



Allegiance from the Heart
Small Group Discussion Guide
Week of September 20, 2026

Primary scripture text: Deuteronomy 10:12-22; 30:1-6
Secondary scripture texts: Romans 2:25-29; John 3:1-8

Learning outcome: Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how the Holy Spirit produces the renewed heart that God seeks, brings us into participation in Christ, and forms us into a people whose love for God is expressed through service to others.

Questions that are marked with an asterisk () are priorities. If you are worried about having enough time, focus on these questions and skip those that are unmarked.*

LOOKING BACK (5 MINUTES)

Last week's discussion was focused on Jesus as the one to whom we must listen, and ended with a confession of Jesus as the Eternal Son in the words of the Athanasian Creed.

Invite any willing participants to share briefly about how they have been seeking to listen to Jesus more deeply since we last met, and how that has encouraged and/or challenged them.

DISCUSSING DEUTERONOMY (12 MINUTES)

Ask one or two group members to read Deuteronomy 10:12-22 and 30:1-6 aloud.

Invite listeners to notice: When Moses speaks of the "heart", this includes our whole selves, our thinking, desiring, and willing. What is it that God asks of his people, and what does he promise to do for them? What is the importance of the sojourner or foreigner?

1. *Compare Deuteronomy 10:16 with Deuteronomy 30:6. Why do you think that God commands something and then himself promises to do that very thing he commands?

2. What do you think is meant by a “circumcised heart”? And what does this look like in terms of the community described in Deuteronomy 10:17-19?

OPENING THE CATECHISM (8 MINUTES)

The assigned reading for this week was Qs. 84-91. These are attached at the end of this document.

1. Did anything in the assigned catechism questions strike you as encouraging, challenging, or confusing?

Ask one or more group members to read questions 84, 86, 89, and 91 aloud.

2. *According to these questions and answers, what might you look for in a congregation where the Holy Spirit was truly at work?

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION (15 MINUTES)

The excerpt below is from Ben Myers’ little book *The Apostles Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Lexham Press, 2018).

You will notice how Myers traces the work of the Holy Spirit from creation all the way to Pentecost and into the life of the church. He explains how the work of the Spirit touches not only individual people, but also their relationships with one another.

Ask one or more participants to read the passage aloud or give the group time to read it silently. Invite group members to underline or highlight one phrase that helps them to understand more fully the Holy Spirit’s work.

The story of the Bible begins with the Spirit brooding over the abyss, ready to bring forth creation out of nothing (Gen 1:2). And at the turning point of the ages we find the Spirit brooding over the womb of a virgin (Luke 1:35). The Spirit rests on Mary’s body in order to bring forth the new Adam, the beginning of a new creation.

The language of the creed reminds us that the work of this creative Spirit is not yet finished. The same Spirit is now brooding over the whole human race, bringing forth a new human community in the image of Christ.

One of the great themes of the Bible is the unity of the human family. In the garden of Eden, God makes a man and a woman, a miniature society imprinted with God’s own image. And the Bible ends with depictions of a future city where

people from every tribe and tongue will live together in a perfect harmony of praise (Rev 7:9).

In Genesis, the fall brings about a tragic disordering of human relationships. There is a curse now at the heart of the relation between man and woman, as well as between parents and children. The relation between humans and the rest of creation is likewise blighted (Gen 3:14–19). God's creation is divided. Each human being is a fragment torn loose from the whole.

This grim assessment of human fallenness culminates in the story of Babel (Gen 11:1–9). Here, human beings have begun to use their collective life to mock God. And so God divides their language, making it impossible for them to work together. They can no longer share a common world or articulate a common good. They cannot form a coherent society. Each group is a mere splinter of humanity, all scattered across the cursed earth, exiled and alone.

But with the coming of Jesus, the story of Babel is reversed. When the Spirit descends on the frightened company of Jesus' followers, they all begin to speak in different languages. The multicultural crowd outside is astonished to find that each one's language is being spoken by a band of Galileans. They ask, "How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" (Acts 2:1–13).

The Pentecost story shows the undoing of the fall through the creation of the Christian community. There is now a new human society in which all the old divisions are torn down. That is what happens when the Spirit is present. The Spirit fulfills the Creator's original plan by bringing forth a universal community whose boundaries are as wide as the world. The Spirit broods over the chaos of human nature, lovingly piecing the fragments back together so that together we form an image of the Creator.

Paul notes that the presence of the Spirit is marked by heightened individuality as well as a deeper communal belonging. The Spirit fuses unity and diversity by bringing "many gifts" together in "one body" (1 Cor 12:12–31). We become more truly ourselves as the Spirit broods over us and as our lives are knit together with other lives and stories.

