

# Lesson 8 | April 21, 2024

## Life in the Spirit

**Study Text:** John 3:5–8; 14:15–26; 16:7–11; Romans 8:1–11; Galatians 5:16–21; Titus 3:3–7

**Central Truth:** The Holy Spirit is central to Christian living.

### **Key Verse: Galatians 5:16**

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh (KJV).

Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves (NLT).

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Students will explain biblical spirituality.
- Students will appreciate the unique role of the Spirit within the Trinity and pursue a closer relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.
- Students will choose to deepen their personal spirituality by experimenting with a spiritual discipline or practice.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** Today, we're beginning a study on the fruit of the Spirit—the evidence of life in the Spirit. Spirituality is a popular topic of conversation today, which can open doors to share your faith and experience. But first, we should understand what being “spiritual” really means.

### **Opening Activity—Spiritual or Religious?**

*Ask: What does it mean to be spiritual? What does it mean to be religious? Do these terms apply only to Christians? Do you perceive yourself as spiritual? religious? both? neither? Try to get responses from as many people as you can.*

**Say:** It's been said that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship. Becoming a Christian is the process by which we are reconciled to God and find new life in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting this idea, some in the Church today use the label “Christ-followers,” considering themselves to be apprenticed to Christ with the goal of being transformed into His likeness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Our lesson opens with a nighttime conversation between Jesus and a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Perhaps Nicodemus conducted his interview under cover of darkness because he was afraid of the Jews. After all, he was one of their leaders. Perhaps John's use of “by night” suggests Nicodemus was in spiritual darkness. In either case, Jesus shone the light of truth on the question of true spirituality: Religion alone is not enough. No one can see the kingdom of God without new birth (John 3:3).

# Part 1—Be Born of the Spirit

## Necessity of the New Birth

John 3:5–8

**Say:** The biblical definition of *spirituality* is life in the Spirit. And that life begins with a new kind of birth. This isn't "a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God" (John 1:13, NLT). It's a spiritual birth—that is, a birth through the Spirit. This new life is available to any person who receives Jesus as Savior and puts their trust in Him. At the moment they are born again, they become "children of God" (verse 12, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus explained that being born of the Spirit is necessary for one to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5). "Humans can only reproduce human life" (verse 6, NLT), and although the value of human life is far above the rest of creation, human life still has limitations. It is physical, material, and mortal.

Natural birth—or as Jesus puts it, "being born of water" (verse 5, NLT)—produces human beings with human nature. Humans can be good people who care about each other's welfare, as the word *humanitarian* signifies. However, behavioral scientists attest that every human is broken or wounded in some way. Such is the human condition. Every human mind constructs an identity, or *ego*, with its own programs for happiness to try to make up for that brokenness. The ego seeks recognition and dignity while pursuing power, affection, or security. Unfortunately for our egos—our false, self-made identities—these agendas are unfulfilling and often harmful.

Without the Spirit of God, we cannot enter the kingdom of God—whether in eternity or in the present. Our human efforts cannot achieve the peace and power of God's rule or emulate God's way of living, thinking, behaving, and loving. It is the Holy Spirit who "gives birth to spiritual life" (verse 6, NLT).

Our human condition may have limitations, but God does not. Beyond that, God is full of kindness and love! Through the Holy Spirit:

- God gives us new birth: life in the Spirit.
- God produces Christ's nature in us: the fruit of the Spirit.
- God lets us participate in His supernatural work: the gifts of the Spirit.

What a marvel! In verse 8, Jesus compares the work of the Spirit to the nature of the wind. He moves powerfully and mysteriously, completely beyond human understanding and control.

### **Discuss**

? How does the world's definition of *spirituality* ("related to the human spirit as opposed to something physical or material") compare to the biblical definition ("life in the Spirit")?  
? Which program for happiness does your ego seek—power, affection, security, or something else? How is the Spirit forming you into your "true self," which lines up with God's unique design for you?

## Contrast of the New Birth

Titus 3:3–7

**Say:** What a difference there is between the old life and the new! In his letter to the church leader Titus, the apostle Paul described in sharp contrast the two ways of living: the old way of being human and the new way of living in Christ that comes from being born of the Spirit. To paraphrase Paul’s testimony, “At one time my life was a real mess too, but God . . . !” (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Human nature is foolish and disobedient. Without the Spirit’s guidance, our old selves can be easily misled and enslaved by the very things that used to seem attractive. But at salvation, God steps in and changes the narrative. The sheer goodness of God pierces through the darkness, despite the condition of a person’s soul. The Greek word translated “love” in Titus 3:4 carries a deeper meaning: “love for humanity.” God took the initiative to reach us, and our Savior still seeks out those who are trapped in the sinful human condition. No record of good deeds merited such kindness; it was because of God’s mercy.

What are the results of God’s intervention?

