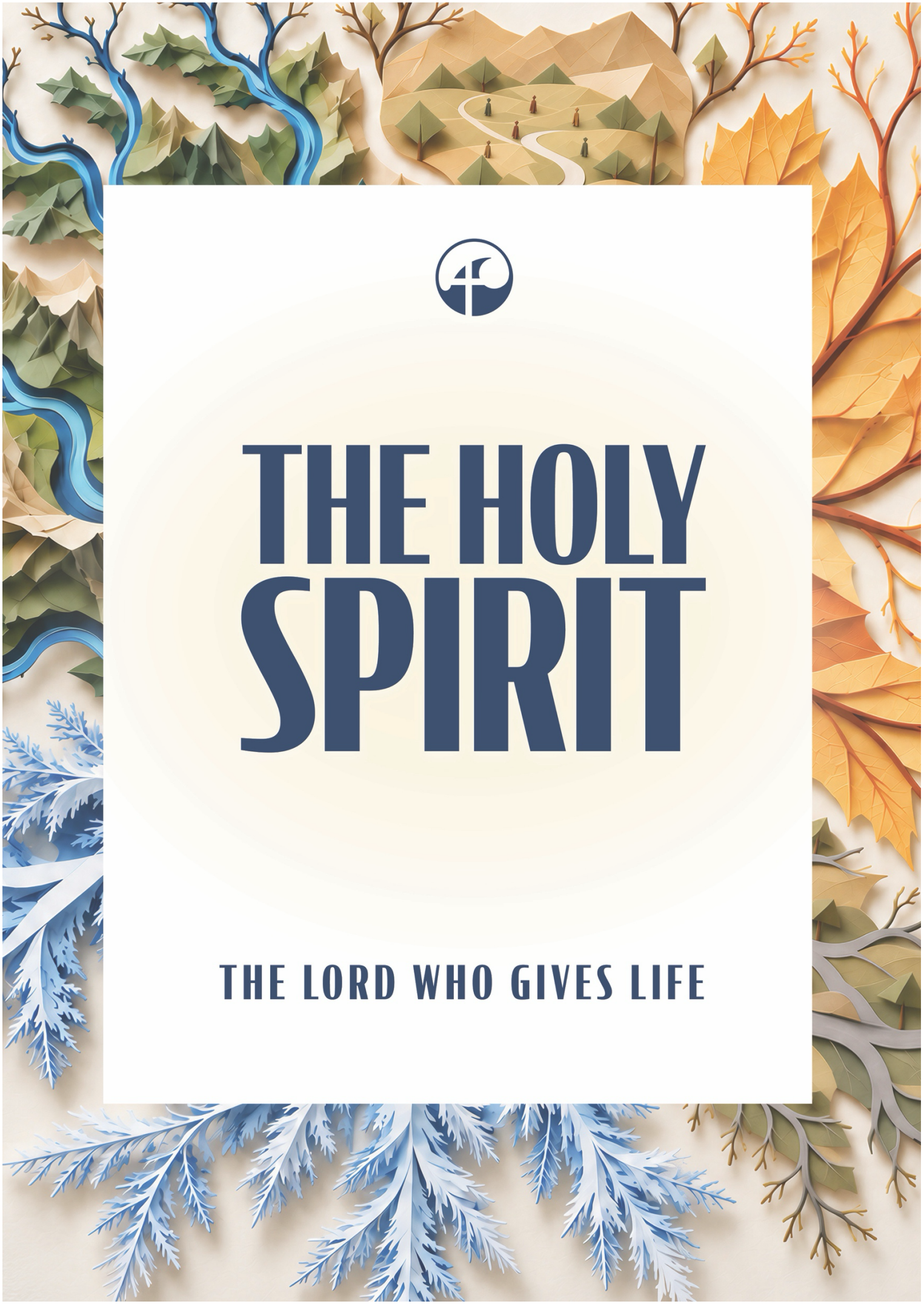

# THE HOLY SPIRIT

## THE LORD WHO GIVES LIFE

# The Spirit Who Gives Life

*Who is the Holy Spirit? What does he do? What difference does that make for us?*

The Holy Spirit can be the person of the Trinity Christians find hardest to picture.

We know what it means for Jesus to be a person. We can read about him, listen to what he says, watch what he does. We can imagine the Father as a person too. But Spirit can sound more mysterious: a force, a feeling, or a power.

God tells us something much better than that.

As we read the Bible together we will see that the Holy Spirit is a person. He is God. He speaks, teaches, guides, gives life, changes people, brings us together and helps us pray. He is not an optional extra for unusually spiritual Christians. The Spirit is given to all Christians - he is with us.

But what does it mean that he is 'with us'? That's what these seven studies explore. Here's the flow of the series:

**Week 1**: the Spirit is a divine person and he makes Jesus known.

**Week 2**: the Spirit is sent on Jesus at his baptism, then on all God's people at Pentecost.

**Week 3**: the Spirit is the Lord who gives life to all of God's children.

**Week 4**: the Spirit assures us we belong to God as his children.

**Week 5**: the Spirit forms the fruit of Christ's character in us and we are called to keep in step with him.

**Week 6**: the Spirit gives all God's children gifts to build up the church.

**Week 7**: the Spirit is the guarantee or a firstfruits of the glorious future God promises us.

**So the big idea of the whole series?**

The Holy Spirit is a divine person, sent by the Father and the Son, who gives us life, assures us we belong to God, shapes us into Christ's likeness, equips us to serve one another, and guarantees the glory still to come. He does all this for one purpose: to make Jesus known and bring us into the life of God.

## ONE GOD, THREE PERSONS: A WORD BEFORE WE START

We can’t speak of the Holy Spirit without speaking of the Father and the Son. Christians believe in one God, not three. Within the one Godhead are three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each is fully God. None is a piece of God, and God is not one person simply appearing under three different names.

A simple way to say it is this: "God" tells us what God is; "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" tells us who God is. So he is one and three. There is one God, eternally existing as three persons.

The Father, Son and Spirit have always existed together. God did not create the world because he was lonely or incomplete. Before there was a world, the Father loved the Son, the Son loved the Father, and Father, Son and Spirit shared perfect life and fellowship.

