

# Holy Spirit

## Introduction

Of the three Persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit tends to be the hardest for us to understand. We understand God the Father, the Creator, because we encounter this person of the Trinity in the Creation narratives, during conversations with Abraham and Moses, in Israel's deliverance from slavery and exile, and elsewhere in Scripture. We understand Christ because he became fully human as Jesus. He "emptied himself" and "humbled himself" to be "born in human likeness" (Philippians 2:7, 8). Jesus experienced all of the suffering and temptation that come with being human.

But the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is much more difficult to relate to. This Person of the Trinity is as hard to hold on to as the wind, which is one image people often use to describe the indescribable. The connection between the wind and the Holy Spirit goes back to the original biblical manuscripts, which were written in Hebrew (much of the Old Testament) and Greek (the entire New Testament). The Hebrew and Greek words for "Spirit," *ruach* and *pneuma* respectively, also mean "wind" and "breath."

Perhaps because the Spirit is so hard to grasp, both literally and figuratively, we tend to give it short shrift, trotting it out at Pentecost and then tucking it away for the rest of the year. (If the Spirit were a person, instead of a Person, it might develop an inferiority complex.)

When we do pay attention to the Holy Spirit, we make a couple of mistakes. First, we focus exclusively on the Pentecost story as if all the Spirit ever did was energize Peter and his companions on a single day two millennia ago (not that it wasn't an amazing accomplishment!). Second, we often reduce the Spirit to a churchy version of the human conscience.

## **LIMITING THE SPIRIT'S SCOPE**

To understand the Spirit's role in Scripture, we have to start at the beginning—literally. The Spirit was active in Creation: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2, NIV). Throughout the Old Testament, leaders such as Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon receive wisdom and power from the Spirit.



Fast-forward to the New Testament. There Mary becomes pregnant through the Spirit (Matthew 1:18), John predicts that Jesus will baptize with the Spirit (Mark 1:8), and the Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:21-22). And all that happens before Jesus' ministry even begins.

At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus promises his disciples that "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Following his resurrection, Jesus sends his disciples into Jerusalem to wait until they "have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49), a power that comes in the form of "a sound like the rush of a violent wind" and "tongues, as of fire" (Acts 2:2-3). The rest, as they say, is church history.

### **LIMITING THE SPIRIT'S POWER**

One mistake we often make with regard to the Spirit is equating this person of the Trinity with the conscience or with the proverbial cartoon angel who hovers over one shoulder, giving us sound advice and arguing with the cartoon devil who sits on the other side of our head.

There's a nugget of truth to this image: In John 14:26, Jesus himself calls the Holy Spirit the Advocate (some translations say "Counselor"). Jesus tells his disciples that the Advocate "will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." The Spirit plays the angel-on-the-shoulder role, advising us and helping us make tough decisions. But the Holy Spirit is so much more. Focusing only on a single characteristic of the Spirit is as short-sighted as describing the church as a building where people meet together once a week.

The Holy Spirit counsels us; but it also empowers us (Acts 4:31), comforts us (Acts 9:31), blesses us with spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11), fills our hearts with love (Romans 5:5), and prays for us in "sighs too deep for words" when we don't know the words to pray (Romans 8:26).

### **THE SPIRIT IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

Trained theologians struggle to describe and define the Holy Spirit; so young people, especially, will have trouble grasping the concept of the Spirit. To help confirmands better appreciate this person of the Trinity, we need to emphasize all of the roles that the Holy Spirit plays. Some young people will see the Spirit most clearly as an advocate or counselor who provides comfort and advice during difficult times. Some will see the Spirit as the source of their gifts and abilities. Others will know the Spirit best as a giver of strength and courage. A young person might relate to one of these expressions of the Holy Spirit now and might relate to others as he or she grows in faith.



