



THE FAMILIAR STRANGER

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is designed to help groups move beyond simply learning about the Holy Spirit toward living with the Holy Spirit. Throughout this series, we'll hold together both truth and experience as we learn to recognize and respond to the Spirit's presence in our everyday lives.

INTRODUCTION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Over the years, I've realized something that continues to surprise me, although it really shouldn't: a lot of Christians know a decent amount about the Holy Spirit, but very few of us really know what it looks like to live with the Holy Spirit.

For some, the Holy Spirit feels mysterious or confusing—maybe even a little uncomfortable. Some of us grew up in churches where the Spirit was barely talked about at all. Others grew up in spaces where the Spirit was talked about constantly, but often in ways that felt emotionally manipulative, strange, or disconnected from real life. And for many people, if we're honest, the Holy Spirit has simply become background noise in our faith.

Like a familiar language, but a distant reality.

Here's what else I've noticed: when pastors introduce the topic of the Holy Spirit, they often do what I just did—they point out all the ways we are both familiar and unfamiliar with the Spirit. That's important, but I think there's something deeper underneath it all that gets talked about far less: disappointment.

DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

For many Christians, that disappointment comes from expectations like these:

- “If I have enough faith, God will speak clearly...”
- “If the Spirit is real, I should feel him constantly...”
- “If I pray hard enough, healing should happen...”
- “Spirit-filled people should be more transformed than everyone else...”
- “The Spirit will make faith obvious and emotionally powerful...”

But then real life happens:

- prayers go unanswered,
- “charismatic” leaders fail,
- spiritual highs fade,
- people manipulate others in the name of the Spirit,
- and ordinary Christian life feels mostly... ordinary.

And that creates a crisis.

Maybe you’ve prayed for God to speak and heard silence. Maybe you desperately sought the Lord and felt like nothing happened. Maybe you experienced emotional hype at a camp or retreat that didn’t last. Maybe you watched spiritual leaders abuse power or use the language of the Spirit to manipulate people, and now you’re not sure you can trust experiential spirituality. Or maybe you quietly wondered why other people seemed to have dramatic experiences with God while your faith felt ordinary and dry.

Some of us were handed a version of Christianity that made spiritually mature people seem constantly confident, close to God, and full of certainty and power. And when that didn’t become our experience, disappointment settled in.

I think many of us live somewhere on that continuum: we’re not openly hostile to the Holy Spirit, we’re just unsure what to do with him anymore. So when someone like me starts talking about the Spirit, skepticism naturally rises up.

HUNGRY FOR MORE

At the same time, I think many of us carry a quiet hunger for more: more connection with God that actually touches ordinary life—the stress, exhaustion, parenting, grief, anxiety, questions, and Mondays.

And what if that longing isn't something to suppress, but an invitation?

That's really the heartbeat behind this series.

My hope is not that we become a church that is emotionally driven or obsessed with spiritual experiences because they make us feel warm and fuzzy. I'm not interested in hype or manufacturing moments that make us appear more spiritual than we are. And I definitely don't think spiritual maturity means checking your brain at the door.

In fact, one of the things we'll see throughout this series is that Scripture refuses to separate truth from experience, head from heart, theology from encounter. The Spirit of God is not opposed to wisdom, discernment, or thoughtfulness.

At the same time, I don't want us settling for a version of Christianity that is safe, controlled, and spiritually numb.

When you read the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is not an optional extra for especially passionate Christians. The Spirit comforts, empowers, convicts, guides, transforms, and sends people. The early church had no category for life with Jesus apart from the Spirit—and I don't think we should either.

But if we're honest, many of us do.

When I examine the lives of many Christians today—including my own—I think we often try to live life with Jesus apart from the Spirit. And I think we're worse for it.

SERIES OVERVIEW

Throughout this series, we're going to explore the different ways Scripture describes the Spirit: breath, wind, water, fire, a dove, advocate, comforter, power, witness, and love. We're going to talk honestly about fear, surrender, discernment, suffering, healing, spiritual gifts, and what it means to become people who are genuinely open to God without losing our grounding in Scripture.

Most importantly, my hope is that this series helps us discover that the Holy Spirit is not just for dramatic church moments or emotionally charged experiences. The Spirit is God's personal presence with his people—not just at church camp or during worship services, but in ordinary life. In suffering. In weakness. In quiet faithfulness. On ordinary Mondays—especially the Mondays.

The series is called The Familiar Stranger because I think that describes where many of us are. The Spirit is familiar enough that we recognize the language, but still strangely distant in practice. The title comes from Tyler Staton's book of the same name, and I'd highly recommend reading it alongside this series.

My prayer is that over these next eight weeks, the stranger becomes familiar again.

My hope is simple: that together we would become more available to the Spirit of God—and in doing so, become more like Jesus.

WEEK ONE

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

SUMMARY

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force or fringe doctrine, but the personal presence and power of God available to ordinary believers.

CONNECTION

- What's something you thought you understood for years, but later realized you barely knew at all?
- Some churches and communities tend to “sensationalize” the Spirit, seeking his power over his person. Others take a high view of knowing God’s Word (intellectually) but know very little of him experientially. Which most resembles your current reality? Explain.