That matters for this series because sometimes people wrongly think that the Spirit does not arrive until late in the story. But the Spirit was there since before the beginning and is present at the Creation. He was there in the life and ministry of Jesus. He was poured out on the church at Pentecost and he is with Christians now.

The Spirit is not God at a distance. He is God with us. Or in the words of the Nicene Creed, the Holy Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life.

## HOW THESE STUDIES WORK

Each study starts with just one short passage. We will talk about what it says, ask what difference it makes, and then take a few minutes to put it into the bigger story of the Bible. There are also a few references for those who want to keep digging.

The questions are there to help the conversation, not run it. Servants, not masters. If the group finds something worthwhile in the passage that the questions don't cover, or you don't get through them all, that's fine. Just keep coming back to the Bible.

There is more here than you will get through in one sitting. Feel free to pick the four or five questions that suit your group rather than working through every one, and make sure you protect time for prayer at the end.

The Big Picture section then gives a guided summary of the big theme of the week. You may wish to discuss whether there are things there which need clarification, or

discuss ideas which are new or helpful, or push the ideas into how they might be applied in life.

Similarly, the Going Deeper section gives some flexibility as to what your group may choose to cover. A number of passages are given which also speak to the big idea for the week. You may not get to any of these passages or you may choose one or two to consider. The Going Deeper passages you choose in the community group studies may or may not line up exactly with where the sermon goes that week.

Knowing true things about the Spirit matters. But the point is not simply to know more about him. The Spirit is the one who gives us life, makes us like Christ and brings us into the life of God's people. So what we learn should change the way we live and pray.

We encourage you to use the Parish prayer points alongside the prayer points in these studies. Those prayer points are available in the Community Mag, the church website, or the Prayer Mate App feed – https://praynow4.org/st-faiths-anglican-church-narrabeen

## The Spirit who unites us in the truth

The Spirit makes Jesus known and unites us to him and each other. He does not draw attention away from Jesus. He glorifies him, joins us to him and makes us more like him.

Christians disagree about some aspects of the Spirit's work and gifts. Those questions matter, but they are not where we are going to begin. You will find an appendix that picks up some of those questions. First though we want to hear what Scripture tells us about who the Spirit is and what he does. So let's begin there.

# **WEEK 1**: The Holy Spirit is a person, and that is good news

Text: John 16:12-15 (NIV)

## Before you read

Think of someone whose job, in a sense, is to make someone else look good. A best man at a wedding. A good producer standing behind a singer. Someone who knows how to point attention towards another person rather than themselves. Keep that person in mind as you read. Jesus is about to describe someone who does that perfectly.

**Read John 16:12-15**

Jesus is talking to his disciples on the night before he is crucified. He is preparing them, and us, for what will happen after he is no longer physically present but has returned to the Father.

**Talk about it**

1. Look at what the Spirit does in these four verses. He guides, speaks, hears, tells and glorifies. What kind of person does that sound like?

2. Verse 14 says that the Spirit will glorify Jesus. Why is that significant? What does it tell us about what the Spirit wants us to see?

3. In verse 15, Jesus says that everything the Father has belongs to him, and that the Spirit makes what belongs to Jesus known to the disciples. What does this tell us about the relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit?

4. What is the difference between knowing facts about Jesus and actually knowing Jesus? What does this passage suggest the Spirit does to bring us from one to the other?

5. If the Spirit is a person rather than a force, how should that change the way we think about relating to him?

6. If the Spirit's work is to glorify Jesus, what might it look like in ordinary Christian life to follow his lead? What might it look like to be fascinated with spiritual experiences while losing sight of Jesus?

7. We often talk about using our time, abilities and resources. What would it mean to approach the Holy Spirit differently, not as something to use, but as someone to listen to and depend on? How do we do that?

8. If the Spirit is the one who makes Jesus known to us, what difference might that make when reading the Bible, praying or coming to church? Where might you need to ask the Spirit to help you see Christ more clearly?

**The Big Picture**

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. That is the first thing we need to get clear.

Jesus speaks about the Spirit as someone who guides, speaks, hears, tells and glorifies. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the Spirit can be grieved, lied to and resisted. These are not things you do to electricity or a vague spiritual vibe. The Spirit is a person.

And he is not merely a person who happens to work for God. The Spirit is fully God, together with the Father and the Son.

But there is something else in this passage that matters just as much as the Spirit's personhood. Jesus tells us what the Spirit does: he glorifies Jesus.

The Spirit does not arrive to start a new spiritual movement centred on himself. He makes Jesus known. He takes what belongs to Jesus and makes it known to his people.

That gives us a helpful test for everything we hear about the Holy Spirit. If something makes us more fascinated with spiritual experiences but less interested in Jesus, something has gone wrong. The Spirit's work is to bring Jesus into clearer view.

This also means the Spirit is not a power we learn to control. We cannot switch him on, direct him where we want him to go, or make him do what we want. We can listen to him, depend on him, obey him and pray for his help.

That is good news. If the Spirit were simply a force, we would have to work out how to harness him. But he is a person who knows us, speaks to us and leads us towards Christ.

So, the Christian life is not about getting hold of some mysterious spiritual substance. It is about knowing God, through his Spirit, and being drawn more deeply into the life of Christ.

**Going deeper** - If time permits, choose one or two of the passages below and ask what it means, why it matters, and how it applies to your own life this week.

**1 Corinthians 2:10-16** Paul describes the Spirit as the one who knows the deep things of God and makes them known to us, so that we have the mind of Christ.

**John 14:16-17** Jesus describes the Spirit as another Advocate who will be sent by the Father to be with his people forever.

**Ephesians 4:30** Paul says that God's people can grieve the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 5:3-4** Ananias lying to the Spirit is lying to God.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** Although the Holy Spirit is not named in these verses, Scripture is described as God-breathed and equips God's people for every good work. Compare this with the breath of God, the words of God and the Spirit of God in Genesis 1.

**Pray**

Thank God that the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force but a person who knows us and has been given to us.

