



LESSON 3
PREPARATION NOTES

Living in
the Spirit

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT IN BRIEF:

The Holy Spirit empowers us and directs us to follow him daily.

KEY ELEMENTS:

- In this lesson, we focus on the title *paraclete*—the Holy Spirit as our help. He makes our faithfulness possible.
- *Zigzag Illustration* and *Live by the Spirit* are the two key sections of this lesson.
- The *Zigzag Illustration* shows the up-and-down pattern of the spiritual life experienced by most Christians—a pattern which sometimes includes dramatic or lengthy backsliding. A life in the Spirit is not immune to weaknesses and falls, but it generally sees smaller falls and shorter recovery times (i.e. turning to God for forgiveness and healing is considerably quicker).
- The Holy Spirit as Paraclete helps us to be faithful to God and to stay in a Christ-centred relationship. We need to experience ongoing conversion after we first put Christ at the centre of our lives. This is our journey of faith, and we are not able to do it on our own strength.
- The *choose and ask* model is a way to help us understand how to live by the Spirit at all times, and to live that ongoing conversion through keeping Jesus at the centre of our lives. We *choose* to orient our lives with Christ at the centre. We *choose* to reject temptation and wrong thoughts and actions. We *ask* through prayer, in faith, for the Holy Spirit to help us, empower us and direct us to follow God.



LESSON 3

Living in the Spirit

1 How has your understanding of the Holy Spirit deepened so far in this study?



- | **LEADERS:** The opening question is not related to last week's
- L** challenge in order to respect the privacy of participants' choice
- | whether to go to the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Introduction



We are not alone in our spiritual battles—Jesus promised that the Father would send us the Holy Spirit. He specifically referred to the Spirit as the *Paraclete* or Advocate, which literally means “he who is called to one’s side.” This Greek word refers to the legal terminology for a defense attorney, but can also mean spokesperson, mediator, consoler, helper and comforter. All these meanings paint a fuller picture of the way the Holy Spirit helps us in our spiritual growth. The theme of this lesson, *Living in the Spirit*, is about living the Christian life daily and consistently, assisted and empowered by the Paraclete—the Holy Spirit.



Our Helper



2 Read Galatians 5:16-25. What is happening in Galatians 5:16-17?

GALATIANS 5:16-17

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

A | **ANSWER:** There is a struggle within ourselves to not give in to our selfish desires and weaknesses, and instead to please God in all that we do.

L | **LEADERS:** Ask your group, “What does this passage remind you of?” It may remind them of Romans 7 and 8 from last lesson.

3 Look carefully at how Paul speaks about the Holy Spirit. What phrases help us understand how the Holy Spirit acts and helps us?

A **ANSWER:** This passage emphasizes that the only way to live a life pleasing to God is by living in the Spirit.

L **LEADERS:** Point out where Paul refers to the Spirit—live by the Spirit, (be) guided by the Spirit, follow the Spirit. You could also have participants look at how these phrases are translated in their Bibles. Some translations read: walk in the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit. Ask your group, “How do these different expressions give us extra insight into what Paul is saying?”

ANSWER: They inform the reader that living in the Spirit is a constant, ongoing, moment-by-moment reality. It is not just something that happens once in a while, like on Sundays or at our Baptism and Confirmation. It is meant to be a way of life in which we are guided by and follow the Holy Spirit.

A *Grace* is the theological word for supernatural help. The *Catechism of The Catholic Church* (articles 1996-2005) describes grace and the various ways this supernatural help is offered to us through the Holy Spirit. For example:

- Sanctifying grace (the gift of our salvation and the grace to be faithful in following God) (CCC 1999-2000).
- Actual grace (special interventions and helps from the Spirit) (CCC 2000).
- sacramental graces (CCC 2003).
- charisms and gifts of the Spirit (CCC 2003).
- graces of state—roles/vocation in the body of Christ (CCC 2004).

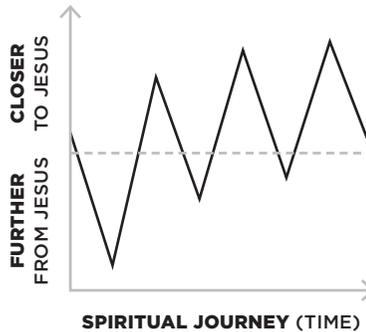
The Zigzag Illustration



The *Zigzag Illustration* is a visual representation of the spiritual life. It can be used as an image of what we have read in Galatians 5.

The vertical side of the graph shows the degree to which our lives are in conformity with the will of God. This axis points toward a spiritual lifestyle of growing in intimacy with the Lord. By moving down the graph, we progressively distance ourselves from God, and fall into sin. The horizontal axis indicates time.

4 What kind of spiritual journey does this first zigzag represent?



This zigzag could represent *two* kinds of spiritual experiences.

