



**Christian Reflection**  
A Series in Faith and Ethics

**Christian Reflection**  
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## Study Guides for

# Pentecost

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to explore the significance of Pentecost for our discipleship. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

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Pentecost marks not the reversal of Babel, but the subversion of shared language as a necessary basis for common identity. At Babel, the proliferation of languages leads to the proliferation of social identities and profound disunity. At Pentecost, it leads to the formation of one new social identity and profound unity.

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Always a pioneer, Hildegard of Bingen is one of the first writers to include illustrations with her text, not as "mere decoration" but as integral to her theology. The importance to her thought of the Holy Spirit – the "supreme and fiery force" – is most evident in these brilliant miniature illuminations.



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### Focus Article:

- 📖 The Spirit's Gift and Witness  
(*Pentecost*, pp. 11-20)

### Suggested Articles:

- 📖 Descent of the Holy Spirit  
(*Pentecost*, pp. 44-51)

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# The Holy Spirit's Gift and Witness

Pentecost marks not the reversal of Babel, but the subversion of shared language as a necessary basis for common identity. At Babel, the proliferation of languages leads to the proliferation of social identities and profound disunity. At Pentecost, it leads to the formation of one new social identity and profound unity.

### Prayer

Father, through your Holy Spirit  
you create us and sustain us.  
Open our hearts and minds to your presence now  
as your Spirit moves among us.  
Transform our minds  
that we may see your great salvation in one another.  
We pray in the name of Jesus,  
and through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-15

### Reflection

Many communities, cities, and nation states today are threatened by social disintegration; they face mistrust and angry disagreement— even rioting, terrorism, and warfare— that are stirred by social, economic, religious, and economic differences among people. But these problems are not new. As Aaron Kuecker notes, “The strife that comes from competing social identities— particularly ethnic identities— is a social reality shared by the New Testament and contemporary worlds.”

For instance, even though Luke-Acts is well known for its expansive and hospitable vision of salvation, identity-related issues provide much of the narrative tension in those books. Members of the early church, it seems, sometimes lost sight of what brings true unity and what unity is supposed to look like.

“It is the coming of God in Christ that reconciles humanity to God and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, reconciles humans to one another,” Kuecker explains. Believers cannot create unity in their communities artificially through exclusion or coercive homogeneity. Christ’s universal lordship is what unites members in their differences, and that is something meant for and available to everyone regardless of nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or gender. Submission and conformity to Christ will bond them to him and to one another through his self-giving love, but it does not make them look the same or sound the same. They do not need to share a culture or a language, as was dramatically revealed at Pentecost when the Spirit shaped believers’ common identity not by *eliminating* linguistic diversity, but by *amplifying* it. Their shared identity in Christ did not just transcend or accommodate differences; it reconciled and enriched them, making them fruitful.

Yet loving people who are different is not easy. In Luke’s narrative, loving people with competing identities is beyond the grasp of disciples, almost impossible for those who do not follow Jesus, and still very difficult for the post-Pentecost Church. God alone, through those upon whom he has poured out his Spirit, can practice the kind of self-giving love that results in reconciliation and shared identity



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with those who are profoundly other. Perhaps this is most clear in Luke 9, where in just ten verses the disciples argue about who is greatest, John attempts to stop an outsider from ministering in Jesus' name, and James and John offer to call down fire on an inhospitable village of Samaritans.

Becoming a community of reconciled difference is a difficult goal. It requires members to cling to the identity they share, which can seem distant and abstract compared to their immediate and threatening social differences. But whenever personal or subgroup identities become primary, even the Church becomes dysfunctional and her members can perpetuate injustice.

Kuecker highlights several instances in Acts where we can see the success of the Spirit's work at the boundaries of identity:

- ▶ *Pentecost* (Acts 2) is the most dramatic example. In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Christ is proclaimed to the diverse crowds not just in a language they can understand, but "in the language of their birth." The message of Christ does not annihilate their individual identities, but embraces and reconciles them.
- ▶ The *early Jerusalem church* (Acts 4), which is gathered from diverse Diaspora Israelites, is a community of incredible relational, social, economic, and spiritual solidarity. The immediate result of the gift of the Spirit is a peaceable community crossing socio-economic and linguistic boundaries.
- ▶ The *Jerusalem Council* (Acts 15) finally determines that non-Israelites can worship the God of Israel through Christ by the power of the Spirit. Significantly, through the reconciling work of the Holy Spirit, the Gentiles are fully accepted as brothers and sisters by the Israelites without forfeiting their ethnic and social difference.

Identity in Christ transcends every other identity, and yet the Spirit does not obliterate diversity. To the contrary, it is the Spirit's preservation of diversity, reconciled in Christ, that bears witness to the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord of all peoples.

