**Series OVERVIEW**

The Holy Spirit is present in the life of every Christ-follower. He wants to transform us into persons who reflect the love, grace, and justice of Jesus. He wants to empower us to restore God’s dream for this world. The question is: Are we open to the Holy Spirit?

To be “open” means both that we are receptive to the transforming presence of God and willing to be empowered by God. This three-week series will challenge us to be open to all God wants to do in us and through us.

We could challenge people to pray a prayer all three weeks of this series. Something like:

God, I am open to the Holy Spirit.

Make me ever-aware of your presence dwelling in me.

Speak to me, transform me, empower me to be more like Jesus.

God, I am open to the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

**NOTE:** This series is based on concepts and teachings in Scot McKnight’s book *Open to the Spirit.*

**Week 1 | March 24, 2019 | Open to the God in Us**

*Note: This is Child Dedication Weekend*

**SCRIPTURE**

John 14:16-17, Matthew 3:16-17, John 1:32-34, Acts 10:37-38

**Message Big Idea**

When we are open to the Spirit, we will experience life more and more like Jesus.

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. -John 14:16-17

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” -Matthew 3:16-17

32 Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.” -John 1:32-34

37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. -Acts 10:37-38

**Message Description**

The Holy Spirit is the most mysterious and misunderstood member of the Trinity. Who is the Spirit? We’ll start this message with a brief introduction to the Holy Spirit.

One of the most significant and intimate elements of the Christian faith is that the God has chosen to dwell inside every Christ-follower (John 14:16-17...briefly hit this, it will be a focus in Week 2). Stop and consider the immensity of that...the God of the universe has chose to take up residence in you and me!

Each of us is designed by God to be receptive to the Spirit. We are Spirit-ual beings. We are created with a spirit, which means we are created by God to be Spirit-receptive.

The French Philosopher and Jesuit Priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin once said: “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Yet, though we were created to be Spirit-receptive, sometimes we are Spirit-resistant. Sometimes we are not open to the Holy Spirit. Why? Several reasons come to mind:

* We don’t want the transforming presence of God because we’d rather stay the way we are.
* We don’t want the transcendent power of God because we’re afraid it will make us weird.
* We simply live unaware of the Spirit’s presence how he desires to work in our lives.

To better understand what it means to live “open to the Spirit,” we’ll look to the life of the one person in all of human history who was perfectly wide open to the Spirit: Jesus.

**The following are quotes and insights from *Open to the Spirit* by Scot Mcknight**

Chapter 2 - Jesus was Wide Open to God’s Spirit. We can draw from these ideas and Scriptures to understand how Jesus was open to the Spirit.

“Jesus was a real human being, which means he grew Spirit-ually by learning to be open to the Spirit...Jesus was a human, he needed to be empowered from day one with and by the Holy Spirit.” (p. 9-10)

All four Gospel writers record Jesus’ ministry beginning with the Spirit descending on him (in Matthew, Mark, and Luke this happens at his baptism). See Matthew 3:16-17 and John 1:32-33.

Luke 4:1-2. “Jesus was led into the wilderness for testing, and he succeeded in overcoming the temptations because he was filled with the Spirit.” (p. 12)

Jesus knew he was being empowered by the Spirit to carry out his ministry (“The Spirit of the Lord is on me…” Luke 4:18-19). (p. 13)

Jesus was wide open to the Spirit and that empowered him to perform miracles.

Peter said this about Jesus: “37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” -Acts 10:37-38

Gerald Hawthorne, the late Wheaton college professor: “The Holy Spirit was the divine power by which Jesus overcame his human limitations [such as being limited in knowledge and bound by physical space and human strength], rose above his human weakness, and won out over his human mortality.”

Gerald Hawthorne: “[Jesus] needed the Spirit’s power to lift him out of his human restrictions, to carry him beyond his human limitations, and to enable him to do the seeming impossible.” (p. 16)

“Jesus was a Spirit-drenched man. Jesus did what he did because he was wide open to the Spirit, more open to the Spirit than any human in history.” (p. 14)

To be a follower of Jesus is to be open to the same Spirit to whom Jesus was wide open. The good news is that the Spirit at work in Jesus is available to us. How do we begin to open ourselves to him?

We can start by praying this prayer…

God, I am open to the Holy Spirit.

Make me ever-aware of your presence dwelling in me.

Speak to me, transform me, empower me to be more like Jesus.

God, I am open to the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

We’ll need to make this idea of being open to the Spirit applicable for us in everyday life. What will happen if we are open to the Spirit? We will begin to see people as God sees people, we’ll be convicted by sin, we’ll be empowered to resist temptation, we’ll feel compelled to stand up against injustices, etc.

**Docent Requests**

* Quotes / brief explanations from theologians or spiritual writers speaking to the identity of the Holy Spirit. Who is he?
* Commentary on Matthew 3:16-17 and John 1:32-34 focusing on the meaning of the Holy Spirit coming on Jesus.
* There might be some good content to draw from in Forgotten God (Chan)
* How did the early church speak of the Holy Spirit? How did they understand His role within the local expression?

**Week 2 | March 31, 2019 | Open to the God Who Transforms**

*Note: Benevolence Offering Weekend*

**Scripture**

John 14:16-18, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 5:22-26, Ezekiel 36:26-27

**Message Big Idea**

When we are open to the Spirit, we will be transformed to become more and more like Jesus.

