

4. The Holy Spirit and the Early Church

Opening question

Invite people to describe powerful encounters they have had with God. (It may be worth inviting some to think about this in advance.)

Fact-check: the Spirit's activity in a believer's life

The New Testament records three stages of the Spirit's activity in a believer's life:

- Indwelling at conversion, enabling them to believe (John 3:5, Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3, Titus 3:5).
- A particular event when He meets with a believer for the first time in an experiential way, what we term receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit (e.g. Acts 8:14-24).
- Further empowering and encounters (Ephesians 5:18, e.g. Peter in Acts 2:4, 4:8, 4:31).

(N.B. We'll focus on the various ways in which the Spirit works throughout our lives in the sessions that follow this one.)

Fact-check: what is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Luke begins Acts with a double repeat of Jesus's promise to baptise His followers with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5,8). We see this happening to different people throughout the book of Acts, and by looking at all these instances together we can get a good idea of what to expect.

Get people into five groups and give each group one of the following references:

- Acts 2:1-4, 14-21
- Acts 8:14-24
- Acts 9:17-20
- Acts 10:44-48
- Acts 19:1-6

Ask each group to answer these questions:

- Did something observable happen?
- Did anyone lay hands on the people here to receive the Spirit?
- Had they been baptised in water before they were baptised with the Spirit?
- Was there speaking in tongues?
- Were there other spiritual gifts given?

Discussion

The only one of those questions that is answered "Yes" every time is, "Did something observable happen?" How should this God-given collection of stories shape our expectations for being baptised with the Spirit?

Fact check: more than once, and in more than one way!

We've seen that the baptism with the Spirit can happen in different ways. Moreover, a powerful encounter with the Spirit like this is not supposed to be a one-off event. Luke records people being filled with the Spirit on multiple occasions:

- Peter in Acts 2:4, 4:8, 4:31
- Stephen in Acts 6:5,7:55
- Paul in Acts 9:17, 13:9

Paul encourages us to expect the same in Ephesians 5:18, where he uses the present continuous tense to tell us to "go on being filled with the Spirit".

Acts describes these encounters with a variety of words, which seem to be used almost interchangeably:

- Baptised with the Holy Spirit (1:5, 11:16)
- The Spirit will come upon you (1:8)
- Filled with the Holy Spirit (2:4, 4:8, 9:17, 13:9, 13:52)
- The Spirit is poured out (2:17-18, 33, 10:45)
- Receive the Holy Spirit (2:38, 8:15, 19:2)
- The gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38, 8:20, 10:45, 11:17)
- The Spirit fell on (10:44, 11:15)

Let's also remember what we said previously about the different images used to describe the Spirit, and by implication our experiences of Him:

- Wind (John 3:8, Acts 2:2, and most of the Old Testament)
- Fire (Acts 2:3)
- Water (John 7:37-39)

(Brief) discussion

Which of those terms particularly fits with how you're wanting to experience the Spirit's power in your life?

Pray together to receive the Spirit

(Leaders may find it helpful to read the article ["Helping Others to Receive The Holy Spirit"](#) beforehand, and even use it to lead through this prayer time.)

Invite the group to direct their attention to God, and to show their receptiveness to Him (by, for example, opening hands in a receiving position). Read out Acts 2:38-39. Ask if people if they believe that the Holy Spirit is part of God's promise for them? If they do, tell them to ask God to pour His Spirit on them, to fill them, to give them His promised gift! As a group, you could say together, "Come, Holy Spirit".

You've read in Acts about hands being laid on people for them to receive the Spirit, you can do that too. If you, or other people in the group, have faith for certain gifts of the Spirit to be given, as seen in the readings, ask God for these and encourage people to step out in them.

To reflect on during the week

You can ask the Holy Spirit to fill you each and every day! Try to make asking a daily habit, and see what He does.