, the disciples were about to upgrade by experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives.

After his resurrection, right before he ascended into heaven, Jesus promised his disciples that they "will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you". What was this power that Jesus spoke of and how did it serve as an advantage to the disciples? There are three primary ways that the Spirit empowered the early disciples and still empowers Christians today: **(1) through the effective preaching of the Bible, (2) Spiritual gifts and (3) miraculous works.**

During the early church era, the public preaching of the Gospel was a primary way that men and women came to faith. This began in Acts 2, with Pentecost. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, who were huddled together in fear. Luke describes it this way, "suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." This is quite an entrance for the Holy Spirit to make and it drew a crowd. Apparently, the sound of the rushing wind was loud enough that a large and diverse crowd

gathered around the house. When the disciples started talking in the various different languages, the people “were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.” The Holy Spirit had given the disciples the ability to speak languages that they hadn’t previously known but were known to the diverse people of Jerusalem.

So, given this newfound ability, what did the disciples do? They preached. Peter stood up and preached the gospel to them and 3000 people were saved that day. The Holy Spirit gave the disciples an amazing (and miraculous) ability so that they could preach the gospel to a diverse crowd and, as a result, they were able to be far more effective than they otherwise would have been. This was a clear pattern in the early church that continued in Acts 4:8 when Peter and John were before the council and “filled with the Holy Spirit” preached to them about Jesus being the Messiah. Acts 31 describes another remarkable moment when the building was shaken by the Spirit and the result was that the disciples were “all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” Stephen came up against Jewish opposition in Acts 6:10 but the religious leaders couldn’t “withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.” By all accounts, those religious leaders were more educated and qualified to teach than Stephen was and yet, because of the Spirit, they couldn’t come against him. Paul tells the Thessalonians 1:4-5 that he knows they were chosen by God because “our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction.” Humans can preach the gospel winsomely and effectively but only the Holy Spirit can bring full conviction.

The Holy Spirit not only empowers the preached word but he also gives Spiritual Gifts to Christians for the edification of the church and the good of nonChristians. 1 Corinthians 12:1-13 is a remarkable passage that gives a robust outline of the extent that the Spirit equips Christians for ministry.

*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.*

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in*

*everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

This passage deeply Triune and therefore, a good reminder that the work of the Spirit is ultimately the work of both the Father and the Son as well for they are all of one will and purpose. But, it's clear that the Spirit's role to play is one of empowerment to ministry. Spiritual gifts are "manifestations of the Holy Spirit", given to Christians in order to bear witness to the truth about God and the gospel. Further down his argument Paul tells the Corinthians that the point of these gifts is that outsiders would "declare that God is really among you." The spiritual gifts are tools that the Spirit uses to draw people to Christ's saving work on the cross and not to himself.

The last way we see the Holy Spirit work in the New Testament is by empowering the disciples to do miracles. Wayne Grudem defines miracles as "a less common kind of God's activity in which he arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to himself." It's that last phrase that is most important. Miracles are never meant to make the observers marvel at the giftedness of the women or men doing them. They are never meant to simply invoke awe for the sake of awe, like special effects in an otherwise bad movie. Miracles are often called "signs" in the Bible because they point beyond themselves to the God who empowers them. In fact, often miracles are simply the righting of what has gone wrong in the world because of sin. When Jesus healed the blind and mute or raised people from the dead, he was undoing the effects of the fall and setting to right what had gone wrong. This not only displayed his power but also his purpose for the world.

Miracles were more commonplace in the book of Acts than anywhere else in the New Testament, though they are by no means exclusive to Acts. Acts 2:43 describes the earliest

church gatherings by saying, awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” Peter told a lame man to walk in Acts 3:6, Phillip healed the sick and exorcised demons in Acts 8:7, Peter raised Dorcas from the dead in Acts 9:40 and on it goes. Miracles were proof of power that legitimized the teaching of the apostles and moved many people to faith.

