

The Power to Change

Week of September 4

Lesson Focus:

The Spirit has the power to transform lives.

Church/Home Theme:

Our God Gives

Lesson Scripture:

Acts 2:1-8, 38-42.

Lesson Path

1 Life Need:

Acknowledge the significance of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life.

2 Bible Learning:

Review the Acts account of the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost.

Suggested material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and Reproducible Sheet—Acts: The World Turned Upside Down

3 Bible Application:

Identify ways the Holy Spirit is at work transforming lives.

Suggested material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster—Breathe in Me

4 Life Response:

Testify to someone of the transforming power of God's Spirit.

The Promises of God—Everything that we see, believe, and hope began with a promise from God; the promise that Christ would come to live and die; the promise that the Spirit would dwell with men; and ultimately the promise that men will one day dwell with God. The manifestation of the first promises is our reassurance (seal) that the latter promise is sure (not far off).

The Presence of God—has taken on various forms. He has been revealed in a burning bush, in a mount, in a still, small voice, in the heavens, in the earth, and in man. In the Book of Acts, He is manifest in a mighty rushing wind and cloven tongues of fire. Disciples who were once filled with fear were now filled with faith, and God's presence was seen and felt by men from every nation.

The Spirit of God—On the day of Pentecost, unbelievers became believers; a new people, a new anointing, a new church emerged, and the world would soon be turned upside down. The Spirit of God is given to produce more than just signs and wonders; it is temperance (self-control) and holiness. It is manifest when believers embrace that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead now works in them, empowering them to live for God. The experiences of the early church will be essential in the latter church. The glory of the latter house will be greater than the glory of the former house. Without the Spirit of God, believers cannot discern the times, cannot resist the enemy, and cannot reveal God's glory through righteous living and good works.



The Power to Change

A Present-Day Illustration

The blood curdling screams roused William and made his head flop down and his eyes flutter open. A man straddled a woman with his left hand clutched around her throat and his right hand raised, gripping a knife. William turned off the television as the blade descended.

The clock above the set said 2:13 a.m. Sometimes after getting off the night shift, he would sleep in the back room until his wife and children began to stir around 6:00 a.m. William flipped the side handle on the recliner, pushed himself up, and went into the kitchen in search of a snack.

He peered into the refrigerator and didn't see anything he wanted. Then he found himself easing down the hallway to the room of his 13-year-old daughter, Jalisa. She had been different lately. The teenager had gone to church about nine months ago and had come back "saved," whatever that meant. She talked about Jesus a lot. She had stopped hanging out with her old friends and had begun to make new ones. Her grades had even improved, mostly because she started doing her schoolwork.

William couldn't deny the change. He had been hesitant about making nightly visits to Jalisa's room for the last few months. Standing outside of her bedroom door now, he realized his wavering was close to fear. William made his way back to the recliner. He turned on the television just as the woman's killer was being handcuffed.

1. *Where has Jalisa's power to change come from? List external changes in her life that indicate a change of heart.*

2. *Why do we need the Holy Spirit to transform us? Why can't we just change on our own?*

3. *Describe a life transformation you've observed recently as God's Spirit has been at work in a new (or recommitted) Christian.*

*LESSON FOCUS:
The Spirit has the
power to trans-
form lives.*

Pre-session

As Your Students Arrive

Ask your students to list as many gifts and fruit of the Spirit as they can think of. Write these on a board or sheet of newsprint. Next, ask them to do a personal inventory of how the Holy Spirit has been at work in their lives to empower and transform them, evidenced by spiritual fruit and gifts. Explain that this week's lesson will highlight the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and His transforming power in the lives of all believers.

Link to Last Week: Ask a few of your students if they had any time the past week to visit with or renew an acquaintance with someone with special needs.

1 Life Need

Acknowledge the significance of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life

Remember Peter? He was the man who, in Jesus' darkest hour, denied knowing the Lord . . . and he did so with curses! After Pentecost, however, Peter boldly declared the risen Christ as Messiah. What a transformation!

We know that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost had an amazing impact on those first Christians, but is the Holy Spirit still in the business of changing lives? After reading the anecdote, form small groups to discuss and respond to **Questions 1, 2, and 3.** Question 1 will identify the Holy Spirit as the one empowering Jalisa to change. Students will also note that her inner transformation is having a big impact on her lifestyle.

Question 2 will establish that we can't transform ourselves. We need supernatural change that only God's Spirit brings.