### Study Questions

1. According to Aaron Kuecker, in what sense do the events of Pentecost do more than 'reverse' the story of Babel? What does this reveal about Christian unity?
2. Why is it that "whenever subgroup identities become primary, injustice and ruptured relationships are close at hand"?
3. Would you describe your congregation as "a community of reconciled difference"? How can it move closer to this calling of the Spirit?
4. Loveday Alexander describes the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost as "a gift that brings God's living word to articulate expression in a host of individual tongues." How do the four images that Heidi Hornik discusses in "Descent of the Holy Spirit" interpret this gift visually?

Departing Hymn: "A Rushing, Mighty Wind"



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### Focus Article:

 Dreams, Visions, and  
Prophecies  
(*Pentecost*, pp. 21-27)

### Suggested Article:

 Revising Memories at  
Pentecost  
(*Pentecost*, pp. 79-82)

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# Dreams, Visions, and Prophecies

The outpouring of God's Spirit "upon all flesh" at Pentecost would lead us to expect Spirit encounters that resemble it in the rest of Luke's story. What should we think when his reports of dreams, visions, and fulfilled prophecies in the believing community do not live up to those high expectations?

### Prayer

Father, through your Holy Spirit  
you create us and sustain us.

Open our hearts and minds to your presence now  
as your Spirit moves among us.

Transform our minds  
that we may see your great salvation in one another.

We pray in the name of Jesus,  
and through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Scripture Reading: Acts 2:14-36

### Reflection

When people are "in Christ," Paul says, "there is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Indeed, Peter's sermon interpreting the marvelous events at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) reads like an introductory tour of the "new creation" for those people on that day.

Peter prophetically transforms the *place* where the people live. Pentecost (or Festival of Booths) traditionally harked back to Mt. Sinai where the people were formed by covenant with God, but Peter attends instead to the upstairs room and David's tomb nearby as the intersection of the Spirit's power. Jesus was truly the Messiah from David's line; yet he is not buried like David, but is risen from the dead and enthroned as king in heaven (Acts 2:29-35). And Peter employs Joel's prophecy to transform the *time* when the people live. Bill Shiell notes, "Instead of reminiscing about times gone by, Peter said a new day of the Lord had dawned: sons and daughters could prophesy, men and women could preach, senior adults and young adults could see visions, and anyone who called on Jesus could be saved (2:16-21). A harvest festival designed to remind them of receiving God's law was transformed into a day to empower them by the Spirit."

Throughout Acts, we catch glimpses of Peter's prophecy being fulfilled in the believing community. For example, dramatic visions and dreams comfort Stephen (Acts 7:54-56), convict Paul on his way to Damascus (9:3-7; cf. 22:6-11; 26:12-18), guide Ananias to heal and instruct Paul (9:10-16), and then direct Paul's ministry (16:6-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11). Likewise, Cornelius and Peter's visions in Acts 10 lead to a "Second Pentecost" when the Spirit is "poured out" on Cornelius's household (10:40), and later they convince the church leaders in Jerusalem of those Gentiles' conversions (11:1-18 and 15:6-21).

Yet, Alicia Myers notes, the reports of God's Spirit moving among those early believers do not live up to the high expectations established by Peter's sermon. Luke recounts how the Spirit



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miraculously guides the Judean men Stephen, Peter, and Paul, and the Gentile centurion, but prophetic women and slaves are rare in the story. When they do appear, their insights are ridiculed (Acts 12:12-17) and silenced (16:18), or they do not speak at all (21:8-11). Myers wonders what we should make of this *uninclusive* record. Should we expect today outpourings of the Spirit on “all flesh” as Peter foretells, or just the limited experiences in the story as it unfolds?

Myers cautions us to read Luke charitably and in his social context. Compared to others writers of his era, Luke reports relatively positive roles for women and slaves. Myers concludes, “Like Peter, who in Acts 2 certainly could not have fathomed the inclusion of Gentiles that was to come in subsequent chapters, perhaps Luke likewise would be surprised at the fuller realization of God’s declaration in Joel 2 in other chapters of the Christian tradition. Perhaps the confines of his narrative account or vision, or both, led him to emphasize God’s Spirit upon certain Judean, freeborn men. Nevertheless, in so doing, Luke leaves plenty of room for the telling of God’s involvement with humanity outside his own plot—which is, after all, only one story in the midst of so many others both inside the New Testament and beyond it.”

### Study Questions

1. How is Joel’s prophecy (quoted and expanded in Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:17-18) fulfilled in the events of Pentecost? How is it fulfilled through Stephen (Acts 7:54-56), Peter (10:9-29 and 11:1-18), and Paul (9:3-7; 16:6-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; and 23:11) in the rest of the story in the book of Acts?
2. Compare the stories of the slave girl, Rhoda (Acts 12:6-17), the unnamed slave girl possessed by a Pythian spirit (16:16-19), and the four unmarried/virgin daughters of Philip (21:8-11). In each case, is there reason to be disappointed with their small roles in the narrative?

How would you respond to someone who concluded from these stories that women will always play only a small role in the Holy Spirit’s activity?