Even Paul credits his ministry success to the miraculous works of the Spirit. He says in Romans 15:18-19, “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience – by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God – so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.” And again in 1 Corinthians 2:3, “I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

The question you might be asking is, “Can miracles still happen today?” The simple answer is yes. The longer answer requires more time and space than we have here so I will give the medium answer. Simply, there is nothing in the scripture to suggest that miracles have ceased to happen or will cease to happen before the second coming of Christ. Positively, we know that miracles are designed to accomplish two things: confirm the truthfulness of the gospel and bear witness to God’s intention for the world. God continues to desire that both of these things would happen and since we have no biblical reason to believe that he wouldn’t accomplish those ends through miracles, it is safe to conclude that miracles may still happen today. More than that, we should eagerly desire them, pray for them and look for them. Anything that would add persuasiveness to our gospel witness or demonstrate God’s perfect will for his creation is to be sought earnestly by every Christian.

### **The Holy Spirit reveals**

The second major category of the work of the Holy Spirit is revelation. Revelation takes many forms, as we will see but the first, and most powerful, was the revelation of scripture to the hearts of men.

2 Peter 1:21 says that the Old Testament exists because “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” and in John 16:13, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit “guided into all truth” the apostles who would write the New Testament. This was an obviously significant part of the Holy Spirit’s work but one that is no longer taking place. While the Spirit absolutely still reveals the truth to humans, he no longer does so with the authoritative voice that created scripture. This is why Paul encourages Christians to “test the spirits” in 1 John 4:1. The Holy Spirit will never speak something contrary to the Bible and often when the Spirit speaks, it is just a reiteration of a Biblical truth that he wants to bring to our mind in the moment.

Another way that the Holy Spirit reveals is by revealing the will of God for a particular decision or direction. Though fairly rare in the scriptures, there are moments when the Spirit specifically guides a decision or moves people in a direction. The Spirit “drove” Jesus into the wilderness for his testing in Luke 4:1. In Acts 8:29, the Holy Spirit told Phillip to “Go over and join this chariot” where he witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch. He told Peter to go with the men from Cornelius in Acts 10:19-20. There are several moments like these in the scriptures where the Spirit directed someone in a specific decision. Some are the result of prayerful petition and others seem to be at the instigation of the Spirit.

Luke’s testimony about them is also remarkable in its specificity, recording long and specific sentences rather than just a “leading” or a “sense” of the Spirit. And yet, at other times he records that at the Jerusalem council their decision “seemed good to the Holy Spirit” and later that they were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.” There are other moments like these recorded in Acts particularly when the Spirit gave only a sense or affirmed what seemed good. Notice that each of those moments were bathed in prayer and done in community. All the members of the Jerusalem council agreed to what the Spirit had said and Paul, traveling with his team, agreed about what the Spirit was preventing them from doing.

This is by no means a comprehensive look at what the Holy Spirit is and does but it’s a good place to pause and turn our attention to how we hear and are intentionally guided by the Holy Spirit. The primary way God guides us is through his Word, and nothing should supplant our daily search to know God more fully by studying his Word and submitting to it. In fact, a fuller understanding of God’s character and will through his Word will better enable us to distinguish his voice when he leads us in other ways. Jesus says that his sheep will recognize his voice and

respond to it and it's only by studying the Bible that we will be able to recognize the kinds of things that Jesus would say to us and filter out the things that contradict his character and will.

## **How to Hear the Holy Spirit**

We believe that God still speaks to and leads people outside of scripture so, how do we listen to him? And if we spend time listening, how do we know if we've actually heard from him or not? We'll address all these questions in this section, but before we do, we need to recognize that all of us come to this conversation with presuppositions that are formed by our past experiences.

You may have never intentionally spent time listening to the Holy Spirit, or you may daily spend time in listening prayer. Maybe you've seen abuses in the hyper-Pentecostal church where the things of the Holy Spirit were practiced without biblical boundaries. Maybe you've been a part of a church that actively walked in the things of the Spirit in a way that made much of Jesus and was an encouragement to you.

Whatever your past experience, my hope is that you'd engage this discussion with an openness to what Jesus has to say about this vital part of the Christian life. We don't need to fear because we can trust the Holy Spirit. He has been given to lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13). Let's approach this conversation expectant of the work that the Holy Spirit is eager to do in our lives.