Example 1—This could be a fairly faithful, average Christian who experiences growth as well as struggles, temptations and sin. Having not committed mortal sin, this person remains in a relationship with Christ. However, they give in—perhaps regularly—to a variety of venial sins (e.g. gossip, crude language, critical attitude, lack of prayer and Scripture reading, selfishness, envious thoughts, overlooking people who need them). *Sloth* (spiritual laziness) may leave this person unaware of venial sins.

Example 2—This person's spiritual life is often shifting from spiritual highs to lows, perhaps resulting in serious backsliding or mortal sin.

The graph applies to both examples. It shows a person who takes a significant amount of time to rekindle intimacy with God and to continue spiritual growth. People in this pattern might slip spiritually and not get back on track until they attend a conference or retreat. Guilt or ignorance of remedies to the problem may keep them away from God for long periods of time.

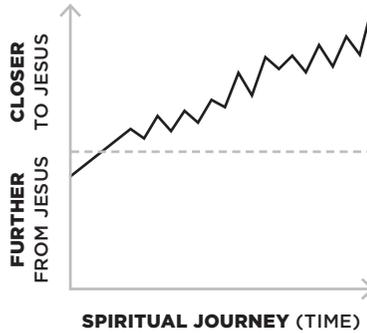
For people in Example 1, this “getting back on track” may come about through motivation at a retreat or in prayer. They become more diligent in following the Lord, repenting and changing their actions and attitudes.

For people in Example 2, this “getting back on track” will likely be a bigger, more momentous repentance and conversion because of how far and for how long they have fallen away from the Lord. They sincerely repent and go to the sacrament of Reconciliation to make a fresh start.

Both these cases represent spiritual lives full of struggles that might be avoided by a change of lifestyle.

LEADERS: Remind participants that the person in Example 1 is still in a Christ-centred relationship because sanctifying grace has not been lost from the soul. The person in Example 2, however, may have a broken relationship with God and no longer have sanctifying grace due to rebellion and mortal sin. This person needs to seek a restored relationship with God. Emphasize to your participants that no matter how unfaithful we are, God is always faithful to us and will forgive us if we turn back to him with true contrition.

5 What is the advantage of the spiritual experience demonstrated by the second zigzag?



In contrast, the second zigzag shows that this person may still fall, but will return to the Lord more quickly. This person is not falling as far away from God (i.e. less frequent or less serious sin has built up in his or her life).

The second zigzag models what we should strive for in our faith journey: to keep our growth constant and steady.

The quicker we repent and turn to the Holy Spirit for help, the less difficult it will be to continue moving forward in our spiritual growth. The grace we receive empowers us to live according to the Spirit.



6 Galatians 5:25 tells us, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.” The word *live* implies walking in the Spirit in an ongoing and consistent way. Why do you think this is an important principle?

ANSWER: The Christian life is a journey. There is no instant transformation. It is a journey that presents challenges, rewards, difficulties and even temptations to turn back. Perseverance and faithfulness will win the day. In any great story, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, the heroes complete their journey by faithfully pressing on.

The Christian life can be incredibly frustrating and unfulfilling when our commitment level is anything less than 100%. However, when we give our lives fully to God as best we can—consistently and faithfully following him—we experience his abundant love, peace and joy. We need to invest in our relationship with God in order to experience this real and vital intimacy with him.

A

The abundant Christian life is not without struggles, trials or even dry times—these are to be expected, like the seasons of nature that come and go. In the midst of these challenges, however, we can still find refuge in the deep inner joy, peace, and love we receive from God. Consider these Scripture verses:

“ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ”
John 10:10

“ ...and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ”
Ephesians 3:19

| **LEADERS:** If you feel it is appropriate, you could discuss how
L apathy, laziness or complacency could detract from our spiritual
| progress. Ask, “Can’t we just stay the way we are?”

Of course, you can stay the way you are—your level of commitment to the spiritual life is up to you. There is, however, a danger involved: we need a healthy concern about not losing our faith altogether. Scripture warns us not to be complacent. For example, Revelation 3:15-16 warns us about being lukewarm, and Philippians 2:12 instructs us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Matthew 7:21 says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

7 Read Luke 11:13. How do we know we can ask for the Holy Spirit’s help on a moment’s notice?

LUKE 11:13

If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children good things, how much more will the heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?

| **A** **ANSWER:** The Holy Spirit is a gift that God the Father will not
| deny us; in fact, he delights in giving us his Holy Spirit.

| **L** **LEADERS:** Ask, “Can it be hard to believe in this kind of
| goodness?”

Let's pull together the points developed in the past two lessons.



In our attempts to follow God, we can encounter a variety of setbacks, where our weaknesses and sin lead us to do things we regret. We can feel distanced from God. This up-and-down spiritual life is not uncommon and it underscores our constant need for God's help. The Holy Spirit, as the Paraclete, assists, comforts and comes alongside us as we strive to follow God. In Scripture, this life in the Spirit is described as walking in the Spirit and being guided by the Spirit, implying an ongoing and consistent life with him. It is the Holy Spirit who works out, in us, our ongoing conversion and helps us to keep Jesus at the centre of our lives.

Two key words will help us to stay in a Christ-centred relationship and live by the Spirit: *choose* and *ask*.