3. “Preaching still has the power to revise memories of a place and commission people in the Spirit’s power today,” Bill Shiell writes. How can preaching reshape our appreciation of cultural holidays—like Mother’s Day, school graduations, or Memorial Day—that often compete with Pentecost Sunday?
4. How does David Music’s hymn “A Mighty Rushing Wind” depict the fulfillment of God’s promise “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2:16)?

Departing Hymn: “A Rushing, Mighty Wind”



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### Focus Article:

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

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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* (12<sup>th</sup> C.), trans. John Austin (1613-1669), alt.



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### Focus Article:

📖 When the Holy Spirit Intercedes  
(Pentecost, pp. 37-43)

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# When the Holy Spirit Intercedes

The Spirit prays for us whether we are aware of it or not, but for our own comfort and confidence it is important that we should be aware of what the Spirit is doing on our behalf. God knows our hearts and is intimately acquainted with our groaning. And that should cause us to love and praise him.

### Prayer

Father, through your Holy Spirit  
you create us and sustain us.  
Open our hearts and minds to your presence now  
as your Spirit moves among us.  
Draw from our mouths  
all of the glorious wonder, love, and praise  
that you desire and are due.  
We pray in the name of Jesus,  
and through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:26-27

### Reflection

When the Apostle Paul describes how life is marvelously transformed for those who are set free from sin and death by Jesus Christ, he admits they'll groan over the damaged creation and long for the completion of God's redemptive work (Romans 8:2, 18-25). But he promises in their prayers to God, they will not be alone. They will be joined by...God's Spirit (8:26-27). What does Paul mean by this, and how does it impact our discipleship?

To help us better understand this mysterious role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, Timothy Wiarda explores these questions:

- ▶ *Does the Spirit pray for us, or help us to pray?* Since usually "the Spirit...communicates to and through people on behalf of God," Wiarda admits Paul may be saying "the Spirit's intercession happens in and through the prayers he enables us to utter." Yet, he thinks Paul is pointing primarily "to an activity of God's Spirit lying outside of our own experience, an activity of communication, mysterious though it may be, directed toward God," because twice Paul mentions the Spirit *interceding* – which is speaking on behalf of another – and emphasizes "the Spirit *himself* intercedes."
- ▶ *When does the Spirit pray for us?* Perhaps, at any time; but Paul highlights believers' suffering or groaning, and their not knowing what they should pray. Thus he might be "calling attention a particular ongoing circumstance, our present ignorance, that makes the Spirit's intercession necessary," but mainly when we are trying to express our suffering to God.
- ▶ *What content does the Spirit convey to God?* Something that is news to God, or something God already knows? The first view threatens God's greatness and the second trivializes Paul's teaching. "This dilemma becomes especially acute if we envisage the Spirit's intercession to be largely a matter of communicating information, ideas, or requests," Wiarda notes. The Spirit's *groaning* may suggest the intercession goes beyond sharing information. "Paul implies that what the Spirit communicates, and what the heart-searching God thereby comes to know, includes a sizeable measure of feeling,



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particularly feeling relating to the believers' experience of suffering." How would the Spirit know? "In Romans 5:5, for example, Paul says the Spirit pours out God's love in the hearts of believers. While passages such as these typically portray communication and influence flowing from the Spirit to the believer, they nevertheless show that Paul understood the Spirit to be in intimate internal contact with the inner life of believers. It is hard to divorce Paul's statements about the Spirit's groaning intercession from this larger picture of the Spirit indwelling believers' hearts."

So, if the Spirit is praying for us whether we are aware of it or not, why does Paul tell us about this? Or, put differently, "why does God include this intriguing picture as part of his word to us?" Wiarda concludes: "as with so much of what Scripture tells us about God and his redemptive work on our behalf, this picture is given to encourage us, comfort us, and give us hope – especially at times when we are conscious of the suffering, weakness, waiting, or groaning Paul describes in Romans 8."

### Study Questions

1. On Timothy Wiarda's interpretation, what is Paul saying in Romans 8:26-27 about the Holy Spirit's activity? What does Wiarda think it means to say the Spirit prays for us?
2. How, according to Wiarda, is the Holy Spirit supremely positioned to be an intercessor for the saints before God? Consider whether the Spirit's intercession pushes God further away or draws God closer to humans in their weakness.
3. Many Christian theologians think that God's greatness includes the attributes of omniscience (knowing all that can be known) and impassibility (not being tossed about by feelings). How does this view of the Spirit's intercession fit with those divine attributes?
4. Read Romans 8, the immediate context of Paul's teaching on the Spirit's intercession. What encouragement should we take from this activity of the Spirit?

### Departing Hymn: "Spirit of God, Descend on My Heart" (vv. 1, 3, and 4)

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;  
wean it from earth; through all its pulses move;  
stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art,  
and make me love thee as I ought to love.

Teach me to feel that thou art always nigh;  
teach me the struggles of the soul to bear,  
to check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;  
teach me the patience of unceasing prayer.

Teach me to love thee as thine angels love,  
one holy passion filling all my frame;  
the kindling of the heaven-descended Dove,  
my heart an altar, and thy love the flame.

