*Session 1*

***The Spirit Comes***

Introducing the Study

As the risen Savior and Lord, Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, so He has given His disciples their marching orders. The kingdom of God came in the person of Christ, and His disciples are to make it the mission of their lives to spread the good news of the gospel to every nation on earth. God told Abraham centuries ago that his descendants would bring blessing to the nations; that promise is fulfilled in Jesus and His disciples as active participants in God’s global purpose of redemption.

**What are some of the competing priorities Jesus’ commission forces us to rethink?**

The task Jesus gave His disciples was massive. Impossible even. Which is why Jesus did not send His followers out alone. He promised that He would be with them always, even to the end of the age. God’s enduring presence in the life of believers would come in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit provides Christ’s followers with the courage and conviction necessary to complete the mission of God.

**What is the most challenging part of making Jesus’ Great Commission the focus of your life?**

Setting the Context

Jesus continued to instruct and encourage His disciples for forty days after His resurrection. Then, just before He ascended into heaven, Jesus clarified the mission He was giving them. The disciples were to be Jesus’ witnesses; they were to tell others about who He is and what He has done to provide salvation to the world. And this mission would take them to the ends of the earth, to every nation, tongue, and tribe. But first, they were to wait in Jerusalem for the Father’s promise.

**Why do you think the disciples needed to wait? Why didn’t the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit immediately?**

So they waited together for ten days, united in prayer, until the day of Pentecost. Pentecost was one of the pilgrim festivals, so this meant that Jews had traveled from all over to be in Jerusalem, swelling the city’s population. The celebration of Pentecost marked the end of the grain harvest as the people rejoiced and gave thanks to God for the harvest blessings by offering the first portion of the harvest. The festival concluded with a shared meal—a party—celebrating God’s provision.

But this Pentecost celebration would be like none other. It was during this Pentecost that Jesus’ disciples would experience the provision of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts tells of the wonderful works of the Holy Spirit through Jesus’ disciples. “Hearing the Old Testament in Acts” (p. 11) shows how even these events were foretold by God.

**Why do you think so many Christians are confused about the Holy Spirit?**

CHRIST Connection

Jesus had instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit because the Spirit would empower them to be His witnesses on earth. Just as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, filled them, and empowered them at Pentecost, resulting in three thousand new believers. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus.

Continuing the Discussion

Watch this session’s video, and then continue the group discussion using the following guide.

**How would you describe the person and work of the Holy Spirit to a non-Christian?**

**How do Christians experience the person and work of the Holy Spirit in their lives?**

***As a group, read Acts 2:1-4.***

**How does this passage reveal both the power and the purpose of the Holy Spirit?**

**Why is it significant that the tongues of fire rested on each believer?**

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would come to a prophet temporarily for a specific purpose. But at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to take up permanent residence in believers. The tongues of fire resting on each person was evidence of the Spirit’s individual filling. The Spirit empowered the disciples to give themselves to God’s mission of declaring the gospel, proven by their new ability to speak in the languages of those gathered for the festival.

***As a group, read Acts 2:22-24,36-40.***

**What are the essential components of sharing the gospel based on this section of Peter’s sermon?**

**Why is it important that Peter gave the people a way to respond?**

**In what ways might we overcomplicate the gospel as we share it?**

Peter’s sharing of the gospel convicted the crowd. When the Jews gathered around him heard about Jesus, they knew they needed to respond but didn’t know how. Peter answered them and shared how they could be saved, and about three thousand people were added as believers that day. The newly-born church was growing.

***As a group, read Acts 2:41-47.***

**What activities did the church engage in? Why was each vital?**

**What does it mean that the early church was filled with awe of God? How might this relate to “the fear of the Lord”?**

**Do we have that same fear of God today? Why or why not?**

Like the early church, the church today is to be devoted to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to breaking bread, and to prayer. These activities show how the church is built upon the Scriptures, gospel community, and spiritual development. As new believers joined the early church, we see that everyone was in awe, referring to a healthy fear and reverence of God. Accordingly, this fear arose as many signs and wonders, demonstrating God’s hand on the church, were performed through the apostles.

MISSIONAL Application

Record at least one way you will apply the truth of Scripture as a believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit and empowered for the gospel mission.