Thank him that the Spirit's work is to make Jesus known.

Ask the Spirit to help you see Jesus more clearly, listen to him more carefully and depend on him more readily.

# **WEEK 2**: The Spirit is sent

Text: Luke 3:21-22, with Acts 2:32-33 (NIV)

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## Before you read

Think of the closest, warmest relationship you have with another person. Now imagine that relationship existing before you were born, before the world existed, needing nothing else to complete it. That is something of what Christians mean when they speak about the Trinity. Keep that picture in mind as you read. The Father, Son and Spirit are not three parts of God, or one person appearing in three different ways. They are three persons who have always existed together as the one God.

**Read Luke 3:21-22**

This is the moment Jesus is baptised. Watch closely. Three persons are on stage at once.

**Talk about it**

1. Who is doing what in these two verses? Find the Son, the Spirit and the Father, and discuss what each one is doing.

2. This is one event, but three persons are present and active in it. What does that tell you about how Father, Son and Spirit relate to each other?

3. The Father says he loves the Son and is pleased with him, before Jesus has done anything in public yet. Why do you think the Father says this now, at the very start, rather than waiting to see what Jesus does first?

**Read Acts 2:32-33**

Peter is explaining to the crowd what has just happened at Pentecost.

1. In verse 33, what does Jesus receive from the Father, and what does he do?

2. What does this tell us about the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit?

3. Who does Jesus pour his Spirit upon? Why do you think the Spirit is given to all God's people? What difference would it make if only a few especially spiritual Christians received the Spirit?

4. Look back at Acts 2:32-33. Before Pentecost the disciples had scattered and denied even knowing Jesus. After receiving the Spirit, Peter is preaching to a crowd in the same city. What changed?

5. If receiving the Spirit is a gift rather than something we earn, how should that affect a Christian who feels like their faith is weak or their witness is timid?

6. What is the connection between the sending of the Spirit and the mission of making Jesus known to all the nations? (See Acts 1.8) How does the gift of the Spirit empower us for mission and what does that look like in practice?

7. Is there a conversation about Jesus you have been putting off because you do not feel equipped for it? What would it look like to have it this week, trusting the Spirit rather than your own confidence?

**The Big Picture**

The Spirit is not simply a doctrine to believe. He is God's own Spirit, given to us through Jesus.

At Jesus' baptism, the Father, Son and Spirit are revealed together. The Father speaks. The Son is baptised. The Spirit descends on him.

Jesus doesn't become the Son at this moment. He already is the eternal Son who has taken on flesh. What begins here is his public ministry, with the Father declaring who he is and the Spirit coming upon him.

Later, after Jesus dies, rises and is exalted, something else happens. Peter says Jesus has received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father and poured him out on his people.

The Spirit who was with Jesus is now given to us.

That matters because faith in God is not something Jesus expects us to manage by ourselves. The Father sent the Son, and the risen Son gives his Spirit to his people.

The Spirit is not an optional extra for Christians who want a more intense spiritual life. He is God's own Spirit, given to all of God's people.

And the gift is not simply for our private benefit. The Spirit makes us alive to God, teaches us to live as his children, equips us to serve one another and gives us courage to speak about Jesus.

We do not need to manufacture his presence by our worship or by somehow calling him down. All receive him when they put their faith in Jesus.

So when we feel weak, confused or spiritually dry, the answer is not to pretend that we are stronger than we are. We can ask God for help, trusting that he has already given us his Spirit.

And when we are nervous about speaking about Jesus, we do not have to imagine that everything depends on our ability to say exactly the right thing. The Spirit has been given to us.

God does not leave us alone. The Holy Spirit is God with us. (There is more on that in the coming weeks.)

**Going deeper** - If time permits, choose one or two of the passages below and ask what it means, why it matters, and how it applies to your own life this week.

**John 14:16-17** Jesus promises that the Spirit will be with his people.

**John 15:26-27** Jesus describes the Spirit as the one who testifies about him, alongside the witness of his disciples.

**Acts 1:8** Jesus connects receiving the Spirit with being his witnesses.

**Galatians 4:4-7** Paul puts the sending of the Son into the world alongside the sending of the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.

**Romans 8:14-16** The Spirit makes us God's children and enables us to cry out to the Father.

**Pray**

Thank God that he did not leave us to follow Jesus on our own.

Thank him for sending his Son into the world and sending the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.

Ask the Spirit to help you depend on him rather than yourself, and to give you courage to speak about Jesus when opportunities come, so that Jesus might be glorified.

# **WEEK 3**: The Spirit gives life

Text: John 3:1-8 (NIV)

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## Before you read

Think about your birthday, or the fact that your heart started beating in the first place. You did nothing to bring either about. You could not give yourself life. Today's passage is about another kind of birth. Jesus is going to tell Nicodemus that the spiritual life God wants to give him is not something Nicodemus can do himself. It can only come from God.

**Read John 3:1-8**

Nicodemus is a respected religious teacher. He comes to Jesus at night, carefully, with a compliment ready.

**Talk about it**

1. Nicodemus opens with a compliment for Jesus. Instead of responding to it, Jesus changes the subject completely in verse 3. What does Jesus say, and why do you think he says it?

2. Jesus says a person must be born again in verse 3, and Nicodemus takes this literally in verse 4. What does his confusion tell you about how strange this idea sounded, even to a serious religious insider?

3. Does being born again sound more like improving the life you already have, or receiving a new kind of life from God? What difference does that make to how we feel about the Christian life?

4. Verse 8 compares the Spirit to the wind. You can see the effects of wind, but not the wind itself, and you cannot control where it blows. What is Jesus saying about the Spirit and his work in a person's life?

5. If Nicodemus needs the Spirit to give him life, is there anyone who doesn't? What does that tell us about ourselves?

6. If new life comes from the Spirit rather than from our own effort, what difference should that make to the way you approach God? Where might you be trying to improve yourself instead of asking God to change you?

7. The Spirit's work is compared to the wind: real, powerful and not under our control. How should that affect the way we pray for ourselves and for people who don't yet know Jesus?

