



**LESSON 4**  
**PREPARATION NOTES**

**Barriers to  
Living in  
the Spirit**

## **BARRIERS TO LIVING IN THE SPIRIT IN BRIEF:**

There are obstacles that prevent us from being receptive to the Holy Spirit's influence—knowing them can help us deal with them.

### **KEY ELEMENTS:**

- It is important that participants speak about their experiences integrating the *choose and ask* model in their lives. It is a helpful way to remember to establish a habit of ongoing conversion to Jesus and ongoing conversation with the Holy Spirit for help, guidance and empowerment. Make sure participants do not forget about this helpful tool after Lesson 3.
- Barriers looked at in this lesson: unconfessed sin, worldly lifestyle, not surrendering everything, difficult circumstances, sloth, and relying solely on self-effort. All of these barriers block the flow of grace to our souls, like logs jamming the flow of water in a stream.
- Take time to reflect upon your own experience with these barriers. Share examples of how you overcome barriers through the power of the Holy Spirit. Or perhaps you can share what you would do *if* you were struggling with certain barriers. You might want to share what you would do now, in retrospect, with particular barriers, in light of what you know now about the Spirit-filled life.
- The personal reflection section is very important for participants. Ask for the Holy Spirit's help and rely on his gifts as you offer suggestions and strategies to help participants work through their barriers.
- The *Galatian Trap* section highlights the works-based mentality of the Galatians. When Paul refers to how the Galatians received the Holy Spirit through faith and not works in Galatians 3:2, he is referring to what the Church calls *justification*. Paul exhorts the Galatians to remember that their justification is a free gift of grace and mercy. This is not in opposition to the Catholic teaching that salvation requires both faith and works. Justification happens when the Holy Spirit cleanses us from our sins and communicates

to us the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ and through baptism (CCC 1987). It is merited for us by the Passion of Christ and establishes cooperation between God's grace and human freedom. Our participation in justification is our assent of faith to the Word of God (CCC 1992-93). Justification is closely related to, but distinct from, sanctification (becoming holy by God's grace) and salvation (our ultimate goal).

- Encourage participants to speak to a confessor or spiritual director, especially if you feel unable to give them suggestions with the personal struggles that come up.

#### **RECOMMENDED READING:**

- Our enemy, the devil, wants to see us defeated in the spiritual life. C.S. Lewis explores this reality in his fictional story *The Screwtape Letters*. It is an interesting and surprisingly light read (considering the topic), showing various tactics Satan could possibly use to make a believer stumble and give up.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sections 1987-1995 on Justification.





## **LESSON 4**

# **Barriers to Living in the Spirit**

# 1 Did the *choose and ask* model help you turn to the Holy Spirit for help more often last week? How? Share some specific examples.



## Introduction



We have learned that the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in our lives as Christians. Despite the interior battle against sin and temptation, living in the Spirit brings us fulfillment and joy.



Occasionally, however, it seems that certain obstacles block the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives, not unlike how clogs in a pipe prevent water from flowing freely into our homes. We realize we are not experiencing the strength, direction or assistance we have been promised. Today's lesson will concretely address typical yet significant barriers that prevent the Holy Spirit from having full influence in our lives.

## Common Barriers



**LEADERS:** Your personal sharing will make the barriers much more concrete and relevant for the participants.



Divide the verses. Have the person reading the verse also prepare the answer. Encourage others to relate their experiences as well.

Note: some of these barriers are simply implied in the verses and are not spelled out as "this is a barrier because..."

## 2 Read Hebrews 12:1. What prevents us from running the race Paul describes?

### HEBREWS 12:1

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.*

**A** | **ANSWER:** Sin, especially unconfessed sin, which remains in our souls.  
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## 3 Read Romans 12:2. What does Paul warn us to avoid?

### ROMANS 12:2

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

**A** | **ANSWER:** Worldly lifestyle. If we are conformed to the world, there will be no noticeable difference between our speech, priorities and activities and those of non-believers.  
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## 4 Read Matthew 19:16-22. What does this young man's response indicate about his relationship with God?

### MATTHEW 19:16-22

*Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*

**ANSWER:** He is not totally surrendered—he is sitting on the fence. In Revelation 3:15-16 it is called *lukewarm*.

### A REVELATION 3:15-16

*I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

**LEADERS:** Ask, "Was money really the issue?" Maybe, but it could have been anything taking the place of God in his life. Then ask, "What are some things that can be idols in our lives?"

## 5 Read Hebrews 6:11-12. What does the author of Hebrews warn the believers to avoid?

### HEBREWS 6:11-12

*And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

### ANSWER:

- Laziness.
- Procrastination.
- Sloth.

## 6 Read James 1:2-3. What barrier does James address?

### JAMES 1:2-3

*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*

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**A ANSWER:** Difficult circumstances.

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| **LEADERS:** Ask, “What are some circumstances that might  
**L** make it difficult to live a spirit-filled life?” (Lessons 3 and 4 of  
| *Trust* are dedicated to similar topics).