### **Biblical Foundation - John 10:14-15, 27**

*"<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*

Jesus makes it clear in this passage that knowing God is foundational to the Christian life. Jesus' vision for our lives isn't just that we would know things about him, but that we'd know him *personally*. He says in the passage above, "I know my sheep, and my sheep *know me*." Jesus doesn't just want us to know our Bibles, study theology, and have the right doctrine. Though these things are important, they are not an end in and of themselves, but a means to the end of knowing and loving God.

Jesus' vision for the kind of relationship that we are to enjoy with him is remarkable. In the passage above, Jesus says that we are to know him, "... just as the Father knows me and I know the Father." Did you catch that? Jesus wants us to know him like *he knows the Father and like the Father knows him*. That's crazy! Jesus is inviting us to know him in a way that is similar to how the Father and the Son have known one another within the Trinity for all eternity. Relational nearness. Deep knowing. Constant communion. These are to be marks of the way that we enjoy relationship with Jesus.

It should go without saying then that listening to God is foundational to the Christian life. After all, it's hard to know someone if you don't spend time listening to them. That's why Jesus says that his sheep *listen to his voice*. So, first off, how does he speak?

### **How does the Holy Spirit speak?**

The way we hear Jesus is through the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15). Listening to the Holy Spirit isn't as complicated as we might think. Actually, one of the ways that the Holy Spirit regularly speaks to us is through simply bringing encouragement to us. What are some ways that God has brought encouragement to you? Maybe he has:

- Brought a Bible verse to mind
- Reminded you of a line from a sermon
- Brought to mind an image or a picture
- Reminded you of a truth
- Highlighted something a friend says to you
- Brought a thought to mind

These are all ways that we can hear from the Holy Spirit. While this list is certainly not exhaustive, you might notice a pattern in it. Most of the time when we hear from the Spirit, it's in the ordinary, everyday stuff of life. Also, most of the time when we hear from the Holy Spirit, we don't hear an audible voice, but something much more subtle. It's our job simply to pay attention.

## How do we listen to the Holy Spirit?

A biblical model of prayer involves both speaking and listening. Unfortunately, we're often times much better at the speaking part than the listening part. Imagine a marriage where the wife constantly talks to her husband but never stops to listen to him. How healthy would that marriage be? It would probably be quite broken because healthy relationships require both speaking and listening.

The same is true with God. In our relationship with him, we need to make space not only to speak to him, but also listen to him. So, how do we go about this? Here's a simple way to try out listening prayer:

- Ask, "Holy Spirit, is there anything you want to encourage me in right now?"
- Take 5 or so minutes and stop and listen

It's really that simple to practice listening prayer. Don't overcomplicate it.

It's important to remember that focused times of listening prayer like this can help us to develop a listening posture to the Holy Spirit throughout our days. As we engage in listening prayer during a time of silence and solitude, it can help us to be aware of his speaking and leading throughout our days. To be clear, the goal isn't only that we'd spend 5 minutes a day engaging in listening prayer. However, this is a good starting point as spending dedicated time in listening prayer helps us to cultivate a continual awareness of the Spirit's speaking and leading throughout our days.

As you spend time in listening prayer, you might experience a thought, Bible verse, or a picture come to mind. In this, you might not be certain that what you hear is from the Holy Spirit or you might not hear anything. Let's look briefly at both of these scenarios:

- You might not be certain: Simply hold what you hear open-handedly. Most of the time when we listen, we aren't 100% certain that what we've heard is from God. It's best to simply hold what we hear open-handedly and test it (read more below in "How do we test what we hear?").
- You might not hear anything: Sometimes we won't hear anything when we engage in listening prayer and that's ok too. The Holy Spirit sometimes will want to minister to

us simply through being still in his presence (Psalm 46:10). Also, spending time in listening prayer where we don't hear anything will help us be more confident about what we hear when we do hear something.