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. -John 14:16-18

18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. -2 Corinthians 3:18

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. -Galatians 5:22-25

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. -Ezekiel 36:26-27

**Message Description**

Most of us long to live a flourishing kind of life, one of growth and victory over sin and wisdom and clear direction. Yet most of us also know what it is like to try hard to live that kind of life and fall flat on our faces in failure.

If we long to flourish, then we need, as Scot McKnight says, “Someone who transcends our inabilities and who can transform our abilities. What we need is God’s presence in us, and this is exactly what Jesus promised to give to anyone who wanted to join his team of Spirit-empowered humans.” (Open to the Spirit, p. 56)

In John 14, Jesus promises to send the Spirit to his followers. In the original Greek, the word for “advocate” is Paraclete, which refers to a legal advocate and at the same time as someone who would accompany those for whom he is advocating. McKnight continues:

The Paraclete will be with us forever; the Paraclete is the Spirit of truth; the Paraclete counters the world’s system of death; the Paraclete is both ‘with’ us and ‘in’ us. But that’s not all. The Paraclete enables us to be obedient by teaching, reminding, and empowering us through his presence with us and in us. The Paraclete leads us into God’s peace. The Paraclete keeps us focused on Jesus.” (p. 58-59)

It is the Spirit of God, living inside of us, who transforms us from the inside out. Transformation is not about “trying harder,” it is about being open to the Spirit.

“To speak here of being open is not to focus on what we have to do, the conditions we have to meet, or the rules we must follow. Being open to the Spirit has nothing to do with struggling to meet a standard. Rather, to be open is an inside-out and upside down approach. To be open means God’s grace is at work in us through the Spirit. Openness is not a game of strategy and intense planning, like chess. Rather, being open is a dance in which we listen to the beat of the Spirit and respond to the Spirit’s promptings.” (p. 21)

Transformation requires an inner disarmament. A surrender. As New Testament professor M. Robert Mulholland Jr. once said: “Spiritual formation is the great reversal: from being the subject who controls all other things to being the person who is shaped by the presence, purpose, and power of God in all things.”

And over time, as we continue to be open to the Spirit, we will be transformed more and more to be like Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:13). As spiritual writer Dallas Willard said: “Spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”

This transforming work becomes visible in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Fruit is the natural result of a healthy tree (Jeremiah 17:7-8). We are not responsible for the fruit; God is. We don’t create the fruit; the Spirit does. Our role is to be open to the Spirit.

**Docent Requests**

* Commentary on John 14:16-18 focusing on the meaning of Paraclete.
* Commentary on Galatians 5:22-26.
* Quotes / material from spiritual writers on the fruit of the Spirit.
* Help us understand the work of formation/transformation.

**Week 3 | April 7, 2019 | Open to the God Who Empowers**

**Scripture**

Matthew 12:22-28, John 14:8-14, Acts 2:1-4, Ephesians 1:17-21

**Message Big Idea**

When we are open to the Spirit, we will be empowered to do even greater things than Jesus did.

22 Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. 23 All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?” 24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”

25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. -Matthew 12:22-28

8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” 9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority.Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. 12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. -John 14:8-14

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. -Acts 2:1-4

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. -Ephesians 1:17-21

**Message Description**

“Power” is valued in our modern world. However, most of those who chase after it are after their own good.

Jesus was the most powerful human who ever. Yet his power was not self-centered; it was Spirit-centered. The Spirit empowered Jesus to perform many wonders and miracles. In Matthew 12, Jesus heals a man who was blind and mute. In their jealousy, the religious leaders thought Jesus was directed by demons; but Jesus challenges them in effect saying, “Are you open to the Spirit of God working in me?”

The same Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus to perform miracles is available to you and me in the here and now. In fact, Jesus, himself, said that his followers would do the things he had been doing and “even greater things” (John 14:12).

When the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), new powers were unleashed in the lives of Christ-followers. What kind of powers do we have? (p. 93-94)

Power to exorcise demons and conquer evil through the Spirit.

Power to conquer disease through the Spirit.

Power to announce sins forgiven by Jesus and power to conquer sin through the Spirit.

Power to witness to the world and conquer spiritual death through the Spirit.

Power to speak other languages and conquer world divisions through the Spirit.

Most of us have a hard time grasping that the Spirit has given us the power to do these things. Some of us are afraid of this power. McKnight writes:

“If you are genuinely open to the Spirit, you will learn that you are open to a power unlike anything you’ve ever known...Many of us need to ponder why we are not more open to this kind of power. There is no reason to remain closed to it because the Bible speaks often of Spirit-prompted power and promises it to us.” (p. 91)

The apostle Paul prayed that the eyes of Christ-follower’s hearts would be opened so that they would grasp the “incomparably great power” available to us (Ephesians 1:17-21). McKnight adds:

“The Spirit empowers us beyond what we could do on our own and transforms our existing gifts, abilities, and talents to advance God’s glory. The Spirit takes us beyond ourselves, taking what we have and making it better and taking what we don’t have an making it something.” (p. 63)

This message could lead into an extended time of prayer where we have prayer teams pray for healing, freedom, etc.

**Docent Requests**

* Commentary on John 14:8-14 focusing on the “greater things” verse.
* Commentary on Ephesians 1:17-21 focusing on v. 19-20.
* Look at Christianity with Power by Charles Kraft for ideas, illustrations, and quotes that fit this message.
* What are the ways the Spirit leads us? How do we identify that?
* Stories of “being led” by the Spirit.
* Funny examples about following someone/something’s lead that didn’t end well.