

What Is The Holy Spirit? And Why Should I Care?

1. Warm up: If you were going to create the perfect plate of food comprised of three different kinds of food, what would be on your plate?
2. The Christian concept of the Trinity is *loosely* analogous to your perfect plate of food. The Trinity is three different expressions of the same God, and three different ways of experiencing that God, which taken together give us a perfect understanding of God – or at least as perfect as we humans can come to understanding God. Often we focus most attention on God the Father, the so-called First Person of the Trinity, and God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, relegating the Third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit – to an afterthought. So on Sunday we began an in-depth study of the Holy Spirit. Before delving into the Spirit, let's first reflect a bit on God the Father and God the Son.
 - a. Take a look at the traditional diagram of the Trinity on p. 3 – three oblong ovals that substantially overlap, signifying that each Person of the Trinity shares many core characteristics, like *agape* love, for example. But as the diagram indicates, each Person of the Trinity also illustrates and amplifies certain unique characteristics essential to a full understanding of God. For example, God the Father is often associated with the infinite power and grandeur of God. Tell us about a time in your life when you've experienced awe and wonder at the grandeur of God.
 - b. Jeff compared God the Son (Jesus) to "God with skin on." Since we humans learn best by example, God came to us in the form of Jesus to give us a concrete model – a living, breathing example – of what God is really like and what it means for us, as children of God, to live in the ways of God. Tell us something about Jesus that gives you critical insight into what God is like and how we, as children of God, should live.
3. A deep understanding of God the Father and God the Son gives us profound insight into who God is and what God is like, but there's still a critical additional piece of the puzzle needed to round out our understanding of God. God the Father is "way out there," so to speak, and God the Son lived "way back then," two thousand years ago. But we live right here right now way down here on planet earth. So if all we had was God the Father and God the Son, we might feel pretty isolated and God might seem quite distant. But there's Good News; there's more! There's also God the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus began to tell his disciples it was necessary for him to go away. He said, "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away." John 16:7. Imagine yourself as one of Jesus' original disciples. When Jesus began to say, "I have to go away," how would you have felt?
 - b. Jesus went on to explain why it was advantageous to us for him to complete his mission, then go away. He said, "[When] I go away, I will send the Helper to you." John 16:7. Jesus elaborated further in verse 13, "When the Spirit of truth

comes, the Spirit will guide you into all truth. For he will not speak on his own, but will . . . take what is mine and declare it to you.” Basically, what Jesus was saying is that the Holy Spirit would be Jesus crowd sourced – Jesus metastasized in Spirit form, no longer confined by space and time, but able to be with *every single believer* in every single place for all the rest of time, so that wherever you go, whatever you do, no matter how far you roam, the power of Jesus, in Spirit form, can be right there with you – not just *with* you, but *in* you. Imagine you had no idea of the Holy Spirit, imagine that way of understanding God was missing for you. How might that affect you in your spiritual walk in your practical everyday life?

4. On the evening of the first day after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples. Let’s read what happened in John 20:19-22, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. When Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” what does that mean? What was Jesus trying to tell us?
 - b. In our passage, Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” but Jeff noted that they didn’t. It took 49 more days before they were finally able to receive the Spirit on what we now call “the Day of Pentecost.” Why the delay? What might have taken them so long?
 - c. When the disciples did finally receive the Holy Spirit, there was a mighty rushing wind and they saw visions of flames hovering over each head – men, women, and children). Filled with power, they left their prayer gathering, rushed out into the streets, and were able to proclaim the message of Jesus in languages they never spoke before. What should we learn from this? What happens to a person when they receive the Holy Spirit? How does it change us?
5. All the foregoing raises the question, how does a person “receive the Holy Spirit”? Jeff suggested two key steps. First, you must dare to believe you can receive the Holy Spirit. Jeff said, “For many people, the biggest hurdle to receiving the Holy Spirit is believing that you can – that *you* can actually have a close personal, empowered relationship with God.”
 - a. Too many of us suffer from low spiritual self-esteem. We think we’re not “the church type.” We think we’re too ornery and wayward for God to want to be in relationship with us. Maybe we’ve spent many years being told that we’re not God’s type of person. Have you ever felt that way or known someone who has? If so, what finally made the difference for you or for that other person?
 - b. Others of us suffer from cynicism and skepticism. We may have learned to view faith as something for simple-minded people, not smart, educated people. Leo Tolstoy thought that, so did Blaise Pascal. But both experienced a deep emptiness inside, dug more deeply into questions of faith, and ultimately had profound spiritual experiences that led them to deep faith. Have you ever felt cynical and

skeptical about faith or known someone who has? If so, what finally made the difference for you or for that other person that brought you to faith?

- c. The second critical step to “receiving the Holy Spirit” is to consciously invite the Spirit into your life and to begin practicing the presence of the Spirit in your life, by listening for the Spirit’s guidance, opening yourself to feel the love and comfort of the Spirit, and daring to act in the power of the Spirit. Have you ever consciously invited the Spirit of God to fill you and abide in you? Why or why not?
- d. In the week ahead we’ll dig more deeply into what it means to practice the presence of the Holy Spirit. But for now, tell us about a time recently when you’ve experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life in a practical way.

John 20:19-22

19 It was evening on that day, the first day of the week when Jesus arose. The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, and Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.²¹ Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’

