

Chapter 3

Relationship with God: Living By the Spirit

Opening Question: How do you experience living by the Spirit?

DEBRIEF

Have group members share how they did with last week's "Respond" step (Memorizing Scripture) and repeat the memory verse (Matthew 3:17) as they arrive.

OPENING

Open with prayer for the Spirit to illuminate the group during the study.

Last week we saw that Jesus' identity as a well-loved child of the Father enabled him to pass tests of integrity, preparing him to influence others in a God-honoring way. We saw the Spirit of God descend on him like a dove and then lead him into the desert. Because we are followers of Jesus, the Spirit lives inside us (1 Corinthians 6:19) and the way we grow in our relationship with God is to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). Keeping in step with the Spirit may lead us into trials, as we see from Jesus' experience in today's text.

HEAR THE WORD

Old Testament Context: Jesus refers to two Old Testament stories in our text from Luke. The first (1 Kings 17) is about a poor widow in Sidon, which is north of Israel. It was a Gentile region and not part of the land God had promised to Israel. Elijah the Jewish prophet was sent to the widow in a time of famine and drought, and he miraculously provided for her.

Second is the story (2 Kings 5) of Naaman, another Gentile, this time from Syria, which is also north of Israel. Naaman had leprosy, and God led him to Elisha, another prophet. God miraculously cleansed Naaman through washing in the Jordan River.

Isaiah 61:1 predicts that the Messiah will be anointed, that is, filled with the Spirit. He will be a light to the Gentiles (nations), not just to the Jews. Both Jesus and his hearers in Nazareth would have known this prophecy..

Matthew starts Jesus' teachings with the Sermon on the Mount. This story about Jesus at Nazareth in Luke gives another sermon Jesus made that also introduces his purpose. It is likely that Luke didn't record every word of the sermon. In Luke, this text immediately follows the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert.

Have someone read the text aloud.

Luke 4:14-30 (NIV)

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

²³ Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

²⁴ "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah

was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

OBSERVE (What does the passage say?)

1. Are there any unfamiliar words or phrases that need clarification?
2. After his experience in the desert, what does Jesus do in the power of the Spirit, and what is the reaction in Capernaum?
3. Now the scene turns to Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. Imagine that you are one of the town’s citizens listening to Jesus that day. You have known him all your life, and have heard that he has been healing people in Galilee. What do you see Jesus doing and saying?
4. Make a list of what Luke says the Messiah will do.
5. When Jesus says, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” he is saying, “I am the Messiah.” The people react positively at first. But Jesus knows what is in their hearts. They want to see miracles they have heard he did elsewhere. “Physician, heal yourself” in verse 23 is probably a proverb that means “Show us some proof.” No prophet is accepted in his hometown, Jesus says, and he reminds them about two prophets. What had these prophets done?

INTERPRET (What does the passage mean?)

6. What would the words Jesus read from Isaiah 61 have told Jesus’ hearers about his ministry? Does the list you made in question 4 surprise you in any way?
7. Why would the mention of prophets who were involved with Gentiles (foreigners) have angered the people at Nazareth so much?
8. Sidon and Syria are not that far away. What does Jesus want the people of Nazareth to understand?

APPLY (What does the passage mean to me and my community?)

9. Jesus was led by the Spirit through both his time in Capernaum and in Nazareth. What does his experience in both places show us about following the Spirit? How might returning to your home community be difficult?

RESPOND

Spiritual Practice: Lectio Divina

It is not always easy to know what the Spirit is directing us to do or say, especially if that leading seems like it might bring us into trials, as in this text. Lectio Divina (spiritual reading) introduces us to a way to listen to God by listening to his Word. We will practice it now, and each of us can practice it this week.

Lectio is less about reading a Bible passage as it is about letting the passage read you. Someone will read the passage three times, slowly; and then pause for 2-3 minutes in silence to give each person time to listen and reflect. Here is the pattern:

Begin by taking three long slow breaths and welcome the presence of God. It is best to sit upright in a chair. A passage has been selected by the leader.

1. **Read.** The passage is read and hearers are asked to consider what word or phrase seems to stand out or "shimmer." 2-3 minutes of silence.
2. **Invitation.** The passage is read again, and this time the hearers listen for why that word or phrase is meaningful to them; in the 2-3 minutes of silence, each listens for the invitation that the Spirit has for them through the word or phrase.
3. **Prayer.** The passage is read a third time, and this time each person asks for help to receive and pray through what the Spirit is saying to them through the word or phrase. 2-3 minutes of silence.
4. **Quiet.** This is a time to *stop* thinking or considering and simply enjoy the Presence of God in silence for 2-3 minutes, with a thankful heart and an open soul.

Participants can then be invited to share if they want to about what God has spoken to them. When all who want to have shared, the leader prays briefly to close the time. The whole process should take less than 20 minutes.

Try this together with Psalm 51:1-12 or 63:1-8 or 131. Pray for the Spirit to meet us as we practice Lectio Divina.

CLOSING

Close with group prayer for people groups mentioned in response to question 9.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This chapter was written by Katie Rawson of InterVarsity-USA. She became involved with international students as an international grad student doing research in Paris, where she was part of the GBU, the French student movement associated with the IFES. Katie has served among international students in the USA for over forty years, and she has a passion to see students living in and glorifying Jesus wherever God sends them. Marc Papai, Director of International Student Ministry for InterVarsity, commented on the study, as did YeChan Park from Korea, an InterVarsity campus minister in Hammond, IN.

Facilitator's Notes

Objectives of the Study

- To impress on students the necessity of listening to God in order to be led by the Spirit
- To help students understand that being led by the Spirit may bring us into trials
- To get Luke's view of what Jesus' peacemaking involved
- To see again that following the Spirit may lead to trials like those of Old Testament prophets

Notes on the Questions

If the study seems too long to do in your allotted time, focus on questions 3,4,7,8, and 9 and the Lectio prayer exercise. If you can bring in a Bible with maps or find some maps online to share, that might help people understand the references to other nations in this text.

Question 3: A Nazarene would have known Jesus from childhood, probably as a carpenter or carpenter's assistant. Women would have been friends with his sisters and men with his brothers. "Messiah" means "Anointed One" and is the Hebrew word translated into Greek as "Christ"; the Messiah was a deliverer who would restore God's reign, but many disagreed about what that looked like.

Question 4: Although Jesus read from the Hebrew, the New Testament is written in Greek. So the words given here are from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament text. This is why the words we read here don't completely match what we read in the Old Testament.

Question 6: You may remind your group of Chapter 1 when we studied the Beatitudes. How did the qualities that Jesus highlighted there, compare to what he says in Luke 4 about his ministry? It may surprise some people that Jesus focuses in both places so much on the poor, the meek, the lost, the imprisoned, the forgotten, and the blind.

Question 7: Isaiah 61 was a special chapter to Jews who read in it the vindication of Israel, that is, Gentile nations would be defeated and Israel restored to her former glory and peace. But Jesus turns this on its head by implying that God's favor was for non-Jews as well as for them.

Question 8: We are to see that people are set free both spiritually—when we share Jesus with them—and that physical needs are met. We must share God's grace and favor with those who are ethnically different from us, including traditionally hated groups.