



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Friendship with the Holy Spirit
(Pentecost, pp. 28-36)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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Friendship with the Holy Spirit

The marvel of God making us friends is given practical contours through the gifts of the Spirit, which are interpersonal dispositions that allow us to relate to God. By living through these gifts, we live in personal contact with the Gift—the Holy Spirit.

Prayer†

Come, Holy Spirit, send down those beams,
which sweetly flow in silent streams
from your bright throne above.
O come, Father of the poor;
O come, source of all our store,
come, fill our hearts with love.
Grant to your faithful, dearest Lord,
whose only hope is your sure word,
the sevenfold gifts of grace. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:1-5

Reflection

The most memorable biblical images of the Holy Spirit—as a dove at Jesus’s baptism, or a rushing wind from heaven or tongues of fire resting on the disciples’ heads at Pentecost—don’t speak to us of personal relationship, like images of the Triune God as a loving parent or devoted child do, Brandon Dahm observes. “Perhaps more personal is Jesus’ description of the Spirit’s role in our discipleship, as like an ‘advocate’ or ‘helper’ or ‘someone else to stand by you’ (John 14:16-17, 26).”

To flesh out this role of the Spirit in our discipleship, Dahm does not emphasize the marvelous effects of Pentecost, like speaking in tongues, healings, and prophecies. Rather, he points to “the ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit—the ones that grace the Messiah: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, piety, courage, and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2).” These, he notes, “are worthy of our attention as well, for they are part of something equally marvelous: our being drawn into friendship with God.”

A long tradition of Trinitarian thinking sees the Holy Spirit as the love between the Father and Son, and as the first gift through whom God’s gifts are given to creatures. Thus, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) notes, the Spirit is rightly named Love and Gift. The seven particular gifts of the Spirit reshape us so that we can be friends of God; they make us more aware of God’s presence in our lives and help us see the world more as God sees it. Psychologists today would call these “second-person experience” of the other person and “joint-attention” with the person, respectively.

- ▶ The gifts of *understanding* and *knowledge* help us share a perspective toward the world with the Holy Spirit. In Columba Marmion’s words, “The gift of knowledge makes us see created things...in the light of the Holy Spirit, as the work of God wherein His eternal Perfections are reflected.”
- ▶ The gift of *wisdom* transforms our desire as well as our intellect. Through what Aquinas calls “connaturality”—a growing sympathy that is grounded in a similar attitude and emotional stance—we come to relish the perspective of God.



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- ▶ By the gift of *counsel* “we share a stance with God about what we should *do*,” Dahm writes, and *courage* sustains us when doing it is “beyond what we are capable of achieving in our fallen state.” The second-person relatedness of courage is evident in Andrew Pinsent’s idea of it “as a sharing in God’s confidence that a good outcome is possible, in the face of every particular danger on the way to eternal life.”
- ▶ The gift of *fear of the Lord* is not groveling, servile fear of divine punishment, but filial fear tied to our growing love for God. Aquinas explains, “the more one loves a person, the more one fears to offend him and to be separated from him.” Thus, *fear of the Lord* relates to the gift of *piety*, which focuses our affection on God. “Through our love of our Father, we also have affection for others because God is their Father,” Dahm notes. “We thus attend to our lives with the Holy Spirit, and this includes our being alert to the danger, in errant thoughts and deeds, of hurting our friendship with God.”
“Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit,” Dahm concludes, “God shares the divine life with us. Each one ‘can be interpreted as *participating in God’s stance* toward various matters.’”

Study Questions

1. “Friendship” may seem like an odd description of our relationship with God, because friends must share something in common, and we share nothing with God. How do the gifts of the Spirit enable us to be drawn into friendship with God?
2. What do psychologists mean by “second-person experience” of another person? How do the gifts of the Holy Spirit support our second-person relatedness to God?
3. What is meant by sharing “joint attention” with another person? How do the gifts of the Holy Spirit lead us to jointly attend to the world with God?

Departing Hymn: “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (vv. 2 and 4)

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away our bent to sinning,
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

Finish, then, thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Charles Wesley (1747)

Suggested Tunes: BEECHER or HYFRYDOL

† From *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (12th C.), trans. John Austin (1613-1669), alt.