8 How does the word *choose* apply to our ongoing conversion and life in the Spirit?

ANSWER: *Choosing*, simply put, is to choose God first. It is reasserting our decision to put Christ at the centre of our lives.

A It is choosing, even in day-to-day living, to orient our lives (the various aspects, activities, thoughts) to Jesus' lordship. We will quickly discover that we can never do this on our own strength and good intentions—that is why the next point, *ask*, brings us to the Holy Spirit for grace. We will get more into that in the next question.

Some other aspects of choosing:

- We choose in two ways: positively and negatively, an agreement and a refusal, a turning to and a turning away from. We agree by choosing to follow God and we refuse in turning away from that which leads us to God's love. For example, a refusal could be sinful choices, behaviours or environments that not only lead us away from God explicitly, but perhaps also subtly play into weaknesses that, slowly, can lead us away from God.
- Another way of saying it: we *choose* what we promised in our baptismal vows: to reject sin/Satan, and to believe in God (and everything else we proclaim in the creed).
- When dealing with specific struggles (e.g. low self-esteem, despair or discouragement about a situation, loneliness), we need to *choose* to believe the truth we find in Scripture and Church teaching. For example: I am a beloved child of God, God will never leave me or forsake me, I am the temple of the Holy Spirit, God will work all things together for the good, God is my shield and protector.
- In facing these specific struggles we can also "choose to refuse"; that is, choose to reject those lies, doubts, temptations that come at us, and to replace them with God's truth. For example: believing I am not a *lost cause*, God has a wonderful plan in mind for me, or I refuse to believe that I am not worthy of love, God loves me, Jesus died for me, nothing can separate us from his love (Romans 8:31-39).

A very concrete way we choose a Christ-centred life and reject sinful actions and weaknesses is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

A | **LEADERS:** You could direct participants to look back at **L** Galatians 5:16-25, as this passage speaks about this choosing to **I** follow God and turning away from the desires of the flesh.

9 How does the word *ask* apply to our ongoing conversion and life in the Spirit?

ANSWER: *Ask* means that we pray to the Holy Spirit and, in faith, ask for his help. As was just read in Luke 11:13—it is a prayer we can have confidence that God will answer.

A We can ask for his help anytime: in our times of prayer, in the sacraments, at the beginning and end of our day and most certainly in those moments when we recognize we need help immediately. It might be for help with struggles such as overcoming temptation, weakness or incorrect thinking. We might need grace to do the good we want to do, or at least know we should do, such as loving someone who is difficult, making time for prayer, doing the honest/right thing or being generous.

Remember: one of the meanings of Paraclete is *lawyer*. In this way, we can think of the Holy Spirit as fighting for us to help us overcome difficulties.

LEADERS: You could ask, “What might be some other specific real-life situations where you could ask for the Holy Spirit’s help?”

To help explain the need for both *choose* and *ask* and their relationship to the Holy Spirit’s action, you might use the analogy of a boat with sails.

L *Spirit* comes from the Latin word for breath (wind). The Holy Spirit is the *wind*, but the wind keeps the boat moving only if we put up our sails to catch it. It is absolutely essential that we put up our sails: that we choose to follow God, listen to the Holy Spirit and reject sin. Ultimately, though, it is the wind, the Holy Spirit, that provides the power and direction for the boat. Of course, the wind at sea may blow any which way, but the Holy Spirit is a Person and he actually knows the best direction for us to go.

Summary

The Holy Spirit as Paraclete is our helper. We cannot continue to grow in a Christ-centred relationship without his help. Otherwise, we experience unfulfilling, frustrating, guilt-ridden, up-and-down spiritual lives. We are invited to walk in the Spirit continually, choosing to turn to him for help in any and all circumstances.

Living It Out

CHALLENGE

This week, remember the choose and ask model several times throughout your day to live by the Spirit.

MEMORIZE LUKE 11:13

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Leader's Journal



Take 15 minutes as soon as possible after finishing the lesson to reflect on how God moved during your study and how your small group participants responded.

1 Thanksgiving

Reflect and say a prayer of thanksgiving for specific ways the Holy Spirit was present in that small group.

- a. How did you experience the Holy Spirit helping you to lead the lesson?

- b. How did you experience the Holy Spirit moving in the small group today?

- c. What were the positives from today's group?

- d. What were areas for improvement?

2 Prophetic Listening

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you review the lesson. Think about each person in your small group as you prayerfully reflect on these questions.

- a. What are some indications that each participant caught the main points of this lesson?

- b. If you noticed gaps in any participant’s understanding of the main points, is the Holy Spirit inviting you to do anything over the course of this week to help this person better understand?

- c. Are there any other ways the Holy Spirit is inviting you to intentionally care for or nurture your individual small group participants?

- d. Is there anything you want to remind yourself from what played out in this lesson for when you sit down to prepare the next lesson?

3 Intentional Accompaniment

Write down a plan to intercede for your small group participants based on the specific insights above, including how you will reach out to them and/or tailor the next lesson’s introduction based on your reflections.