George Croly (1854)  
Tune: MORECAMBE



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### Focus Articles:

- 📖 The Spirit's "Supreme and Fiery Force"  
(*Pentecost*, pp. 52-66)

### Suggested Articles:

- 📖 Tracing the Spirit through Scripture  
(*Pentecost*, pp. 83-88)
- 📖 Who is the Holy Spirit?  
(*Pentecost*, pp. 89-93)

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# The Spirit's "Supreme and Fiery Force"

Always a pioneer, Hildegard of Bingen is one of the first writers to include illustrations with her text, not as "mere decoration" but as integral to her theology. The importance to her thought of the Holy Spirit—the "supreme and fiery force"—is most evident in these brilliant miniature illuminations.

### Prayer

Father, through your Holy Spirit  
you create us and sustain us.  
Open our hearts and minds to your presence now  
as your Spirit moves among us.  
Pour your divine love into our hearts  
that we may live in harmony with one another.  
We pray in the name of Jesus,  
and through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture Reading: John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

### Reflection

For the twelfth-century Benedictine abbess and sage, Hildegard of Bingen, "doctrine was an ongoing divine 'encounter,'" notes Carmen Acevedo Butcher. "Beginning in early childhood, her visions animated doctrine throughout her life, and her orthodox faith—fed daily through *lectio divina* Bible meditation and liturgical prayer—nurtured her mystical consciousness."

Butcher traces Hildegard's reflection on the Holy Spirit through four of her illuminations. "Hildegard knew the art of illumination and probably supervised the design and creation of these in her own scriptorium at the new abbey of Rupertsberg," she explains. "What the miniatures lack in formal polish is more than compensated by their bright colors and numinous designs."

- ▶ *THE VISIONARY* depicts the sources of Hildegard's theology: as the Holy Spirit's five tongues of Pentecostal inspiration penetrate the roof, Hildegard is framed by pillars representing the Old and New Testaments, and assisted by her friend Volmar. Nearby text describes her 'writer's block': "As I started this task, I looked to the living Light, asking, 'But what should I write down?' and that Brightness commanded, 'Be simple. Be pure. Write down what you see and hear!'"
- ▶ *ON THE ORIGIN OF LIFE* presents the Holy Spirit as a winged female figure, Caritas (or, Love). In Hildegard's *Book of Divine Works*, Caritas boldly asserts "I am the supreme and fiery force who kindled every living spark" and "I am the fiery life of the essence of God" and "I am Life, whole and undivided—not hewn from any stone, nor budded from branches, nor rooted in virile strength; but all that lives has its root in Me." Heinrich Schipperges explains this Trinitarian image: "The figure of Love, surmounted by fatherly Goodness, carries the Lamb, symbolizing tenderness. Love has exerted itself and produced the creation, which it now protects with its encircling wings while trampling evil underfoot." In a companion miniature below, a flame of divine inspiration descends to Hildegard's upturned face.
- ▶ *THE BLUE CHRIST* is a vision of the Trinity. Hildegard writes, "You see a bright light, which without any flaw of illusion, deficiency or



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deception designates the Father; and in this light the figure of a man the color of sapphire, which without any flaw of obstinacy, envy or iniquity designates the Son, Who was begotten of the Father in Divinity before time began, and then within time was incarnate in the world in Humanity; which is all blazing with a gentle glowing fire, which fire without any flaw of aridity, mortality or darkness designates the Holy Spirit, by Whom the Only-Begotten of God was conceived in the flesh and born of the Virgin within time and poured the true light into the World."

- ▶ *THE EGG OF THE UNIVERSE* "visualizes the universe as a cosmic egg where God, humanity, and nature enjoy the interrelatedness of interdependency," Butcher writes. The human home is in the center, surrounded by stars and planets, refreshed by winds, and enfolded within a ring of shining flame that "signifies God's Spirit holding the cosmos together with all-embracing divine love, bathing the world in the celestial fire that incubates new life."

In these amazing images drawn from Hildegard's visions, we can glimpse the truth that is sung in her music: "Spirit of fire, Paraclete, our Comforter, You're the *Live* in *alive*, the *Be* in every creature's *being*, the *Breathe* in every *breath* on earth. ..."

### Study Questions

1. In these images, how does Hildegard depict the Spirit inspiring her (and, by extension, other theologians) to write?
2. What familiar biblical features of the Spirit does Hildegard weave into these images? What elements surprise you?
3. What do you learn from these miniature illuminations about the Holy Spirit's role in the Trinity?
4. Hildegard's "basic premise is Augustinian: God is merciful and creation is good (if fallen)," Carmen Acevedo Butcher writes. "She improves, however, on Augustine in her persistent articulation of a glass-half-full, God-is-love theology." How is this outlook evinced in these illuminations?

### Departing Hymn: "Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling" (vv. 1, and 3)

Holy Spirit, ever dwelling  
in the holiest realms of light;  
Holy Spirit, ever brooding  
o'er a world of gloom and night;  
Holy Spirit, ever raising  
those of earth to thrones on high;  
living, life-imparting Spirit,  
you we praise and magnify.