Friendship with the Holy Spirit

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.
2. To introduce the psychological concepts of second-person experience and joint attention.
3. To use these concepts to better understand how the seven gifts of the Spirit enable us to be drawn into friendship with God.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Pentecost (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" locate one of the familiar tunes BEECHER or HYFRYDOL in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

As we grow in the life of the Spirit, ideally we become more aware of God in our lives, come to share God's concerns, and begin to see daily events as God does. It's as though we are looking at everything, but now with God present. Brandon Dahm retells a winsome story by John Vianney, a curé or parish priest of Ars, France in the early nineteenth century, to illustrate this goal.

In Vianney's parish there was "a local peasant who often spent long hours sitting in prayer. Curious about this, Vianney one day asked the man what was going on in his mind.

"Going on in my mind, M'sieur Curé?" The old man smiled. "Nothing. I am not much good at thinking, nor do I know many prayers. So I just sit here, as you see, looking at God. I look at Him and He looks at me. That is all."

Dahm concludes, "As two lovers might look into each other's eyes, the peasant, aware that God was looking at him, simply looked at God."

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer in the study guide aloud.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Romans 5:1-5 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The Holy Spirit descended on disciples in dramatic fashion at Pentecost, but how do we relate personally to the person of the Spirit in our discipleship? Brandon Dahm points us toward the traditional seven gifts of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:2) as virtues, or essential traits, which allow us to know and love God, and to begin sharing God's perspective on the world. To better understand these gifts, Dahm employs two ideas from contemporary psychology: each gift enables "second-person experience" of God and "joint-attention" toward the world with God. The ultimate goal of these gifts is to provide us some common ground with God so that we can be drawn ever more deeply into friendship with God through his Spirit.

Study Questions

1. "From antiquity, friendship was considered to be the most significant and rich relationship possible between persons," Brandon Dahm notes. Ancient philosophers, like Aristotle (384-322 BC) "could not imagine any friendship existing between a human being and a divine being" because they share nothing in common. "The Christian God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, is transcendent beyond what Aristotle thought. Thus, any friendship between a human being and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would seem to be even less likely. But, according to Aquinas, this deep relationship is precisely what the sharing of the Holy Spirit – the giving of the Gift – accomplishes."

Commenting on Romans 5:5, Aquinas explains, "For the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and of the Son, to be given to us is our being brought to participate in the love who is the Holy Spirit, and by this participation we are made lovers of God." In other words, a friendship between unequals is begun by God sharing his life with us.

2. Dahm explains, "A second-person experience of another must have these characteristics: you are aware of the other person as a person, your personal interaction with the other person is relatively direct and immediate, and that person is conscious. It is called a 'second-person' experience for a reason. It is not reducible to introspective knowledge about one's own self (which would be first-person knowledge) because it requires knowledge of the other person. And it is not reducible to knowing true propositions about the other person, or knowing about that person through another person's experience (third-person knowledge) because it requires experience of the person *as a person*." The term "second-person experience" is commonly used by psychologists to describe what is missing in autism spectrum disorder. "Autistic persons know about other persons (that is, they know a lot of true propositions about them), but do not see and interact with them as persons."

Dahm gives a clever example of second-person awareness of a person in the instance of your grandmother coming to sit beside you as you are watching a mildly vulgar movie. You are conscious of her as a person, with a distinct perspective on the events in the film.

"The divine love (*caritas*) does not just provide an additional motivation to care for others, but it reshapes for the best every aspect of our thinking, feeling, and acting," Dahm explains. The gifts of *knowledge* and *understanding* make us aware that God is a person with a distinct, divine perspective and comprehension of things in the world; *wisdom* also calls attention to God's loving the world more deeply; and *counsel* and *courage* show us God acts (and calls us to act) differently. Together these gifts make us aware of God's personal presence with us.

3. "To jointly attend to some object is to share a stance toward that object with another person," Dahm explains, and simultaneously be aware of the object "as the focus of the other person's attention." The example of your grandmother watching the vulgar movie works here: you are watching the movie, but now you are watching it through her eyes. Andrew Pinsent notes, "The key point is that although it is the object, rather than the other person, that is the focus of one's attention, the presence and attention of the other person seem to make a qualitative difference to one's experience."

The gifts of *knowledge* and *understanding* make us more aware of what God notices and how God comprehends relations among the things of the world; *wisdom* also calls attention to how God loves each creature; *counsel* helps us evaluate our actions from God's perspective. Together these gifts help us think, feel, and act *with* God in the world. *Piety* and *fear of the Lord* call attention to our deepening love for God, and help us monitor how our thoughts, feelings, and actions impact that relationship.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.