Finally, especially if you're newer to practicing listening prayer, keep things focused on asking the Holy Spirit for encouragement at first. Avoid asking the Holy Spirit for anything that is

- Predictive – anything concerning the future
- Directive – how to make a decision
- Corrective – something you should start doing or stop doing

While the Holy Spirit *definitely does* speak these ways sometimes, all of these areas can have significant horizontal implications require higher levels of discernment. For those who are newer to listening prayer, keeping things to the area of encouragement is kind of like bumper bowling. Just as having bumpers up when bowling helps younger kids to safely enjoy a game of bowling, so keeping things to the area of encouragement in listening prayer gives us a safe space to grow in our confidence in listening to the Holy Spirit.

### **How do we test what we hear?**

Whenever we practice listening prayer, we want to test what we hear both biblically and in community. So, ask yourself these two questions:

- Biblically: Does what I heard agree with what the Bible teaches?
- In Community: Do other Christians who know my story affirm what I heard?

It's important to remember that the Holy Spirit is the divine author of the Bible. He will never contradict himself through saying something that goes against the clear teaching of the Bible. For example, if a guy who is in a serious relationship thinks that he hears the Holy Spirit say in a time of listening prayer, "It's ok to have sex with my girlfriend because we're planning on getting married and are as good as married in God's eyes," he heard wrong. The Bible clearly teaches that sex is reserved for covenant relationship in marriage (Gen 4:1). The Holy Spirit will never contradict himself.

It's also important to test what we hear in community because we are to discern the speaking to the Holy Spirit not just individually, but corporately. If you think you heard something from the Holy Spirit, share it with a mature Christian friend who knows your story. Maybe that's someone in your MC, DNA, or an elder. Ask them how it hits them in light of your story and if they think it could be from the Holy Spirit.

Finally, it's important to be aware that when we spend time in listening prayer, we need to be able to discern between the voice of the Holy Spirit and the voice of Satan. The Holy Spirit will bring encouragement to us and he will bring sweet conviction of sin, but he will never make us feel condemned for sin. If we experience negative thoughts, shame, despair, etc when we engage in listening prayer, we need to rebuke and disbelieve the lies that we hear. The chart below is a helpful guide to distinguishing between the sweet conviction that the Holy Spirit brings and the condemnation that Satan brings:

<b>CONVICTION</b>	<b>CONDEMNATION</b>
is from God	is from Satan
leads to life	leads to despair
ends in joy	ends in sorrow
makes us want to change	makes us believe we can't change
brings specific awareness of a sin	brings vague uncertainty about sin
looks to Jesus	looks to self
is a blessing	is a burden

### **Exhortation**

Jesus when he ascended to heaven didn't leave us as orphans (John 14:18). We have been given the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit no longer dwells in the tabernacle or in the temple, but he now dwells in us as temples of the Holy Spirit. This is a big deal. This is why Jesus said that it's better for us to have the Holy Spirit in us than himself physically with us (John 16:7).

So, let's not live like orphans, sticking to merely knowing about God when we've been invited to know God. Let's not merely live our life based on principles when the Holy Spirit is alive to guide us and lead us into all truth. Let's make the space to hear from him, so that we can do the things that he is uniquely leading us into.

We can come to listening prayer expectant that the Holy Spirit will speak. We can trust him as our Helper who has been given to us as a gracious gift from Jesus. Try dedicating at least 5 minutes a day to listening prayer, and then go about your days in a listening posture to the Holy Spirit.

## **SUMMARY - LISTENING PRAYER GUIDE**

*Include this on the last page of the handout*

### **How to practice listening prayer:**

- Ask, “Holy Spirit, is there anything you want to encourage me in right now?”
- Take 5 or so minutes and stop and listen

### **Remember, keep things to the area of encouragement at first:**

- Avoid asking the Holy Spirit for anything that is:
  - Predictive – anything concerning the future
  - Directive – how to make a decision
  - Corrective – something you should start doing or stop doing

### **Remember, test what you hear:**

- Biblically: Does what I heard agree with what the Bible teaches?
- In Community: Do other Christians who know my story affirm what I heard?