8. If becoming a Christian means receiving life from the Spirit rather than proving that we are good enough for God, how should that change the way we think about our own failures, and about people who seem far from God?

**The Big Picture**

If the Spirit gives life, Christianity is not a self improvement project. Christianity is not about becoming a slightly better version of yourself but about being made new.

Nicodemus had done a lot of things right. He was religious, knowledgeable and respected. Yet Jesus tells him that he needs something he cannot achieve by being more religious, more knowledgeable or more respectable. He needs life.

Jesus calls this being born again, or born from above. The point is not that Nicodemus gets a chance to go back and start his life over. The point is that the life God wants to give him comes from God himself.

We cannot manufacture it through effort, morality or religious achievement.

The Spirit gives what we cannot give ourselves: new life from God.

That does not mean our response to God doesn't matter. Jesus goes on to call Nicodemus to believe in him. But the new life Jesus describes is God's gift, not Nicodemus's achievement.

Jesus then compares the Spirit's work to the wind. You cannot see the wind itself or command it, but you can see what it does.

The same is true of the Spirit. His work may be mysterious to us, but it is real. He changes people. He brings conviction, faith, repentance, love, and new desires. Hearts of stone are turned to flesh. The Spirit turns people towards God.

We still need to repent. We still need to believe. We still need to obey. But we do all of that because God has given us a new life, not because we are trying to earn our way towards a new life.

This also gives us hope for other people. We cannot make someone believe. We cannot argue someone into new life. We can explain the gospel, love people, pray and invite them to put their faith in Jesus.

But only the Spirit gives life. So we pray, and ask that the Spirit will do his work in the hearts of those we love.

**Going deeper** - If time permits, choose one or two of the passages below and ask what it means, why it matters, and how it applies to your own life this week.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** God promises a new heart and his Spirit, centuries before John 3.

**Titus 3:4-7** Paul describes salvation as the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

**Ephesians 2:1-5** Paul describes us as dead in transgressions, and says God made us alive with Christ.

**John 1:12-13** Those who receive Christ are described as being born of God.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** In Christ, there is a new creation.

**Pray**

Thank God that the new life he gives us is his gift, not our achievement.

Ask him to help you depend on his Spirit rather than trying to manufacture spiritual life by your own effort.

Pray for someone you know who seems far from God. Ask the Spirit who gives life to bring them to Jesus.

# **WEEK 4**: The Spirit assures us that we belong in God's family

Text: Romans 8:14-17 (NIV)

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## Before you read

Think of the difference between a guest in someone's house and a member of the family. A guest is welcome, but still knows they are a guest. A family member knows they belong. Which one do you feel like most days in your relationship with God?

**Read Romans 8:14-17**

Paul has been describing life in the Spirit, as opposed to life in the flesh. Now he tells us what that life feels like from the inside: the Spirit assures us we are God's children.

**Talk about it**

1. Verse 14 says those led by the Spirit are God's children. What does being "led by the Spirit" actually look like in an ordinary week?

2. Verse 15 contrasts a spirit of slavery and fear with the Spirit of adoption, who lets us cry "Abba, Father." Where do you catch yourself relating to God more like a nervous employee than a child?

3. Verse 16 says the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Is that testimony a feeling to chase, or something else? What is it?

4. Verse 17 links being God's children to suffering with Christ, before sharing his glory. Why do you think Paul puts suffering next to glory instead of skipping past it?

5. If you really believed you belonged to God as his child, what would you do differently this week?

6. What can we do if there are times when we don’t feel like these verses are true for us?

**The Big Picture**

The Spirit does not simply tell us facts about God. He brings us into a relationship with God as our Father.

A lot of Christians live as though they were nervous guests in God's house, unsure if they are really welcome and waiting to be found out. But the Spirit gives every Christian a new relationship with God the Father. We are God's adopted children. We can call him Abba, Father.

Jesus is the Son by nature. We become God's children by adoption, through Christ and by the Spirit.

The Spirit assures us that this is who we really are.

That does not mean Christians will never doubt. It does not mean we will always feel close to God. Feelings change and confidence can sometimes be shaken.

But our belonging to God does not rest on the strength of our feelings. It rests on what God has done for us in Christ, and the Spirit assures us that his promise is true.

This matters especially when we sin. If we think of ourselves as guests, failure might make us think we are unwelcome. If we know we are God's children, sin can drive us back towards the merciful Father who loves his children.

And being ‘led by the Spirit’ in this passage does not mean receiving mysterious private guidance about decisions in life. In Romans 8, the Spirit leads God's children into a new way of life: putting sin to death, following Christ and living as people who belong to God.

Paul also connects this Spirit-given belonging to Christ with suffering and hope. We are heirs with Christ, but we are also called to share in Christ's sufferings before sharing in his glory. Suffering does not mean God has abandoned us. Following Christ may be costly, but we remain his children.

The Spirit assures us of something we could never establish for ourselves. We can know that we belong to the Father.

**Going deeper** - If time permits, choose one or two of the passages below and ask what it means, why it matters, and how it applies to your own life this week.

**Galatians 4:4-7** Paul makes almost the same argument in fewer words: God sends his Son to redeem us and sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, enabling us to call God Abba, Father.

**1 John 3:1** See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.

**Mark 14:36** Jesus himself prays "Abba, Father" in Gethsemane. The same intimate family address is now used by those who belong to Christ.

**Romans 8:23-25** Paul connects our present experience with our future bodily resurrection.

**Pray**

Ask the Spirit to give you a settled confidence that you belong to God as his child.

Thank God that your relationship with him rests on Christ's death, resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit - not on your performance.

Ask him to help you run towards him for forgiveness when you sin rather than hiding from him.

And ask him to help you live as the child who already belongs to the family.

# **WEEK 5**: Keeping in step with the Spirit

Text: Galatians 5:16-25 (NIV)

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## Before you read

Think of something in your life that grew slowly and could not be rushed, like a friendship or a skill. Now think of something you expected to change instantly and got frustrated when it didn't. Which category do you think Christian character falls into?