Holy Spirit, ever working  
through the Church's ministry;  
quick'ning, strength'ning, and absolving,  
setting captive sinners free;  
Holy Spirit, ever binding  
age to age and soul to soul  
in communion never ending,  
you we worship and extol.

*Timothy Rees (1874-1939)*

*Suggested Tunes: IN BABILONE or NETTLETON*

# Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

# The Holy Spirit's Gift and Witness

## 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 consider how the proliferation of languages at Pentecost leads to the formation a new unity through reconciled difference.
2. To explore the difference between homogeneity and true Christian unity-in-diversity.
3. To discuss how you congregation can become a healthy community of reconciled difference.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 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 and suggested article before the group meeting. The departing hymn "A Rushing, Mighty Wind" is located on pp. 67-69 of *Pentecost*.

## Begin with an Observation

"Depicting the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost has fascinated artists for centuries," Heidi Hornik notes. "The dramatic arrival of the third person of the Trinity – with a sound like a mighty wind from heaven and a tongue of fire appearing to rest on each disciple, then the disciples speaking in various languages and the crowd reacting to this marvel – requires a complex composition. It also allows for an extraordinary level of artistic interpretation and creativity."

She finds the image of fire is "particularly poignant" as a theological sign, for "as Loveday Alexander observes:

The thing about a flame is that the more you divide it, the more there is to go round: split a flame in half and you get more, not less. So the coming of the Spirit is a gift of new life to the community, which brings out the individual gifts of each member, a gift that brings God's living word to articulate expression in a host of individual tongues." (*Pentecost*, 45)

## 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 Acts 2:1-15 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

The miraculous events at Pentecost subvert the idea that a shared language or culture is necessary for unity in the Church. Christian unity is founded on the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, which transcends all ethnic, cultural, social, economic, and gender divides. Therefore, Aaron Kuecker suggests, congregations are called be "communities of reconciled difference" that are characterized by unity in diversity rather than oppressive homogeneity. He explores the book of Acts for examples of Spirit-inspired communities of reconciled difference as well as how things go wrong when subgroup identities become primary.

## *Study Questions*

1. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit overcomes the profound disunity caused by the proliferation of languages at Babel, but not by eliminating those different languages or replacing them with a shared language. Indeed, Aaron Kuecker suggests, the apostles and crowds did not need a shared language, for most would have spoken Greek or Aramaic. Thus they did not need a miracle to occur in order to understand each other. Instead of eliminating difference, the Holy Spirit emphasizes the diversity of those united by Christ's lordship. The crowds hear Christ proclaimed "in the language of their birth" (Acts 2:8) — emphasizing their diverse homes and cultures, and coming to each individual intimately, on their own terms. Christian unity, then, does not require that their ethnic differences be obliterated or hidden, but only that their identity in Christ be primary, valued above all others. The distinctions brought about at Babel are not reversed, but their consequent discord is overcome. The differences are turned to good as the Gospel expands and reaches diverse people with the message of Christ.
2. Aaron Kuecker writes, "It is frequently at the boundaries of social identity that antagonism — whether explicit or implicit, passive or active — erupts." We are familiar with the fear, anger, resentment, and even violence that emerge from the friction at these boundaries. We are not comfortable with those who are different; we feel threatened by people whose experience we do not share, whose problems and victories are not ours. It is no wonder that problems arise among Christians who prioritize secondary identities — as members of a particular nation, region, class, race, ethnicity, or other group.

The love Christ has for us is the one thing that transcends every division, every identity we may have. It is the one thing that allows us to see even our enemies as potential brothers and sisters, adopted into God's family just as we are. Seeing the world in this way reconciles us to one another without a compulsion to homogeneity.
3. Consider how your congregation prioritizes members' shared identities in Christ. What programs, ministries, or worship traditions help members to embrace those who are different within and outside of your congregation? How might your church improve in welcoming those with diverse ethnic, cultural, economic, and other backgrounds? Discuss specific ways your congregation can foster greater reconciliation within and beyond the Body of Christ. Remember, we must work hard to seek unity in Christ, but it is only through the self-giving love of the Holy Spirit that we will ever succeed. Do not only start campaigns or plan new ministry opportunities, but turn to the Spirit for guidance and the gifts necessary to become more like the community of reconciled difference founded at Pentecost.
4. Split into four groups — one each to discuss the illuminated manuscript, Duccio, El Greco, and Emil Nolde's paintings of the event of Pentecost. Consider how each artist interprets the dramatic sign of the Spirit's gift of new life. (Heidi Hornik compares them in regard to four "main narrative and/or iconographical themes: the way the fire is distributed, the presence or absence of Mary in the group, the location of the event, and the symbolic depiction of God the Father.") After allowing enough time for each group to finish, call the groups back together to discuss the paintings. How are they different? What do they share? What insights do they offer about the event of Pentecost?

