



LESSON 5
PREPARATION NOTES

Docility
to the
Holy Spirit

DOCILITY TO THE HOLY SPIRIT IN BRIEF:

Mary, our model of docility, entrusted her life completely to the Holy Spirit.

KEY ELEMENTS:

- **This is the key lesson in this study.** Everything participants have learned thus far has been intended to prepare them to choose docility to the Holy Spirit.
- This lesson can take a long time if you aren't aware of its progression, so make sure you prepare extra carefully before leading this lesson.
- Docility is essential to our growth in holiness. This is how we cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit.
- Docility is openness. It means being malleable, teachable, willing, and ready to be led and influenced by God through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- This teaching will be more challenging for some participants than for others. They may not be ready to give God permission to influence every area of their lives, especially the future. Be patient with them as they absorb this valuable teaching. Present the lesson as an invitation to which they can respond, but do not be pushy. This area of Christian growth is a continual challenge for all of us.
- The introduction conveys the idea that if we really knew the Holy Spirit's goodness, we would not react with such anxiety and fear at the thought of abandoning ourselves to him.
- Mary is a model for us to emulate. She was detached from her own plans and abandoned herself to the Holy Spirit.
- Although docility is similar to commitment to Christ, it has its own specific meaning. Docility implies a greater abandonment of our plans to God's sovereignty and a greater willingness to be moulded into the image of God.

- This lesson also presents the notion that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. We look first at the Old Testament temple and Holy of Holies, then at how this temple has changed in the New Covenant. Beginning with Mary, we can all become temples of the Holy Spirit. This is an incredible mystery and honour.
- The section on Mary does not present exclusively Catholic teaching. It simply looks at the account of the Annunciation in the Bible. All denominations would agree that Mary's *fiat*, her "yes," is a model for Christians to imitate.
- In the section called *Fiat*, participants will be invited to pray for docility and guidance from the Holy Spirit. Leaders should pray to the Spirit as well, asking him to give participants a sense of freedom in being docile to God. We should also pray against any fears and anxieties with which the enemy may be tempting them.
- We have to embody peace in order to demonstrate the freedom and vitality of a life in the Spirit. Don't try to fake this. Ask the Holy Spirit to manifest this peace within you.
- The challenge is small and practical, but requires a huge leap of faith. Participants are to choose one small problem in their lives that they will surrender to God. Encourage them to trust God and to believe that he will act.
- **Very important:** prepare to share an example of how you entrusted an everyday problem to God, willing to follow with docility what he would tell you to do.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- More information on Mary: CCC 721-726 (and many more references in the CCC index).



LESSON 5

**Docility
to the
Holy Spirit**

1 How did the strategies we shared last lesson help you overcome barriers in approaching the Spirit?



Introduction



In the last few lessons, we have discussed who the Holy Spirit is, what role he has in our lives, the struggles we have with sin and temptation, God's plan for a life in the Spirit, and the barriers that typically impede his activity in our life. This week we will examine how to be led by the Holy Spirit.



We read in Romans 5:5 that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." There is something attractive about a person in love with God who is led by the Holy Spirit and filled with his grace.

2 What characteristics should describe a Spirit-filled person?

ANSWER: In the Holy Spirit we experience freedom, vitality, creativity, love, enthusiasm, exuberance, beauty, goodness, peace, safety, confidence, inner joy—things that describe life at its very best: the sense of being loved and in love. This does not mean that the road is always easy and pleasant, but that we experience deep contentment and peace despite the challenges.

LEADERS: Ask, “Do some of these characteristics describe your life? Does the life they describe sound desirable to you?”

ANSWER: Some participants may feel uncomfortable opening themselves up to the Holy Spirit. Some might expect that opening themselves to the Holy Spirit will have an effect opposite to what is described above. Some may imagine his presence as uncomfortable, weird, boring or oppressive—not a life of freedom, joy, love and confidence. The purpose of this lesson is to introduce participants to the Spirit, who is life and love.

50

Temple of the Holy Spirit



It is a great blessing to know the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism, Confirmation and the other sacraments, we encounter him in a privileged way. However, human beings have not always enjoyed this incredible privilege. In the Old Testament, people had a very different experience of the Spirit of God.

As we learned in *Discovery*, the fall of Man caused by sin created a rift between humanity and God. Isaiah 59:2 tells us that our “sins have hidden his face”—this was the day-to-day experience of the Jewish faithful in the Old Testament.

3 What was the Jewish (Old Testament) understanding of the Spirit of God's dwelling place?

ANSWER: In the Old Testament, the presence and glory of God dwelt in the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. The Ark was the golden chest in which the Ten Commandments were held, and the presence of God was said to dwell there. The Holy of Holies was separated from the rest of the Tabernacle/Temple by a heavily woven veil (more like a tapestry).

EXODUS 40:20,21,34

He took the covenant and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy-seat above the ark; and he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the curtain for screening, and screened the ark of the covenant; as the Lord had commanded Moses. The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), when the Hebrew people were reconciled with God (see Leviticus 16). In that room, two ten-foot gold-covered angel statues stood with outstretched wings that reached from either side of the north and south walls and met in the middle over the Ark (1 Kings 6:27).

