

WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP: JOINING IN WITH THE SPIRIT



Session 1: Joining in with the Spirit: The big picture of God's mission and the Spirit.

What does 'Joining in with the Spirit' cover?
What is the ultimate purpose of being a disciple (and life)?
What is God's mission?
What is the purpose and priority of the church?
What is the mission of the church?
Is mission about who we are or what we do?
What does the Holy Spirit do? How does He relate to the Spirit of Christ or God? Why is He "holy"?
How does the Holy Spirit create and sustain life?
How does the Holy Spirit re-create a broken world?
How does the Holy Spirit restore disciples?
How does the Holy Spirit make God's love and presence real?
How does the Holy Spirit commission and strengthen disciples?
Why is mission "joining in with the Spirit"?
What will help me want to "join in with the Spirit"?

What does 'Joining in with the Spirit' cover?



We have seen that the starting place for discipleship is 'Being with God'.

If you had sixty seconds in a lift to share with someone what being a Christian is, you might begin by saying that the good news is that we are made to live in the closest possible relationship with God forever (a covenant), and that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus has made that possible.

We have also seen that discipleship is about 'Becoming like Christ'. Jesus called disciples as apprentices who, as they spend time with the rabbi, take on His characteristics in a way that also makes them more fully themselves.

But as we have also read previously, the end point of discipleship is "Being with another person...in order to become capable of doing what that person does...An 'apprentice' of Jesus is learning from Him how to lead their life as He would lead their life if He were they."
(Dallas Willard)

The aim of any apprenticeship is to join in doing what the teacher does, to the extent that you are then able to apprentice others. One writer puts it, "The mark of a deeply mature man or woman, the mark of a very mature disciple of Jesus, and the mark of someone truly giving his or her life away is this: he or she is a person who blesses others and blesses the world, just as God does and just as Jesus did." (Ronald Rolheiser)

These five weeks explore how the purpose of our lives of discipleship is to "Join in with the Spirit" in the mission of God in the world. The first two sessions shape our understanding of what that mission is, and the last three unpack how we might live it out in the power of God's Spirit.

It is not hard to see that these two themes – mission and the Spirit – can be the source of a lack of confidence among Christians. We might have fears or doubts about mission because we see the church shrinking and becoming marginalised in society, and so wonder what 'effective mission' means.



Or we may be affected by a general suspicion towards those 'on a mission' in a culture suspicious of truth claims or perceived hidden agendas.

It may be easier for us as well to relate to God as our Father and Jesus as one of us, than to have confidence in the nature and purpose of the Holy Spirit.

Yet Paul promises that life in God's rule is a matter of "joy in the Holy Spirit". (Romans 14:17) It is impossible to grow in any aspect of our lives as disciples without God's Spirit – Jesus did nothing apart from the Spirit.

These five weeks aim to equip us to join in with God's mission in whatever ways He is calling us, and to do that with a **desire** for the Spirit, a **trust** in the Spirit's goodness, and an **openness** to the Spirit in our lived experience.

What is the ultimate purpose of being a disciple (and life)?



While we might have uncertainty about the idea of mission, or at least what it should look like, it is hard to find an organisation without a mission statement.

The word 'mission' means 'sent out' and such statements say what the purpose of the organisation is sent to do – what does it exist for?

At a fundamental level all human beings need a sense of mission. A psychologist called Viktor Frankl spent most of his life studying the question, What makes life meaningful? He had an argument with Sigmund Freud about it.

Freud thought that what humans most want is pleasure and comfort, and that we organise life around finding it. Frankl argued that what people desire is something deeper – a sense of purpose, mission and belonging. He said it is when we can't find meaning that we will try and numb ourselves with pleasure.

He developed a “therapy of meaning”, recommending that people look for three things:

- A project to work on, ideally which helps others.
- A way of looking for the ways in which the difficulties we face can be turned to good.
- Sharing our lives with a person or people who love us.

Frankl was put in charge of thirty thousand mental health patients who were at risk of suicide in the area around Vienna. He inherited a situation in which many people were dying. Yet by applying these principles, Frankl lost no one under his care to suicide. (Story told in 'Scary Close' by Donald Miller).

Jesus described his purpose in life as the true food He needed. “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34)

He envisaged those who were with Him and becoming like Him living highly fruitful lives, producing “a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (Matthew 13:8) The minimum is a thirty-times multiplication.

As we have already seen, He modelled a spiritually healthy life with as containing a balance of relationships – being with God (up), His close community (in) and then reaching out to others with the message and power of God's rule (out).

As those who 'learn as they follow' His disciples did not have to wait until they had been with Him or trained by Him for a period before being sent. In Mark's gospel Jesus' first call to Simon and Andrew is, “Come, follow me...and I will send you out to fish for people.” (Mark 1:17) He was using a common phrase from the time to describe those who would go and capture people's imaginations with teaching.

