

THE SPIRIT ENABLES



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's disciples obey Christ (Acts 2:1).
2. Jesus's disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2-5).
3. Jesus's disciples reveal God's works (Acts 2:6-13).

Background Passage: Acts 2

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The disciples obeyed Jesus and waited for the Holy Spirit to come as promised, an arrival that was marked by great power from God.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus had instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit because He would empower them to be His witnesses on earth. As promised, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, filled them, and empowered them to complete the mission they had been given. God gives the Holy Spirit to all who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because the Holy Spirit changes us to be more like Christ each day, we rely on the Holy Spirit as we share the gospel, call people to repentance and faith, and live in community.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What would you say is the most memorable day you have ever had?** (the day someone received Christ as Savior; graduating from a school or program; a wedding day; the birth of a child; an important event attended)

TRANSITION: Our lives are punctuated by various special days that hold significant meaning and shape us in many ways. In this session, we will focus on a momentous occasion in the lives of Jesus's disciples: the day of Pentecost. This event continues to impact us profoundly to this day. We will explore how this day marked the arrival of the Spirit of God, which empowered all those who follow Jesus, including believers today. The same empowerment that the disciples experienced on that day is available to us, enabling us to serve as Christ's witnesses.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- For ten days following Christ's ascension to heaven, the disciples had been in Jerusalem. They were waiting for the Father's promise of the Holy Spirit, which would empower them to be Christ's witnesses to the whole world. During this time, they dedicated themselves to prayer and prepared for the next phase of their ministry by filling Judas's apostolic vacancy with Matthias. Finally, the day arrived, and they were about to experience the power of the Spirit in their lives.



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POINT 1

JESUS'S DISCIPLES OBEY CHRIST (ACTS 2:1).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:1** from his or her Bible.

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

INTRODUCE: **Verse 1a** highlights that the time of the Pentecost celebration had arrived and we will soon read that this is the setting for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Although the association of Pentecost with the Spirit's arrival is prevalent today, historically Pentecost was a celebration for Israel.

DISCUSS: Using the bullets below, explain the significance of Pentecost (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 74):

At Pentecost, God's perfect timing reminded the disciples of their commission to go to the harvest of all nations.

- Pentecost had two meanings for the Israelites of Jesus's day. First, it was an agricultural festival of firstfruits at the completion of the grain harvest. Through God sending the Holy Spirit, the festival celebrating the wheat harvest was also a time for harvest and gathering for the disciples. On this day, a few verses later in Scripture, we see that 3,000 people came to faith in Jesus Christ as a result of Peter's preaching of the gospel (Acts 2:38-41).
- The Israelites also associated the giving of the law of Moses with Pentecost, as it occurred fifty days from when Israel would have left Egypt and come to Mount Sinai. The association of Pentecost with God's commands reminded the disciples that teaching was also part of their commission.
- Pentecost was the second of three great harvest festivals for Israel. It occurred between the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. It was one of the most popular pilgrimages as it occurred in a favorable weather season for travel to Jerusalem. Thus, Jerusalem was full and active at this time with travelers from foreign places.

ASK: (DDG p. 74)

How can knowing that God's timing is always perfect encourage us in our walk of faith? (we can patiently wait for His guidance; we can know everything has a purpose for His glory; we can be amazed by how He works so effortlessly; we can be assured that He is at work even when it might not seem like it)

DIG: Invite a volunteer to read Acts 1:4,12-13. Then looking at **verse 1b**, ask: "How were the disciples obedient to Jesus's instructions?" (they waited in Jerusalem together; they spent ten days together in prayer and worship; they waited all together in one place for what God would do next)

FEAST OF PENTECOST

The Feast of Weeks—the Feast of Pentecost in Greek—was the Old Testament celebration of firstfruits (Ex. 34:22). In Jesus's time, it was known as Pentecost, which means "fiftieth" in Greek, as it was observed 50 days after the Passover.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are opposite sides of the same coin."¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

EXPLAIN: Using the previous information and the points below, explain from **verse 1b** (DDG p. 74):

The disciples obeyed Jesus in staying together in one place, revealing their faith in Christ's promises.

