

SESSION 1

Convicted by the Spirit

THE POINT

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin and points to the truth of salvation.

THE PASSAGE

John 15:26-27; 16:7-15

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Readers of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* know well the scene where Gandalf is dragged over the edge of a broken bridge. Gandalf held on long enough to charge his friends to fly away. Then he slipped away, presumably never to be seen again. Frodo and his friends escaped with their lives, but Frodo was heartbroken at the loss. Gandalf had been his mentor, guide, and encourager. Frodo was lost without him.

We understand loss. Whether it's the loss of a parent to death or the loss of a close friend because of a relocation, we know the pain of losing someone meaningful to us. The Gospels describe such a loss for the disciples. Jesus had become their guide, their hope, and their Lord. When He explained He was going to leave them, we sense their confusion and distress. After finding the one they believed to be the Messiah, how could the disciples continue without Him?

But Jesus told them He would not leave them alone. He would send His Holy Spirit to be with them. Jesus also promised that He will not leave us alone.

THE SETTING

Jesus had returned to Jerusalem, knowing that the time for His death was at hand (John 12:23-24; 13:1). He celebrated the Passover with His disciples and used the meal as a time to give them instructions regarding His departure. The Lord emphasized that the disciples were to remain in Him, keep His commandments, and love one another. He promised that when He left, He would send another Counselor to them.

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

JOHN 15:26-27

²⁶ “When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father — the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me.

²⁷ You also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud John 15:26-27 on page 15 of the PSG.

RECAP: Jesus spoke these words during His final Passover meal with His disciples in an upstairs room in Jerusalem (Luke 22:7-13). Jesus knew that in a few hours He would be arrested, tried, beaten, and crucified. He also knew His disciples would be scattered, confused, and afraid. So, as they finished the meal—a meal that Jesus instilled with new significance and meaning (vv. 14-20)—He began what some have called His farewell address. Of the many things Jesus told them that night, perhaps the most poignant moment was when He told them He was leaving them.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 15 of the PSG: “How would you describe the job of a counselor?”

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to give further background on the Holy Spirit’s role as Counselor.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 15 of the PSG. Jesus used two phrases to describe the Holy Spirit.

▶ **Counselor.** The Greek word is *parakletos* and means “one called or sent for to assist another,” “an advocate,” or “one who pleads the cause of another.”¹¹ The role of the Holy Spirit was to be present with those who belong to Jesus. The Spirit would provide the help they needed.

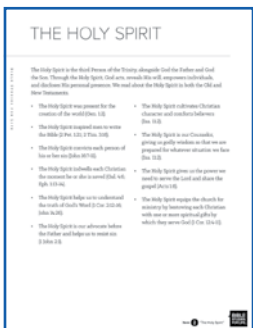
▶ **The Spirit of truth.** A key role of the Holy Spirit is to give testimony to the truth of Jesus. In John 5:31-39, Jesus identified six witnesses who testified about Him: (1) Himself; (2) John the Baptist; (3) Jesus’s miracles; (4) The Father; (5) Scripture; and (6) “another” (v. 32). Jesus identified the Holy Spirit as that Other. The Spirit would continue to testify to the truth of Jesus.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item 2**, “The Holy Spirit” handout, and distribute them to group members to give an overview of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Invite volunteers to read different aspects and attributes aloud.

TRANSITION: Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to us. In the next verses, we see that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How have you experienced the Holy Spirit’s counsel?



JOHN 15:26-27 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 26] Jesus promised He would send the Holy Spirit to His disciples. Jesus had earlier told His disciples that He would soon be leaving them to return to God the Father (14:1-14). He had promised the disciples that after He left them, He would send “another Counselor” to be with them forever (v. 16). Jesus further noted that this Counselor is the Spirit of truth. The world could neither know nor see the Spirit, but Jesus’s disciples would know the Spirit because the Spirit would remain with and in them (v. 17). A little further in the chapter, Jesus identified the Counselor as “the Holy Spirit,” noting that God the Father would send the Spirit in Jesus’s name. This Spirit would teach the disciples all things and would remind them of everything that Jesus had told them (v. 26).