Being with Him naturally led to joining in with His work. When Jesus heals a demon-possessed man, He sends him to others straight away:





"Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." (Mark 5:19) In the next chapter Jesus sends out the twelve in pairs, with His authority, to do what He did. So "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." (Mark 6: 12-13)

Similarly, in Matthew's gospel we see this natural link where mission is part of discipleship. Jesus tells His disciples to pray for more workers for God's harvest (Matthew 9:37-38). Again we read how He sends the apostles out (the word apostle means 'sent one') to proclaim this message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near." And to act: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons." (Matthew 10: 7-8)

Jesus tells them that the logical outcome of receiving His life will be sharing that with others: "Freely you have received; freely give." (Matthew 10:8) Right from the beginning He acknowledges that to do this will not be easy: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16)

Ultimately, Jesus summarises the goal of discipleship as being able to apprentice others: "... go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28: 19-20) And to usher in God's kingdom, the good news of His rule, in every part of His creation: "He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15)

Pope Francis calls the church a "community of missionary disciples" because it is impossible to separate being with God and becoming like Christ from joining in with what God is doing. As God sent Jesus into the world, so He sends His disciples into the world.

Going back to our 60 second lift conversation, one way of sharing good news might be to say that being a disciple answers the deepest human questions of "Who am I?" and "What am I here for?"

As we have seen, who we are is found in the relationship of covenant-love that God wants with us and makes possible for us. What we are here for - our ultimate purpose in life as His disciples - is to join in with His work. Jesus didn't die and rise again to save us from something, but *for* something.

The 18th century missionary Zinzendorf had a motto: "Wherever at the moment there is most to do for our Saviour, that is our home."

Jesus' disciples dropped everything immediately because they knew that following Him would give them meaning they could never find themselves.

A doctor went to see a rabbi. "Tell me, rabbi, please," he said, "about God." The rabbi pulled out some books. She talked about Jacob wrestling the angel. She tugged at her braid and told a Hasidic story about how at the end of one's life, it is said that you will need to apologise to God for the ways you have not lived. "Not for the usual sins," she said. "But for the sin of living small."

Tom Wright says, "There is no such thing as an unwritten life, only a badly written one."

This module aims to help us allow God to write a story of meaning and purpose in our lives, so that we can live 'large' for what truly matters by joining in with Him.



What is God's mission?



The more we understand what is God up to in the world, and what Jesus understood He came to do, the more we will see in what ways disciples are called to join in with God.

Just as our picture of God is the most important thing in determining our relationship with Him, so our picture of the world will shape the purpose of our lives.

For example, some people's purpose is shaped by the idea that the world is just material and exists for our benefit – this tends to lead to us consuming as much as we can, while we can. Some believe that the direction of the world is about different civilisations are clashing with each other – this might result in adopting a purpose of being stronger than anyone else.

Some believe that the world is meaningless – this may result in seeing our mission as just existing in the moment. Our big story about the world and its purpose is the foundation for our mission in life.

In looking at Jesus life, death and resurrection, we have already seen how everything He did was rooted in God's mission. So how might we understand it?

In short, the mission of God is “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” Or, as The Message paraphrases it, God has “a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.” (Ephesians 1: 9-10)

He is working towards no less than, “the re-creation of the world, when the Son of Man will rule gloriously.” (Matthew 19:28) God is looking to “restore all things” (Acts 3:21) and “through (Christ) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:19-20)

While church growth or human moral improvement might be part of this, the mission of God into which Jesus invites us is far greater. It's no less than the restoration of human beings to the covenant relationship of love He made us for.



And the new creation of disciples who will join in seeing God's rule (kingdom of God) fully on earth, restoring everything that is broken until heaven and earth are reunited again.

These two themes of **covenant** relationship with God, and the life of God's **kingdom** on earth as it is in heaven are two of the most important strands of the story of God's world, and of our lives. Module 4, 'Knowing the Story and Bible Confidence' unpacks this story in more detail.

Here is a brief overview:

God is a creator, who brings new life. He creates the heavens – not a separate place we go to when we die but a description of God's space, the realm of spiritual realities we cannot see – and the earth – the space where human beings exist.

From the beginning, God's intention is that heaven and earth should overlap and be in harmony. Human beings are created as the pinnacle of God's creation, made to live in the closest possible relationship with Him, and given the royal dignity of being able to join in with God's creative work by ruling.

But the experience of human beings has two realities. We are made in the image of God, and to be a blessing in God's creation.

But the decision to make ourselves the ones who decide what is good and evil, rather than obeying God (described in the story of Adam and Eve but played out again and again in history) drives us away – separating heaven and earth.