- The disciples' obedience led to the promise and blessing of the Holy Spirit. It did not earn them this gift, but it enabled them to be at the right place and the right time to receive God's blessings, as God had ordered it. It is important to note that God's grace cannot be earned; however, when we walk obediently with Him, we can experience a greater presence and power of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, when we walk in disobedience to God's commands, we do not lose our salvation, but we limit our ability to experience all of His blessings.
- The disciples "were all together in one place." We are reminded that not only does the Holy Spirit empower us to do things individually, but He empowers us corporately as we strive to be unified as God's people with a unified mission to fulfill God's commission. The Holy Spirit can be grieved by our disunity and strife (see Eph. 4:30-32).

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 74)

How does obedience to God's Word affect our lives? (obedience to God's Word helps us grow in our relationship with Him; as we obey His commands and follow His ways, we become more Christ-like and develop a deeper understanding of His will for our lives; when we obey, our intimacy increases with the triune God)

REFLECT: Say: "Take a moment of reflection and ask yourself, 'In what areas of my life am I not obeying God's commands? What can I repent of or confess or change in order to live in greater obedience to Christ?' Consider what steps you can take to live in greater obedience to Christ and pray for God's help and guidance in this process."

TRANSITION: The disciples' obedience led to an incredible experience as they received God's promise of the Holy Spirit and began to fulfill the mission to be Christ's witnesses throughout the world.

POINT 2

JESUS'S DISCIPLES ARE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (ACTS 2:2-5).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:2-5** from his or her Bible.

2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. **5** Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

EXPLAIN: A loud noise and rumble filled the house where the disciples gathered. Discuss from **verses 2-5** (DDG p. 74):

Christ's disciples experienced a complete and permanent presence of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to obey Jesus's commission to reach the nations.

- In John 3:8, Jesus told Nicodemus: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." At Pentecost, God illustrated the power and prerogative of His Spirit as He performed His mighty work. Surely something miraculous, something never seen or heard of before, was happening and stirring a commotion. If imagining the scene, it would have been extremely loud and bright.
- The experience of speaking in tongues clearly describes the disciples miraculously speaking in the various languages known amongst the vast geographical regions of the audience described in the following verses. Devout Jews who had come to celebrate the harvest would be an immediate field of harvest for the disciples freshly baptized in the Spirit. Though the disciples may have been able to communicate the gospel to all in the common language of Aramaic spoken in Jerusalem, God used this miracle for the disciples to share the gospel with the captivated crowd so they would be astonished that Galileans could communicate fluently in the various native languages represented.

ASK: (DDG p. 74)

Jesus told the disciples that they would experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit. How is the arrival of the Holy Spirit like baptism? (it is wholly immersing—externally and internally—as the Spirit lives in the believer; the disciples felt and experienced the physical presence of the Holy Spirit; it is a permanent experience as baptism serves as a one-time experience in a believer's life—a believer only experiences the initial indwelling of the Spirit one time)

TEACH: The Holy Spirit rested upon the disciples like tongues of fire, filled them, and empowered them to speak in different languages. God the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, did this, not some type of force. Use the information below to continue to teach the personhood of the Spirit (DDG p. 74–75).

Key Doctrine #63: Personality of the Holy Spirit: The Bible not only affirms the full divinity of the Holy Spirit but also His personhood. Many people have mistakenly believed that the Spirit is a force or power, not a person. However, Scripture affirms His personhood by acknowledging that He is treated as a person (Acts 5:3; 7:51; Heb. 10:29), acts like a person (John 14:26, 15:26; Rom. 8:14), has attributes of a person (1 Cor. 2:10-11; Eph. 4:30), and acts in personal ways (Isa. 63:10; Acts 13:2). In addition to these, the Bible also affirms that Christians relate to Him personally (Acts 5:3-4; 7:51).

