



## Acts and The Early Church (Week 2/8) Possessed by the Spirit of God

### Small Group Discussion Questions

**Connect** *On one of your frontlines, what is one way that you can be helpfully distinctive in order to demonstrate how your life has been transformed by the Gospel?*

#### Warm-Up

1. When did you first come to learn about the Holy Spirit? What were your first impressions?
2. In what ways is the Christian belief in the Holy Spirit weird or distinctive in our culture?

#### Read Acts 2:1-13

3. Who is gathered in the room on the day of Pentecost? Why were the disciples still in Jerusalem?
4. Imagine you were in the room with the disciples. What did you *hear* and *see*?
5. What did the Spirit enable the disciples to do? Who understood what they were saying?
6. Why were the Jews from all other nations *bewildered*?
7. How did the disciples *know* the Spirit had arrived? Why were the disciples expecting the Spirit?
8. Who is the Holy Spirit? What is the Holy Spirit's role in the church?
9. What aspects of the Spirit's identity and work have you found confusing? What aspects are clear?
10. Who was filled with the Spirit in the Old Testament? What is the difference now?

#### Read Acts 2:14-21

11. What *phenomenon* is Peter trying to explain?
12. Which promise is now fulfilled with the Spirit's arrival?
13. Who is the Spirit poured out on? Why is that surprising *and* comforting? How is that still true today?
14. Read Verse 38. If you believe in Jesus, will you receive the Spirit? Why is it incorrect and damaging to suggest that only *particular* Christians receive the Spirit (or *specific signs* must accompany belief)?
15. Is the Spirit *always* experienced in the same way by people in Acts and in the New Testament? What are some of the different experiences people have when they come to faith in Jesus?
16. What has been your experience of the Spirit? Why can the Spirit decide to act in different ways?

#### Read Acts 8:9-24

17. How did Simon try to acquire the power of the Spirit? Why was the Spirit's power attractive?
18. Why can't we control the Spirit? What is the purpose of God's power at work through the Spirit?
19. Why could the disciples *with confidence* go out from Jerusalem proclaiming the gospel? How is the same power of God at work in you, on your frontlines and in your witness?

**Apply** *How should the presence of God with you by his Spirit change your day to day?*

**Pray** *Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Spirit, for all the ways he is at work in our lives. Amen.*

# GOING DEEPER

## **Acts and The Early Church (Week 2/8) Possessed by the Spirit of God**

### Small Group Discussion Questions

#### **On Your Frontline this Week**

*What are you giving your attention to actively at the moment? How is it shaping you?*

#### **For Families**

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: [stbartskids.org](https://stbartskids.org)

#### **Listen, Watch, and Read**

- *Listen (sermon):* “The Spirit Breaks Out!” by Vaughan Roberts:  
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/the-spirit-breaks-out/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Long Live the King” by Chris Wright:  
[https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show\\_media=304030&show\\_file=334422](https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=304030&show_file=334422)
- *Listen (sermon):* “The Descent of the Spirit” by Timothy Keller:  
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-descent-of-the-spirit/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Pentecost Proclamation” by William Taylor:  
<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/53495/>
- *Read (book):* “He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit” by Graham Cole.
- *Read (chapter):* “The Holy Spirit and the Church” in *Evangelical Theology (2nd ed.)* by Michael Bird. 📖

#### **Series Resources**

- *Read (book):* “Strange Religion” by Nijay Gupta. 📖
- *Read (commentary):* “The Challenge of Acts” by Tom Wright. 📖
- *Read (book):* “Why the Gospel” by Matthew Bates.
- *Read (advanced commentary):* “Acts: Witnesses to Him” by Bruce Milne.

📖 [Available to borrow in the Church library](#)

## ACTS: STRANGE RELIGION

Week 2/8 “Possessed by the Spirit of God”  
by Amy Norman (03/08/2025)

하나님의 영에 사로 잡히다 | A ciiek ke Nhialic | 被神的灵所拥有

Bible Passage: Acts 2:1-21; 8:9-24

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*Gracious Father, thank you for the gift of your Spirit.  
for the seen and unseen ways your Spirit has continued to be at work  
from the beginning of your church until now.  
In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.*

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The Roman Empire was *full* of statues.