# Supplies and Preparation

## Basic Supplies

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|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bibles of various translations<br><input type="checkbox"/> markerboard or large sheets of paper<br><input type="checkbox"/> markers<br><input type="checkbox"/> pens or pencils | <input type="checkbox"/> clear tape and/or glue<br><input type="checkbox"/> masking tape<br><input type="checkbox"/> index cards or paper cut about the same size (3-by-5 or 4-by-6)<br><input type="checkbox"/> sheets of posterboard | <input type="checkbox"/> paper (Use paper that has already been used on one side as much as possible, depending on the activity.)<br><input type="checkbox"/> scissors |
|--|--|--|

Activity

preparation

Other Supplies

## WHAT?

Opening Ritual	Write the opening meditation—which is adapted from 1 Chronicles 16:8, 12, 15, 23—on a markerboard; or project the meditation, using the slide on the website.	<input type="checkbox"/> vine from previous sessions <input type="checkbox"/> vine branches (1 for each student)
The Spirit in Scripture	Gather supplies.	<input type="checkbox"/> optional: Bible with pronunciations in it or an audio Bible and equipment to play it on

## SO WHAT? PART 1

Burning, Breathing, Blowing	Tie streamers to the grill of the fan so that, when the fan is turned on, they flutter in the breeze.	<input type="checkbox"/> candle <input type="checkbox"/> small electric fan <input type="checkbox"/> streamers of plastic or crepe paper
Blow, Blow, Blow Your Boat	Make copies of the “Origami Sailboat” handout on the website.	<input type="checkbox"/> squares of paper <input type="checkbox"/> “Origami Sailboat” instructions <input type="checkbox"/> small electric fan
The Spirit Moving in You	Be prepared to tell the youth an example from your own life about the Spirit nudging you. (See the activity.)	

## SO WHAT? PART 2

The Spirit Moving in John Wesley	Make copies of the “Spirit Moving in John Wesley” worksheet and narrative on the website. Optional: Try out the Mentos® rocket to see how it works.	<input type="checkbox"/> “Spirit Moving in John Wesley” worksheet and narrative <input type="checkbox"/> optional: Mentos®, two-liter bottle of diet cola, towels for cleanup, and a basin
Listening for the Spirit	<p>Locate an empty room, and use masking tape to mark on the floor a line parallel to one wall. (Or use a rope to mark a line outside.)</p> <p>Cut out shapes from pieces of colored paper so that you have one shape for every two participants. Scatter these shapes on the floor.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> cutouts of shapes from colored paper <input type="checkbox"/> masking tape (or a rope if the activity will be done outdoors) <input type="checkbox"/> blindfolds (one per pair of youth)
The Spirit on the Move	Make a copy of the “Spirit Movement” cards on the website, and cut the cards apart.	<input type="checkbox"/> “Spirit Movement” cards

## NOW WHAT?

Closing Ritual	Write the benediction, “John Wesley’s Rule,” on a markerboard; or print out the poster on the website.	
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## What ?

### supplies

- vine from previous sessions
- vine branches (1 for each student)
- markers or pens

**preparation:** Have on hand supplies for the youth to add branches to the vine. Write the opening meditation—which is adapted from 1 Chronicles 16:8, 12, 15, 23—on a markerboard; or project the meditation, using the slide on the website.

**NOTE:** Take time before you get started to talk with the confirmands about what they read and wrote in the “Redemption” section of their CREDO STUDENT JOURNALS.

### supplies

- Bibles
- scratch paper (preferably paper that has been used on one side already)
- pens or pencils
- markerboard
- marker
- optional: Bible with pronunciations in it or an audio Bible and equipment to play it on



## OPENING RITUAL

(10 minutes)

As confirmands arrive, point them to the confirmation vine and give each person a branch. Invite the confirmands to reflect on the previous session and to write on their branch something they learned or experienced during that session. Ask the confirmands to attach their branch to the vine. Remind the youth that this vine and its branches represent God’s story, a story that they are a part of.

When all of the confirmands have arrived, invite each person to talk briefly about what he or she wrote on his or her branch. Then invite the youth to read aloud the opening meditation, which is adapted from 1 Chronicles 16:8, 12, 15, 23:

Give thanks to the LORD,  
and make God’s deeds known among the peoples.  
Remember the wonderful works that God has done;  
remember God’s covenant forever.  
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.  
Tell of God’s salvation every day.

## THE SPIRIT IN SCRIPTURE

(20 minutes)

Ask for volunteers to summarize what they learned during the first session, “Creation,” about the doctrine of the Trinity.

Say: “During our first session, we looked at the Trinity, focusing on God, the Father and Creator. Then in the previous session, we discussed Jesus Christ, the Son and Redeemer. In this session, we’ll take a look at the Holy Spirit.”