- After the initial baptism of the Spirit at the day of Pentecost, believers receive the Spirit when they believe the gospel message of Christ and repent of their sins (Acts 2:38). Paul clearly taught that the Holy Spirit is received at the moment of salvation through Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 12:13 emphasizes that all believers, regardless of their background or status, are given the same Spirit. In Romans 8:9, Paul asserts that those who do not possess the Holy Spirit do not belong to Christ and are controlled by their sinful nature. Furthermore, Ephesians 1:13-14 teaches that the Holy Spirit is the seal of salvation for all who believe in Jesus, serving as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the final redemption of God's possession.
- We often confuse the concepts of Spirit filling with Spirit baptism. While believers can experience a greater filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), the initial reception, sealing, or baptism of the Holy Spirit is a singular event at the moment of salvation (1:13).

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 75)

Why is it important that Christ's disciples be filled with the Holy Spirit? (to receive the power to be His witnesses to the world; to be guided and reminded of the truth Christ proclaimed; to be comforted and led by God; to be assured of God's presence wherever they go)

TRANSITION: The indwelling of the Holy Spirit enabled Christ's disciples to experience God's power. After receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were able to begin fulfilling Christ's commission to be His witnesses. As God drew the attention of the crowds to them, the disciples immediately began their mission.

FIRE

John the Baptist foretold that Jesus would baptize with the Spirit and with fire (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). God often appeared as fire to His people. For example, an angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2-4). God also led the Israelites out of Egypt as a pillar of cloud and fire (13:22), as well as appearing on the tabernacle as fire (40:38).

POINT 3

JESUS'S DISCIPLES REVEAL GOD'S WORKS (ACTS 2:6-13).

READ: Due to some more difficult place names in this passage, read aloud **Acts 2:6-11** yourself from this guide or your Bible.

6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. **7** And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **9** Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

DIG: Break into groups of 2-4 and ask: "Why do you think Luke wrote out so many of the different people groups listed?" (as examples of a variety of people and nations that needed to hear the gospel message; to acknowledge that all nations and cultures have a right to hear the gospel message; as a way to honor the importance of various cultures, that they may be seen; also see notes below)

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 6-11**, discuss (DDG p. 75):

The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus's disciples to witness to people from all backgrounds and cultures.

- Luke's list of nations in the Pentecost story was not intended to be an all-inclusive list, but instead, emphasized the significant communities where Jews had been residing since the period of Israel and Judah's captivity. Many Jews had returned to the nation of Israel, while others chose to remain in the places where they were taken during the captivity. Although some Jews who returned to Jerusalem may have viewed those who stayed in the lands of captivity as unfaithful, the disciples did not make any distinction.
- Luke highlights the importance of the disciples' witness to the diverse nations by listing five distinct Jewish groups of people from different regions: (1) the area east of the Euphrates River—Parthia, Media, Elam (Elymais), and Mesopotamia; (2) Judea; (3) Asia Minor, which includes Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, and Phrygia and Pamphylia; (4) Egypt and nearby Libya and Cyrene; and (5) those from Rome, from the European mainland.
- Throughout the book of Acts, we observe Christ's disciples dedicated to spreading the gospel to all people as the Holy Spirit empowered them as He continues to empower us today.



PENTECOST VS. THE TOWER OF BABYLON

Scan this QR code for an explanation of the events at Pentecost as a reversal of God's judgment at Babel.

PROSELYTES

Those who have changed from one religion to another. In this context, those who accepted the ways of Judaism but who were not Jewish by birth.

ASK: (DDG p. 75)

How can you develop more relationships with those of various cultures to share the gospel? (be intentional in seeking relationships of different cultures: ex., hosting an international student, volunteering to teach English, going to ethnic restaurants and befriending staff; seeking out mission trips to other cultures; studying other cultures to be prepared for an encounter)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:12-13** from his or her Bible.

12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” **13** But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

HIGHLIGHT: In **verses 12-13**, those with a receptive heart were astounded, but others mocked the disciples and dismissed the power of God in their presence. Think about these different reactions as you highlight the following (DDG p. 75):

The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus’s disciples to share the gospel with people, no matter the response.

