

BRMC Small Group Study: Holy Spirit Session 3

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 3:1-21

Supplementary: John 6:63, Genesis 1:2, 2:7, and Ezekiel 37:1-14

Open to the Spirit:

Focus chapter: 8

Supplementary chapters: 7 and 16

Context:

"The prominence of the Spirit in Luke's narrative from Pentecost onwards makes clear beyond doubt that for Luke the mission of the church could not hope to be effective without this empowering from God (the Spirit of God) which *transcends human ability and transform human inability.*" (p 63) However, the Spirit did not appear only from Pentecost but has been active even in the creation of the world. Understanding the word "ruach" and its use in the Bible helps to see how the Spirit blows, to give breath to life, to revive and give eternal life.

In John 3:1-21, John tells the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he has to be born again: born of water and the Spirit. God works through the Holy Spirit to give spiritual rebirth because Jesus by his death has taken away our sin. Jesus was sent not to condemn, but to save.

The supplementary passage from Ezekiel tells of the role of the Spirit in revival, in renewing us to live as God would want us to live.

Lesson Objectives:

- The Holy Spirit grants life / gives life.
- The Holy Spirit revives us / gives us renewal.
- The Holy Spirit gives us eternal life when we are born of water and the Spirit.

Introductory

1. What did Jesus say is required to see the kingdom of God?

- Jesus said one must be "born again" (v3), born of water and the Spirit (v5), born of the Spirit (John 3:8).
- In John 3:5-8, pneuma is used to refer to "Spirit", "spirit" and "wind" (p67). This is the equivalent to the Hebrew word *ruach*.
- McKnight suggests: "To a first-century listener, these words of Jesus would have been astounding: Jesus was claiming to have the power to do what God did at

creation. Jesus was saying he had the power to create new life, to turn the chaos of sin and evil inside out to cleanse it, and to do this work of new creation through the power of the Holy Spirit." (p 67)

2. How do we have eternal life?

- Believe in Jesus (John 3:15). However, in practical terms, what we are believing in is Jesus' words about Himself. This then leads to the next question...

3. In John 6:63 who is said to give life?

- It is the Spirit that gives life, and the word that has been spoken by Christ.
- In fact, the coming of the Spirit has been foretold by the Prophets, which is why Jesus says that as teacher of Israel, Nicodemus should have knowledge of this (John 3:10) e.g. Isaiah 44:1-5..
- In Genesis 1:2 and 2:7, we see that the Spirit was at work in the creation of the world and in giving man life.
- McKnight says, "[w]e need to see that the spirit that gives us life is connected to the Spirit that grants life as well as eternal life... We need to let God suffuse the spirit of our birth and creation as humans with God's own Spirit. Only in that way can we become all we have been created to become." (p 63) The Greek word for *ruach* is *pneuma* (p 67)

Reflection

4. What role did the Holy Spirit play when you became a Christian?

- This is an opportunity to hear the conversion testimony of each member in the group. More importantly, it is an opportunity to reflect on the role of the Holy Spirit in that "conversion".
- In John 3:1-21, we see the gentle conversion of Nicodemus, a Pharisee, member of the ruling council, and Teacher of Israel. We see later Nicodemus standing up for Jesus when the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest Him (John 7:50-52) and taking Jesus' body after His crucifixion for burial (John 19:38-42) (p 70). Nicodemus full conversion did not necessarily occur in an instant, but would appear to have been progressively strengthened.
- However, the starting point was that night-time meeting with Jesus and Nicodemus' openness to receiving the work of the Holy Spirit in believing the words of Jesus.
- Can the members of the group see their own progression and the role of the Holy Spirit?

5. In Ezekiel 37:1-14, Ezekiel was asked the question: "Son of man, can these bones live?" Do you believe that God can make these bones live? What do you think that means for us now?