**Read Galatians 5:16-25**

Paul has spent most of Galatians arguing that we are made right with God by faith, not by keeping rules. Here he answers the obvious follow-up question: if it is not about rules, what stops a Christian doing whatever they want?

**Talk about it**

1. Verse 17 describes a real conflict between "the flesh" and "the Spirit." What does it tell you that Christians experience this conflict rather than simply growing out of it?

2. Look at the acts of the flesh in verses 19-21. Are these all obviously shocking sins, or could some hide comfortably inside a respectable life?

3. Now look at the fruit of the Spirit in verses 22-23. Paul calls it fruit, not a list of achievements. What does that suggest about how these qualities grow?

4. Verse 24 says those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh. Verse 25 tells us to keep in step with the Spirit. If Christ has already dealt with sin's power, why do we still need to keep choosing to walk with him?

5. If the Spirit produces the fruit, what is the difference between depending on him and simply trying harder?

6. Keeping in step with the Spirit sounds ordinary and ongoing. What might that look like in an average week, at work, at home, when you are tired or tempted?

7. Which fruit do you find hardest to see growing in your own life right now? What would it look like to bring that, specifically, to God this week, rather than just resolving to try harder?

**The Big Picture**

Paul offers fruit, not a checklist. Fruit grows slowly. You cannot pull on a branch and force an apple by lunchtime, and you cannot fake it. What is happening inside the tree eventually shows outside.

But it is not only slow. Notice the way Paul urges the Galatians into action: resist, crucify, keep in step! Sometimes the Spirit's work looks like patient growth you barely notice. Sometimes it looks like a sudden, decisive break with a sin. Both are his work.

Either way we are not passive. We resist the flesh, put sin to death, repent when we fail, keep choosing love on purpose, again and again. The Spirit produces the

fruit, not us. But depending on him is not the same as waiting for something to happen. Keeping in step is active.

He is not just making us nicer. He is forming the character of Christ in us.

The Christian life is not instant perfection. But it is not being unchanged or inactive either. Do not assume nothing is happening just because change feels slow. And do not let patience become an excuse to stop fighting a sin you could kill today.

The fruit is not a menu to pick from. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control belong together. They describe one life, increasingly shaped by Christ.

This changes how we handle sin. If growth depended on our effort alone, sin would mean we had failed. But the Spirit is forming us over time, so sin is a reason to go back to him: confess, repent, ask for help, keep walking.

The goal is not to look impressive and the kind of perfect person that never struggles. It is to keep in step with the Spirit for a lifetime, fighting real battles against sin and not just waiting them out.

**Going deeper** - If time permits, choose one or two of the passages below and ask what it means, why it matters, and how it applies to your own life this week.

**Romans 8:12-13** Paul makes a similar contrast between flesh and Spirit, with a warning attached.

**Philippians 1:6** God, who began a good work in you, will carry it on to completion.

**2 Corinthians 3:18** We are being transformed into Christ's likeness, an ongoing process rather than a single event.

**Colossians 3:12-15** Paul describes many of the same qualities as things Christians are to put on as God's people.

**Pray**

Thank God that he does not expect you to transform yourself.

Ask the Spirit to grow his fruit in you, especially in the area you know needs to change.

Ask him to help all in the group to keep in step with him in the ordinary moments of the coming week.

When we sin, ask him to help us repent quickly, receive God's grace, and keep walking.

# **WEEK 6**: The Spirit gifts each of us to help build the church

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-27 (NIV)

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## Before you read

Think of teams where one person tried to do everyone else's job as well as their own, or teams where one person's contribution was treated as unimportant. What happens to teams like this?

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-27**

The Corinthian church was proud of its spiritual gifts and was using them to rank people against each other. Paul corrects this by explaining what the gifts are actually for: not to make individuals impressive, but to build up the whole church.

**Talk about it**

1. Verse 7 says the Spirit gives a gift to each person "for the common good," not just their own benefit. Why do you think God designed spiritual gifts that way?

2. Verse 11 says the Spirit distributes gifts just as he determines. What difference does it make that gifts are given, not earned?

3. In verses 15-20 one part of the body wants to leave because it feels unimportant. In verses 21-25 another part is treated as if it is not needed. Which mistake do we make more, feeling unimportant, or treating someone else as unimportant?

4. What would church look like if we had 13 gifted bass players that all wanted to play every week because that was their gift? Or what if nobody felt they had the gift of administration?

5. Verse 26 says that when one part suffers, every part suffers, and when one is honoured, every part rejoices. What would it look like for our community group to actually live like that?

6. Is there someone you tend to overlook because their gift is quiet or behind the scenes? What is one way you could notice or encourage them this week?

7. What happens to you when you compare your gifts with someone else's? Does it tend to make you feel superior or inferior? How does knowing the Spirit distributes gifts as he chooses challenge that?

8. What is one gift, ability or opportunity God has given you that you could use more deliberately for someone else's good this week?

**The Big Picture**

The Corinthians wrongly treated gifts as a scoreboard for showing who was more ‘spiritual’. The apostle shows why that isn’t a Christian way of thinking.

Nobody gets to boast about a gift they did not earn or deserve. The Spirit distributes them just as he determines. And nobody gets to write themselves off as unnecessary either.

Paul's answer to both problems is the same picture: a body. A body needs different parts. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you." The foot cannot say, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong." Different does not mean less important, and visible does not mean more valuable.

The same is true of the church. The Spirit gives different gifts to different people, but for the common good. The gift is not ultimately about the person who receives it. It is about what God wants to do through them for everyone else.

So gifts are not a ranking system. Someone who teaches publicly is not more important than someone who quietly encourages people. Someone who leads music is not more valuable than someone who orders the toilet paper - both are needed!

The Spirit is building a body, not a collection of impressive individuals, and a body means we all need one another. That is why Paul can say that when one part suffers, every part suffers, and when one is honoured, every part rejoices. Christian community is not just people who happen to believe the same things. We are joined to one another in Christ.

This also changes how you look for your own gifts. The better question is not "what am I good at" but "how can God use what he has given me for other people." He has not given you gifts to build yourself up but others. He has given you something the body needs, and given other people something you need.