- Some of the people in the crowd were at a loss for an explanation, confounded and bewildered by the disciples’ fervor. The power of the Spirit of God is beyond what our minds can comprehend. This is the power that Jesus promised will accompany those who become His witnesses.
- We should not be surprised when we encounter individuals with hardened hearts. Some in the crowd, after witnessing the disciples’ miraculous speech that clearly testified to the power of God, mocked not only the disciples but the Spirit of God. They claimed that the disciples were drunken babblers.
- Given that the grape harvest would not occur for two more months, the accusation that they were full of “new wine” was not an attempt to explain the situation but a pejorative comment to dismiss what was obviously happening before them.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 75)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **How should the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives help us to not fear rejection or hostility when sharing the gospel with others?** (knowing He is with me would make me less fearful; knowing He empowers me would make me more confident; knowing the Spirit speaks to hearts would help me feel less overwhelmed)

TRANSITION: Peter was not distracted by the insults of the mockers but used their comments to share the gospel of Christ, leading to an amazing result, as we’ll see later.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Jesus had instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit because He would empower them to be His witnesses on earth. As promised, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, filled them, and empowered them to complete the mission they had been given. God gives the Holy Spirit to all who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit changes us to be more like Christ each day, we rely on the Holy Spirit as we share the gospel, call people to repentance and faith, and live in community.

HEAD:

The disciples' faith in Christ's promises and obedience to His commands enabled them to experience God's power and the Holy Spirit's work. Unwavering faith in God's promises brings peace and trust in His guidance and provision, while obeying His commands gives a sense of purpose and direction in life. Aligning ourselves with God's will and obeying Him allows us to experience His transformative power and live a life aligned with His plan for us.

How does knowing God is trustworthy help you obey His commands for His glory?

HEART:

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were impacted forever by the incredible work of God's Spirit that transformed them for gospel ministry to reach the world. Today, all of Christ's followers have the same Holy Spirit within us and the same command to reach the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In what areas of your life can you confess your lack of obedience in carrying the gospel to the nations?

HANDS:

The disciples received the Holy Spirit not only for personal edification but for them to be Christ's witnesses. We have received the Holy Spirit to lead and empower us too. By relying on the Holy Spirit, we can participate in the harvest for God's kingdom.

What opportunities has God given you to share the gospel this week?

PRAY: Father, we thank You for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. May we be faithful to Your Word, available for Your service, and empowered to share the gospel in both word and deed to everyone.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Should we not press it home upon our consciences that the sole object of our conversion was not the salvation of our own souls, but that we might become co-workers with our Lord and Master in the conversion of the world?"²

—Lottie Moon (1840–1912)

EXTRA

POINT 1: JESUS'S DISCIPLES OBEY CHRIST (ACTS 2:1).

+ COMMENTARY

“Pentecost was the day on which the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples (2:1-4). This event is perhaps one of the three most important moments in redemptive history. The first event was creation, the moment when God created the stage on which he would work out his sovereign plan. . . . The second most significant moment in redemptive history was the substitutionary death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In the cross and resurrection of Christ, God accomplished redemption and ushered in the new covenant, fulfilling all the promises and expectations of the Old Testament. The third most significant event in redemptive history is the day of Pentecost—the birth of the church, the creation of God’s new covenant people.”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

The term “poser” is a slang word used to describe someone who pretends to be something or someone they’re not in order to fit in with a certain group or to gain attention or respect. For example, imagine you meet someone who claims to be a fan of a music group, but when you ask them about their favorite songs or albums, they don’t seem to know much. They may just wear a T-shirt with the band’s logo or attend their concerts without really understanding their music.

James 2:17 calls out “poser Christians.” Just like the music fan who follows a group without really knowing anything about them, this person may be drawn to the idea of being a Christian without fully understanding the commitment that it entails. They may be attracted to the social aspects of church or the idea of being a “good person,” but they haven’t yet allowed Christ to transform their heart and mind to move them to actions of obedience and service to the Lord.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to more than just superficially following Him. We are called to dive deep into His teachings, form a personal relationship with Him, and allow His love to transform our lives. This kind of faith is evident in Acts 2:1, and the disciples’ genuine faith allowed them to experience God’s power and blessing. Likewise, when we stop “posing” and live for Christ in obedience and service, we experience the Holy Spirit working in and through us as we tell others of the amazing good news of Jesus Christ.