As we have seen, “Sin is the one doctrine we can’t dispute.” (G.K. Chesterton) We live with the consequences of this separation in lives which fall short of our human calling, relationships between God and people, and between human beings, in which trust is broken, and in which things which are created to be a blessing can easily be twisted out of shape.

This “fall” affects the “heavens” as well as the earth, with much of the evil and pain we face being influenced by the unseen rebellion of spiritual forces. Death results. The story of the world is God’s mission to restore what is broken, so that heaven and earth can once again be reunited, and human beings can recover our original relationship and calling. So God re-creates, at first by calling a people to be a blessing to the nations. A new people.

For the Jewish people, the purpose of life is joining in with God’s restoration of the world. In order to be with them, God establishes a Temple in the midst of His people – initially a moveable tent called a tabernacle, and later on a physical building in Jerusalem. This is the place where His presence (heaven) overlaps with ours (earth) and so both tabernacle and Temple were decorated in a way that made the people remember the initial garden in which they were made to be completely at one with God.

At the centre of these dwellings is the Holy of Holies – the space in which God dwells. It can only be entered once a year by the high priest. This is because God remains holy, and His people remain cut off from Him by sin. So around the Temple God gives a system of animal sacrifice, in which the lives of animals are given to absorb the cost of people’s sin, though not in a permanent way.

Despite this being an incomplete solution, it provides a way for God and His people to continue in relationship. God’s love for His people, and His calling on their lives to be a blessing remain, but again and again Israel keep choosing not to obey, leading eventually to their exile from God’s Promised Land – they are taken into captivity. Yet through this time God appoints certain people to speak His words to Israel – calling them back to be people who will live holy lives, marked by justice and right-living, restoring the earth.

Over time this vision emerges as a promise of God’s kingdom being fully established again – a time when God’s heavenly rule will be completely at one with the earth.

Prophets speak of someone anointed with God’s Spirit (Messiah) who will bring God’s kingdom to earth once again, healing lives, changing people’s hearts so that they will want to do what God desires once again, and enabling them to be with and worship God everywhere.

Jesus is this anointed one. He is called the “Word made flesh” who sets up God’s tabernacle among us (John 1). He is the Temple – the place of God’s full presence.



In His life and wherever He goes He creates places where heaven and earth overlap once again, those who are sick are restored, the oppressed are set free, and people's hearts are turned towards God in love.

Through Jesus God's mission is re-established. Jesus begins to restore what is broken, but also points to a time when this healing will be complete, and God will be all in all.

He sent His disciples to join in the same work:

“

Go! I am sending you... When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'” (Luke 10: 8–9)

Jesus also becomes the sacrifice – the Lamb of God – whose death means that evil, sin and death are absorbed and defeated, not as a temporary solution, but possible for all people, time and space.

As God's covenant people, Jesus' disciples are called out (the meaning of church) to continue this work of the reconciliation of all things and people.

They are given God's presence (Spirit) to begin to rule creation once again in His image. While they long to see God face-to-face, their hope is not to leave the earth when they die, but to be with God forever in a renewed creation, in which heaven and earth overlap completely once again, and humanity rule in the love and power of God.



The end of the Bible looks forward to a time when this restoration will be complete. While they look for this renewed creation, joining in with the restoration God began most fully in Christ, they still experience the 'death throes' of evil, chaos and mortality in the world.

The world itself is still groaning like a woman in childbirth longing to be “liberated from its bondage to decay”. God's mission of restoration continues in the context of this struggle, but with the hope and vision that one day the kingdom will be fully “on earth, as it is in heaven”.

This is the mission God that shapes a disciple's life, and the life of God's people. It helps us know who we are but also what we are here for.

The handout 'Being completely secure in who you are' unpacks these two questions and provides a group or mentoring resource.

What is the purpose and priority of the church?



At the heart of the church is of course worship. We exist to worship God and will enjoy Him forever. We are “God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

That is why we begin the Way of Discipleship by 'Being with God' in worship. But our worship has always been expressed by responding to the call to join in with God for His purposes.

Worship and mission are intertwined, the one naturally leading to the other. We are not a tribe who look after ourselves, but to live out God’s purposes in the world. “The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning.” (Brunner).

It is not that the church has a mission, but that “the mission of God has a church”.

The more we have a sense of joining in with God’s mission, the more we will be being true to the nature of what “church” means.

A recent report talked about the need for us to be a “Mission-Shaped Church”. This is why the wartime Archbishop, William Temple, famously said, “The Church is the only organisation that does not exist for itself, but for those who live outside of it.”

The Methodist Church defines what church is very similarly to Pope Francis: “a discipleship movement shaped for mission.”

This neatly describes the relationship between the three words, church, mission and discipleship, in a way that is sometimes counter-intuitive to our expectations.