- In every city, in every town, and every temple - you could be guaranteed to find *many statues*. It wasn't because Rome had an obsession with marble, but Rome had an obsession with *gods* - *the more the better*.
- There were so many statues, because the Romans and Greeks believed the gods *could* come down, and *inhabit and indwell* these statues.  
People would visit these statues (often in temples) in the faint hope that they'd somehow get the god or goddess to *use their* powers to help them (or at least not harm them).  
Even though people knew where to go to meet with the gods,  
they could never be sure if the god or goddess would be interested or even turn up.
- Compared to the Romans with hundreds of statues and temples, Christians looked godless. Christians had no statues - instead they believed God had come to them in his Son. And now that his Son had ascended, he had left his Spirit to indwell *in them*.
- Christians had no temples either, for *they themselves* became temples of the Holy Spirit, where God by his Spirit was always with them.
- The arrival of God the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, was what Jesus had promised, it was the very *fulfilment of the promises* made by God long ago, that God would pour out his Spirit on all people. >

- On the surface, this seems like a wild claim!  
But the arrival of God's Spirit was not a doctrine devised later by the church, for the Holy Spirit *came* in a specific place, at a specific time, with specific signs.
- This is how the early church *knew* and *believed* that they were possessed by the Spirit of God. By looking at Acts 2 and 8; the events around Pentecost, and the interaction between Simon the Sorcerer and Peter, we see:
- **The Spirit arrives suddenly,  
the Spirit is given to all,  
the Spirit is God's power at work.**

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## THE SPIRIT ARRIVES SUDDENLY | ACTS 2:1-13

성령이 급하게 임하심 | Jōḡdit ëë bën nē Lään tōḡ tēi | 圣灵突然降临

*First, the Spirit arrives suddenly. Verse 1 ...*

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Acts 2:1-8

- The arrival of the Spirit - was strange, sudden, and demanded attention!  
As the 120 followers of Jesus gathered together,  
suddenly what *sounds like* a violent wind fills the whole house,  
they see what *looks like* tongues of fire on each person's head,  
and all those gathered begin *to speak* in other languages.
- The arrival of the Spirit was loud and visible, it was both observable and strange!  
It is no wonder that Jews living in Jerusalem come to investigate!
- I think I would be intrigued by seeing what looks like tongues of fire on each person,

4

but in fact what bewilders the crowd, is they each *hear* their own language being spoken.

- If you've ever been in a foreign country for a while, and suddenly hear an Australian accent, it gets your attention.
- Hearing *their own language* being spoken, gets the attention of the Jews living in Jerusalem, for Luke tells us they are from every corner of the world, probably the Greco-Roman world. From as far east as Parthia (think modern day Iran), west to Rome, and every other place surrounding the Mediterranean.
- They were all Jews, but had wildly different native languages, *but now* - they are *hearing* this group of people from Galilee speak *their language!*
- Here at Pentecost, the Spirit is not causing people to speak *an unrecognisable spiritual language*, but they are speaking different and diverse *human languages*.
- That is why the people from all the nations are intrigued, bewildered, and amazed. Some made fun of the Galileans - thinking they had too much wine. But Peter clarifies, that what is happening *is not* from drunkenness, but rather the fulfilment of what was promised.
- The night before he was crucified, Jesus had told the disciples he would send them the Holy Spirit. And again *he told them* before he ascended *to wait* for the gift the Father had promised.

5

- The disciples were expecting the Holy Spirit to come (they just didn't know when or how).
- *This* sudden arrival of the Spirit was not just a fulfilment of what Jesus had said, but as Peter points out - it is the fulfilment of what God had promised his people long ago.
- When the Jews from all the nations ask what this all means, Peter points them back to the Old Testament and quotes from the prophet Joel.
- Peter doesn't begin his quote perfectly, but makes one small change to the first word. He changes "afterwards" to "in the last days". It is a signal for how Peter understands what has just happened and what has begun.
- The arrival of the Spirit *signals* a new era in God's whole salvation story. John Stott calls it "the age of the Spirit", which comes between the *first* coming of Jesus the Messiah and the second coming, that is when Jesus returns.
- Up until this point, the Spirit had empowered *particular people* (like prophets, judges, artisans, and kings) for *special tasks*. *But now* the Spirit has arrived permanently for *all* God's people, who put their trust in his Son. //
- It is easy to get caught up in all sorts of questions about the Holy Spirit, about gifts and signs, baptism in the Spirit, and being filled with the Spirit.
- But importantly *here* at Pentecost, Peter is describing what has just happened. The Spirit has arrived.