- The story in Ezekiel is incredible and awesome. There are some key points (p 65-66): dry bones had to hear the word of the Lord; the Lord will put His breath into them; they will come alive; and they will know that "I am the LORD".
- Ezekiel then had to say the words and obey the Lord.
- McKnight states: "The Day of Pentecost is no more and no less dramatic than the dry bones piled in the valley suddenly turning into living bodies, for that is what Pentecost does to each of us: it takes our deadness and brings it to new life." (p 67)
- This question is an opportunity to reflect on each person's spirit-life. Is there a longing for renewal with God? Is there a feeling of deadness in our walk with God? What can we do about it?
- As the leader, would you ask yourself that question asked of Ezekiel ... would you speak those words over your group members that the dry bones would receive the word of the Lord and live and know that He is LORD.
- Tell them what Jesus told Nicodemus, they must be born again, born of water and the Spirit.

Application

6. What does it mean to be born again?

- Allow the members of the group to share what they believe or what they think this means. Some will be esoteric, and may require guidance to focus on the question: "what does that mean to you in your life?"
- You can share with the group what McKnight says is being born anew:
 - "Jesus offered Nicodemus new birth because new creation is unleashed by the *ruach* who has come from above and makes all things new. This is what it means to be born anew:
 - God's Spirit hovers over us and unleashes new creation into us.
 - God's Spirit draws us to believe in Jesus, the Son of God.
 - God's Spirit draws us to believe in Jesus, the Son of God.
 - God's Spirit enters into those who are open to God in Christ.
 - God's Spirit begins to transform us into Jesus followers." (p 69-70)
- You can share with the group your personal experience. And for those who may not have invited Jesus into their lives, or who feel they are spiritually "dead", the next question may be helpful.

7. Have you been born of the Spirit? Have you prayed to invite Jesus into your life? Or, if you have, have you ever doubted your salvation? How can I be sure of my salvation?

- If members have not been born again, this is an opportunity for them to (pray sinner's prayer). If this is what they want. The prayer should cover these 4 elements:
 - Admit, he/she is a sinner, and therefore needs Jesus.
 - Repent, of his/her sins.
 - Believe, that Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose again to pay the penalty for his/her sins and to prepare a place in heaven (eternal life) for him/her.
 - Receive, the Lord Jesus into his/her life by invitation.

The following is a prayer that you could use to lead. The prayer should be said by the person, you should ask them to read it or repeat it after you:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, I believe You are the Son of God. I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your Name.
Amen

- Please remember to congratulate the “new” believer and to welcome them into the family of Christ. They are now a new creation. You may wish to do a separate follow-up with him/her as a new believer and to recommend attending the Baptism and Membership class.
- If they have already believed and received, then perhaps re-commit to follow Jesus or seek assurance of salvation. Let them be renewed, be open to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. (p 70)
- McKnight mentioned that “...if you have the Spirit dwelling in you, then eternal life is in your future ... if you see marks in your life in being open to God speaking to you in these ways, then you can know that the Spirit is at work in you for an eternal redemption.” (p 134-135).
- McKnight writes: “You can be assured of God’s redemption...
if you are open to the new-creation life,
or open to the new message of God in Christ,
or open to a new presence of God in your life,
or open to the new day of the Spirit and a new baptism,
or open to a New Ego forming in you that is empowered by
God’s Spirit and leading you to see the church as the new
people of God and your own family.
You can know you are in the kingdom of God...
if you are open to supporting cross-shaped leaders and to
serving with new people of God,
or open to a new orientation to the Body of Christ as your
offer your gift for the common good of the local church,
or open to a life shaped by love.” (p 135-136)
- The Spirit is the assurance that we have eternal life. (2 Corinthians 1:22) And the presence of the Spirit in our life produces visible fruits in us.
- Romans 10:9 is also a good verse to share for the assurance of salvation.
- A useful test of whether it is the Holy Spirit working in you or not, you can ask the question: “did this experience or word move me towards Jesus or move me away from Jesus?” If the experience brings you closer to Jesus in understanding, love or commitment, that may provide the answer.

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.
- If it is appropriate, suggest to members to pray for each other concerning their openness to be born again and to be assurance of their salvation.
- It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.