

HOLY SPIRIT



SHEPHERDCHURCH

LESSON 2: RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

WELCOME

Think of a gift you were really hoping for. Why did it mean so much to you, and how did you react when you received it?

Guide the Conversation

This is a simple and fun question that helps your Life Group to start thinking about gifts before shifting the conversation toward God's gifts later in the lesson. Keep the conversation moving so everyone who wants to share has an opportunity.

WORSHIP

As a Life Group, read **Psalm 143** (maybe ask each group member to take a turn reading a verse). Then, discuss the following question for a few minutes:

- Where do you most need the Holy Spirit's guidance right now?

After the discussion, say a brief prayer concluding this section of the lesson.

Guide the Conversation

Budget around seven minutes for this part of the lesson. When you ask group members to share one area of life where they need the Holy Spirit's guidance (aka, His wisdom, strength, etc.), remind them to share only what they're comfortable sharing. Before moving on to the WORD part of the lesson, pray for the Holy Spirit to lead each person in discernment and help them faithfully follow Jesus.

WORD

1. In **Acts 2:37**, what happened to the people after they heard Peter's sermon, and why does it matter?

Guide the Conversation

Acts 2:37 says the crowd was "cut to the heart" after hearing Peter's sermon. This phrase means the crowd was deeply pierced. This wasn't just an emotional moment—it was the Holy Spirit opening their hearts to realize that Jesus really is the promised Messiah and that they needed His forgiveness. Instead of making excuses, they asked, "What shall we do?" showing their desire to repent and follow Jesus. Explain to your Life Group that this is what biblical conviction looks like: the Holy Spirit lovingly reveals our sin, not to leave us in guilt, but to lead us to transformation in Jesus. This is a chance for your group to reflect on how they respond when God convicts them through the Holy Spirit. Do they resist, ignore, or respond with a willing heart? At some point, tell them that the Holy Spirit always points us toward Jesus, never away from Him.

Deeper Dive

Acts 2:37 says that after the crowd heard Peter's sermon, "they were cut to the heart." The Greek phrase *katanyssō tēn kardian* (κατενύγησαν τὴν καρδίαν) literally means "to be pierced or deeply wounded in the heart." Such words describe a deeper impact than a quick emotional reaction or a guilty conscience. Through the Holy Spirit, God's truth penetrated to the deepest part of those in the crowd. Preaching from the Old Testament, Peter had just taught them that Jesus was the promised Messiah, that they had rejected and crucified Him, and that God raised Him from the dead and made Him both Lord and Christ. Many in the crowd traveled to Jerusalem for Pentecost from across the Roman Empire (read more about Pentecost in the explanation for the next question/prompt). They not only came to believe that Jesus was exactly who Peter said He was, but they also embraced the need for forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

Their response shows what genuine conviction looks like. Instead of making excuses or arguing with Peter, they asked, "What shall we do?" That question reveals hearts that were ready to repent and obey. Throughout Scripture, one of the Holy Spirit's primary ministries is to bring conviction of sin (John 16:8). The Spirit never leaves people in shame but leads them to salvation and transformation through Jesus. Conviction always points us toward hope because it drives us to Jesus. This is why spiritual transformation begins when the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to God's truth.

2. In Acts 2:38–39, what stands out to you about the words "gift" and "promise," and what do they tell us about the Holy Spirit?

Guide the Conversation

Acts 2 takes place on Pentecost, an annual Jewish festival celebrating the harvest, and God chose that very day to pour out the Holy Spirit as people from many nations had gathered in Jerusalem, showing that His plan was to spread the gospel to the world. In Acts 2:38, the Greek word for "gift" means a "free gift," which reminds us the Holy Spirit isn't earned through good works or spiritual maturity. The Spirit is graciously given by God to those who repent and place their faith in Jesus. The word "promise" in verse 39 points back to God's Old Testament promises to give the Spirit to His people. This is why the words "gift" and "promise" reveal that God is both generous and faithful. The Holy Spirit is both God's gracious gift and the fulfillment of His promises.

Deeper Dive

Acts 2 takes place on Pentecost (which means "fiftieth"), an annual Jewish festival celebrated 50 days after Passover. In the Old Testament, it was called:

- The Feast of Harvest because it celebrated the firstfruits of the wheat harvest (Exodus 23:16).
- The Feast of Weeks because it came 7 weeks after Passover (Leviticus 23:15–22; Deuteronomy 16:9–12).

By the first century, Pentecost had become a major pilgrimage festival where Jewish people traveled to Jerusalem from across the Roman Empire (Deuteronomy 16:16). This explains why “devout Jews from every nation under heaven” gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5), creating the ideal opportunity for the gospel to spread quickly to many nations. So, God’s timing is never an accident! Just as Passover pointed forward to Jesus’ sacrificial death (1 Corinthians 5:7), Pentecost pointed forward to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of a great spiritual harvest as people from many nations came to faith in Jesus.