## 7 Are you experiencing any of these barriers? Which one(s)?

## 8 How can we incorporate what we have learned about the Holy Spirit into our response to these barriers?

**L** | **LEADERS:** This teaching—of turning to the Holy Spirit for the help we need in light of the barriers we face in following God—is an important nugget we want *Source* participants to take with them from this study.

**A** | **ANSWER:** The *choose and ask* model is very helpful for overcoming these barriers and turning to the Holy Spirit for help on a daily or even moment-by-moment basis. Since one of the Holy Spirit's actions in our lives is to convince us of our sin, he can help us recognize when we are slipping into these kinds of weaknesses and failures. We can then *choose* to repent of them, turn to him and *ask* for the grace to follow his will.

**L** | **LEADERS:** Remember, this minimizes the up-and-down Christian experience so that it does not take months or years to return to God. This content leads into our discussion about docility next lesson. Remember: through this lesson, you are preparing participants to decide next week to become docile to the Holy Spirit.

# The Galatian Trap



We will now address what is perhaps the biggest barrier to our Christian walk. Since it is less obvious than the others, it can be more difficult to overcome. It can be called the *Galatian Trap*.

## 9 Read Galatians 3:1-3. Why is Paul upset with the Galatians?

### **GALATIANS 3:1-3**

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?*

**ANSWER:** The Christians in Galatia are Gentiles, not Jews. Paul is upset because they are listening to other “teachers” who are convincing them to move away from the Gospel and turn instead to the false belief that they can be saved by the Jewish law.

## 10 By turning to the “law,” who are the Galatians ultimately depending upon?

**ANSWER:** They depend upon themselves/self-effort, and not on the Holy Spirit.

## 11 What is the *Galatian trap*?

**ANSWER:** Rejecting the Gospel message—that salvation is a gift of grace and mercy freely given from the Father, by the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The Galatians exchanged this truth for a lie. They believed, instead, that they could please God and earn their salvation on their own by following the law.

## 12 How can self-effort be a hindrance to the Christian walk? How could it be a help?

**ANSWER:** Relying on our own efforts leads us first to pride and then to failure—we forget about God’s help and then we become frustrated because we cannot achieve the quality of spiritual life we desire. We try to become super-Christians on our own steam but we cannot—this is why we are given the Holy Spirit. The church in Galatia seems to have forgotten this.

Nevertheless, though we should not rely solely on our own efforts, we must still actively participate in our own spiritual growth. We must cooperate with God’s grace (put up our sails, from Lesson 3) and do our part under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Think of gas in a car: no matter how much I maintain my car, it will not move without fuel. The Holy Spirit is the fuel. Alternatively, I cannot expect fuel alone to get me somewhere. I need to get in the car, turn the key, and drive the car with a full tank.

# 13

## The Galatians were trying to earn salvation through careful observance of the law. How do we fall into this trap today?

**ANSWER:** We might try to please God through our involvement or service without allowing the Holy Spirit to have real leadership in our lives.

We might try to win our salvation through good deeds or by impressing God with our spiritual résumé and, in the process, fail to trust him and surrender our lives to him.

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We might try to please God by “acting holy” (e.g. praying harder, reading Scripture more often, etc.). Even though these things are good in themselves, we might be keeping God at arm’s length because we focus too much on our own efforts. As a result, we get discouraged that we are not making much progress, and our faith stagnates.

# Personal Reflection

**14** List barriers you are currently facing in your spiritual life and strategies to invite the Holy Spirit into these areas. Share your barriers with the group. Together, try to think of more ways to overcome these barriers, and find Scripture verses that offer wisdom particular to your situation.



**LEADERS:** Give participants 3-5 minutes to fill in the chart on their own. Examples of Scripture verses to address certain needs or concerns are on the following page.

Barriers	Strategies
For example: There are certain sinful behaviours in my lifestyle that God is asking me to reject.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk to a trusted friend about it.</li><li>• Go to Confession and receive counselling from the priest.</li><li>• Pray for the courage to change.</li><li>• Reflect on a worship song about surrender.</li><li>• Reflect on Titus 2:6-8.</li></ul>

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**LEADERS:** Examples of Scripture verses that address certain needs or concerns:

- **Worried:** Philippians 4
- **Needing courage:** Joshua 1
- **Depressed:** Psalm 34, 139
- **Facing a crisis:** Psalm 121
- **In danger or afraid:** Psalm 91
- **In doubt:** Hebrews 11
- **Discouraged:** Psalm 23,42; Isaiah 40
- **Tempted:** Psalm 1; 1 Corinthians 10

# Summary

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Awareness of barriers to a Spirit-filled life is essential for overcoming them. Equipped with this knowledge, we must turn to the Holy Spirit to empower us and give us the courage to live as children of God.

# Living It Out

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## **CHALLENGE**

Put into practice your strategies to overcome one of your personal barriers to living in the Spirit.

## **MEMORIZE HEBREWS 12:1**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.*

# 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.**