During this period in history, the Holy of Holies was *hidden* and *unapproachable*. It was scandalous to think of an ordinary person approaching the inner rooms of the temple.

LEADERS: It is essential for participants to understand the Holy of Holies in order to appreciate the profound privilege we now have of carrying God within us as temples of the Holy Spirit.

To set up a later question on Mary as the New Ark of the Covenant, you should mention the following: there were three things inside the Ark of the Covenant—the staff of Aaron (Moses' brother and spokesman), the Ten Commandments, and manna (the bread that God sent from heaven to the Israelites while they were in the desert).

As we know today, God sought to remedy this situation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Let us look at the direct results of Christ's saving work on Calvary.

4 Read Matthew 27:51 and 1 Corinthians 6:19. How has this event radically changed our relationship to God, especially in the Person of the Holy Spirit?

MATTHEW 27:51

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?

A **ANSWER:** When Jesus died on the cross, the temple veil “was torn in two,” ushering in a new era of freedom, redemption and relationship. There was no longer a barrier between God and humanity. Christ broke through the barrier and restored our relationship to the Father. Before Christ, God’s Spirit only dwelled in a particular, inaccessible spot. Now he dwells in us. The temple is us! Our God has done everything he possibly could to be close to us. How incredible and powerful it is to know that, in this age, the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

Mary as our Model

51

We will now look at Mary. This Jewish teenager experienced the profound mystery of receiving God into her person in an unprecedented way. Her story will teach us what it means to become a temple of the Holy Spirit.



5 Read Luke 1:26-38. In the Annunciation of the Lord, we witness Mary’s response to the Holy Spirit. Discuss what it might have been like for Mary to experience this event.

ANSWER: She would have been very young (14-16 years old), and yet she still responded with openness and abandonment to God’s plan for her life. She was about to be married and probably had hopes and dreams for her future—this message from God changed everything.

A She must have been shocked and overwhelmed to be chosen to bear the long-awaited Messiah. For centuries, her people had been longing and crying out to God for him to come.

Mary may also have been amazed to learn that Elizabeth was with child in her old age. Moreover, she was puzzled by Gabriel’s greeting—she would never have imagined that God’s messenger would call her “highly favoured” or “full of grace” (depending on your Scripture translation).

6 Read verses 35-38 again. What interaction is Mary about to have with the Holy Spirit?

| **ANSWER:** She is to be overshadowed—the Holy Spirit will
A come upon her. By the power of by the Holy Spirit, she conceives
| the Christ child.

7 Mary is sometimes called the *Ark of the New Covenant*. Given the account of the Annunciation, why would the Church give her this title?

| **ANSWER:** The Ark, as mentioned above, was the place where
God resided. Mary becomes the Ark of the New Covenant
because she carried Jesus inside her so he might come into the
world as a human being.

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| On a more profound level, Mary herself is the prototype of the New
Covenant—a sign of the unity that God wishes to have with his
people. She is the first person to receive the Holy Spirit within her.

| **LEADERS:** You can refer to CCC 2676:

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| *Mary, in whom the Lord himself has just made his dwelling, is...
the ark of the Covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord
dwells. She is “the dwelling of God...with men.” Full of grace,
Mary is wholly given over to him who has come to dwell in her
and whom she is about to give to the world.*

| **Ask, “What made it possible for the Holy Spirit to enter into
Mary?”** The answer is her *fiat* (let it be done)—her “yes” to God.

Mary, through her *fiat* (or “yes”), allowed the Holy Spirit to overshadow her and conceive Jesus in her womb. This attitude of “let it be done to me according to your word” can be summed up in a single word: docility.



“ The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that “with God nothing will be impossible” and so giving her assent: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word.” Elizabeth greeted her: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” It is for this faith that all generations have called Mary blessed.

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CCC 148

Mary was the first to receive the Holy Spirit through her *fiat*—she was not meant to be the last.

8 What does it mean to be called to docility, as Mary was?

ANSWER: Docility means giving God permission to lead your life. It is an attitude of openness and receptivity to God who, by forming and correcting us, teaches us to be more like him. It is like being clay in God’s hands. We must ask ourselves: are we malleable or resistant to the working of the potter?

LEADERS: Some participants may be uncomfortable with the implications of docility. Always remember to be gentle, striving to identify with the situation of each person. Present the teaching and invite participants to respond, but do not be pushy. This is a challenging area for all of us.

As Mary experienced, God’s call in our lives can sometimes seem intimidating, perhaps unbelievable. We can ask ourselves, *Who am I that God would want to do great things through me?* We may be excited about how God will use us, but we may also be tempted to count the cost of saying “yes,” fearful of how this could change our lives.

9 In what areas is it difficult to be docile to the Holy Spirit?

A | **ANSWER:** Future plans, relationships, finances, etc. You can remind participants of some of the barriers encountered in Lesson 4. Usually, barriers involve some kind of fear or insecurity.