Divide the confirmands into pairs or groups of three. Assign one or more of the Scriptures below to each group. (It’s OK if multiple groups look at the same Scriptures, but make sure that every Scripture is assigned to at least one group.) Give each group a few minutes to read its Scripture(s) and to discuss what the passage says about the Holy Spirit.

- ✦ Genesis 1:1-5 (The Spirit is present at Creation.)
- ✦ Matthew 3:13-17 (The Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism.)
- ✦ John 14:25-27 (The Spirit is our teacher and advocate.)
- ✦ Romans 5:1-5 (The Spirit fills our hearts with love.)
- ✦ Romans 8:26-27 (The Spirit intercedes and prays for us.)
- ✦ 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (The Spirit blesses us with spiritual gifts.)

Bring everyone back together, and ask each group to summarize, in a single sentence, its Scripture and what the passage has to say about the Holy Spirit. Write these summaries on a markerboard.

Ask:

- ✦ What very important Scripture about the Holy Spirit did we not cover? Allow the youth to guess the Bible passage you're talking about. (*Acts 2:1-21, the Pentecost story*)

Read Acts 2:1-21 aloud. (Given the difficult names in this passage, it's better not to ask a student to read it aloud.) If possible, read from a Bible that offers pronunciation helps for difficult names or use an audio Bible.

Ask the confirmands to listen carefully to the Scripture for anything that the passage says about who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does. Ask the youth to name these things aloud. List their responses on a markerboard.

Say: "Nowadays, we celebrate Pentecost—the day on which the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples—as the birthday of the church. Some congregations even serve birthday cake on Pentecost Sunday."

## So What? Part 1

### **BURNING, BREATHING, BLOWING**

(10 minutes)

Say: "Scripture helps us understand who the Holy Spirit is and what the Spirit does by comparing the Holy Spirit with things that we are more familiar with."

Light the candle, and explain that fire is an image people often use to describe the Spirit. This image comes from the Pentecost story. Then extinguish the flame.

Say: "The books in the Bible were originally written in Hebrew and Greek. The Hebrew word for *spirit*—*ruach* (ROO-ah)—and the Greek word for *spirit*—*pnuma* (NOO-muh)—also mean 'wind' and 'breath.'"

Invite the confirmands to breathe gently on the backs of their hands.

Say: "The Holy Spirit is the breath of God that fills us with life. We see this image of the Spirit in Genesis 2:7, when God breathes life into Adam's nostrils."

Then turn on a small fan that has streamers tied to its grill.

Point out the fan, and say: "The Holy Spirit, like the wind, is invisible but powerful, moving things around as it wills."

Then invite a youth to read aloud John 3:8: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

#### **Supplies**

- Bible
- candle
- matches or a lighter to light the candle
- small electric fan
- streamers of plastic or crepe paper

**Preparation:** Tie streamers to the grill of the fan so that, when the fan is turned on, they flutter in the breeze.



### SUPPLIES

- squares of paper
- copies of the “Origami Sailboat” instructions
- small electric fan

**preparation:** Choose the instructions on the website, on the websites that are linked there, or your own. Make copies of the instructions, and be sure that you can make the boat.

**NOTE:** Since people have various learning styles, the best instructions for this activity are the ones that you can follow and help the students follow. That way, you’ll be better able to help any youth who need assistance.

**preparation:** Be prepared to tell the youth an example from your own life about the Spirit nudging you.

**NOTE:** If you choose to divide this session into two one-hour classes, break here.



Ask:

- How do these images (fire, breath, and wind) help you better understand who the Holy Spirit is and how the Holy Spirit works?
- Which of these images (fire, breath, and wind) best fits your understanding of the Holy Spirit?

Say: “None of these images fully describes or explains the Holy Spirit, but each image gives us a better idea of how the Spirit works in the world.”

## **BLOW, BLOW, BLOW YOUR BOAT**

(10 minutes)

Hand out copies of the Origami Sailboat instructions of your choice. (See the website for options.) Give the students about five minutes to create sailboats, following the instructions. Help students as needed.

Give the confirmands plenty of time to create their boats; then invite them to race their boats across the length of the table, powering them with the wind of the fan used in the previous activity. Don’t worry about who wins, just watch how the wind carries the boats across the table.