READ EPHESIANS 1:17-21

- In Ephesians 1, Paul prays for “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.” What do you think it means to know about God versus truly knowing him?
- Why do you think many Christians feel comfortable with Jesus and God the Father, but uncertain or distant from the Holy Spirit?
- Paul prays that we would experience God’s incomparably great power, which is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead in our lives. What do you think that might look like?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What part of the sermon deepened your understanding of this passage or helped you notice something you might have missed on your own?
- From the sermon, what helped you see the Holy Spirit more clearly or differently than you had before?

LIVING IT OUT

- Which of these feels most true for you right now in your relationship with the Holy Spirit: curiosity, hunger, uncertainty, skepticism, fear, or familiarity? Why?
- What would it look like this week to become more available to the Holy Spirit in ordinary life?

CLOSING PRAYER

Before you go, pause and pray together. Thank God for your time and pray for his continued work in each other's lives this week.

WEEK TWO

BREATH/WIND: THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE

SUMMARY

The Spirit meets chaos, deadness, exhaustion, and emptiness with the breath of God.

CONNECTION

- When do you feel most spiritually alive?
- What role do you feel like the Holy Spirit plays in your every day life?
- When you hear the phrase “life in the Spirit,” what comes to mind?

READ JOHN 3:1-8

- What do you think Jesus is trying to communicate through the mystery and unpredictability of wind?
- Why do you think Nicodemus had such a hard time understanding Jesus even though he was deeply knowledgeable about Scripture?
- Nicodemus struggled to understand what Jesus meant by being “born again,” and “born of the Spirit”? What do you think kept him from fully seeing it?
- How can spiritual familiarity sometimes make people less open to the work of God?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What part of the sermon deepened your understanding of this passage or helped you notice something you might have missed on your own?
- From the sermon, what helped you see the Holy Spirit more clearly or differently than you had before?

LIVING IT OUT

- Where in your life do you feel spiritually tired, numb, or stuck right now?
- What helps move faith from something merely intellectual into something lived and experienced?
- What practices help you slow down enough to notice the Spirit's presence?

CLOSING PRAYER

Before you go, pause and pray together. Thank God for your time and pray for his continued work in each other's lives this week.

WEEK THREE

DOVE: THE SPIRIT GIVES POWER

SUMMARY

The Holy Spirit empowers ordinary people to participate in the continuing work of Jesus in extraordinary ways. The same Spirit that rested on Jesus now rests on his Church.

CONNECTION

- What's something you've done that felt intimidating at first, but became possible because someone helped or encouraged you?

READ JOHN 14:12-14

- Jesus says His followers will continue his works. What stands out or challenges you about that?
- Jesus says, "Anyone who believes in me" will continue his works. What do you think that reveals about how God views ordinary believers?
- Why do you think Jesus connects his followers' mission so closely to prayer in this passage?
- What do you think Jesus means by "greater works"? How have you heard this passage interpreted before?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What part of the sermon deepened your understanding of this passage or helped you notice something you might have missed on your own?
- From the sermon, what helped you see the Holy Spirit more clearly or differently than you had before?

LIVING IT OUT

- Where do you most need the Spirit's courage or strength right now?
- What keeps people from depending on the Spirit's power in everyday life?

CLOSING PRAYER

Before you go, pause and pray together. Thank God for your time and pray for his continued work in each other's lives this week.

WEEK FOUR

WATER: THE SPIRIT GIVES PRESENCE

SUMMARY

What we are most thirsty for is ultimately the presence of God. The Spirit is the abiding presence of God who satisfies thirsty souls.

CONNECTION

- What's your go-to source of comfort or refreshment after a hard week?
- Where have you felt a longing for the Holy Spirit in your life?

READ JOHN 7:37-39

- Why do you think Jesus uses the image of thirst to describe spiritual longing?
- How does this passage challenge the ways we normally try to satisfy our deepest longings?
- What do you think Jesus means by "rivers of living water" flowing from within someone?
- What does this passage teach us about the heart of God toward spiritually dry or exhausted people?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What part of the sermon deepened your understanding of this passage or helped you notice something you might have missed on your own?
- From the sermon, what helped you see the Holy Spirit more clearly or differently than you had before?

LIVING IT OUT

- What are some things people commonly turn to when they feel spiritually empty or emotionally exhausted?
- What keeps people from honestly bringing their thirst and need to God?
- Have there been seasons where you felt especially aware of God's presence? What helped cultivate that awareness?
- How can we make more room in our lives to truly be with God?

CLOSING PRAYER

Before you go, pause and pray together. Thank God for your time and pray for his continued work in each other's lives this week.

WEEK FIVE

PROPHECY: THE SPIRIT STILL SPEAKS

SUMMARY

The Spirit speaks, guides, convicts, and encourages—but discernment matters. We are called to be spiritually open without becoming biblically ungrounded.