L | **LEADERS:** After allowing time for participants to name some examples, ask, “Where do our fears and insecurities come from?” If they are at a loss, ask them, “Why did Adam and Eve eat the apple?”

ANSWER: Our first parents decided to disobey God’s commands because they doubted in God’s goodness.

A | Fear comes from the false sense that we are alone—that God does not care about us, and that we need to get what “belongs” to us before someone else gets there first. This can be our mindset with our time, money, plans and energy.

This aspect of the human condition leads to the battle between the spirit and the flesh, and contributes to our insecurities. We are afraid of being alone and of having to deal with the problems of life on our own.

10 What happened when Mary said “yes” to God? How is this different than the decision of our first parents?

L | **LEADERS:** The purpose of this question is to bring participants out of the “bad news” of how hard docility is, into the “good news” of how beautiful it can be.

ANSWER: Mary’s “yes” was a yes to life: the life of this child in her womb, the life of God in her, and most especially a “yes” to eternal life for all. She cooperated with God’s plan for our salvation. In her body, God became flesh. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection fulfilled God’s plan to save us from slavery to sin, eternal death and separation from God. Her “yes” opened the door for humanity to be reconciled to God.

Mary’s “yes” was a “yes” to the Holy Spirit. As we have learned, he is the source of life and love and he does not leave us alone. He will work in us to help us become docile, if that is our desire.

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Adam and Eve did not fully believe what God had told them. Mary, however, wholeheartedly believed and accepted what had been spoken to her. Mary’s trust in God’s goodness was so great that she was willing to embrace an unknown and potentially dangerous calling. Adam and Eve were afraid that God was holding out on them, so they decided to take matters into their own hands. As a result of their choice, Adam and Eve were separated from God. Mary’s choice led her to experience a profound and deeply fulfilling union with God—a union that would impact not only her own life, but the life of the whole world.

11 How does docility make you feel?

LEADERS: Participants may experience an interior battle as they come to terms with the concept of docility. We pray that the Spirit will use this study to strengthen their desire for unity with God and to remind them of their aching need to be back in communion with him. Despite this need, however, our fallen nature still fears a loss of safety and security in the face of the unknown. The Spirit is a great unknown when we first encounter him.

Some may be thinking, *Mary's trust in the Spirit was great... I could never make a decision like that.* Remind them that docility is achieved through small steps, like dealing with the barriers discussed in Lesson 4, or letting the *choose and ask* model from Lesson 3 remind us to regularly turn to the Holy Spirit for help.

Emphasize that the Spirit is not pushy; he will only come in if he is invited. He will not move in our lives without permission.

As we have learned, the Spirit has resided in us since our Baptism. He is always at work within us but we can experience much *more* freedom and vitality if we give him permission to move in our lives. It is only when we open wide the doors of our hearts to him that we are truly living in the Spirit.

Even if we feel we can only open the doors of our hearts a little bit, the Holy Spirit is still pleased with our effort. He will work with what he is given.

Ask, "What is your desire? Do you wish to experience the freedom, vitality and relationship that we've learned comes from living in the Spirit?"

This is an opportunity for participants to share what docility means to them. They might express fear of where God may call them or confidence in his great plan.

Reassure them that responding to God is a personal choice and that the Spirit is gentle—he knows our fears about letting go. We should take to heart Gabriel's words to Mary: "Do not be afraid" (Luke 1:30).

It is very simple to give the Holy Spirit permission to direct our lives. All it takes is a sincere prayer of faith, opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit's action. Let us take a moment now to reflect on this invitation in quiet prayer.

LEADERS: Direct participants to take a few minutes in silence to collect their thoughts. Invite them to think of all they have learned about the Holy Spirit: his gentleness, his love, his desire to be in relationship with us.

Tell them that if they so desire, they can pray out loud with you the prayer below. Do not pressure them to say the prayer—make sure they know they have the option to remain silent.

+ Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Pause for a few seconds of silence.

Holy Spirit, I welcome you into my heart and thank you for the special role you have in my life. I come before you now, conscious of my weaknesses, shortcomings and hesitations, to trust you.

I know I need your grace and help to live the Christian life. You are the source of all love, abundance, life, healing and freedom for me. I pray that you would stir up your gifts, power and love in my heart. And I pray that you would be stirred up in my heart.

Full of gratitude, I give you my *fiat*, my “yes.” I give you permission to act in my life. I pray that I would have the courage to give you my “yes” every day and in every area of my life. Let it be with me according to your word.

Amen.

Summary

Docility is a lifelong challenge. It calls us to surrender and entrust our greatest dreams and aspirations to God. It also invites us to live daily in the freedom of God's plan. The present moment is an opportunity to give the Holy Spirit permission to lead us, and for us to follow that lead. May we have the grace to follow Mary's example of childlike trust and openness to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Living It Out

CHALLENGE

This week, let go and let God move in your life. Sincerely give the Holy Spirit permission to act in just one small problem in your life. Listen to his lead, prepared to follow. See what happens.

- | **LEADERS: Very important:** Share an example of how you
L entrusted an everyday problem to God, willing to follow with
| docility what he would tell you to do.

MEMORIZE LUKE 1:38A

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

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.