## **THE SPIRIT MOVING IN YOU**

(10 minutes)

Ask:

- When traveling by sailboat or hot-air balloon, what determines your course? (*the wind*)
- What role does the captain or operator of these vehicles play? (*understanding and cooperating with the wind, not fighting against it*)
- Does the wind sometimes take the boat or balloon where the captain or owner doesn’t want to go? (*yes*)
- How is the Holy Spirit similar to the wind? (*The Spirit guides our path; it sometimes pushes us in directions we don’t feel comfortable going; it’s easier to go with the Spirit or wind than to go against it; and so on.*)

Then ask the confirmands whether they have ever felt pulled, perhaps by the Spirit, to do something that they didn’t really want to do. This might be anything from being nice to an annoying sibling to reaching out to someone at school whom everybody else ignores or abuses.

Be prepared to tell the youth an example from your own life, perhaps about the Spirit nudging you into a line of work that you hadn’t previously considered, pushing you to sacrifice something that you enjoyed but knew that you could do without, instructing you to make changes in the way you budget your time and/or money.

## So What? Part 2

### THE SPIRIT MOVING IN JOHN WESLEY

(20 minutes)

Tell the confirmands that you will tell them a story about how the Holy Spirit touched the life of John Wesley, a founder of the Methodist movement, but that you're going to let them help tell the story in the style of Mad Libs™.

If you have a large group, divide the youth into groups of 3 or 4. Then give each group a copy of the "Spirit Moving in John Wesley" worksheet from the website. Give the teams a few minutes to fill out their worksheets. Then read aloud to first "The Spirit Moving in John Wesley Narrative," from the website, filling in one group's words as you go. Read the story again, using another group's words.

Continue until all of the groups have been represented. Finally, read aloud the story, using the correct words.

Then ask:

- ✦ When, in this story, was the Holy Spirit working in John Wesley's life? (*all of the time*)
- ✦ When, in this story, might John Wesley have been resisting or working against the Spirit? (*when he tried to reduce faith to a set of rules; when he went to Georgia even though he wasn't prepared*)
- ✦ When did John Wesley allow the Spirit to lead him? (*when he learned from the Moravians; when he went to the meeting in Aldersgate Street; as he kept wrestling with what it means to be a Christian*)
- ✦ Why, do you think, was John Wesley's experience in Aldersgate Street so powerful?

Then ask the confirmands to think of a time when they went to an event or took on an activity reluctantly or with low expectations but, to their surprise, had a positive or even life-changing experience. This might have been when they watched a movie that they found themselves thinking about for days (or that made them cry) or a church retreat where they heard God speaking to them. Allow volunteers to tell about their experiences, and be prepared to tell a story from your experience.

Say: "The meeting that John Wesley went to on Aldersgate Street was pretty ordinary. It was the sort of meeting that happened frequently. The same can be said for Pentecost. Pentecost is another name for the Jewish holiday Shavuot (shuh-VOO-oh), an annual celebration that recalls the event when God gave Moses and the Israelites the Torah on Mt. Sinai. What was different about that particular meeting on Aldersgate Street and that particular Pentecost celebration was the way that the Holy Spirit made something ordinary into something quite extraordinary."

#### SUPPLIES

- pens or pencils
- copies of "Spirit Moving in John Wesley" worksheets
- optional: Mentos®, 2-liter bottle of diet cola, towels for cleanup, and a basin (See the option, below.)

**PREPARATION:** Make copies of the worksheet for small groups of youth and a copy of the narrative for yourself.

**OPTION:** For a visual demonstration of turning the ordinary into the extraordinary, make a Mentos® rocket. Place a 2-liter bottle of diet cola in a basin, and remove the bottle cap. Then drop a few mint-flavored Mentos candies into soda, and watch the resulting eruption. (Other carbonated soft drinks will work, but experiments have shown that diet cola creates the most impressive eruption. In addition, since diet cola contains no sticky sugar or corn syrup, any eruption spillage is easier to clean up.) Information about this experiment and videos of impressive diet-cola-and-Mentos eruptions abound on the Internet.



## SUPPLIES

- Bibles
- guest speaker
- cutouts of shapes from colored paper
- masking tape (or ropes if the activity will be done outdoors)
- blindfolds (one per pair of youth)

**PREPARATION:** Locate an empty room near your regular meeting space, and use masking tape to mark on the floor a line parallel to two opposite walls.

Cut out shapes from pieces of colored paper so that you have one shape for every two participants. Scatter these shapes on the floor. Be sure to use a color or shape only once so that the pairs will know which piece of paper is theirs.