Personal Study 1

**The Holy Spirit comes to indwell every believer.**

***Read Acts 2:1-4.***

During Jesus’ final days on earth, before His crucifixion through His ascension, He promised the disciples that another Counselor—the Spirit—would come to carry on His work. He said, “If you love me, you will keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive him because it doesn’t see him or know him. But you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you” (John 14:15-17).

This is a wonderful Trinitarian statement—the Son asks the Father to send the Spirit. But before we get the wrong idea that these three Persons are somehow independent of one another, Jesus adds, “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you” (John 14:18). As the Son and the Father are one, so are the Son and the Spirit. Although Jesus returned to the Father, the Counselor came and Jesus is still present.

Such is the mystery of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are distinct yet one at the same time. We always need to hold these two truths together—God is one; God is Trinity. People have tried to illustrate the Trinity with examples like the forms of water or the parts of an egg, but these illustrations always fall short. We can’t comprehend the Trinity. The doctrine is not illogical, but God’s infinite being lies beyond human comprehension. The Trinity is not a riddle to solve through logic; it is a wonder to behold through faith.

When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, He promised Himself too. He is seated at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:20; Heb. 8:1; 12:2) and He is also with us always, “to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). When the Holy Spirit is sent to us, God is present, and that, of course, means that Jesus Himself is present with us.

The disciples were bewildered by all that had happened leading up to and following Jesus’ arrest and public execution. Days before the crucifixion, Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem like a king arriving for His coronation. The whole city greeted Him, hailing the new King of the Jews. Then He died on a cross. Something far less than they had expected had taken place. Rome remained in control of Jerusalem. There would be no new Israel—no freedom from the tyranny of their oppressors.

And yet, so much more than they had expected had taken place. Jesus had risen from the dead. They’d shared meals and conversations with Him. They’d touched His scars. They’d seen Him appear behind locked doors in a glorified body that was at once recognizable and unrecognizable, familiar and new. And they’d seen Him taken up into the heavens with the promise that He would come again in the same way. But first, the Spirit would come as Jesus had promised.

The story didn’t end with Jesus’ resurrection and ascension; instead, a new chapter began, one in which the Holy Spirit would fill every believer.

In the coming of the Spirit, Jesus’ promise to be with us always was realized, as was the prophet Joel’s promise that God would one day pour out His Spirit on “all humanity” (Joel 2:28). Likewise, the coming of the Spirit revealed the role that Christ’s followers play in the world—not merely as a faithful group that remembers what Jesus has done, but as God’s agents for good in the world and the very vessels God will use to carry out His mission. The advance of God’s kingdom and the continuation of God’s work through His church in His world would come through the Holy Spirit.

**What questions or thoughts do you have about the filling of the Holy Spirit?**

**How should the indwelling of the Holy Spirit change the way we live?**

Personal Study 2

**The Holy Spirit comes to empower the spread of the gospel.**

***Read Acts 2:22-24,36-40.***

It didn’t take long after the Holy Spirit’s arrival for Him to reveal the difference He would make to the church. When the Spirit arrived, He came with the sound of rushing wind. This sound caught the attention of the Jews gathered in Jerusalem from the nations for the festival of Pentecost. The Jews gathered to investigate and the disciples shared the good news of Jesus with them—in the language of each one gathered as the Spirit enabled them. Responding to the people’s confusion, the apostle Peter, filled with the Spirit, stood before the massive crowd and preached the sermon recorded in Acts 2:22-40.

Peter couldn’t contain himself. He nearly exploded as he shared this sermon, urgently pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, the One who came to liberate Israel from the oppressive burdens of sin and death. “Jesus is Lord and Messiah,” Peter told the Jews, “and He rose from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father.” But Peter wasn’t the one talking that day; it was Peter filled with the Spirit who spoke. At the Spirit’s urging, the words flowed from Peter’s lips. He wove together the story of Jesus with passages from the Old Testament Scriptures and laid out the gospel for all to see.

This sermon provides a window into the life and nature of the Trinity. It was not merely Peter’s love for the gospel that was on display, but the Spirit’s love for the gospel and the Spirit’s love for the Son as well. Each Person of the Trinity is enamored with the others. At Jesus’ baptism, the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

Jesus, as we’ve already noted, talked glowingly about the coming of the Spirit and the good that would come with Him. And here, a Spirit-filled Peter preaches rapturously about what Jesus has accomplished and how the Father has honored Him, seating the resurrected Christ at His right hand. When John the apostle tells us that God is love, we don’t have to look any further than the relationships within the Trinity to see that love displayed.

