

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN LIFE

THE HOLY SPIRIT

BEFORE THE TALK

If you have arranged for someone to begin this session by sharing his or her testimony, introduce that person at this point. Ideally, their testimony should last no more than 3 minutes.

Give a brief introduction – the wording below is intended only as a general guide.

We now move on to another reason why we're not alone in the Christian life: the Holy Spirit. The Bible shows very clearly that there is only one God, and yet there are three personal distinctions in his nature. I'm sure you've heard people referring to them: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I'd like us now to look in more detail at the Holy Spirit.

THE TALK

Deliver the talk. The wording below is intended only as a general guide. The aim of the talk is to show how the Holy Spirit works in a person's life, both before and after the person becomes a Christian. The talk opens by explaining who the Holy Spirit is, then goes on to explore aspects of his work: he convicts people of their sin, provides "gifts," gives people the desire to obey God, fights against the sinful nature and brings peace.

There was once a photographer who was taking photos of a raging Australian bush fire. Eventually the fire became too intense for him, so he radioed for a small plane to pick him up and take him over the fire. He was assured that there would be a plane for him at a nearby airstrip, and so he hurried around to the airfield. Sure enough, there on the runway was a small plane exactly as he had been told. He jumped in and said to the pilot, "Take her away." When they were in the air he said to the pilot, "I want you to swing left and go low over the fire." A little later he said, "Now I want you to dive down onto the top of the smoke." The pilot turned to him and said, "Why are you asking me to do this?" And the photographer replied, "Because I'm a photographer and I want good photos." To which the pilot exclaimed, "You mean you're not my instructor?"

Now thankfully, if you become a Christian, you'll be joined by an expert instructor: the Holy Spirit.

Turn with me to John chapter 14, verse 23.

Read aloud John 14:23.

If you become a Christian, Jesus promises in this verse that he and his Father will come and make their home with you. How exactly can this happen?

Look at what Jesus says a few verses earlier in John 14, verse 15.

Read aloud John 14:15–17.

Jesus explains that the “Counsellor” will come to live “in” those who obey him. Who is this “Counsellor”? Well, look at verse 26. The “Counsellor” is “the Holy Spirit.” So, in other words, the Father and the Son make their home with us through the Holy Spirit. It’s a miraculous thing that happens to those who put their trust in Jesus: the Holy Spirit will come to live “with you” and “in you.”

Notice, too, that Jesus talks in verse 16 about “*another* Counsellor.” In effect, he is saying that this Spirit will do for believers what he himself has done for them while on earth: teach them, guide them and enable them to understand God’s word. Indeed, the Spirit who comes to live in Christians is the Spirit of Christ himself. It’s as if Jesus is actually with us.

The Greek word Jesus uses for “Counsellor” is “*parakletos*,” which comes from two words, “*para*,” meaning “alongside,” and “*kaleo*,” meaning “to call.” So this “Counsellor” is literally “the one who is called alongside.” The Greeks used the word “*parakletos*” to describe a friend comforting a bereaved person or a pilot taking a ship into port. So the Holy Spirit is someone who comes to comfort and guide.

Jesus talks about the “Counsellor” again in John 16. Let’s start reading from verse 7.

Read aloud John 16:7–8.

The key word here is the verb “convict.” It is a word taken from the law courts and used in the Greek-speaking world to describe the cross-examination of a witness. Jesus tells us here that he will send the Holy Spirit to cross-examine men and women. So the Spirit makes people aware that they have rejected Jesus, that they are sinful, that they need to be made righteous, that there will be a judgement. He opens our eyes to see our desperate state before God and our need of his forgiveness, made possible for us through Jesus’ death.

At this point, you might want to ask one of the group leaders to give a testimony illustrating the way in which the Holy Spirit prompted him or her to become a Christian.

One of the amazing things about the Holy Spirit is that he gives each of Jesus’ followers different gifts. The apostle Paul insists that every Christian has a unique role to play in God’s church and that he or she is to fulfill that role according to the “gifts” that the Holy Spirit has given him or her. These gifts can be anything – anything that will help other Christians. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 we read: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord ... Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” Now, these gifts are to be used “for the common good.” They’re not there to make us feel important as individuals. They’re given to us so that we can benefit one another.

That obviously prompts the question, “So what are my gifts?” The New Testament lists the gifts of the Spirit in four passages: Romans chapter 12, verses 6–8; 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verses 8–10; Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11 and 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 10–11. You can look these up in your group during the discussion if you like.

Turn with me now to Ezekiel chapter 36, and we’ll read verses 26–27. Here God explains what will happen when he gives Christians his Spirit.

Read aloud Ezekiel 36:26–27.

The Spirit will change Christians’ hearts, giving them the desire to obey laws that would otherwise seem too hard to obey. As the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 7, verse 22: “In my inner being I delight in God’s law.” That longing in your heart to go God’s way is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life.

Although the Holy Spirit makes us delight in God’s law, the presence of the Spirit is not always a comfortable experience, because he is constantly at war with our sinful nature. In the Bayeux Tapestry there is a picture of a Norman soldier running out of the battle, scared stiff. The next picture shows a bishop prodding him in the rear to get him back in the fight, and the caption says, “The bishop comforts his soldier.” That’s a good picture of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes he prods Christians to live a life more worthy of Christ.

The apostle Paul writes this in Galatians chapter 5: “the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.” Just as Jesus convicted people of the sin in their lives, so his Spirit does the same. For example, Jesus frequently accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy. In the same way, the Spirit accuses us when we call ourselves Christians but fail to live in the way we should.

But this battle between the Spirit and the sinful nature is also something to be thankful for, because it confirms that Christ’s Spirit is within you, sensitizing your conscience, giving you a longing to be more like him, fighting against everything that keeps you from knowing God more fully. But I promise you this: this battle between the sinful nature and the Spirit will continue until the day you die.

Boris Becker, the German tennis player, once said, “I’d won Wimbledon twice before, once as the youngest player. I was rich: I had all the material possessions I could want – money, cars, women – everything. I know this is a cliché. It’s the old song of the movie and pop star who committed suicide; they had everything yet they are so unhappy. I had no inner peace.” You see, Boris Becker could have everything the world has to offer, but if he doesn’t have a relationship with the God who made him, he will have no peace.

But when a person begins to follow Christ, he or she no longer feels that separation. Indeed, because the Spirit now resides in that person, God has made his home with them forever. His presence provides peace, described in Philippians chapter 4 as “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding.” Paul writes in Romans chapter 8 that this peace comes from a deep inner conviction that the follower of Christ is one of “God’s children,” no longer separated from him, and certain to be with him in heaven. It’s the peace that can only come from finding rest in our relationship with our heavenly Father.

AT THE END OF THE TALK

Let me leave you with the following questions for your groups:

Display the following questions and read them aloud.

- “I had no inner peace.” What is it that makes people feel like this?
- Having explored Jesus’ life, how would you feel about his Spirit coming to live “with you” and “in you”?

*Allow 30 minutes for groups to work together through the Study Guide section called **GROUP DISCUSSION**.*