## *Departing Hymn*

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

# Dreams, Visions, and Prophecies

## 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 understand Peter's interpretation of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
2. To consider how the promise of dreams, visions, and prophecies is fulfilled at Pentecost and in the rest of the story in Acts.
3. To discuss how your congregation can celebrate cultural recognitions – such as Mother's Day, High School Graduation, and Memorial Day – in light of the promise of Pentecost.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 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 and suggested article before the group meeting. The departing hymn "A Rushing, Mighty Wind" is located on pp. 67-69 of *Pentecost*.

## Begin with a Story

When I was a child, my family often vacationed at Winona Lake, IN, a small resort town that is a center of evangelical Christianity. On muggy July nights I would dig my bare feet into the cool sawdust floor of the Billy Sunday Tabernacle (named for the famous evangelist who had settled in the town) and sing inspiring gospel songs by Charles H. Gabriel (1856-1932), like "Send the Light," "I Stand Amazed in the Presence," and "Since Jesus Came into My Heart," and his haunting tune for "His Eye is On the Sparrow." Gabriel had been a prolific musician in his day; he is said to have written or composed over 7000 songs, many of them for Billy Sunday revivals.

An exuberant refrain from Gabriel's song "Pentecostal Power" sticks in my memory: "Lord, send the old-time power, the Pentecostal power! Thy floodgates of blessing on us throw open wide!" As the congregation's fervor soared high, this prayer appeared to be answered. But later, when everyone's emotions 'came back down to earth,' there was a spiritual power brown-out: problems remained and there was plenty of spiritual work to do.

In this study, Alicia Myers traces a similar pattern from Pentecost to the ensuing years in the book of Acts: as the story unfolds, our soaring expectations are only partially fulfilled, and we wonder where the 'Pentecostal power' went with regard to women (and to slaves). How should we deal with our disappointment?

## 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 Acts 2:14-36 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36 interprets the significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: Peter says this event transforms how the people should see their time and place, and portends continuing activity by the Spirit in their lives. Bill Shiell and Alicia Myers draw lessons for today from two aspects of Peter's sermon;

you may emphasize one aspect or the other, or combine them as in the study guide. Bill Shiell is struck by how Peter revises and deepens the peoples' collective memories of Mt. Sinai and of David's city, Jerusalem, in light of the Spirit's coming; Shiell suggests preaching today can do the same for our cultural recognitions that often compete on the church's calendar with Pentecost. Alicia Myers notes the gap between Peter's expectation of prophecy by all sorts of believers and the muted voices of women and slaves in the rest of the story in the book of Acts. From this she draws lessons on how we should read the book of Acts, and other Scripture, as guiding practices in the Church today.

### *Study Questions*

1. Peter emphasizes that the Spirit will enable believers to prophesize – to have divine insight and speak truthfully – about events in the world. Alicia Myers notes that he adds a second “and they will prophesy” in Acts 2:18, which does not appear in Joel. At Pentecost this is fulfilled, she notes, among “the mixed gender gathering of Spirit-filled believers, as well as the diversity of the ‘Judeans and proselytes’ who have been enabled to hear these words.”

Assign individuals or small groups to read several of the passages about Stephen, Peter, and Paul, and summarize how the Holy Spirit guides them through prophetic dreams and visions. Emphasize how the Spirit continues to guide these leaders in miraculous ways.

2. Form three small groups to study the diminished roles of dreams, visions, and prophecy in the stories of Rhoda (Acts 12:6-17), the slave girl possessed by a Pythian spirit (16:16-19), and the daughters of Philip (21:8-11). Rhoda's report/prophecy is ridiculed. The slave girl is silenced and disappears from the story (in part, surely, because her insight was not given by the Holy Spirit). Philip's daughters are introduced with honor, but are immediately upstaged by another prophet Agabus, a Judean man.

It would be wrong to conclude that these stories show how women *ought* to be valued in the believing community. “Perhaps the confines of his narrative account or vision, or both, led Luke to emphasize God's Spirit upon certain Judean, freeborn men. Nevertheless, in so doing, Luke leaves plenty of room for the telling of God's involvement with humanity outside his own plot – which is, after all, only one story in the midst of so many others both inside the New Testament and beyond it,” Myers explains. “Acknowledging the continued activity of God's Spirit even in this day, we too proclaim the reality of the last days when we offer witness and when we listen to the prophetic voices of those on the margins.”

3. “Pentecost gives us the opportunity to go with people to the places they remember – their families, friends, schools, and communities – and incorporate these into worship by showing how the Spirit empowers us to transform those places,” Bill Shiell writes. “If Pentecost Sunday falls on Memorial Day, we might ask a veteran to share a testimony of God's alternative peace in the midst of perpetual war. When commissioning high school graduates, we might share stories of graduates who spent a gap year serving the poor. If it is Mother's Day, we might ask a family to share a story of serving on mission together.” This approach avoids two mistakes: either “surrendering” the calendar and sermon to the culture, or completely ignoring people's significant remembrances as we cling to the liturgical calendar.
4. David Music employs the two emblems of the Spirit's coming – the sound of a rushing wind and the tongues of fire on the disciples' heads (Acts 2:2-3) – as metaphors for all believers' prophetic speech: “Lord, make our breath a wind and let our tongues be fire, / and as at that first Pentecost your people's lives inspire.” Encourage group members to recall times when they prophesized – i.e., they drew insight from God's Word to speak boldly about events in their families, at work, in the congregation, or in the wider community.