**Going deeper** - If time permits, choose one or two of the passages below and ask what it means, why it matters, and how it applies to your own life this week.

**Romans 12:4-8** Paul makes a similar list of gifts in a different letter, again connecting different gifts with serving the one body.

**Ephesians 4:11-13** In this passage the image is used a bit differently. The people themselves are the gifts! God gives these people as gifts to equip the whole church to do the work of ministry.

**1 Peter 4:10-11** The point of a gift? Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.

**1 Corinthians 13:1-13** Immediately after the passage we have looked at, Paul explains that love matters more than impressive spiritual abilities.

**Pray**

Thank God for the different people and gifts he has placed in our church.

Ask him to show you how to use what he has given you for the good of others rather than your own recognition.

Ask him to help you notice and encourage someone whose contribution is easy to overlook.

Ask him to make St Faith's a community where nobody feels unnecessary, and nobody assumes they can manage without everyone else.

# **WEEK 7**: The Spirit is the guarantee of what's coming

Text: Romans 8:18-27 (NIV)

## Before you read

Think of something good you are waiting for, where the waiting is hard, but you already know it is coming. What keeps you going while you wait?

**Read Romans 8:18-27**

Paul has spent this chapter describing life in the Spirit. Now he looks ahead to where that life is heading.

**Talk about it**

1. Verse 18 compares present suffering with future glory. Is Paul saying our suffering doesn't matter, or something else?

2. Verses 19-22 say creation itself is groaning, waiting to be set free. What examples of a groaning, broken world have you noticed lately, in the news or your own life?

3. Verse 23 says Christians groan too, even though we already have the Spirit. Why doesn't having the Spirit remove the groaning, at least not yet?

4. Paul says we have the firstfruits of the Spirit. What do you think that means, and how does having a taste of something now help while we wait for the rest? (Hint: think of the charity auction of the first carton of mangoes at the start of the mango season)

5. Romans 8:24-25 says hope is for what we can't see yet. What's something in your own life right now that you're hoping for, but can't see the end of yet?

6. Verses 26-27 say the Spirit helps us in our weakness, even when we do not know what to pray. Has there been a time you did not know how to pray? What is the comfort in knowing the Spirit intercedes for us at exactly those times?

7. If the Spirit is God's guarantee that something greater is coming, how might that change the way you think about a disappointment or loss you are carrying right now?

8. Is there something you are waiting on God for at the moment? What would it look like to bring that honestly to him this week, rather than pretending it is fine or giving up on it?

9. Looking back over this whole series, which part of the Spirit's work do you most need to remember right now: that he gives life, assures you that you belong, forms Christ's character in us as we keep in step with him, gives gifts for the church, or gives hope for what is coming? Or something else? Why?

**The Big Picture**

It would be easy to think that once we have the Spirit - that God is in us and with us, that life should already feel finished and glorious. Paul says the opposite.

Having the Spirit means we have already received the life God has promised, while we are still waiting for the day everything is made new. That is why Paul can say both that we have the Spirit and that we groan. The Spirit is not a promise that suffering disappears immediately. Or that we no longer sin. He is the firstfruits of what God will eventually give in full.

Think of that carton of mangoes at the start of the mango season. It is not the whole crop, but it tells you what is coming. The Spirit's presence with us now is a real and glorious taste of the future God has promised. He is not simply a comfort while we wait. He is God's pledge that the waiting will end.

God has already begun his work in us. He has given us new life, adopted us as his children, is growing his fruit in us, has placed us in a body with other believers, and has given us his Spirit as the firstfruits of the glory still to come. We have not received everything yet. But we have received something real that changes the way we wait.

Christian hope is not wishful thinking. It is confidence in something God has promised but which we cannot yet see. We wait because we know the story is not finished.

And while we wait, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Sometimes that is suffering, sometimes fear, sometimes just not knowing what God is doing, sometimes it is as simple as sitting down to pray with no idea what to say. Paul says that even there we are not alone. The Spirit helps us. He intercedes for us. He knows what we cannot put into words and brings our weakness before God.

So the Spirit is both our present help and our future hope, with us now, while we wait for the day the whole creation is set free, our bodies are redeemed, and the

glory of God is revealed. He does not just help us survive the waiting. He assures us that after suffering comes glory and that by his Spirit, Christ is with us now and one day we will all see him.

**Going deeper** - If time permits, choose one or two of the passages below and ask what it means, why it matters, and how it applies to your own life this week.

**Ephesians 1:13-14** The Spirit is described as a seal and a deposit guaranteeing what is to come.

**2 Corinthians 1:21-22** God gives us the Spirit as a deposit, marking us as his own and pointing to what is still to come.

**2 Corinthians 5:1-5** Paul again connects our present groaning with the future life God has prepared, and again names the Spirit as the guarantee.

**Revelation 21:1-4** The future Paul is describing: creation renewed, death gone, God dwelling with his people.

**Revelation 22:17** The Spirit and the bride say "Come," inviting the thirsty to receive the water of life

**Pray**

Thank God that he has not only promised a future with him, but has already given us his Spirit as a foretaste and guarantee of it.

Bring before him in prayer the things you are waiting for, especially what is painful or hard to understand.

Ask the Spirit to help you when you do not know what to pray.

Ask God for the kind of hope that can wait without giving up, because what he has promised is coming.

## AFTERWORD: a recap of what we have seen

Our first week began with a simple claim: the Spirit is a person, not a force.

Seven weeks later, we can step back and see where that person has been at work across the whole story of Scripture.

Genesis 1:2 opens with the Spirit of God hovering over the waters, while the earth is formless and empty. Before there was light, land or anything alive, the Spirit of God was already there. Then God speaks and creation begins to take shape.

That gives us a picture of something we see throughout Scripture: God brings life where there is emptiness, and the Spirit is at work breathing his life into the creation.

In Week 2 we saw that The Father sends the Son, and the risen Son gives the Spirit to his people. At Jesus' baptism, the Father, Son and Spirit are revealed together. At Pentecost, Jesus receives the promised Spirit from the Father and pours him out on his people.