1. New birth—regeneration or being born again
2. New life—not just a recycling of the old nature but the gift of a qualitatively new nature

New birth and new life are brought about by the washing away of our sins and God’s generous gift of pouring out the Holy Spirit on us through Jesus Christ. Not only do we get a fresh start on life, but we get the wherewithal to keep living it. In God’s record books, we are now accounted as righteous; and in God’s family, we are now heirs. What a wonderful hope! This is all the work of grace, which is God’s unmerited kindness extended toward us.

Because of its poetic format in the original text, biblical scholars suggest that Titus 3:4–7 may have been an early Christian hymn or confession. Stating that it is a “trustworthy saying” (verse 8, NLT) indicates the importance of the message in verses 4–7; it is meant to be believed and lived out. Others propose Paul may have edited an earlier baptismal hymn (such as 1 Peter 1:3–5) into this prayer of thanksgiving. Whatever Paul’s intent, the content of these verses is so significant that New Testament congregations may have regularly repeated them as part of corporate worship.

### Resource Packet Item 1: Old Life vs. New Life

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to read the Scriptures and reflect on the differences between their old life of sin and their new life in Christ.

#### **Discuss**

? Do you recognize any of the vices listed in Titus 3:3 from your life before Christ?

? What hymns or worship songs can you name that encapsulate the truths found in Titus 3:4–7?

## Part 2—Know That the Spirit Has Come At Work in Their Hearts

John 14:15–26

**Say:** Jesus promised His disciples, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. . . . He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you” (John 14:16–17,26, NLT). And Jesus’ promise has been fulfilled! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the week leading up to His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus had predicted His death to the crowd following Him (12:23–36). Then during the Passover celebration, as Jesus was washing His disciples’ feet, He predicted His betrayal, later identifying Judas as the one who would betray Him. After Judas left the room, Jesus told the disciples, “I will be with you only a little longer” (13:33, NLT). Peter assured the Master of his loyalty even unto death; then Jesus described the way Peter would deny Him. Jesus had been deeply troubled (verse 21), and now His closest followers were troubled too (14:1). Jesus encouraged them with the promise He would prepare a place for them, providing the only way they could get to the Father. Amid the disciples’ bewilderment, Jesus made them—and us—a great promise.

To those who love Christ and keep His commandments, Jesus promised the presence of the Holy Spirit (verse 15; 1 John 3:23–24). He described the Spirit’s work in the world using the title *Paraclete*, a word often translated “Comforter.” Based on the verb it is derived from—literally meaning “called alongside”—*Paraclete* could also be rendered as one who encourages, exhorts, urges, helps, advises (offering legal counsel), advocates (presenting a defense), or serves as a proxy (representing someone else). The *Paraclete* is a Comforter, Counselor, Companion, and so much more!

Jesus promised not to abandon His followers; instead, He would come to them (verse 18) and manifest himself to them (verse 21). Not only would He appear at His second coming, but daily both He and His Father would live within those who love and obey Him (verse 23). How? Jesus described the Spirit as “another” *Paraclete* (verse 16) who would be His “representative” (verse 26, NLT). In every way that Jesus was a *Paraclete* to His original disciples, the Holy Spirit was intended to be a *Paraclete* to all of Christ’s followers. There were two noteworthy differences:

1. Although Jesus would depart this world and return to the Father (13:1), the Spirit would remain with Christ’s followers forever.
2. Although the Incarnation physically limited Jesus to one time and place, the Spirit can be everywhere at all times—including within each believer!

The Father would send this precious partner and member of the Trinity to Jesus' loving and obedient followers. The *Paraclete*, another Master Teacher like Jesus, would make the truth plain, reminding believers of everything the Savior said (verse 26).

### **Resource Packet Item 2: The Holy Spirit's Role in Discipleship**

Distribute the worksheet and reflect on the three main roles of the Holy Spirit in discipleship based on the Greek words from which *Paraclete* originates.

#### ***Discuss***

- ? What aspects of the Holy Spirit's work have you experienced in your life?
- ? What aspects would you like to experience more?

### **At Work in the World**

John 16:7–11

**Say:** In God's wisdom, the coming of the Holy Spirit was preferable to Jesus' remaining on earth. As Jesus told His followers, "It is expedient for you that I go away" (John 16:7, KJV). Unless Jesus left, the Spirit would not come. But why was the Spirit's coming so important for Jesus' followers? On a personal level, the Spirit remained when Jesus departed. On a theological level, the Spirit provided the only way for Jesus' followers to fully understand Him. On a practical level, the Spirit mobilized and empowered Christ's followers to reach the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John 14:17 says the world cannot accept the Holy Spirit since it does not see or recognize Him. John 16:8–11 shows that the result of this lack of recognition is not simply the indifference of unbelievers, but their hostility—the same kind of hostility they had for Jesus.