### *Departing Hymn*

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

# 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/](http://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.

# When the Holy Spirit Intercedes

## Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
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 explore how the Holy Spirit intercedes for the saints before God.
2. To discuss the implications of Timothy Wiarda's interpretation for larger questions about God's nature.
3. To consider how the Spirit's intercession for us impacts our discipleship.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 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 "Spirit of God, Descent upon My Heart" locate the familiar tune MORECAMBE in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ ([www.hymntime.com/tch/](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/)).

## Begin with a Story

Clarence Jordan (1912-1969), the New Testament Greek scholar who founded Koinonia Farm, a small a religious community from which Habitat for Humanity grew, translated the New Testament into his folksy, west Georgia dialect. In the "Cotton Patch Version," The Epistle to the Romans becomes "The Letter to the Christians in Washington [DC]," and the difficult passage of Romans 8:26-27 is rendered as this memorable promise:

Similarly, the Spirit also helps us out in our weakness. For example, we don't know beans about praying, but the Spirit himself speaks up for our unexpressed concerns. And he who X-rays our hearts understands the Spirit's approach, since the Spirit represents Christians before God.

That doesn't clarify everything, does it? But it captures the central idea: though "we don't know beans about praying," it brings us into the mysterious presence of God and there (as Jordan might say) our praying doesn't require our knowing.

## 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 8:26-27 as translated by Timothy Wiarda (*Pentecost*, 37):

In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes with groans not expressed in words. And the one who searches hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to God's will.

## Reflection

On the occasion of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended with power, it is appropriate to explore the important roles of the Spirit in our discipleship. Paul's discussion of Christian life in the letter to the Romans is framed beginning and end, and filled with references to the Spirit; his teaching about the Spirit's intercession in chapter 8 is a high point.

### Study Questions

1. "Paul explicitly says the Spirit communicates with God on behalf of believers and that God receives what the Spirit communicates," Timothy Wiarda writes in summary. "Paul also implies that the believer's felt experience of weakness forms part of what the interceding Spirit brings to God. Our exegetical analysis suggests that Paul sees the intercessory action of the Spirit to be part of the process through which God searches the hearts of believers and comes to know something of their inner life and feelings of suffering."  
Wiarda sees the Spirit's praying for us as "actual communication that takes place directly and entirely between the Holy Spirit and God," whether we are aware of it or not, and perhaps all the time, but especially when we are trying to communicate to God our suffering.
2. "In principle an ideal intercessor or mediator should be close and sympathetic to the one with a need or request, while at the same time very close and acceptable to the one to whom appeal must be made," Wiarda notes. Regarding the second condition, the Spirit "stands in perfect union with God and...God fully and willingly receives all he communicates on our behalf." Regarding the first condition, "Paul understood the Spirit to be in intimate internal contact with the inner life of believers," Wiarda writes. "There is reason to think that Paul's concept of the Spirit *indwelling the hearts of believers* underlies what he says about the Spirit's intercession in Romans 8:26-27. He mentions this indwelling three times in Romans 8:9-11, and in 8:15 he mentions 'receiving' the Spirit. Elsewhere he locates the Spirit in the 'hearts' of believers (2 Corinthians 1:22 and Galatians 4:6). He frequently pictures the Spirit acting within believers, influencing and communicating to their inward selves."  
Someone might object that there is no need for an intercessor 'between' humans and God, or that an intercessor would only push them apart. But on Wiarda's reading, the intercession is God himself searching the hearts of believers in their suffering.
3. To say the Spirit communicates with God on our behalf may threaten some views of God's omniscience, especially if we think of the Spirit "communicating information, ideas, or requests," Wiarda admits. Paul's description of the Spirit interceding "with groans not expressed in words" may ameliorate the problem, by showing how "the Spirit can offer something distinctive and necessary without bringing God's omniscience or any other aspect of God's character into question." Another solution to the dilemma might be that in the Spirit's intercession the Triune God is speaking to himself, so to speak, which is more like focusing on the suffering of the saints than learning about it.  
"Christian theologians have traditionally held that the idea of God being impacted by suffering amounts to a denial of his transcendent holiness and perfection," Wiarda notes. Perhaps Romans 8:26-27 "suggests that God gets in touch with our suffering, but does so in a way that maintains his freedom and holiness. Intercession implies, first, a distance between suffering believers and God that must be overcome and, second, a mediating party who bridges the gap. What comes to God through intercession comes to him indirectly, through the mediation of the Spirit. So this scriptural picture suggests God gets in touch with human suffering even while remaining apart from it."
4. Romans 8 opens on a note of triumph: believers have been "set free" by Christ from their weakened resolve (8:2); as "children of God" they are empowered to "live according to the Spirit" and "set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (8:5, 14). Yet they still endure personal temptations and struggle to live faithfully in the context of a fallen world. In a way, their suffering has been amped up, for they suffer with Christ (8:17) the distortions of their world. Themes of suffering and waiting dominate 8:18-25. The good news is that God indwells them with the Spirit and groans with them. They do not struggle alone, but along with their creator, redeemer, and sustainer.