In Acts 2:38, Peter tells the crowd, “You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The Greek word for “gift” is *dōrea* (δωρεά), which refers to “a free gift that is generously given,” not something that can be bought, deserved, or worked for. The Holy Spirit comes by God’s grace through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9), not because we’ve reached a “high level” of spiritual maturity. Peter also says, “Repent and be baptized,” because repentance and faith are THE appropriate responses to the gospel.

Then, in Acts 2:39, Peter also calls the Holy Spirit “the promise” and says, “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” The Greek word *epangelia* (ἐπαγγελία) means “a promise or pledged commitment.” The word highlights how faithful God is to keep His promises. When the crowd heard Peter’s words in verse 39, they probably remembered God’s promise to pour out His Spirit and create a new covenant with His people (Joel 2:28–32; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Jeremiah 31:31–34).

The promise extends beyond those standing before Peter to future generations and to “all who are far off,” pointing not only to Jews scattered throughout the nations but ultimately to Gentiles (non-Jewish people) who would also be brought into God’s family through Jesus (Acts 10 records the conversion of the first Gentile).

3. What do [John 3:5–8](#) and [Acts 2:38](#) teach about the Holy Spirit’s role and work in conversion?

Guide the Conversation

In this discussion, help your Life Group see that both John 3:5–8 and Acts 2:38 teach that conversion is the Holy Spirit’s work. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus (a Jewish religious leader) that no one can enter God’s Kingdom without being “born of the Spirit.” The Greek word for “born” means “brought to life.” While becoming a Christian includes adopting new beliefs, it’s ultimately all about receiving NEW spiritual life in Jesus. To make this point, Jesus uses a Greek word for “spirit” that means “wind” or “spirit.” Even though we can’t see the Holy Spirit, we clearly see His work in transformed lives. All of this is connected to Acts 2:38, where Peter calls people to “repent”—a Greek word that means “a 180-degree turn” or “to change one’s mind.” Peter then told the crowd that after being baptized and repenting, they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. If time allows, you can lead your Life Group to discuss both God’s part and our part in conversion... we respond to the gospel with repentance and faith, while the Holy Spirit brings new life and empowers us.

Deeper Dive

In John 3, Jesus goes on to compare the Spirit to the wind. The Greek word *pneuma* (πνεῦμα) can mean both “wind” and/or “spirit.” Just as we can’t see the wind but can see its effects, we can’t see the Holy Spirit, but we clearly see His effects. Just as no one controls the wind or fully understands where it comes from or where it’s going, the Holy Spirit sovereignly brings new life according to God’s will.

This conversation took place with Nicodemus, a respected Jewish Pharisee and teacher who believed that religious knowledge and keeping Moses’ law were central to a person’s relationship with God. Jesus challenged that assumption by teaching that even the most religious person must be spiritually reborn. He told Nicodemus that no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are “born of water and the Spirit.” The Greek word for “born” is *gennaō* (γεννάω), meaning “to give birth or to be brought into life.” When people follow Jesus, they aren’t only adopting new beliefs—they are spiritually born again through the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:38 shows what this new birth looks like in response to the gospel. As we mentioned in the explanation under the previous question/prompt, after the crowd was convicted by Peter’s sermon, he called them to “repent and be baptized,” promising them they’d “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The Greek word *metanoeō* (μετανοέω), translated “repent,” means “a 180-degree turn” and “to change one’s mind in a way that results in a changed direction of life.”

- Repentance and faith are the human response to the gospel.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit is God’s work within the Christian.

From beginning to end, every believer’s new life shows the Holy Spirit has been actively drawing, transforming, and empowering them to follow Jesus.

4. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit from **John 7:38–39**? What are some ways people today try to satisfy their thirst without Jesus?

Guide the Conversation

Jesus uses the idea of “thirst” to describe the deep spiritual need every person has, which only the Holy Spirit can satisfy. Try asking your Life Group members to first discuss what John 7:38–39 teaches them about the Holy Spirit, and then to discuss how people try to fill such emptiness apart from Jesus. As people share, make sure to keep the conversation free from judgment, because everyone is tempted to seek satisfaction in things like success, relationships, money, entertainment, approval, etc. While those things may bring temporary happiness, only Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, provides everlasting joy, peace, and fulfillment.

Deeper Dive

John 7:38–39 takes place during the Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Feast of Booths), one of Israel’s yearly festivals. During the celebration, priests would draw water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it out at the temple as a reminder of how God provided water for Israel in the wilderness and as a prayer for God’s future blessing.