6

- The effect of the Spirit's *presence* is audible and visible, but he is still somewhat elusive. For the Spirit is not just distilled power of God, The Holy Spirit is the Person of God, the third person of the Trinity.
- The Spirit that arrives at this moment to the early church, is God himself - God the Spirit. Jesus didn't ascend and then send the disciples on their way to figure out the rest by themselves.  
Jesus told them he *wouldn't* leave them as orphans.  
God the Father *promises* and God the Son *sends* God the Spirit to his church.
- And the *same* Spirit who empowered and sent the church into mission, is still alive and active in Christ's church today.  
The Spirit makes it possible for us to grasp and take hold of the saving work of Jesus, he gives life, distributes gifts, sanctifies and unifies his people, and reveals the plans of God the Father in the Son Jesus.
- Pentecost is the beginning of the church, for the arrival of the Spirit gathers and empowers God's people to worship and witness to the risen and ascended Lord Jesus.

7

## THE SPIRIT IS GIVEN TO ALL | ACTS 2:14-21

모두에게 오신 성령 | Jöjdit ëë yën këek kë dhiä | 圣灵赐给所有人

Second, **the Spirit is given to all**. Peter quotes from the prophet Joel, giving us an insight into *who* the Spirit is given to. *Verse 17 ...*

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17 “In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.

18 Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy. *Acts 2:17-18*

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Peter points back to Joel to *explain* to the crowd *what* is happening here, and *why* they can suddenly hear their own languages being spoken.

- He points to the *promise* that is *now being fulfilled*.
- What they can see and hear before them,  
120 followers of Jesus *all* speaking in languages they've never learnt,  
*demonstrates* that the time has come where God's Spirit *is being* poured out on all people.

8

- This is a change to how the Spirit has operated in the past.  
Historically, the Spirit was poured out selectively, only a few with special tasks.  
But now, the Spirit is poured out on *all people*:  
*sons and daughters, young and old, even servants.*
- The Roman world was one divided by gender, by age, and by class.  
But the Spirit overcomes all these divisions. No one *who is in Christ* is excluded.
- Note here that no one is considered *more worthy* than others to receive the Spirit, but the Spirit is poured out to all.  
The image is not like pouring a cup of tea (where it is obvious how much is enough), but rather we should imagine the pouring out of a torrential tropical storm.
- Like a storm, God's Spirit is poured on *all* people.
- The events that happened on the day of Pentecost points to what God began, and what he *continues* to do.
- Today, here in Toowoomba (or wherever you are online), it is *still true* that God's Spirit is given *to all* who believe.  
To men and women, to the young and old, to both the CEO and the homeless.
- There are some strands of Christianity and influential leaders who suggest that the Spirit is *only* given to particular Christians, or only to Christians who do particular spiritual things.

9

- But this is simply not true. As we witness here and throughout the New Testament, is that the Holy Spirit is given *to all* who believe in Jesus Christ.  
This is what Peter says later in verse 38 to the crowd, that in response to repenting and turning to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, they *will* receive the Holy Spirit. //
- God promises the gift of his Spirit. Jesus said he would send his Spirit.
- But neither the Father or the Son were *prescriptive* of how the Spirit would be experienced.  
It is not necessary for the Spirit to fill people the same way.
- *The type* of experience at Pentecost (with the ability to speak in other languages) is repeated later to signal that the Gentiles *too* had received the Spirit (in Acts 10), and to John the Baptist's disciples who had not yet learned about Jesus (in Acts 19).
- Some people assert that *unless* the Spirit arrives in the same way as Pentecost, then you haven't really received the Spirit. Or unless your faith is accompanied with prophesy or miracles, then you are not a real believer.
- But all through Acts, people come to faith in Jesus and receive the Spirit, but the Spirit is experienced in different ways. /
- No matter what your experience has been, if you believe in Jesus then you have received the Holy Spirit.  
The very same Spirit who filled the disciples at Pentecost, is alive in you.  
How the Spirit expresses his power might look different, but his purposes are the same.