**NOTE:** Be sure to recycle the paper later.

Balls or other items may be used instead of the paper if you choose. Just be sure that these items are all different from one another.

\* To add difficulty, after the blindfolds are in place, scramble the non-blindfolded players so that they are not directly across from their partner.



## LISTENING FOR THE SPIRIT

(15 minutes)

Say: "God communicates with us through the Holy Spirit. But it can be hard to hear the Spirit's voice amid all of the other voices competing for our attention."

Remind the confirmands of the earlier discussion about times when they felt pulled to do something that they didn't want to do. Ask them to talk about who or what persuaded them to attend that event or to participate in that activity.

Say: "Discernment is a way in which Christians make decisions by listening for and being faithful to the Spirit." (You might mention that you'll be talking about discernment in more detail during the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" session, in the "Confirm Your Faith" unit.)

Move the class to the room in which you've scattered colored shapes on the floor. Divide the youth into pairs; and have the pairs split up and move to designated opposite ends of the room. Blindfold all of the confirmands on one end of the room. Assign to each of the non-blindfolded confirmands one of the shapes on the floor. (If you have an odd number of students, you will need to be the non-blindfolded person in one pair.)

When you say, "Go," the sighted confirmands should direct their blindfolded partners to their assigned shape. The non-blindfolded confirmands may say whatever they want, but they must stand still at their end of the room.\*

When all or most of the blindfolded students have found their paper, have the partners swap roles and repeat this activity. Move the shapes around after the blindfolds are in place. Then return to your regular meeting space. Ask:

- ✦ How difficult was it to discern your partner's voice?
- ✦ How did you focus on your partner's voice?
- ✦ How difficult was it to give your partner directions?

Wrap up by pointing out that, to be successful in this activity, both parties had to persevere. That is, they had to stay focused and determined even when the activity became frustrating.

Say: "We can't turn off the other voices and distractions in our lives. But we need to focus on what the Holy Spirit is saying to us, even when we have trouble hearing the Spirit at all. Fortunately, as we saw in John Wesley's story, the Spirit is persistent."

Then ask:

- ✦ In what ways does the Spirit speak to us? (*through Scripture, through worship, through other people, through our experiences, and so forth*)
- ✦ What can we do to stay focused on the Spirit? (*spend time in prayer, read and study Scripture, spend time with Christian friends, participate in worship, and so forth*)

## THE SPIRIT ON THE MOVE

(15 minutes)

Say: “As we learned in Scripture, the Spirit has been at work in the world since Creation. We’ve looked specifically at the Pentecost story and John Wesley’s experience. Now we’ll look at some other Spirit-filled moments in history.”

Divide the students into groups of two or three; and give each group one or more of the “Spirit Movement” cards, from the website.

Give the groups a few minutes to read the stories on their cards. Then ask a representative from each group to report what they learned and how the Holy Spirit was at work in the life of the person(s) on their card. After you’ve gone over all of the cards, invite the youth to name additional examples of persons they know personally or know of who have been touched by the Holy Spirit.

Then say: “These people we’ve discussed were just like John Wesley and the disciples on Pentecost: They were followers of Christ who had opened their ears, eyes, minds, and hearts to the Holy Spirit. We should follow their example by opening our ears, eyes, minds, and hearts to the Spirit.”

## Now What?

### CLOSING RITUAL

(10 minutes)

Gather the confirmands into a circle. Lead the youth in prayer, giving thanks to God for your time together and all that the group has learned and experienced. Then go around the circle, inviting each person to pray aloud one word or phrase that describes something he or she learned during the past week of confirmation.

After every person has had a chance to contribute a word or phrase, say a brief closing prayer. Then invite the confirmands to say aloud and in unison the benediction, “John Wesley’s Rule.”

### SUPPLIES

- “Spirit Movement” cards

**preparation:** Make a copy of the “Spirit Movement” cards on the website, and cut the cards apart.

**NOTE:** Before you dismiss, instruct the confirmands to read, reflect on, and journal about the material in the “Holy Spirit” section of the CREDO STUDENT JOURNAL before your next session. Also encourage them to try to do the activities related to “Holy Spirit” on the confirmand website.

### SUPPLIES

- markerboard
- marker

**preparation:** Write the benediction, “John Wesley’s Rule,” on a markerboard; or print out the poster from the website.