We saw that pattern again in Week 3. Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can see the kingdom of God without being born of the Spirit. The person who needs life cannot create it. The Spirit gives what we cannot give ourselves.

We saw the same Spirit at work in Week 4, assuring God's people that they belong in his family. The Spirit does not merely make us religious people. He enables us to cry, "Abba, Father." The life he gives is life with God.

In Week 5, we saw that this life keeps growing. The Spirit produces fruit in us over time: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The Christian life is not instant perfection. It is the Spirit forming the character of Christ in us over time.

Then Week 6 showed us that the Spirit does not form isolated individuals. He builds a body. The gifts he gives are for the common good. The Spirit unites us in the church and builds us into one body by giving these different gifts.

The Spirit's work in us is therefore not an afterthought. The Father sent the Son. The Son gives the Spirit. The Spirit gives us life, assures us that we are God's children, forms us into Christ's likeness and gathers us into God's people.

And then Week 7 showed us where all of this is going.

The Spirit is the firstfruits of a future that has not yet arrived in full. Creation is groaning. We are groaning. We are waiting for the redemption of our bodies and the revealing of God's glory.

But we do not wait without hope. We have the Spirit. He is God's pledge that what he has begun, he will finish.

And that takes us right back to the beginning.

Genesis opens with the Spirit hovering over the waters. The Bible ends with the Spirit and the bride saying, "Come." Between those two moments lies the whole story of creation, rebellion, promise, rescue, resurrection and renewal.

The Spirit has been at work throughout that story. He was there at creation. He was there in the life and ministry of Jesus. He was poured out on the church at Pentecost. He is giving new birth, growing fruit, building God's people and sustaining them in their weakness now.

And he will bring God's people safely to the end.

God's story is not finished yet. Creation still groans. We still groan. We still wait.

But the Spirit is already here. He gives us a taste of the life that is coming, assures us that we belong to God, forms us into the people Christ is making us to be, joins us to one another, and helps us while we wait.

So the Christian hope is not that one day we will finally escape this world. It is that God will finish what he began by remaking his broken world and bringing it from suffering to glory.

The creation he made will be renewed. The people he called will be gathered. The bodies he promised to redeem will be raised. The death and brokenness we know now will not have the last word but will be defeated.

And the Spirit who has been at work throughout God's story will bring us to the day when God's promise is complete.

## APPENDIX: SOME FAQ

These seven studies have focused on who the Spirit is and what he does in the life of every Christian and the church: giving life, assuring us we belong, growing character, gifting us to serve each other, and giving us hope. That has left out plenty of other questions Christians ask about the Spirit, some old, some newer, some genuinely disputed among faithful believers. This appendix does not try to settle every one of them. It is here for anyone who wants to keep thinking, giving a short beginning of an answer and a Bible reference or two to follow up.

### Is the Holy Spirit a "he," an "it," or just God's power?

He. Scripture describes him with the language of a person throughout, not a force. He speaks, teaches, guides, and can be grieved and lied to. See John 16:13-14, Ephesians 4:30, Acts 5:3-4.

### How is the Spirit different from the Father and the Son, if they're all the same God?

There is one God, eternally existing as three persons. Each person is fully God, not a third of God. Father, Son and Spirit are distinguished by their relationships to one another, not by having different amounts of divinity. The Father sends the Son, the Son gives the Spirit, and all three have always existed together in perfect love. See Matthew 28:19, John 15:26.

### What's the "baptism of the Spirit," and is it a second experience after conversion?

The New Testament describes receiving the Spirit as something that happens when you come to faith in Christ. It is not a later, separate top-up available to ‘Super-Christians’ who have ‘super-spiritual’ gifts like speaking in tongues. Paul tells the whole Corinthian church, not just some of them, that they were all baptised by one Spirit into one body. See 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 1:13-14.

### Are the miraculous gifts still happening today, or did they stop with the apostles?

Christians who take Scripture seriously land in different places on this. Some believe gifts like tongues and prophecy or healing continue in the same form as the New Testament describes; others believe those particular gifts served a purpose tied to the apostolic age and are not the normal Christian experience today. What is not in dispute is that the Spirit is at work in every Christian's life now, in the ways this series has traced: giving life, assurance, growing character, love for the church, and hope. See 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

**What is speaking in tongues, and should I expect to do it?**

In the New Testament, tongues refers either to speaking a real human language the speaker had not learned, as at Pentecost, or to a Spirit-given prayer language Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians. It is one gift among many, given to some, not a mark of a more spiritual Christian, and Paul is clear elsewhere that it is not the most important gift. Where it happens it must be translated so that everything can be understood See Acts 2:4-11, 1 Corinthians 12:29-30, 1 Corinthians 14:1-5.

**Can you lose the Holy Spirit, or "grieve him" out of your life?**

No, you cannot lose him. But yes, you can grieve him, and that matters.

Ephesians 4:30 tells Christians not to grieve the Holy Spirit, in a passage about lying, anger, bitterness and unwholesome talk (Ephesians 4:25-31). Grieving him is not vague in this passage. It is specific: sin against the people around you in the way you speak and relate.

Ephesians 1:13-14 calls the Spirit a seal and a deposit, God's guarantee of what is still to come, not a reward that shrinks as you sin. Romans 8:38-39 rules out anything separating a believer from God's love, your own sin included. So the Spirit's presence in you does not depend on your performance and cannot be forfeited by your sin.

That does not make grieving him a small thing. It is possible to have him and ignore him, quench him, act as though he were not there. The right response is not to wonder whether he has left. It is to repent, specifically, of whatever you just read and recognized in Ephesians 4:25-31.

**Is the Spirit "leading" me through an inner sense of direction, and how would I know?**

Be careful here. The Bible's main categories for the Spirit's work with his word are not "leading" as private guidance, but inspiration and illumination.