CONNECTION

- Have you ever had a strong sense or intuition about something that later proved meaningful?
- Have you ever experienced a moment where you sensed God speaking, guiding, warning, or encouraging you? What was that like?

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22

- What do you think it means to “quench” the Spirit? What are some ways people or churches might unintentionally do that?
- What do you notice about the balance between “do not quench the Spirit” and “test everything”?
- Why is discernment important when talking about hearing from God?
- Why do you think the Spirit’s voice is often described as leading toward truth, love, encouragement, conviction, and holiness rather than shame or fear?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What part of the sermon deepened your understanding of this passage or helped you notice something you might have missed on your own?
- From the sermon, what helped you see the Holy Spirit more clearly or differently than you had before?

LIVING IT OUT

- Have past experiences with church or spirituality made you more cautious about the Holy Spirit? How?
- What makes it difficult to slow down and listen for God's voice?
- How can we become more spiritually open while staying rooted in Scripture and community?

CLOSING PRAYER

Before you go, pause and pray together. Thank God for your time and pray for his continued work in each other's lives this week.

WEEK SIX

HEALING/WITNESS: THE SPIRIT SENDS THE CHURCH

SUMMARY

The gifts of the Spirit are given for the sake of others and the world. The Spirit empowers the church to embody and proclaim the kingdom of Jesus.

CONNECTION

- Who is someone whose faith has impacted your life in a meaningful way?
- What do you feel like you've learned about the Spirit over the last few weeks?

READ ACTS 1:8 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11

- According to Acts 1:8, what is the purpose of the Spirit's power?
- In Acts 1:8, why do you think Jesus connects the coming of the Spirit to witness rather than personal spiritual experience alone?
- What do you notice about how spiritual gifts are used in Acts and 1 Corinthians?
- Why is it important that spiritual gifts are described as being "for the common good" rather than personal status or recognition?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What part of the sermon deepened your understanding of this passage or helped you notice something you might have missed on your own?
- From the sermon, what helped you see the Holy Spirit more clearly or differently than you had before?

LIVING IT OUT

- What fears keep Christians from sharing their faith or praying boldly for others?
- Have you ever experienced a moment where you sensed God using you to encourage, help, serve, or impact someone else?
- Where might God be inviting you to take a small risk of obedience, courage, or witness right now?

CLOSING PRAYER

Before you go, pause and pray together. Thank God for your time and pray for his continued work in each other's lives this week.

WEEK SEVEN

REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING: THE SPIRIT MEETS US IN WEAKNESS

SUMMARY

Life in the Spirit does not exempt us from suffering; it transforms how we endure it. The Spirit is not only present in power, but also in pain.

CONNECTION

- Who has helped you endure a difficult season in your life?
- Have you ever experienced a season where hardship unexpectedly deepened your faith or relationship with God?

READ ROMANS 8:18-27

- What comforts you most in Romans 8's description of the Spirit?
- Romans 8 says the Spirit intercedes for us "with groans too deep for words." What does that reveal about God's nearness in pain?
- How does this passage challenge the assumption that suffering means God is absent or disappointed with us?
- Why is it important that life in the Spirit does not promise freedom from suffering?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What part of the sermon deepened your understanding of this passage or helped you notice something you might have missed on your own?
- From the sermon, what helped you see the Holy Spirit more clearly or differently than you had before?

LIVING IT OUT

- How can suffering deepen dependence on God instead of driving us away from him?
- What practices help you remain open to God's presence during seasons of grief, weakness, or uncertainty?
- How does knowing the Spirit prays with and for us change the way you think about prayer during difficult seasons?
- What does it look like for a community to carry one another's pain well?

CLOSING PRAYER

Before you go, pause and pray together. Thank God for your time and pray for his continued work in each other's lives this week.

WEEK EIGHT

THE WAY OF LOVE: THE SPIRIT FORMS CHRISTLIKE PEOPLE

SUMMARY

The ultimate evidence of the Spirit is not spiritual intensity but Christlike love. The goal of the Spirit's power is to help us become more like Jesus and live for others.

CONNECTION

- Who is someone you know that genuinely reflects the love of Jesus?
- Have you ever known someone who was spiritually impressive but not particularly loving? What impact did that have on you?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:27-13:13

- Why do you think Paul places the “love chapter” directly after teaching about spiritual gifts?
- According to these chapters, how can we measure spiritual maturity?
- Why do you think Paul says spiritual gifts without love are ultimately empty?
- What does this passage teach us about the difference between spiritual power and spiritual maturity?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What part of the sermon deepened your understanding of this passage or helped you notice something you might have missed on your own?
- From the sermon, what helped you see the Holy Spirit more clearly or differently than you had before?

LIVING IT OUT

- In what areas of your life is the Spirit currently trying to form you into a more loving person?
- How can we tell whether the Spirit is genuinely transforming us over time?
- What would it look like for our church or small group to become marked by love?
- As this series ends, what is one practical way you want to continue growing in life with the Holy Spirit?

CLOSING PRAYER

Before you go, pause and pray together. Thank God for your time and pray for his continued work in each other's lives this week.