After Jesus had predicted that His disciples would suffer hatred and persecution for their allegiance to Him (15:18-25), the Lord again promised He would send them the **Counselor** (*parakletos*). The term *parakletos* describes one who has been called alongside or sent to assist another person. It can be translated *advocate*, *comforter*, or *helper*. The Holy Spirit and Jesus’s disciples will testify to the world about the truth concerning Jesus, God’s Messiah, as well as of God’s coming judgment against sin. The Greek word translated **testify** (*martureo*) is used to describe the activities of both the Holy Spirit (John 15:26) and Jesus’s disciples (v. 27). It means to provide information or bear witness about a person or event based on personal experience and/or knowledge.

The Counselor would be sent by Jesus **from the Father**. The unity of the working of the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) can be seen by comparing this statement to Jesus’s earlier statement concerning the sending of the Holy Spirit in John 14:26. In that verse Jesus stated that God the Father would send the Spirit to His disciples in Jesus’s name. So closely united are God the Father and God the Son in their working that the apostle John saw no contradiction in saying that the Spirit

was sent by the Father and that the Spirit was sent by the Son.¹

The phrase **who proceeds from the Father** refers not to the nature of the Holy Spirit in relation to the other two members of the Godhead, but rather to the mission of the Holy Spirit in the world in relation to the plan of salvation. Just as God the Father sent God the Son into the world through the incarnation of Jesus Christ to accomplish the work of redemption through Jesus’s life, atoning death, and resurrection, so too God the Father has sent God the Holy Spirit to *testify* about Jesus. All three members of the Trinity work together harmoniously in accomplishing the plan of redemption. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth that Jesus Christ is God’s Messiah.

The Holy Spirit is **the Spirit of truth** (see 14:17). In John’s Gospel, *truth* (*aletheia*) usually has the meaning of reality, what is true in contrast to what is false. Jesus described Himself as “the way, the truth, and the life” (v. 6). He is the ultimate truth, “the revealed reality of God.”² The Holy Spirit communicates the truth, particularly about Jesus.

[VERSE 27] The work of the Holy Spirit is connected to Jesus’s disciples. The Holy Spirit would indwell the disciples (John 14:17) and would teach and remind them of everything Jesus had told them (v. 26). The disciples would **testify** to Jesus through the power and instruction of the indwelling Holy Spirit. They had been with Jesus **from the beginning**, most likely in this context referring to when they had been called to follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit would empower and aid the disciples as they testified about the gospel of Jesus Christ to a hostile world (Acts 1:8; see Matt. 10:17-19; 28:18-20). The same Holy Spirit that worked in the apostles still works in believers today as we live out our faith and testify about Jesus to a lost world!

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

JOHN 16:7-11

⁷ “Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don’t go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment: ⁹ About sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud John 16:7-11 on page 16 of the PSG.

RECAP: John 16 begins with Jesus explaining to the disciples how hard their lives would be. It may have been even more startling to the disciples when Jesus told them His departure would actually benefit them. The disciples had chosen to be with Jesus. They had left fishing boats, tax booths, families, and homes to follow Jesus. How on earth could His absence be to their advantage—especially if they would face the hardships He described?

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 17 of the PSG: “How are people desensitized to the Holy Spirit’s conviction?”

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to give further background on the Holy Spirit’s work of conviction.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 17 of the PSG. Jesus described the convicting work of the Holy Spirit that He would send. Convict is a legal term indicating that someone has decided a person is guilty of wrongdoing. We see this convicting work in three ways:

1. The Spirit convicts us of sin.
2. The Spirit convicts us of righteousness.
3. The Spirit convicts us of judgment.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use the Lamps option on page 25 of this Leader Guide to illustrate the importance of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that the Holy Spirit guides us in the truth.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Why is conviction of sin so important in our spiritual journey?

