**Open Week 1 – Open to the God in Us**

**Message Big Idea**: When we are open to the Spirit, we will experience life more and more like Jesus.

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

**Prop**: Work Glove and various other gloves.

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**Introduction: Unopened Gift**

*(Series Graphic)* I recently heard a story about a gift that went unopened for quite some time. 47 years to be exact. It’s a story about *(picture)* this guy right here…Adrian Pearce from Toronto, Canada. Apparently in 1970, his girlfriend at the time, Vicki Allen, gave it to him for Christmas… right after she broke up with him. Can you believe it? How many of us would toss that gift right then and there? Not Adrian. He held on to this unopened gift for nearly five decades. When the story got picked up, he and his wife decided to travel to British Columbia where he and his ex-girlfriend, Vicki, opened the gift together for a charity event. Do you want to know what the gift was? Of course you do! *(picture)* It was a book about love. How fitting, right? A book about love for the person you’re breaking up with.



Now, most of us probably know better than to hold onto a gift for fifty years, but what if I told you many of us are holding onto a gift that is infinitely more valuable? A gift that has the power to change everything about our lives?

The truth is… the Holy Spirit is a gift that many of us often leave “unopened.” He is one of three persons of God known as the Trinity, but is often the forgotten member. We tend to be more comfortable, more familiar with God the Father and Jesus the Son, but the Holy Spirit is a bit more mysterious to us and as a result, we often leave him forgotten altogether. That’s one of the reasons we wanted to embark on this journey, to open this gift of the Holy Spirit together. To not only learn things about him, but to be open to him moving in and through us in a new way as well.

**The Holy Spirit**

To kick us off, I’d like to give just a brief introduction to the Holy Spirit in three moves: Creation, Old Testament, and New Testament.

First, we begin... well, at the beginning. Here’s how the book of Genesis says it:

**“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.” – Genesis 1:1-3**

Right at the beginning of the story, we see that *(highlight ‘the Spirit of God’)* the Spirit was present with the Father and the Son “hovering over the waters.” The Spirit was not created, he has always been.

If we look at the full arc of the Old Testament, we learn a number of fascinating things about the Spirit. Listen to what the prophet Haggai says:

**“’Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty.‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’” –Haggai 2:4b-5**

It’s here the prophet reminds us that the Holy Spirit isn’t some ethereal force, but the person and presence of God sent specifically to dwell with his people.

Now, in Old Testament times, the Spirit often came upon specific individuals at specific times for specific purposes. Here’s a few examples:

* *(Genesis 41:38)* When none of the other wise men in Egypt could interpret Pharaoh’s dreams, the Spirit gave Joseph the ability to do it.
* *(Judges 15:14-15)* In the book of Judges, we read that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson giving him supernatural strength to defeat Israel’s enemies.
* *(1 Chronicles 28:12)* God’s Spirit gave King David specific plans for building the temple.

The Holy Spirit was present and active in the Old Testament, and plays an enormous role in the New Testament as well. After Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, the Spirit is the presence of God who takes up residence in the life of every follower of Jesus. In fact, this is what Jesus promised:

**“I will ask the Father to send you another Helper, *the Spirit of truth,* who will remain constantly with you.The world does not recognize the Spirit of truth, because it does not know the Spirit and is unable to receive Him. But you do know the Spirit because He lives with you, and He will dwell in you.” – John 14:16-17 The Voice**

Jesus wants his followers to understand that the Holy Spirit isn’t on some far off planet, nor is he some impersonal, nebulas force, but he is the presence of God that dwells in and around us! Stop and consider the immensity of that...the God who created the universe has chosen to take up residence in you and me!

I love how theologian N.T Wright describes it:

**“Those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God’s new Temple. They are, individually and corporately, places where heaven and earth meet.” – N.T. Wright**

**Spirit Resistant**

This has always been God’s plan. From the dawn of creation, human beings were designed to be **“Spirit-receptive”**. We are Spirit-ual beings made to live by the power of the Spirit. But the truth is…often we don’t live that way.

Maybe it would be helpful to think about it like this. *(Grab work glove)*

I have here a glove. It’s a work glove. It’s well made with leather and velcro. It’s tightly stichted together. It’s a solid glove, designed to do work. It’s made to lift and carry and hold. *(Throw glove on the floor)*

So I say to that glove, “Glove – get to work!” It doesn’t do anything… Hmm, maybe what this glove needs is a little encouragement. Let’s try that. “C’mon glove, you can do it! You were created to make a difference in the world!” Wow. Still nothing.