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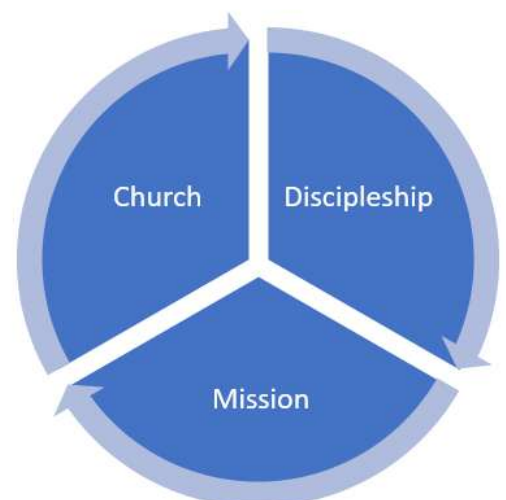
Our task is not grow the church – Jesus said “I will build my church.”

Neither is it to do God’s mission for Him – we are to join in with where He is at work.

Our commission is to “make disciples.” (Matthew 28)

As we grow in discipleship, we will be paying attention to where God is at work and equipped and led to join in with His mission.

And as we join in with His mission, the community of worshipping people called out (church) by God will be shaped around His purposes.



What is the mission of the church?



When Puccini was fairly young, he contracted cancer, and so he decided to spend his last days writing his final opera, *Turnandot*, which is one of his most polished pieces.

When his friends and disciples would say to him, "You are ailing; take it easy and rest," he would always respond, "I'm going to do as much as I can on my great master work and it's up to you, my friends, to finish it if I don't."

Puccini died before the opera was completed. Now his friends had a choice. They could for ever mourn their friend and return to life as usual-or they could build on his melody and complete what he started. They chose the latter. And so, in 1926 at the famous La Scala Opera house in Milan, Puccini's opera was played for the first time, conducted by the famous conductor Arturo Toscanini.

When it came to the part in the opera where the master had stopped writing because he died, Toscanini stopped everything, turned around with eyes welling up with tears, and said to the large audience, "This is where the master ends."

And he wept. But then, after a few moments, he lifted up his head, smiled broadly, and said, "And this is where his friends began." Then he finished conducting the opera.

Mission is 'to continue the opera' – to faithfully do the same things that Jesus did, in the manner in which He did them, for the same ultimate goal.

The creation-wide restoration mission of God has many dimensions, and there have been many attempts to define it. In 1984 the Anglican Church created a "mission statement" and these were fully adopted in 1996.

The statement says: The mission of the church is the mission of Christ:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.
3. To respond to human need by loving service.
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

While there may be other ways of expressing the content of mission, these principles emphasise:

The priority of God's kingdom. The group which developed it wrote, "The first mark of mission, is really a summary of what all mission is about, because it is based on Jesus' own summary of his mission.





Instead of being just one of five distinct activities, this should be the key statement about everything we do in mission."

The creation-wide scope of mission. Leslie Newbigin wrote, "We have to keep steadily in view the fact that what the gospel offers is not just hope for the individual but hope for the world. Concretely I think this means that the congregation must be so deeply and intimately involved in the secular concerns of the neighbourhood that it becomes clear to everyone that no one or nothing is outside the range of God's love in Jesus."

The social impact of mission involves reversing of all the evil consequences of sin, against both God and neighbour. It is not just restoring an individual's relationship with God.

The way mission gets rid of the sacred/secular divide. God is interested in restoring every part of life. Mission is not something we only do as church-based activities together - we are seeking God's rule in all the scattered places we find ourselves in our everyday faith occupations.

The breadth of God's mission is so big that no-one can do it on their own - mission is rarely a solitary adventure - we need each other.

Mission is more about going to others and inviting them to join in, rather than expecting them to come to us. As Jurgen Moltmann says, "... in place of the spread of our ... churches we have to put a passion for the kingdom of God. Mission doesn't mean 'compelling them to come in!' It is the invitation to God's future and to hope for the new creation of all things: 'Behold, I am making all things new' - and you are invited to this divine future for the world!"

Throughout these sessions we will explore these five marks more specifically, looking at what it means in our lived experience to:
join in with God's mission in our everyday faith and workplaces (session 2),
share faith and make disciples (session 3),
serve our neighbours being a church that goes to others (session 4)
and seeking to challenge injustice and look after God's world (session 5).



Is mission about who we are or what we do?



In trying to summarise the nature of the church, one bishop described us as an **instrument** of God's reign – in other words – one of the (main) ways He sees His purposes on earth. But he also used two other words. The church is a **sign** of God's reign, and a **foretaste** of His rule.

In other words, by looking at the church people would see a sign of what it looks like when God is 'in charge' of a community – in the way we love one another and act.

And they would have a foretaste of what the world will look like when God is fully present in the healing and restoration the church seeks to bring.

God needs a visible Christian community that functions as the body of Christ who live out His mission. Mission is not just something we do; it is who we are.