*In this way the Spirit broods over each of Christ's followers, renewing the human race one life at a time and drawing all into a common family. Basil, a great fourth-century Cappadocian pastor and social reformer, explained it like this: the Spirit "is like a sunbeam whose grace is present to the one who enjoys it as if it were present to that one alone, yet it illuminates land and sea and is mixed with the air." (Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 9.22) There is nothing more personal, and more universal, than the Holy Spirit.*

Discussion questions

1. Consider the contrast Myers makes between Babel and Pentecost. How can this contrast deepen our understanding of what the Holy Spirit is doing in and with the church?
2. *If possible, name one place where you need the Holy Spirit to change your heart so that you can better welcome and serve other people that you might not have a natural affinity with.

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)

Allow group members to take a minute or two of silence to name before God one place where their heart is divided. Then invite them to complete this prompt:

With the Holy Spirit's help, this week I want to love _____ by _____.

Encourage them to choose one concrete act of love that would honor God. Invite a few people to share what they came up with, and ask other group members to pray for them.

Close by praying together this prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in me the fire of your love. Direct and rule my heart in all things, empower me for witness and ministry, and daily increase in me your gifts and fruit, to the glory of God the Father; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE APOSTLES' CREED, ARTICLE III

"I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT"

84. Who is the Holy Spirit?

God the Holy Spirit is the third Person in the one Being of the Holy Trinity, coequal and coeternal with God the Father and God the Son, and equally worthy of our honor and worship. (*Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30; Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; John 15:26; 2 Corinthians 13:14*)

85. What principal names does the New Testament give to the Holy Spirit?

Jesus names the Holy Spirit "Paraclete" ("the one alongside"), which signifies Comforter, Guide, Counselor, Advocate, and Helper. Other descriptions for the Holy Spirit are "Spirit of God," "Spirit of your Father," "Spirit of Christ," and "Spirit of truth." (*Matthew 10:20; John 14:16-17, 26; Acts 16:7; Romans 8:9*)

86. What are the particular ministries of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit imparts life to every living thing in creation, reveals God's Word to his people, and calls sinners to a new life of faith in the saving and life-giving work of Jesus. The Holy Spirit unites Christians to Jesus, indwelling them, convicting them of sin, giving them spiritual gifts, and bearing spiritual fruit in their lives. (*1 Samuel 16:13; Psalm 143:7-12; Isaiah 11:2; Joel 2:28-29; John 15:26; 16:7-11; Acts 4:5-31*)

87. How does the Holy Spirit strengthen you for life in Christ?

The Holy Spirit bears witness that I am a child of God, stirs my heart continually to worship and to pray, and inspires me to

holiness and good works in Christ. (*Job 27:2-4; Matthew 10:19-20; John 14:12; 16:12-15; Acts 6:10; 13:2; Romans 8:15-17, 26-27*)

88. How do you receive the Holy Spirit?

The Scriptures teach that, by repenting and being baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, I am forgiven my sins and I receive the Holy Spirit, who gives me new birth in Christ and frees me from the power of sin. (*Luke 11:11-13; John 3:1-7; Acts 2:38; 8:14-17; 19:1-6; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 12:13; 2 Timothy 1:6-7*)

89. What is the fruit of the Holy Spirit?

The fruit of the Holy Spirit is the very character of Jesus developing in us through the work of the Holy Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (*Galatians 5:22-25; see also Matthew 7:15-20; 12:33-35*)

90. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Among the many gifts of the Holy Spirit named in the New Testament are faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, other languages (“tongues”), the interpretation of other languages, and words of wisdom and knowledge. The Spirit distributes gifts to individuals as he wills for the sake of the Body of Christ. Other gifts in the New Testament include administration, service, encouragement, evangelism, teaching, giving, leadership, and mercy. Jesus promises that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. (*Luke 11:13; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-31; Ephesians 4:7-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11*)

91. Why does the Holy Spirit give such gifts?

The Holy Spirit equips and empowers believers with gifts for service in the worship of Jesus Christ, for the building up of his

Church, and for witness and mission to the world. (*Exodus 31:1-11; Luke 9:1-6; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 4:12-16*)

A Prayer for the Holy Spirit's Ministry

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in me the fire of your love. Direct and rule my heart in all things, empower me for witness and ministry, and daily increase in me your gifts and fruit, to the glory of God the Father; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

“THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH”

92. What is the Church?

The Church is the whole community of faithful Christians in heaven and on earth, called and formed by God into one people. The Church on earth gathers to worship God in Word and Sacrament, to serve God and neighbor, and to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth. (*Exodus 19:4-6; Psalm 22:22-23; Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Articles of Religion, 19*)

93. How does Holy Scripture teach you to view the Church?

Holy Scripture teaches me to view the Church as God's family, as the Body and bride of Christ, and as the temple where God in Christ dwells by his Spirit. (*Isaiah 54:5-8; Hosea 2:16-20; Matthew 12:46-50; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Revelation 5:9-10; 19:6-10*)

94. Why is the Church called the Body of Christ?

The Church is called the Body of Christ because all who belong to the Church are united to Christ as their Head and source of life, and are united to one another in Christ for mutual love and service to him. (*Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:25-30*)