What we learn by looking at the Book of Acts is that the Spirit compels us to speak out as well. The mission of the church—to go out into the world and share the good news of God’s reconciling work in Jesus—is a reflection of the heart of the Holy Spirit, who is more eager than anyone to celebrate the work of the Father and the Son.

We should understand that the immense power of the Holy Spirit is given to us as Christians specifically for the mission God has given us. The Holy Spirit is not like the electric company. The electric company provides a source of power, but its responsibility ends there. What appliances we plug in, how many lights we turn on and off, or how many extension cords we run is up to us. The electric company is neutral when it comes to the usage of the power it provides. The Holy Spirit, though, not only provides us with the power we need to live out God’s mission, He directs us to give ourselves to that mission.

Knowing this should dramatically shift the way we think about sharing the gospel. You might find yourself struggling to speak up at times, to know when to share your faith, or to initiate conversations about Jesus. Some suggest techniques for making these conversations easier; many churches offer classes on the subject. And that’s not a bad thing. But the easiest, and greatest, way to be bolder in sharing the gospel is by seeking to be filled with the Spirit (see Eph. 5:18-19; cf. Acts 13:50-52).

**What prevents Christians from sharing the gospel with others?**

**How does the filling of the Holy Spirit overcome our barriers to share the gospel and empower our evangelism?**

Personal Study 3

**The Holy Spirit comes to build the community of faith.**

***Read Acts 2:41-47.***

When the Holy Spirit comes to a new believer, He brings life and growth. This growth resembles that of a tree with its branches and roots. On one hand, the kingdom spreads into the world in visible, extensive ways characteristic of the church’s mission. The momentum of this growth is overflowing and outward. But the kingdom also grows in ways often unseen with an inward momentum resulting in depth, stability, and holy relationships. We encounter this inward growth in Acts 2.

This passage records many demonstrations of God’s grace and work. There are signs and wonders—miracles such as healing the sick and casting out demons—that characterized Jesus’ ministry and the ministry of the apostles. But there are more subtle demonstrations as well. The believers shared their possessions, they sold what they had in abundance to help those in need among them. And they met regularly and shared meals.

This depth of community doesn’t just happen. Most of the time, when you force people to live in tight, communal circumstances, the opposite occurs. Proximity leads to conflicts, and conflicts lead to strengthened borders. “Good fences make good neighbors,” as they say. That’s because there’s less potential for conflict when what’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours, and we both know which is which.

In Acts 2, however, this newly formed community presses into one another’s lives, and the boundaries around possessions and wealth disappear. Moved by the Spirit, each believer’s interests shifted from self to the good of the community of faith, and they began sharing all they had. They were sharing meals, sharing space, and sharing life.

What’s more, as the church grew through the Book of Acts it came to include people of all different kinds of backgrounds. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, people who were previously divided by race, economic status, or educational level were not only associating with one another, but actually loving one another. This type of love and unity is a powerful testimony. Not to the human spirit, because it is in our nature to divide into groups of people who look, think, and act like us. Instead, this unity testifies to the power of Christ through the Holy Spirit who breaks down the walls that keep us separated.

When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, we begin to overflow with love for God and love for our neighbors, especially those who share our faith. These twin loves fuel the whole of the Christian life. It is love of God that leads us to bear witness to the gospel around the world, and it is love of our brothers and sisters that leads us to develop rich, deeply committed relationships with God’s people.

Too often we emphasize one love over the other. When we focus only on the community of faith, we can lose touch with the wonder of God—sharing the gospel keeps that wonder fresh and alive in our hearts. Likewise, when we focus only on bearing witness to Jesus without developing any real relationships with other Christians, we find ourselves without accountability and often lacking the humility and gentleness that come as a result of being deeply known and deeply loved by the people around us.

What’s displayed in Acts 2 comes as a result of the gift of God’s Spirit. It cannot be controlled or manipulated or manufactured. It only comes when open hearts, stirred to faith by the gospel, receive this gift from the Father and the Son and are filled by Him. And so we seek this Spirit-transformed life not by imitating these behaviors but by seeking God’s presence, by asking Him to fill us with His Spirit and renew our love for Him, His Word, His gospel, and His people.

**How have you experienced deep community of faith in the name of Jesus and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?**

**What are some ways we can contribute to this Spirit-filled community of faith?**