

Week 5 – Discovering the Spirit

How do we discover the Spirit?

Jesus promised that, after his death, the Holy Spirit would come to all those who believe. The most famous example is the Spirit coming to Jesus' disciples, and closest followers, at Pentecost – the Bible paints a dramatic picture of their experience:

- a violent wind filling the house where they were gathered
- flames like fire settling on each of their heads
- they started speaking in many different languages at once
- crowds were amazed and some thought they were drunk
- a small, frightened, bewildered group were suddenly transformed into a resolute band of missionaries ready to die for their faith
- they preached about Jesus with incredible conviction and power
- thousands of people were converted and baptised as a result.

It isn't always like that! The knowledge that the Spirit has become part of you, at the centre of your being, often happens gradually rather than suddenly. It may happen when you make your first commitment to Jesus Christ, or some time later. It will go on growing and developing within you, for the rest of your life.

The Holy Spirit

God is the Holy Spirit. Just as much as he is our Father, and Jesus. The Holy Spirit is God who is with us, here and now, inspiring and sharing our journey through life.

Everyone has a deep need for God. It's like having an "inner space" which, if it is empty, leaves us struggling through life on our own, wondering what the point is. It's that "inner space" which will be filled with the Spirit when we invite God into our lives. It's a powerful feeling. Things will never be the same again!

The Spirit will change us. As he guides and helps us, renewing every part of us, we will become more like Jesus himself; much better at dealing with all the problems and challenges that we face; much better at helping and supporting other people.

It is through the Spirit that we come to know God, in prayer. When we pray, it's the Spirit who guides our thoughts, and helps us understand what God is saying to us.

Why we pray

Prayer is time we spend in the company of God. It's the way we develop a close relationship. Sometimes we talk to God; sometimes we feel God speaks to us; sometimes it's good just to be alone with God, not saying anything.

God is always with us, and we can pray at any time – before an important meeting perhaps, or when we hear something in the news. But odd moments snatched from a busy life are not enough to form a relationship. We need to set aside some quality time to be with God.

Praying every day

For Christians, regular prayer is essential. The easiest and best way to do this is to have a daily prayer time. You need to decide on a time and place which suits you, and then plan what you are going to do.

Many people like to pray in the morning, to set them up for the day ahead; and/or in the evening, looking back over the day. It's better to aim for five minutes a day and achieve it, than aim for half an hour and fail.

Pray in the way that comes naturally to you. Find somewhere quiet, free of distractions. Spend some time just feeling God's presence with you. Then open your heart to him; let him know the things you're excited or concerned about; ask him to help you, and to care for people and situations that are important to you; and listen to what God may be saying to you.

It helps to remember that there are three main dimensions to prayer:

3 – Dimensional Prayer

GOD	Reflecting on God's greatness, and his many wonderful gifts, leading to praise and thanksgiving.
US	Confessing our sin, asking for forgiveness and for the help we need, renewing our commitment to God.
THE WORLD	Praying for the Church, for our family and friends, for people in this country and abroad – and finding out what God wants us to do.

Different Ways of Praying

There are many ways of praying, and it's good to pray differently at different times, so that our prayers are always real and meaningful and fresh. For example:

- Silent prayer – not needing any words, just being with God.
- Being still, and letting God speak to us.
- Putting prayers into our own words.
- Using prayers other people have written, which express what we want to say.
- Special prayers – like the Lord's Prayer, and the Grace.
- Reading the Bible, or hymns, and praying about what they mean to us – or using the Psalms as prayers.
- Meditation, on one of the many signs of God's love – until it becomes part of us.
- Repeating a simple prayer many times – like the "Jesus Prayer".
- Praying through the day, about things as they happen – finding God in the moment – being aware of how God touches our lives.