Well, maybe what this glove needs is some training. It needs to be apprenticed. That makes sense, right? So I’m going to do some 1:1 work with this glove right now. “C’mon glove, just put your thumbs and fingers together.. start there…” Still nothing.

Maybe what this glove needs is some fellowship? Get some other gloves to hang around it… *(Dump bag of gloves on the work glove)* Maybe that will do the trick. Still not moving…

Now, no analogy is perfect, but hopefully my point is obvious. Even though this glove was designed to make a difference in the world – it can’t do work until a living hand fills every part of it and does its work through the glove. That’s how life as a Christ-follower works. We are not able to live the supernatural life of God in our own strength. We have the capacity for it, we are made for it, but we don’t have the power for it until we are filled with the Spirit of God.

And while we are designed to be “Spirit-receptive,” far too often we are **“Spirit-resistant”**. There are a number of reason why this might be, but here are a few of my guesses:

* We don’t want the power of God because we’re afraid it will make us weird. We’ve all seen those “crazy Christians,” right? Sure, we want the power of God in our lives, but only if we can still blend in.
* Or maybe we just live unaware of the Spirit’s presence and how he desires to work in our lives. We’re resistant by default because we don’t understand what’s been given to us.
* Or could it be we don’t want the transforming presence of God because we’d rather stay the way we are? If we allow the Spirit to work in our lives, we might have to change.

Honestly, it’s that last one that I struggle with. I can know deep in my gut that I was created to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, but if I’m honest – more often than not, I’d just rather stay where I’m at, in my comfort zone. Being open to the Spirit of God can feel scary, especially if it means that he might lead us into the unknown.

But when we resist the Spirit, either consciously or subconsciously, it’s like leaving an incredible gift unopened. That’s exactly why we’re calling this series (Series Graphic) **“Open.”** In fact, the concept for this series came from a friend of ours, a local theologian by the name of Scot McKnight who wrote a book called, “Open to the Spirit.” We highly recommend it! Here’s the point: the Spirit is available to us. During this series we want to challenge one another to open ourselves to the Spirit. But how do we do that? Let’s start by looking at the one person who was perfectly open to the Spirit…Jesus.

**Jesus’ Humanity**

Now, maybe like me you’re thinking, “Of course Jesus was perfectly open to the Spirit… he’s Jesus! Doesn’t that just come with the territory of being the Son of God and all? Jesus’ Spirit-ness must have oozed out of him, like he would leave little Spirit footprints every where he walked, right?”

Well, not exactly. Perhaps one of the most amazing mysteries about Jesus is that while he is fully God, he is also fully human at the same time. To understand how the Spirit wants to work in our lives, it’s critical we understand the humanity of Jesus. It’s this human-ness of Jesus and the limitations he took on that help us understand who the Spirit desires to be in our own lives.

*(John 1:1-3 NLT)* As God, Jesus, too, was present at creation. John, one of Jesus’ first followers calls him “the Word” who gave life to everything that was created. But then look what happened: *(add)*

**“…the Word became human and made his home among us” – John 1:14a NLT**

Jesus, the living Word, left his throne in heaven, took on human form, and came to this earth to make his home here with us.

And yet, I think because we know he is God, many of us view Jesus as if he’s more like a character in (picture) the Matrix. Any Matrix fans out there? In one of my favorite scenes from the movie, Neo has to learn to fight, so they just upload it right to his brain:

**Video: Clip of Neo Downloading Kung Fu**

*(John 1:14a NLT)* Sometimes we think Jesus is like that… because he’s God, he just downloaded everything he needed. Baby Jesus kung fu!

But his experience on earth wasn’t like that! As we read through the New Testament, it is clear that Jesus took on humanity with all of its limitations.

After he was born, he had to learn from his parents how to walk and talk. He spent time in the temple learning and growing. He was taught the trade of becoming a carpenter. Luke, the historian, describes Jesus’ early years saying:

**“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” - Luke 2:52**

He had to grow and learn just like we do. He experienced everything that comes with being a human being.

* *(Matthew 26:38)* He had human emotions - struggling at times, like we do, with sorrow and grief and loneliness.
* *(Mark 13:32)* His human mind had limitations, just like ours. He said there were things he didn’t know.
* *(Matthew 26:39)* He had a human will – in the garden on the eve of his death, he knew what it was like to desire something different than his Father’s will.