JOHN 16:7-11 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 7] A major part of the Holy Spirit's work is to convict people of their sin. Jesus again warned His disciples of the hostility they would face for being His followers. They were not to be surprised when they experienced persecution. The Lord also acknowledged that His words about His impending return to God the Father had made His disciples sorrowful (v. 6). However, Jesus encouraged them to look beyond their sorrow and understand that His departure was for their **benefit**. They could not receive the Holy Spirit (the Counselor) until Jesus fulfilled His mission on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father. It was not until He returned to the Father that Jesus would **send** His disciples the Holy Spirit.

[VERSE 8] Jesus identified a specific role that the Holy Spirit would play after the Lord sent Him into the world: **“When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment.”** The Greek term for *convict* (*elegcho*) has the general meaning of exposing or bringing something to light, but is used in the New Testament in the sense of exposing a person's sin and calling that individual to repentance. The term was also used in a legal setting, which like the use of *parakletos* suggests courtroom imagery. The Holy Spirit is the prosecutor who exposes the truth of the world's *sin*, God's standard of *righteousness*, and God's *judgment* of the world for their failure to meet that standard.

The Greek term for **world** (*kosmos*) carries a variety of meanings. In John's Gospel it usually refers to humanity. In this sense, it is the *world* that is the focus of God's saving work in Christ (John 3:16-17; 12:47). This *world* hates God and Jesus, His Son (7:7; 15:18). It is controlled by the devil, “the ruler of this world” (12:31; 16:11; see also Luke 4:5-6). Jesus, the Son of God and the Messiah, is victorious over this world (John 16:33), and believers remain in the world but are no longer of it (17:15-21); they testify concerning Jesus to the world (15:27; see also Acts 1:8).

[VERSE 9] The Holy Spirit's initial task is to convict the world of its **sin**; specifically, it's the sin of not believing in Jesus, God's Messiah. “He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:10-11). By convicting the world of its sin, the Holy Spirit calls individuals to recognize their sin, repent of that sin, and believe in Jesus as their Savior.

[VERSE 10] The second task the Holy Spirit performs is to convict the world concerning **righteousness** (*dikaiosune*). The basic meaning of *righteousness* is conforming to a standard. In the biblical sense, it has to do with moral integrity and goodness, of a person's actions being good and right. The standard of righteousness by which everyone is measured is God's own perfect righteousness, His absolute goodness and purity. John here may have been referring either to the people of the world's lack of righteousness or to Jesus's perfect righteousness. All the world stands condemned for their sin because all human beings fail to measure up to God's perfect standard of righteousness (Rom. 3:23). Taken as a whole, the verse points to Jesus's atoning death and resurrection.

[VERSE 11] Finally, the Holy Spirit convicts the world about the coming **judgment**. Those who reject Jesus will face God's judgment for their sins (Acts 17:30-31; see John 5:26-29). With His words, **“because the ruler of this world has been judged,”** Jesus identified the being who rules over the world that rejects God, Satan (12:31), and proclaimed that the devil too has been defeated and will face God's judgment for his sins. Through His atoning death, Jesus defeated Satan and the spiritual forces of evil (Col. 2:15). Later in His farewell address to the disciples, Jesus said, “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world” (John 16:33).

STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

JOHN 16:12-15

¹² “I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ Everything the Father has is mine. This is why I told you that he takes from what is mine and will declare it to you.”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud John 16:12-15 on page 18 of the PSG.

RECAP: Jesus had explained much to His disciples, but He knew they still could not understand all He wanted them to know. Until they saw the resurrected Jesus standing before them, they were not ready to hear. Jesus could only teach them as much as they could comprehend. When the Holy Spirit—“the Spirit of truth”—came and was with them, He would lead the followers of Christ “into all the truth.” The Spirit would teach them more about the character and person of Christ. Even though the disciples had observed Jesus up close, they could not have wholly understood who He is. They could not have been clear about the mission of Christ to the world. The Spirit would change that, however, revealing truth so that they could understand it.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 18 of the PSG: “**What practices or disciplines have helped you listen to the Holy Spirit’s guidance?**”

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to give further background on how the Holy Spirit leads us into truth.