As Jesus spoke to His disciples after the Passover meal, they were clearly troubled at the news of His departure. In fact, they were so grieved Jesus told them, "There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now" (verse 12, NLT). Their sorrow must have been compounded by their growing awareness of the struggle between Jesus and the prince of this world, the suffering their Rabbi would soon undergo, and even their own impending persecution.

Jesus explained the Spirit would shine the pure light of truth, convicting the world in three distinct areas (verses 8–11):

1. The *Paraclete* would show the world was guilty of the basic sin of refusing to believe in Christ.
2. The *Paraclete* would show the world did not understand God's righteousness, since they crucified Jesus, God's only begotten Son.
3. The *Paraclete* would show the world was subject to judgment along with the ruler of this world.

Assured of ultimate victory and guided by the Holy Spirit, the disciples would be able to confidently go forth and challenge the world's interpretation of who Jesus is.

### **Discuss**

? Give a specific example of how the Holy Spirit's presence and power gave you confidence to make a decision or speak up for Jesus.

## **Part 3—Walk in the Spirit**

### **A Line to Toe**

Galatians 5:16–21

**Say:** Living in the Spirit means finding the righteous center between living as a legalist or a libertine. It means abandoning our selfish, sinful desires so we can follow Christ and inherit the kingdom of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The believers in Galatia were being subjected to false teaching that would have pulled them back under regulations of Mosaic law, and they were “biting and devouring one another” (Galatians 5:15, NLT) instead of choosing to “serve one another in love” (verse 13, NLT). In his letter, the apostle Paul called them instead to liberty and love by walking in the Spirit.

Before new birth, the old nature can be called the “flesh” or “sinful nature.” That old way craves evil—the opposite of what the Holy Spirit desires. Sometimes the internal conflict is so strong that a person is unable to do the things they know they should. The solution? Let the Holy Spirit guide your life. Walk hand in hand with the Holy Spirit. Keep in lockstep with the *Paraclete*. Listen for His voice, submit to His will, wait for His signal, and move at His command.

When you are led by the Spirit you need pursue only two commandments:

1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).
2. Love your neighbor as yourself (verse 31).

Paul reiterates Jesus' teaching that these commands are the summation of the Law (Galatians 5:14; see Matthew 22:35–40). He then adds, “Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves” (Galatians 5:16, NLT).

The sinful nature is obvious and so are the effects of following it. When people live under the influence of the sinful nature, they will be marked by all kinds of sin. Following these sinful cravings results in: “sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these” (verses 19–21, NLT). Paul warned what the end result would be: “Anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (verse 21, NLT).

### **Discuss**

? Give an example of the pursuit of a fleshly desire that produced sinful effects.

? List one key principle you have learned in your life about walking in the Spirit. What tips could you share with new believers?

## The Law of Life

Romans 8:1–11

**Say:** Those who are in Christ Jesus enjoy rich blessings from the Holy Spirit, including true freedom. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God took the initiative to do what the Law could not do, sending His Son to save us and His Spirit to enable us to obey His commands. The purpose of salvation is not simply that we might escape punishment, but “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Romans 8:4, KJV). Only in those who surrender to the Spirit’s control can the righteous requirements of the Law be fulfilled.

The fleshly mind is alienated from God, and as Paul clearly states, “Letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death” (verse 6, NLT). The spiritual mind, however, is alive to God and alert to spiritual realities. “Letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace” (verse 6, NLT).

### Resource Packet Item 3: The Spirit’s Fruit in My Life

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to spend this week prayerfully assessing the Spirit’s fruit in their lives.

#### Discuss

? Give an example of one way you have learned to set your mind on the Spirit.

## What Is God Saying to Us?

**Say:** Spirituality, according to the Bible, is life in the Spirit. Such life requires a new spiritual birth, because the old, sinful nature cannot enter the kingdom of God. Life in the Spirit happens through a relationship with God as intimate as the disciples had with Jesus, made possible through the *Paraclete*.

## Living It Out

### Ministry in Action

- Ask the Holy Spirit to open a door for evangelism this week. Without arguing about religion, ask someone about their spiritual life. Be ready to share about your relationship with Jesus.
- Reflect this week on what you most appreciate about the *Paraclete*. Thank the Lord for sending Him.
- Choose something you can do this week to tune in even more to the voice of the Spirit. What spiritual disciplines would help you most?

## Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The Spirit Strives with Sinners.

Genesis 6:1–8

Tuesday:

The Spirit Resisted by Israel.

Isaiah 63:7–10

Wednesday:

The Spirit Changes Lives.

Ezekiel 36:25–29

Thursday:

Characterized by the Spirit.

Acts 6:1–7

Friday:

The Spirit Sets Free.

Romans 8:1–10

Saturday:

The Spirit Confirms Our Redemption.

Ephesians 1:3–14