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS'S DISCIPLES ARE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (ACTS 2:2-5).

+ COMMENTARY

“Holy Spirit brings new life to those who believe in Jesus Christ, and with that life comes a continuing power to those who are continually filled. It means fire in our lives, individually burning away the chaff and flaming out to those around us. It means the truth of God going forth from us in a way we would never have dreamed of—the divine utterance of God through us. It means communication, joy, thankfulness, submission.”⁴

+ COMMENTARY

“Pentecost also signals the breaking of barriers that have separated the human race since Babel, with the formation of a new humanity in Christ. In other words, Pentecost reverses what happened at Babel. In fact, as Conrad Gempf has shown, something greater happened. In a reversal of the scattering that took place at Babel, the Jewish pilgrim festivals, like Pentecost, brought people from the far corners of the earth to worship God. What is new here is that from now on, people would not need to come back to some central place to worship God—and in the Hebrew tongue. Rather, they could go to the far corners of the earth and worship God in their own languages. Moreover, people no longer need to build up to the heavens in search of the significance they lost when they were thrown out of the garden of Eden. God has now sent his Spirit down to us and lifted our experience to a new level of significance. ‘Babel and Eden are not “undone” as much as they are redeemed and their negative effects nullified.’ Pentecost, then, tells us that we, today, can have an intimate experience of God and can manifest power in ministry. Moreover, the barriers that divided the human race have been broken so that a new humanity is on the way to being created.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Imagine you are on a sailboat out at sea with unfurled sails, but no wind to fill them, leaving the boat stuck in one place, unable to move forward. Suddenly, a strong wind blows, filling the sails and propelling the boat forward with great speed and power. In the same way, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, our lives are empowered to move forward as Christ’s disciples. Without the Holy Spirit, we would be unable to make progress or grow in our relationship with God. However, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are able to accomplish things we never thought possible and move forward with great speed and power.

Just as the disciples in Acts 2 were filled with the Holy Spirit, we too can experience the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit enables us to speak with love and grace, serve others selflessly, and share the gospel boldly. The Holy Spirit also works in us to help us overcome sin and temptation, grow in our faith and knowledge of God, and live a life that glorifies Christ.

Therefore, we should not underestimate the importance of the Holy Spirit in our lives and should seek to walk according to the Spirit so that we may be filled and empowered by Him.

POINT 3: JESUS'S DISCIPLES REVEAL GOD'S WORKS (ACTS 2:6-13).

+ COMMENTARY

“When the Holy Spirit comes in power, what we are to have is not some particularly intense experience. We don’t have to speak in tongues so that in a miraculous way everybody will hear our words in his or her language. Rather, we need to have a widespread speaking about Jesus. Everyone will hear as the gospel spreads through the testimony of those who are obeying the Great Commission. That is what you and I are called upon to do. That is the task to which the Lord Jesus Christ sends us.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

A bridge serves to connect two separate points, allowing people to cross over to the other side. In a similar manner, the Spirit of God at work in Christ’s disciples has sought to connect people to God since the birth of the church at Pentecost. Through the empowerment of the Spirit of God, Christians have revealed the love and power of God throughout the world by building bridges between God and humanity.

Christians accomplish this is by spreading the gospel through acts of love, compassion, and service. They share the message of God’s love through Christ with people from all walks of life, breaking down barriers of fear, doubt, and unbelief. Moreover, Christians have also built bridges of understanding and reconciliation between people of different races, cultures, and backgrounds. They work toward promoting justice and equality, and creating a society that reflects God’s love for all people. Through their actions, Christians empowered by God’s Spirit have transformed the world and brought hope to countless individuals.

As we follow Christ and are empowered by the Spirit of God, we too can play a unique role in connecting people to the knowledge, love, and grace of God. By showing and telling others of His glory and grace, we can be used by God to build bridges between God and humanity, bringing people closer to Him, and seeing lives and communities changed by the gospel.

References

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3. R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 1–12 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, *God’s Word for You* (Epsom, United Kingdom: The Good Book Company, 2018), 27.
4. R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 34–35.
5. Ajith Fernando, *Acts, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 90–91.
6. James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 45.