The French philosopher Pascal said that it is virtually impossible to try and persuade people of the truth of Christianity, unless the more important thing is in place – to make people wish that it were true because they see the vision of what it offers lived out in real people's lives.

The writer Hugh Halter says this about God's mission in our time:

“The incarnational big-story gospel will require a place of discovery, where people will be able to see the truth before they hear about it. This place will not be location but a community of people who are inclusive of everyone.

These people will be making eternity attractive by how they live such selfless lives now and will be modelling life in a new kingdom in ways that will make it easy for other people to give it a try...Success is faithfulness. The rest is up to God.”



What does the Holy Spirit do? How does He relate to the Spirit of Christ or God? Why is He “holy”?



How is it that God can be with each person, and in each place, throughout time and space? How can God act in the world?

From the beginning of the Bible, it is through the Holy Spirit that God carries out every aspect of His purposes. It is the Holy Spirit who is the agent of God's mission and the way in which God is present to us.

We saw that in the story of the Bible God's mission is to bring life into being, restore and recreate what is broken, be in personal covenant relationship with His people, and appoint us to live out His purposes.

All of these things happen by the Holy Spirit. He is God's personal and empowering presence. No aspect of God's mission is possible without God's Spirit.

As Christians, we are familiar with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is important to know that this is a continuation and expansion of the work of God's Spirit throughout all of history.

It is with the arrival of Jesus that the Spirit appears in the fulness in which we know Him. While the Spirit is referred to 126 times from Genesis to Luke, from John onwards He is spoken of 196 times.

It is good to know as well that the Holy Spirit is not only an invisible “power”, but a person who helps, strengthens, cries out from within our hearts, knows our own spirits, prays for us, works things together for good, and creates the character of God in us, known as the fruits of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is more than personal, but also not less than personal.

While it has been more common to refer to the Spirit using the masculine 'He' (see <https://www.churchsociety.org/resource/is-the-holy-spirit-to-be-referred-to-as-she/>) in some cases the words used are feminine or neuter. This opens us up to knowing that the character and action of God's spirit is beyond any gendered ideas we might bring.

The Holy Spirit is a divine and a distinct person. Yet the Holy Spirit only works to point us to the Father or the Son. He is 'God behind the scenes', acting anonymously, meaning we are never directly aware of the Holy Spirit, but His presence will make us more aware of the Father or Son. Jesus said the Spirit will “testify about me.” (John 15:26)

Augustine called the Holy Spirit the tie of love between the Father and the Son which He then pours out on us, drawing us into the circle of love and making God's love real to us.





He...”proceeds from the Father and the Son... and makes Christ known in the world.”

That is why people in the Bible do not pray to the Holy Spirit, and such prayer was rare in the life of the early church. In the New Testament the normal pattern is to pray in the Spirit, not to the Spirit.

At the heart of God’s Spirit is a wonderful reminder of God’s self-giving agape love – the desire to make the Father and Son known above all.

In one way, if we find the Holy Spirit hard to relate to, it is perhaps a sign that what really matters is that He is helping us see the Father, through the Son, even more clearly.

The Holy Spirit never comes to us as a separate force, but always makes our vision of God the Father and Son clearer, and our experience of their fellowship more real.

Only by the Spirit could we possibly hope to have the life of our transcendent three-in-one God in us. So even while we honour the Holy Spirit as a distinct person it is consistent to know the Spirit in our lived experience as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Paul talks about the “Spirit of Christ” three times, and the “Spirit of God” 16 times. Nevertheless, as the Bible progresses there is an increasing move to celebrating the Spirit as “Holy” as the normal way of addressing the Spirit.

For example, whereas the Old Testament talks about the “Spirit of God or the Lord” 67 times, this phrase is used only 25 times in the New Testament. In contrast, the name “Holy Spirit” is used just 7 times in the Old Testament, but 88 times in the New.

The Spirit’s holiness is not about distance, but about a uniqueness – in being the only one who creates life as a distinct person.





How does the Holy Spirit create and sustain life?

From the second verse of the Bible, it is the “Spirit of God” who brings order out of a totally uninhabitable world of darkness and chaos, bringing life and meaning to the creation (Genesis 1:2) and human beings. (Genesis 2:7)

There are a number of images used to describe the presence and work of the Spirit, and the first is that of breath. It is God’s breath (breathed out as He speaks things into life) which enables human beings to come to life, giving us a 'spirit' – a divine life-spark.

The same Spirit-word of breath can also mean wind – the invisible force that brings energy to the whole world and makes them move. The writers see the Spirit’s work in bringing life to humans and creation as one and the same.

It is through God’s personal Spirit that He creates and sustains animals, plants, and the movement of the stars, and gives humans a spirit. Through His personal “breath”, His own personal life-giving power, God is present to the world, both creating it and sustaining it.