RECAP: Another aspect of the Spirit’s ministry is to bring glory to Christ. His work among both believers and unbelievers is always to draw attention to Jesus, His incarnation, His saving work on the cross, and His coming return. The Holy Spirit is still the Spirit of truth! He still guides believers to understand Jesus and His mission to reach a lost world with the gospel.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 18 of the PSG: “**How can our group help one another stay grounded in truth?**”

DO: Direct group members to **Engage** with “Sweet Holy Spirit” on page 19 of the PSG (page 25 in this Leader Guide) to help reinforce “**The Point.**”

GUIDE: Refer back to “**The Point**” for this session: “**The Holy Spirit convicts of sin and points to the truth of salvation.**”

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are some obstacles to hearing from the Holy Spirit?

JOHN 16:12-15 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 12] Another of the tasks of the Holy Spirit is to bear witness to the truth concerning who Jesus is and guide His disciples through life in light of that truth. Jesus's statement, **"I still have many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now,"** has been interpreted in different ways. Some suggest that Jesus's words point to the comfort, assurance, and direction the Holy Spirit would provide to the disciples as they testified concerning Jesus and the gospel. The Spirit would also guide the disciples generally in how they lived out their faith.

Another suggested interpretation is that the coming Spirit's role would be to provide further details to the disciples concerning what Jesus had already revealed. In this case, what the Spirit would tell the disciples would come from Jesus. The Spirit speaks nothing on His own, but only what He receives from Jesus, which He then declares to the disciples (John 16:13-14). Some commentators see the meaning of Jesus's words as a combination of the interpretations.

[VERSE 13] Jesus again referred to the Holy Spirit as **the Spirit of truth** (see John 14:17; 15:26). *Truth (aletheia)* is a recurring theme in John's Gospel. Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, sent by God the Father to speak the truth (8:40,45-46); Jesus Himself is in fact the truth (14:6). Jesus's disciples are to live lives of holiness characterized by the truth (17:17,19).

The Holy Spirit's mission is to **guide** Jesus's disciples **into all the truth**. The term translated *guide (hodegeo)* can refer either to assisting someone in reaching his destination or assisting someone in the acquisition of knowledge and information. By *truth (aletheia)*, Jesus was referring to the truth concerning how a person through faith in the atoning work of Christ can be reconciled to God and live a life of obedience pleasing to Him (the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5-6). The fact that the Holy Spirit **will not speak on his own** but rather **whatever he hears** is clarified by Jesus's earlier words: The Spirit of truth, who is sent by God the Father in Jesus's name, will testify about Jesus,

teaching the disciples all things, and reminding them of everything Jesus had told them.

The Holy Spirit will also declare to Jesus's disciples what is **to come**. Interpreters are divided as to the meaning of these words. Some hold that Jesus was referring to prophecy about the future (foretelling), while others believe that Jesus's words refer to the Spirit's giving guidance to the disciples about how to approach the future in light of God's revelation of the gospel (forthtelling). Still others see Jesus's words as suggesting a combination of both interpretations.

[VERSES 14-15] Jesus reemphasized that the Holy Spirit would not speak on His own, saying, **"He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you."**

In the New Testament, the family of terms for "glory" are most often used when speaking of God's glory. To *glorify* God is to recognize and praise His power and majesty and splendor. The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus, the Messiah. He takes the message of salvation found in the gospel of Jesus Christ and declares it to the disciples of Christ, who then declare that same message to the world.

The interrelationship of the three Persons of the Godhead is emphasized in Jesus's statement, **"Everything the Father has is mine. This is why I told you that he takes from what is mine and will declare it to you."** Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had spoken of the nature of His relationship with His Father in similar language of closeness, **"Truly I tell you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son likewise does these things"** (5:19). Just as the Father sent the Son into the world as His agent of redemption, so now the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit into the world to aid believers in testifying about Jesus and living out their salvation in a hostile world.

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 528.

² Ted Cabal, "Truth," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. ed. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 1611.