It was in that setting that Jesus stood up and declared, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.” And Jesus wasn’t talking about physical thirst but the internal spiritual longing that everyone experiences (Ecclesiastes 3:10–11). Jesus promised that those who believe in Him would have “rivers of living water” flowing from within them. John tells us that Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit, whom Christians would receive after Jesus was glorified through His death, resurrection, and ascension.

The Greek word for “living” is *zōō* (ζῶω). While there’s a Greek word for “biological life” and a Greek word for “emotional/psychological life,” the Greek word *zōō* means “life-giving” or the “whole life,” which includes the biological, emotional/psychological, spiritual, etc. It is the Holy Spirit who continually brings this life from God to Christians rather than offering them a one-time spiritual experience at conversion.

Along the same lines, the Holy Spirit overflows from our lives to bless others. The image of “rivers” points to abundance, not scarcity. As the Holy Spirit works in us, He produces:

- Christlike character
- Empowers us for ministry
- Enables us to be a source of encouragement to others
- Helps us to hear from God

...and more. Ask your Life Group to think honestly about where people look for satisfaction apart from Jesus. Some chase success, money, relationships, entertainment, comfort, approval, social media, achievements, or even religion without a genuine relationship with Christ. While such things can provide fulfillment—it’s merely temporary. They will never satisfy the deepest needs of the human heart. You can also ask everyone to reflect on areas of their lives where they’ve looked to something or someone other than Jesus.

5. What does **Ephesians 1:13–14** teach you about your security and identity in Jesus, and what difference should that make in how you make decisions and handle challenges?

Guide the Conversation

For this question/prompt, it’s important that you help your fellow Life Group members study what Paul says is true about every Christian before they jump to personal application. As we will study in week 5 of this series, the Holy Spirit is God’s seal and guarantee, reminding us that our identity and security are rooted in what Jesus has done instead of our performance, feelings, and/or circumstances. This is the discussion your group should have first. Then lead them to discuss how our identity in Christ should change the way they make decisions, face uncertainty, and respond to difficult situations. If appropriate, ask for a real-life example of a challenge they have endured or are currently facing. Keep the conversation focused on God’s faithfulness. Because of our identity in Jesus through the Spirit, we can live

with confidence, obedience, and hope—even when life is uncertain!

Deeper Dive

Ephesians 1:13–14 reminds Christians that their security and primary identity are rooted in Jesus, not in themselves. Paul tells the Ephesian Christians that after they heard the gospel and believed in Christ, they “were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” The Greek word *sphragizō* (σφραγίζω), translated “sealed,” referred to placing an official seal on a document, letter, or possession to show ownership, authenticity, protection, and security. In the first-century Roman world, a king’s or official’s seal identified something as belonging to its rightful owner and guaranteed that it was under that person’s authority. Paul says that every believer has been permanently marked as belonging to God by the indwelling Holy Spirit (an entire lesson will be devoted to this idea in week 5 of this series).

Paul also describes the Holy Spirit as a “deposit” or “guarantee.” The Greek word *arrabōn* (ἄρραβών) referred to “a down payment” or “first installment” that guaranteed the rest would follow. In other words, the Holy Spirit is God’s personal guarantee that He will complete the salvation He has promised and that Christians will one day receive their full inheritance in Christ.

These truths have profound implications for how Christians live. Our identity isn’t based on our successes, failures, feelings, or the opinions of others, but on the unchanging truth that we belong to Jesus! Because the Holy Spirit permanently dwells within us, we can face uncertainty, temptation, suffering, and difficult decisions with confidence that God hasn’t walked away from us and will finish what He has started.

Our confidence rests not in our ability to hold on to Him but in His commitment to hold on to us. Knowing that we possess the Holy Spirit should free us to be faithful to God, knowing that our future is secure because God ALWAYS keeps His promises.

WITNESS

How can **Acts 2:39** motivate you and give you confidence as you share your faith with others?

Guide the Conversation

In Acts 2:39, Peter says the promise of the Holy Spirit is for “all whom the Lord our God will call,” reminding us that God is already at work drawing people to Himself. Everything we do at Shepherd Church, and every decision we make as a church, is with the anticipation of those who are being called and will come, but have not yet arrived. Jesus is the most glorified when those far from Him become followers of Him. Encourage your Life Group to share how that truth affects the way they think about sharing their faith by asking further questions if needed:

- Does it take away some of the pressure to have all the right answers?
- Does it give them confidence to trust God with the results?

You could even ask them to share opportunities they've had—or have right now—to talk about Jesus with a friend, family member, coworker, neighbor, etc. If needed, remind your Life Group members that our responsibility is to faithfully share Jesus in truth and grace, while trusting the Holy Spirit to convict hearts, draw people to Jesus, and transform lives.