Yes, Jesus is God, but he is also fully human. Author Scot McKnight summarizes all of this when he says:

**“Jesus was a real human being, which means he grew Spirit-ually by learning to be open to the Spirit.” –Scot McKnight**

**Jesus’ Baptism**

So maybe you are wondering, “Ok, if Jesus was in fact human, how exactly did he get empowered by the Spirit?”

*(Matthew 3:16-17)* All four Gospel writers describe the Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism. This was a pivotal moment that marked the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry on earth. Matthew tells us at the moment Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened, and the Spirit of God descended on him like a dove.

This imagery of a “dove” might be a connection back to the idea of the Spirit “hovering” over the waters at creation. What is happening at this moment conveys the idea of a “new creation.” Jesus is here to begin something new.

*(John 1:32)* And John writes that the Spirit “remains” on him. From this point on, Jesus is filled with the Spirit as it “remains” on him. With this newfound access to the Spirit’s power, Jesus’ earthly ministry is underway.

**Jesus’ Ministry**

And the first sign of this power? Overcoming temptation. Immediately following his baptism, Luke tells us:

**“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.” –Luke 4:1-2a**

Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness for testing, and he succeeds in overcoming the temptations because he is filled with the Spirit.

From this point on Jesus begins preaching and teaching. *(Luke 4:18-19)* He knew he was being empowered by the Spirit to carry out his mission. He told those in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me…”**

Jesus was wide open to the Spirit. He healed the blind, he freed the oppressed, he fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, he raised people from the dead…all through the power of the Spirit.

Peter, who was right beside him witnessing all of this firsthand, said this about Jesus:

**“You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 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**

Jesus humbly took on human weakness and limitations, fully and completely. What is different about Jesus is that he is the only human being who has every been fully and completely open to the Holy Spirit.

The late Wheaton college professor Gerald Hawthorne put it brilliantly:

**“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 did what he did because he was wide open to the Holy Spirit, more open than any other person in human history.

**Open to the Spirit**

Which makes me wonder… What might happen in our lives…and through our lives…if we became more like him?

To be a follower of Jesus is to be open to the same Spirit to whom Jesus was wide open. Over the next few weeks, we’re going to challenge one another to be open to this incredible gift God has given us in his presence. So let me start today with two challenges.

**Challenge #1: Be Open to Receive**

First, just be open to receiving the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is promised to every person who makes the decision to become a follower of Jesus. When you trust in Jesus and commit your life to following him, you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself promised this.

If you have not yet made the commitment to follow Jesus, you can do that today. Come talk to me or a Prayer Team member or stop at our Welcome center and we’ll help you take that step today. The Holy Spirit is promised to every person who makes the decision to become a follower of Jesus. The first challenge is to be open to receiving him.

**Challenge #2: Be Open to Respond**

And the second challenge… Be open to responding to the Spirit. We are designed for God’s Spirit to reside inside of us. Similar to a glove that is designed be filled by a hand, we are made to be completely filled by the Spirit. If you are a Christ-follower, would you be open to respond to the Spirit living inside of you?

Throughout this series, we’re going to challenge one another to pray a prayer that can help us grow in being open. We’re calling it the **“Open Prayer”** *(heading with prayer below)*. If you are willing to open yourself to the Spirit, would you pray this prayer out loud with me right now?

“**God, I am open to your 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 your Holy Spirit. Amen**”

As we begin this series, I want to encourage you to pray this prayer every day. We have made the prayer available as a downloadable wallpaper for your phone or computer. You can find it on our COMMUNITY app or our website. You can also find it printed in today’s program. Let’s commit to praying this prayer every day in the three weeks ahead asking God to open our hearts to his Spirit.

**Conclusion**

For a while now, the leadership here at Community has been talking about how we sense God wants to do a new thing in us and through us. We believe that God, through his Spirit, is doing this new things. His Spirit can transform us. His Spirit can empower us. His Spirit is an incredible gift. Let’s be a church that is open to receiving him and who continually responds to him.

**Communion Idea**

In Communion, we remember that Jesus was willing to respond to the Father’s will no matter the cost. Even though he realized it would cost him everything, he voluntarily chose to take our place in a punishment we deserved. His response cost him his life. Yet, he knew he was gaining so much more, a connection with the Spirit that fulfills any other desire this life could bring.

However, death couldn’t hold him and he rose again three days later. Its because of this victory over death that we now have access to this power. This same power that overcame death itself is now available to you and to me. As we take the elements, lets remember the price to make this all possible. The juice represents his blood that was shed and the bread represents his broken body. We are not all we were made to be apart from the work and presence of the Spirit of God. The invitation is here, will you receive it?