Inspiration is what gave us Scripture - literally it is a ‘breathing into’ human authors (note this is different from our common use of being inspired as being particularly creative). The Spirit carried human authors so that what they wrote is both their writing and God's own words (2 Peter 1:20-21, 2 Timothy 3:16). That work of scriptural revelation and inspiration is finished. He is not still breathing out new Scripture into anyone's mind today, however it feels. (see Hebrews 1.1-4)

Illumination is what the Spirit does now: opening minds and hearts to understand, love and obey the word already given (1 Corinthians 2:12-14, Ephesians 1:17-18). The Spirit will apply the word of God to our hearts to show us what is right and

wrong, wise and foolish, what we are to love and what are to flee. That illumination is real and ongoing, and it is the Spirit helping you grasp and submit to what God has already said, not handing you fresh private instructions he hasn't said anywhere else.

So a strong inner sense of direction is not, by itself, evidence of anything. Feelings of certainty are not a third category alongside inspiration and illumination. If you want to know what the Spirit is saying, go to what he has already said, and ask him to help you understand and do it. That is illumination, and it is available to you now. See Galatians 5:16-25 and Colossians 3:16 for what a Spirit-shaped life then looks like in practice.

**What about unusual or ecstatic experiences in church history and today, revivals, being "slain in the Spirit," and so on?**

The history of the church includes seasons where large numbers of people came to faith or were renewed in dramatic ways, and also includes plenty of experiences that were more about crowd psychology than the Spirit's work. Neither the presence nor the absence of ecstatic crowds tells you whether something is genuine; the test is always whether it points people to Christ and produces the fruit of the Spirit over time. See John 16:14, Matthew 7:15-20.

**Is the "unforgivable sin" something I could accidentally commit?**

If you are worried you have committed the unforgivable sin, that worry is itself good evidence you have not. Jesus spoke of blasphemy against the Spirit in the context of people who had witnessed his miracles firsthand and deliberately called the Spirit's work in him the work of Satan. A conscience troubled by sin and longing for forgiveness is the Spirit at work in you, not evidence he has abandoned you. See Matthew 12:31-32, 1 John 1:9.

**What did the Spirit do before Pentecost? Was he active in the Old Testament?**

Yes. The Spirit hovers over creation in Genesis 1:2, empowers judges and kings, speaks through the prophets, and is promised as the one who will one day give God's people a new heart. Pentecost is a new, wider and deeper giving of the Spirit to all God's people, not his first appearance in the story. See Genesis 1:2, Ezekiel 36:26-27, Joel 2:28-29. In the Old Testament the Spirit might be given for a season for a chosen individual to enable a task - like ruling or judging or prophecy. The change in the New Testament is that the Spirit is given to all God’s people. And the gift is not for a season but as we have seen in these studies - as a firstfruits forever sign that God is with us and in us.

**What's the difference between a charismatic church and other churches?**

It's complicated, and broad answers like this one won't fit every church exactly. But here's the shape of it.

The global church includes many cultures and styles, all holding to the same gospel. Charismatic churches are part of that family, not outside it.

The modern charismatic movement is young. It began at the start of the twentieth century, and it has changed shape several times since, with different waves each claiming a fresh move of God. So "charismatic" isn't one fixed thing and what is said here can’t completely capture the breadth of charismatic churches.

Two questions though commonly separate charismatic churches from non-charismatic churches.

First: is being "baptised in the Spirit" something every Christian already has the moment they believe, or a further experience that comes later, often marked by tongues? Paul told the whole Corinthian church, no exceptions, that they were all baptised by one Spirit into one body. On that reading, every Christian is baptised in the Spirit at conversion. It isn't a second stage for the especially spiritual.

Second: are gifts like tongues and prophecy the normal experience every believer should expect and seek? Or are they one gift among many, given to some but not others, alongside teaching, generosity and practical service? Many charismatic churches build tongues and prophecy into regular worship. Other churches put their weight on Scripture and teaching, and treat those gifts as less common and no measure of anyone's spiritual standing.

There's a further difference in what churches expect God to do now. Charismatic teaching has sometimes promised more than the bible promises for this life. Miraculous healing, material blessing, complete victory over sin - all these can be claimed if only your faith is strong enough. Scripture does promise these things in full in this life, but after Christ returns, not as something owed to us now. The pastoral fallout from expecting all of God’s blessings now in this life can be serious. People can end up either falsely triumphant, or wondering what's wrong with their faith when the healing or victory doesn't come. Some charismatic leaders would say that other christians are not claiming the promises that God invites us too so miss out on the full experience of the Spirit.

These are real disagreements. They deserve careful thought. Does the New Testament promise the same thing to every Christian, or does it describe two classes of believer? What is the experience of the Holy Spirit supposed to be like in this life?

It's tempting to think the Spirit is somehow more present in charismatic churches, and less present elsewhere. This series has shown why that's wrong. There is no church without the Spirit, and no Christian without the Spirit. Every believer already has him. Every church is united by him. He is not the special possession of one style of church. He gives life, assures us we belong to God, forms Christ's character in us, and gifts us to build up his church, in every congregation that trusts him, whether or not tongues are ever spoken. That is not a lesser experience of the Spirit. It is his normal, ordinary, wonderful work.

**Further reading on The Holy Spirit**

John Stott, Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today (IVP). Short, clear, and calm. Works through what "baptism of the Spirit" actually means, the fruit of the Spirit, and the gifts, without getting bogged down. Oldie but a goldie.

Phillip Jensen, The Coming of the Holy Spirit: Why Jesus Sent His Spirit Into the World (Matthias Media). A massive doorstop of a book that aims to let Scripture set the agenda before turning to disputed questions. The Appendix of 34 short FAQ on specific controversies is worth the price of the book by itself .

J.I. Packer, Keep in Step with the Spirit (IVP / Baker). The classic on holiness and the Spirit's ministry, including a fair-minded assessment of the charismatic movement from outside it, and a careful account of what the Spirit's work in the Christian life actually looks like. Another classic work.

John Stott, The Message of Acts (Bible Speaks Today series, IVP). A full commentary, but pay particular attention to his handling of Pentecost and the Spirit's work through the book. Some may prefer Stott’s opening up of the Bible to a topical summary of the work of the Spirit through all the Scriptures.

D. A. Carson, The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17 (Baker). Another one looking at a section of the bible where we see Jesus' teaching on the coming and work of the Spirit. More like expanded sermons than a technical commentary.