

BRMC Small Group Study: Holy Spirit Session 1

Leader's Guide

Please note that the suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study. Feel free to adapt the questions for your group.

Scripture Passage:

Focus: John 1:32-33

Supplementary: Acts 10:37-38 and Romans 8:26-27

Open to the Spirit:

Focus chapter: 2

Supplementary chapters: "Introduction", 1 and 24

Context:

Jesus, as a human, was open to, and empowered by, the Holy Spirit for His ministry on earth (p 10-11). What does it mean to be open to the Holy Spirit? How can we be open to the Spirit? Jesus shows how He was able to do the will of the Father because He was wide open to the Spirit. We are designed to be receptive to the Spirit, but we have the choice to be open or to be shut (p 8). A paradigm shift may be necessary for some of us. As followers of Jesus, we need "to be open to the same Spirit to whom Jesus was wide open," so as to be able to grow spiritually and to do God's will. (p 16)

In John 1:32-33, John describes how the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, and this event marks the start of His ministry. The power of Jesus in proclaiming the Kingdom of God (such as doing good, and healing) was enabled only by the Holy Spirit's power (anointing) (Acts 10:37-38). In our spiritual growth, our efforts in serving and pleasing God should come from the Spirit's work in us.

Lesson Objectives:

- Being open to the Spirit is an active choice which may require a paradigm shift for some of us.
- Being open to the Spirit is modelled in the life of Jesus.
- Being open to the Spirit enables us to grow spiritually.
- Being open to the Spirit empowers us do God's will.

Introductory

1. From the focus passage, through whom can we be baptised with the Holy Spirit? What does it mean for us to be baptised in the Spirit?

- John testified that Jesus will baptise us with the Holy Spirit (John 1:32-33). Being baptised in the Spirit means God's presence will be residing in us, hence, He will be able to work in us and through us.
- "To be Spirit-receptive means that we are open to God, to God's own indwelling presence. We are open to releasing the grace and power and glory of God in our lives. It is not just that we are empty vessels in need of a filling. We are created to be

Spirit-receptive in the sense that **God's presence is in us and ready to display God's glory through us.**" p. xv (Intro)

2. What can we learn from Acts 10:37-38 as to why we need to be open to the Spirit?
 - Jesus' ministry only started after He was baptised and the Spirit descended upon Him. He was enabled to perform miracles because He was a Spirit-filled man.
 - The Spirit brings our minds and hearts in line with God. (Example: We can live a life of worship and pray true prayers when we are open to the Spirit in us.)
 - All that Jesus did, was "after the baptism that John preached" Acts 10:37.
 - Our spiritual life grows through the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. How, does Acts 10:38 say, was Jesus as a man able to do all that He did?
 - **"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power**, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." Acts 10:37-38.
 - Jesus was able to do supernatural acts which transcends His human capacity because of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection

4. Have I been open to the Spirit and all His powers which can be manifested in me?
 - Although God created us to be receptive to the Spirit, He also designed us to choose to respond according to our free-will.
 - This question is designed for each of us to reflect, on a personal basis, and is an opportunity for your group to share their concerns, mental hurdles or prejudices concerning the Holy Spirit.
 - The author of the book suggests that there are 2 main reasons why people are not open to the "invasive, transcending and transforming presence" of the Holy Spirit:
(1) "We don't want transcending power, and
(2) We don't want the transforming presence of God because we'd rather stay the way we are." (p2)
 - McKnight writes, "I am deeply aware that those responsible for my early Christian training somehow wanted us all to grow spiritually but were nervous about the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We could trust text printed on paper, bound between the covers of a Bible. But the Holy Spirit? How could we ever control a God as elusive as the Spirit? I changed directions on the Spirit because of what I found time and again in the Bible." (p 8)
 - Encourage your group that the journey of discovery about the Holy Spirit may just be beginning for them, and for our church as a whole – therefore let's persevere with an openness to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal more and more to each of us. For others, they may have had a real experience, which we explore in the next reflection question.

5. Have you ever had an experience when you “felt” the power of the Spirit? How did you respond? Did you allow it to freely move in you and through you? Or did you get scared and you just ignored it or even denied what you felt?

- This is an opportunity for people in your group to share. And to follow up with the next question.

6. What may be some reservations which you may have when you think about opening yourself to the working of the Holy Spirit in your life, which the author did not touch on?

- We all have our personal spiritual paradigms which have been established from our different religious upbringings or academic experiences. The author shared how he used to be sceptical about the works of the Spirit, but he also shared how eventually he became open to it (p 2-4). Allow your group to share their personal experiences.
- You should also prepare to share with the group about an occasion where you had such an experience, or heard a testimony from someone you know.
- Our experience with the Holy Spirit need not be “spectacular” but each experience is always marked by profound closeness with God and a gentle (often unexplainable) comforting and peace.
- McKnight shares an interesting illustration: “During World War II, a miracle took place repeatedly in the village of Le Chambon in southern France. Residents of the town, Andre and Magda Trocme were deeply committed Christians who lived out their village’s commitment to rescuing Jews who had been displaced from their homes. So open was their own home that they didn’t lock their doors. Against the pleading of the Jews who found shelter with them from the Nazis, Magda refused to lock her doors. But because the door was always open, something quite special happened that can serve as an image of the Holy Spirit for you and me: ‘A few days after the conversation with the refugees, Magda returned from working all day at the Cevenol School and found flowers everywhere in the house: in the kitchen, in the dining room, in her husband’s office.’ Here is an image to live by: if we leave the doors and windows of our lives open to the Spirit, we may find surprising flowers in our lives.” (p7-8)

Application

7. Do you want to be open to the Spirit as Jesus was? How will you allow the Spirit to work in you and through you?

- Honestly gauging our level of receptivity to the Spirit will help us know where we really stand.
- These questions might yield different answers from the group. This should help in getting the pulse of the group as to where most of them stand, which hopefully will determine the areas of focus for the subsequent lessons.

- For some we need to make a decision to be open to learn about the importance of the Holy Spirit and to be receptive to the Spirit's guidance and then, power.
- For others, it may be a willingness to be more engaged with the Holy Spirit. In the next session, one way to be engaged will be to seek the Holy Spirit whenever we read the Bible.
- Invite the group to make decisions which can be the content for their prayers next...

Prayer

8. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session.

- It may be useful to break into smaller groups and allow some time for people to process what they have heard and learned from the Holy Spirit. Then encourage them to share with one another what their prayer is for this session, and for themselves for the week.
- It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.
- If it is appropriate, suggest to members to write down and journal specific instances when they feel the Spirit at work in them and through them. This aims to help them become more aware of the Spirit's presence in their lives, and if they feel comfortable to share these experiences, it will help them and others grow in their spiritual walk. The journal will also be useful in taking notes during the sermon over the next 7 sessions.