## THE SPIRIT IS GOD'S POWER AT WORK | ACTS 8:9-24

성령의 하나님의 능력이 임하시는 것 | Jöjdit ëë riëër dë Nhälic mään Lui | 圣灵是神运行的力量

Finally, **the Spirit is God's Power at work.**

- Jesus promised the disciples that they would be clothed with power from on high. The power of the Spirit, in signs and miracles, was one of the most distinctive features of the early church.
- But the power of the Spirit isn't just *for anything*, but *only and always* for God's purposes.
- Just a little later on in Acts 8, one man, Simon (who is known in Samaria as a sorcerer), sees the power of the Spirit at work. He sees it in Philip and follows him around. When Peter and John visit Samaria, he sees the power of the Spirit through them and he wants it. *Verse 18...*

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18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. *Acts 8:18-21*

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- Simon understands that the power he is *so amazed by* is that of the Holy Spirit. Simon was familiar with spiritual power. It was a dangerous and revered ability, feared by Rome and compelling amongst the people.

11

- Simon knew spiritual power, but it didn't compare to the Spirit at work. What is instructive *for us*, is how Simon the Sorcerer tries *to relate* to the Holy Spirit. He wants the Spirit for himself, for his control, for his purposes. He even tries to offer Peter money!
- But the Holy Spirit is not someone who can be bought. He is not someone who can be controlled for our own purposes.
- Even though the Spirit is promised *to all*, we can not command or control the Spirit. The Spirit is independent from us, as he is God, and his work in signs, miracles, understanding, and conviction *is always* to point to Jesus.
- That's how we see the Spirit at work in Philip, that *through* signs and miracles, the Samaritans come to believe in Jesus.
- The power of the Spirit displayed in the early church, and in us, *is always* for God's purposes.
- That's why the Spirit's work does *not need* to expressed in amazing signs and miracles, for however he chooses to work (in subtle and obvious ways), the purpose is for Jesus, and for the *body of Christ*.
- As John Stott reflected:

12



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Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be unthinkable, even impossible. There can be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the Spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from his fruit, and no effective witness without his power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead.

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- As the church, as the body of Christ, we *need* the Spirit to be at work in us.  
The fact that we can believe, that we can understand, that we can grow in the likeness of Jesus, is *evident* that the Spirit *is* powerfully at work amongst us and in us *today*. //
- When people in the Greco-Roman world came to worship statues of stone, they could never be sure if their god would show up (and ultimately, *of course* they couldn't be sure because their gods weren't real!).
- But when we worship our crucified and risen King, we can have *complete* confidence he is with us, for the one we worship is *alive in us*.
- His presence and empowerment is not dependent on the mood we're in, how much energy we've got, how regularly we've prayed, the depth of our devotion, how good we've been, how much we've learned, or who we have and haven't helped. The promise of God is that if we believe in Jesus, his Spirit is with us. >

13

- So many people *long* to be close to God, and think it must be dependent on a miraculous sign. But the real miraculous sign has already been given, the cross is the sign that God of all creation has drawn close *to us*. And if you turn and trust in Jesus, *that* is the sign the Spirit has been at work in you.
- And the Spirit doesn't just work in coming to faith, but as we continue in faith.
  - If you've been in a season that you haven't felt close to God, he is still there. He has not abandoned you. You can ask to know his presence and love.
  - If you doubt whether you really have received the Spirit. Then simply repent of your sin and trust in Jesus as your Saviour. You will receive the Holy Spirit.
  - If you feel burdened by the challenges at work or at home, then know the Spirit is with you, longing to comfort and strengthen you, wanting to remind you of the security and assurance you have in Christ.
  - If you feel like you've failed Jesus, then know the Spirit is with you, and wants to remind you of the mercy, forgiveness, and gentleness found in our Saviour.
  - If you feel powerless in witness, know that the Spirit is at work in your words and actions. You can courageously invite people to consider Jesus or just come to Alpha, and you can trust that the Spirit will already be at work in their heart.
- Even though in faith we have received the Spirit, we can still neglect or ignore his work in us. We still have a part to play in *responding* to his work. >

14

- We don't believe the Spirit of God is locked up in a temple or a statue.  
He is alive and active in the world, *not least* in the hearts who trust and believe in Jesus.
- God's Spirit within us doesn't make us mini gods, but makes us God's beloved children, empowered by his Spirit.
- As the early church was sent out from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth - they could go with *confidence*, for God's Spirit was with them.
- They didn't go out because they were perfectly faithful or had a detailed plan.  
They went out in the power of the Spirit.
- When we go out from here, onto all our frontlines, we can have the same confidence.  
The very same Spirit of God is with us.