It is through His “breath” and “wind” that God can be present in the world. Wind and breath remind us of power and gentleness, movement and peace – these are the characteristics of God’s presence. Wind also cannot be contained by anything, and so is a reminder that the work of God’s Spirit will always be bigger and wilder than we can express.

In the New Testament this theme continues. Each Gospel emphasises how Jesus’ work is connected to the creative work of the Spirit. The bird hovering over Jesus at His baptism recalls the Spirit over the waters at creation, bringing new life.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that “no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit, gives birth to spirit. ... The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3: 5-8)

When the Spirit comes on all the disciples at Pentecost they are all able to speak different languages, but be understood. In a twenty-first century multicultural environment, it is crucial for us to see from this that the Spirit creates in such a way to bring people together but celebrate all their differences at the same time.

The creative work of God’s Spirit always does what human beings struggle to do – hold together unity and diversity.

For disciples the mission of God to bring life to creation including human beings can only be by the Holy Spirit. And the mission of God, from the beginning, is seen in every part of His creation.





How does the Holy Spirit re-create a broken world?

After His resurrection when Jesus appears to His disciples “He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" (John 20:22) Through the Spirit, God continues to create and re-create what has been broken.

The Holy Spirit is Creator, but also the Redeemer throughout the Bible, working to draw us to God's future and give us a foretaste of the restoration we long for.

If the first creative work of the Holy Spirit makes us God's creatures, the second work is to reverse the effects of sin by restoring us as His children, growing into who He made us to be, wanting to obey Him.

In the Old Testament, particularly after Israel goes into exile, there is a longing for God's Spirit to be restoring His people. The prophets through whom the “Spirit of Christ” speaks (1 Peter 1: 10-11) look to a time when God will send His Messiah - which means the one anointed by His Spirit - and bring salvation.

The main prophecy about this anointed one is in Isaiah. God promises a King on whom the Spirit of the Lord will rest (the Spirit is mentioned four times) who will bring righteousness, justice and faithfulness to the earth, bringing about a renewed creation. This Spirit will give wisdom and understanding. (Isaiah 11: 1-10)

Ezekiel looks for a day when God will change all His people from the inside out. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you...And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.” (Ezekiel 36: 26-28)

God will bring people who are lost and spiritually dead back to life by His Spirit. Ezekiel speaks of all that the Spirit does, using the words breath, wind and spirit:

“I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life...‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live’...I will put my Spirit in you and you will live...” (Ezekiel 37: 1-14)

This is the high point in describing what the Spirit does - it is only by the Spirit that we can be truly re-created.

As we have seen, the New Testament uses the same ideas and language as the Old (Jesus 'breathing on the disciples', the Spirit hovering over the water, the sound of wind at Pentecost) to describe the work of the Spirit in recreating.

But with the arrival of the anointed one, this new creation breaks into the world in a decisive way, expanding God's work of restoration.





The Holy Spirit's power is linked to the power of Jesus' works and His resurrection. "Christ Jesus... who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 1: 1-4)

We see the Spirit's re-creation in bringing the wholeness of God's kingdom to broken people. In His life and ministry, the healing and deliverance which Jesus brings is done "by the Spirit of God" (Matthew 12:28)

We see this the Spirit's re-creation in the defeat of the power of death. The Spirit has enormous power to bring new life, being involved in raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus "was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." (1 Peter 3:18)

And we see this in the action of the Holy Spirit as being a guarantee, and a foretaste of the complete healing of all things. The Holy Spirit has begun His work and will not stop until the whole creation is liberated.

Because we live at a time when God has defeated the power of death and evil, but we are yet to see that victory completed, we still long for that day.

Paul says that "we groan inwardly as we wait for the...redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:23) Meanwhile, our experience of the Holy Spirit is as a down-payment of that future promise.

We have received the first-fruits of the Spirit (Romans 8:23). Pentecost came at a festival of the first-fruits of the harvest that is to come. The Holy Spirit is at work now, re-creating the world and us. God's mission through the Spirit is, as much as possible, to make His future kingdom a reality today.

In God's new creation, there will be no racism, or hypocrisy, or lies, or sickness, or environmental harm, or fear...and so our mission is to partner with His Spirit to see that healing become real today.

For disciples the mission of God to bring restoration which points to God's future can only be by the Holy Spirit. And the mission of God restores whatever or whoever is broken in any part of creation.





How does the Holy Spirit restore disciples?

We have already seen, in looking at how our characters are changed to become more like Christ, that the having our minds renewed by what we focus on and having a community in which we can be both encouraged and exposed matters.

But we have seen how a key discipleship principle is that it is our practices of being with God which help change us indirectly as they give space for the Holy Spirit to change our hearts – the place of our deepest desires.

The new creation work of the Holy Spirit is seen in the world, but also in disciples being “new creations”, who are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

We are on a journey to become like Christ, and journey which will only be complete when we are resurrected. We are not what we were, but we are not yet what we shall be.