### Departing Hymn

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

# The Spirit's "Supreme and Fiery Force"

## 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 study Hildegard of Bingen's miniature illuminations for insight into the Holy Spirit's role in our discipleship.
2. To consider how images of the Holy Spirit in Scripture interact in Hildegard's visions.
3. To discuss the Holy Spirit's role within the Trinity.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 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 "Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling" locate one of the familiar tunes IN BABILONE or NETTLETON in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ ([www.hymntime.com/tch/](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/)).

## Begin with a Poem

In Hildegard of Bingen's book of theological visions, *Scivias* (short for Latin *Scito vias Domini*, "Know the Ways of the Lord"), God says, "[I]f you love Me, I'll hug you to Me. I'll warm you with Holy-Spirit fire." This embracing fire informs Hildegard's songs, like this beautiful one addressed to the Holy Spirit, which is suffused with biblical imagery:

You soar, sustain, and stir,  
climb, dive, and sing  
Your way through this world,  
giving life to every beating  
heart.

You never end.

You keep circling, crossing over us  
on three wings—  
one speeds through heaven,  
one holds the earth together with a kiss as light as dew,  
and one whispers over, under, and through our lives.

We praise You, Wisdom!

## 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 John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

On the occasion of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit's descent on the disciples is described with the remarkable images of a mighty wind and tongues of fire, it is appropriate to study how those and other biblical images of

the Spirit are employed in theological reflection. Carmen Acevedo Butcher guides us to the visions, poetry, and miniature illuminations of the Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). Hildegard was declared a “Doctor of the Universal Church” by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012, in culmination of a long process that evaluated her theological work as helpful to all Christians. The four miniatures discussed here are in the public domain. They are published in grayscale in the *Pentecost* issue of *Christian Reflection*, but are available in color on the Internet. Download and print the color images for members to study.

Members may want to compare Hildegard’s insights on the Holy Spirit with other theological reflection. Point them to the books reviewed in “Tracing the Spirit through Scripture” and “Who is the Holy Spirit?” for sources in the Bible and church tradition.

### **Study Questions**

1. In the companion miniature below *On the Origin of Life*, three flames of inspiration pour onto Hildegard, who is poised at her writing desk to record her visions on wax tablets. She is flanked by members of her religious community, a nun standing behind her and her friend Volmar seated at his desk in the next ‘room.’ Similarly, in *The Visionary* five tongues of fire descend to Hildegard, who is seated in the convent with a writing tablet on her lap; Volmer looks in from an adjoining space; the pillars represent the Old and New Testaments. Both images highlight the special nature of Hildegard’s inspiration, but they are interpreted in a community, and others assist her in recording and developing her thoughts; *The Visionary* emphasizes the role that Scripture plays in interpreting them.
2. Form three small groups to study *On the Origin of Life*, *The Blue Christ*, and *The Egg of the Universe*. Members may find biblical images of wind or breath (blowing at creation, giving life to creatures, roaring down from heaven at Pentecost), fire (pouring in orange-red flames or streams from above onto her head, not originating in her head), and bird-like elements (wings, nests, etc.). The integration of the Spirit into the Trinity derives from Scripture interpreted by the Church. Various elements of these images might surprise members: for instance, Christ is sky-blue (the color of God’s love in Hildegard’s visions), and is not obviously male or female; the Spirit is personified as a fiery red woman (in Latin, the common words for Love, Wisdom, and Spirit would be feminine gender).
3. The Holy Spirit may be personified (*On the Origin of Life*) or not (*The Blue Christ* and *The Egg of the Universe*) in the images, but in each case the Spirit links the Father and the Son. As Love and creating Wisdom, the Spirit has feminine, nurturing qualities for Hildegard. The Spirit extends from the Trinity to guide human beings and to envelop all creatures.

Invite members to study the miniatures as you read aloud the entire song that begins “Spirit of fire, Paraclete, our Comforter” (*Pentecost*, 60-62). How do the words of this song lead them to notice particular features of the images?

4. While God’s judgment on evil is on clear display in *On the Origin of Life*—the figure of the Spirit, or Caritas/ Love, stands triumphantly on the glowering Serpent/Satan—these images highlight the love that unifies the persons of the Trinity and binds them to the creation. The symmetrical compositions, the recurring patterns, and the calm stances of the figures of the Trinity all suggest that God’s order and nurturing care undergird the universe.

### **Departing Hymn**

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