The Holy Spirit is working to change us from the inside out, to grow the character of Jesus in us (the fruit of the Spirit).

Whereas in the Old Testament people received the Holy Spirit for particular tasks, in Christ the Holy Spirit lives in us for a *lifestyle*. A word for this process is **sanctification** – of the journey being made more holy – set apart for God – throughout our lives.

Just as the Holy Spirit does the 'heavy lifting' in our transformation, even in our being able to put our trust in Christ most of the work belongs to the Spirit.

“No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Our wills are too affected by sin and brokenness to be able to manage on their own.

As one writer puts it, “What matters is not the strength of our spirituality, but the grace of the Spirit of God.”

The encouraging thing in terms of sharing faith is that just as we 'join in' with God's mission in its wider sense, our first need is to see where the Spirit is already at work in people's hearts.

For disciples the mission of God to make disciples more like Christ can only be done through the work of the Holy Spirit in us.





How does the Holy Spirit make God's love and presence real?

Only by the Holy Spirit can the love of God be made real to us, and can we be secure in our identity as His covenant children. The Spirit is God's personal presence.

We reflect this every time we gather for worship.

For example, during Holy Communion we begin by saying, "The Lord is here. His Spirit is with us."

During our thanksgiving prayer there is a particular moment when we call upon the Holy Spirit to be present to us through the bread and wine: "Send your Holy Spirit, that these gifts may be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are looking for an encounter with God through the Spirit.

Jesus promises the Spirit to His disciples as someone who will come alongside them, like a legal defender (paraclete) when He is physically absent. John writes most about the Holy Spirit as being the "Spirit of Truth" who will guide them, teach them, strengthen them when they are persecuted, remind them of Jesus' teaching, and reveal Jesus to them. (John 14-16)

In Romans Paul says it is the Spirit who leads God's children, reassuring them that they have been adopted by touching their spirits, and helping them call out to God with the respectfully intimate name, "Abba Father." (Romans 8)

In one sense, every human being is God's child. But the usual understanding of our intended status before God is as being His children "in Christ". The "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" brings God's love to us, coming to us in our most difficult places and weakness, even helping us to pray when we cannot: "the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans." (Romans 8: 26) Prayer is not something we begin, but something we join in.



The Holy Spirit makes us stand where Jesus stands with the Father, drawing us into the same circle of love.

Just as the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of God's final new creation, so His presence is the seal of our status before God. In Ephesians Paul says that we our freedom through Christ before God was "signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit."

He is like a "signet from God" guaranteeing God's promise for our future. (Ephesians 1: 13-14)

During a confirmation service the words a bishop prays over the candidate, "Confirm, O Lord, your servant with your Holy Spirit", are emphasizing this sense of being marked with God's promises.

For disciples the mission of God means trusting the Holy Spirit's work in us before we join in with Him.



How does the Holy Spirit commission and strengthen disciples?

The Holy Spirit appoints and commissions God's people to carry out tasks and gives the strength and wisdom to put them into action. Again, as the story progresses, we see that the way the Spirit of God does this in the Old Testament expands and is fulfilled in the New.

In the Old Testament the Spirit usually gives people power for certain tasks, at certain times – we have seen the examples of Joseph and Bezalel. God empowers Moses, and through him, seventy others: “Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again.” (Numbers 11:25).

Balaam prophesies by the Spirit of the Lord. (Numbers 24:2) There is a common thread that it is the Spirit that enables people to prophesy throughout the Old Testament. As well as giving life, God's Spirit also influences people with God's wisdom and ideas, giving them insight they could not naturally have, helping them to speak His words.

Later prophets like Micah derive their ability to challenge God's people from the Spirit: “But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.” (Micah 3:8)

Linked to this the Spirit of the Lord coming on people is often associated with the task of leadership. “The Spirit of the Lord came on (Othniel), so that he became Israel's judge...” (Judges 3:10), on Gideon so he can lead the Israelites. (Judges 6:34)

They are given the wisdom and the power to carry out God's work. They are helped to do things not humanly possible (like Samson being able to tear a lion to pieces with his bare hands! (Judges 14:6)).

Anointing with oil becomes a further sign of the Spirit's presence, particularly linked to people being appointed and strengthened. Saul and David both have oil poured over their heads by Samuel when they become king. “So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David.” (1 Samuel 16:13)

When the Spirit of the Lord influences a person, rather than taking away or overriding their human talent or gifting, it fulfils it, making more of their strengths and qualities. The more they are empowered by the Spirit, the more fully human they become, the better a king, or leader, or artist, or high priest, or prophet.



So from the beginning, God's Spirit anoints specific people in particular ways. Yet there is a promise that one day God "...will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." (Joel 2:28-29)

Jesus announces and demonstrates that His whole ministry is through the power of the Holy Spirit (see next section).

But it is after His ascension that Joel's prophecy is fulfilled. The Holy Spirit is poured out on all disciples at Pentecost, empowering them to continue Jesus' work, not through particular anointed individuals, but as a whole community.

They are now able to be "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19), in whom God's Spirit remains. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers and strengthens the disciples for God's mission.

Jesus promises His disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; And you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1: 8) The Holy Spirit is "not a spirit of cowardice, but rather of power" (2 Timothy 1:17) and enables them to speak "the word of God with boldness". (Acts 4:31)

In the same way that specific individuals were gifted by the Spirit in the Old Testament, that promise of gifts is expanded so each one receives ministries and gifts to carry out Christ's work.

At Pentecost, Peter quotes Joel's words to show this is the fulfilment of that promise. Because the Spirit now comes on a community, Pentecost is often known as the birthday of the church.

For disciples, this survey of the work of the Holy Spirit demonstrates how in every single thing, and in every way, whether in the life of the Church or in the life of an individual disciple, the power comes from the Spirit, or not at all.

By understanding this we might grow in a desire for the Spirit, a trust in the Spirit's goodness, and an openness to the Spirit in our lived experience.





Why is mission 'joining in with the Spirit'?

Our tour through the Bible shows just how much the “chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian church is the Holy Spirit. He is the director of the whole enterprise. The mission consists of the things that he is doing in the world”. (Bishop John V. Taylor)

In recent decades there has been a heightened awareness that as disciples we “join in with the Spirit” because He initiates God’s work in the world. Over the next sessions we explore what this means in our lived experience.

The incredible gift is that it is not our job to do God’s work for Him – we just get to join in! As one writer put it,

“

“I used to ask God to bless what I am doing. Now I find out what God is blessing and go there.”

If Jesus is our model for mission, it is instructive to see how much He saw Himself as being led by His Father in it: “...the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing” (John 5:19) and how His whole life and ministry are in the power of the Spirit.

Jesus did all that He did as a human being empowered by Holy Spirit. Just the same as us. He is the anointed one, whom Isaiah prophesied would anoint to bring good news (Isaiah 61). Famously, Jesus quoted these words about Himself at the start of His ministry.

All the gospels, particularly Luke, emphasise how Jesus is led by and speaks by the Spirit.



The Holy Spirit is in the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35), comes on Him at His baptism (3:21-22), leads Him into the wilderness (4: 1-2), comes upon Him at His Transfiguration (9: 28-36) and is promised by Him to His disciples (24:49).

The gospels bring another image into play alongside breath, wind, and oil. Jesus is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit and who “full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan.” (Luke 4:1)

The Spirit fills Jesus and His disciples as if they are empty containers, and soaks them with His power. It is not surprising that for the early Christians it was natural that they “prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8: 14-17), that Ananias prayed for Saul (who became Paul) saying “the Lord...has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9: 17), saw the gift of the Spirit being poured out on those who were not expecting it (Acts 10:45) and that Paul said all the fruit of His ministry came from God: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6)

Bishop Leslie Newbigin, for some time based in Birmingham, wrote, “Mission is not just something that the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness, who changes both the world and the church, who always goes before the church in its missionary journey....every action of the kingdom of God is an action that is performed and sustained only by the power of the Spirit.”

What will help me want to “join in with the Spirit”?



The logical fruit of a life lived with God, and a character being shaped by His Spirit, is to want to join in with His mission.

For those of us who might struggle because of all kinds of pressures or fears to seek the kingdom two themes from this session may help us.

We don't engage with God's mission because it is a task to be done, but because it is the outworking of who God is.

By looking at the nature of the Holy Spirit, we can see that God is in Himself a God who always overflows to others, always goes to them. He is a missionary God.

The poem “The Coming” by RS Thomas describes God looking at the brokenness of the world and ends like this:

“...On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. Many People
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. 'Let me go there,' he said.”

The more we keep company with a God whose nature is to go to the darkest cross to reach those in need the more we will want to share in His mission.

Experiencing the Spirit as the best, and most necessary, gift we can receive.

Moltmann writes that, “The Spirit is more than just one of God's gifts among others; the Holy Spirit is the unrestricted presence of God in which our life wakes up...the greatest and most wonderful thing which we can experience...”

We feel and taste, we touch and see our life in God and God in our life.” Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit as the best gift anyone can receive saying, “...how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Luke 11)

The philosopher Kierkegaard asked, “What is a Christian? A person who has caught fire from God's...presence...a Christian is a person set on fire.”

The story is told of a young monk seeking advice from an older monk about his spiritual life. “Abba,” he said, “as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?”

Then the old man stood up and stretched out his hands toward heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps and he said to him, “If you will, you can become all flame.”