For Question 3, the class can share testimonies about themselves or people they know who have been truly changed by the Holy Spirit.

Review the Acts account of the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost

During His earthly ministry, Jesus promised that He would not leave His disciples as orphans but would send another comforter, the Holy Spirit. Then, before ascending to heaven, Jesus instructed His followers to wait in Jerusalem for this promise to be fulfilled. It wasn't long until, at Pentecost, the promise was fulfilled in an amazing way.

As you begin this step, put up the poster "Acts: The World Turned Upside Down" from your resource kit and make copies of the sheet that goes with it. On the poster, find Jerusalem on the map, and the photo of the temple and its courts, where the apostles preached often and where Peter may have preached at Pentecost. On the outline on the handout sheet, note the number of "firsts" for the early church that you will be studying in the next five lessons, including the first "birthday" of the Church this week.

Read Acts 2:1-8. Key points:

- ▶ During the celebration of Pentecost (or the Feast of Weeks) Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit's coming was fulfilled.
- ▶ Throngs of believers from all over the world were gathered at Jerusalem to observe this feast.
- ▶ During the feast, the Christians had gathered together to celebrate and worship.
- ▶ As they worshiped together, these Christians experienced three phenomena that marked the coming of the Holy Spirit: (1) the sound of a mighty, rushing wind; (2) tongues of fire resting on each of their heads; and (3) the ability to speak in foreign languages.
- ▶ Those who had come from other countries to observe the Pentecost were bewildered at

The Power of the Spirit at Pentecost

Acts 2:1-8, KJV

- 1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
- 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.
- 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.
- 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
- 5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.
- 6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.
- 7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans?
- 8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

Acts 2:1-8, NIV

- 1When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.
- 5Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"

As was their custom, the Christians in Jerusalem had come together for fellowship. Perhaps they were staying in a house near the temple. But this gathering was a special occasion, for it was during the celebration of Pentecost.

The word "Pentecost" means "fiftieth." It was the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks, which occurred 50 days

LESSON FOCUS:
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(a week of weeks) after Passover. For Israel, Pentecost marked the end of the grain harvest.

This Pentecost festival, unlike all previous celebrations, was marked by three miraculous phenomena. The first phenomenon was “a sound like the blowing of a violent wind” (Acts 2:2, NIV). The wind-like sound filled the entire house in which the believers were gathered. The Greek word translated “wind” here is related to the word for “Spirit” and signifies the coming of the Holy Spirit’s power.

The second phenomenon was something that “seemed to be tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3). Apparently, the “fire” first materialized as a single mass of flame. But then, as these believers watched in amazement, individual flames broke away and stood over the head of everyone present.

In the Old Testament, the purifying presence of God is often represented by fire (see for example Gen. 15:17; Exod. 3:2-6; 13:21-22; 19:18; 40:38; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).

The third Pentecost phenomenon occurred when the Holy Spirit filled the assembled believers. According to the narrative, each of them began to speak in “other tongues” or languages (Acts 2:4). Throngs of people were in Jerusalem for Pentecost (vs. 5; 2:9-11). Perhaps most of these people understood Greek. At that time, it was the language of the marketplace. But there were probably many others who knew only the language of their own home district. Nevertheless, when the apostles proclaimed the Gospel in Jerusalem, everyone understood the message in his or her own language (2:6, 8, 11). No interpretation was necessary. According to Luke, this caused “bewilderment” and utter amazement among the multitude of witnesses because they supposed the speakers to be uneducated Galileans (vss. 6-7).

4. Name the three miraculous phenomena which marked the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

5. What was it about speaking in languages that caused utter amazement among the people?

Waiting for the Spirit

The apostles were gathered in Jerusalem at the risen Lord’s command. He instructed them to “wait for the gift my Father promised” (Acts 1:4, NIV). Later, Jesus explained what the apostles were waiting for: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (vs. 8). After this commission, the Lord ascended into heaven out of the apostles’ sight. His earthly ministry was completed.

Eleven of the apostles (minus Judas) in a group of “about a hundred and twenty” believers were assembled for continual prayer in the upper room where they were staying (vss. 13-14). Peter rose to recount the defection of Judas, after which a man named Matthias was chosen to replace him. The second chapter of Acts tells the awe-inspiring story of the Holy Spirit’s coming and the birth of the church at Pentecost.

hearing the Gospel preached in their own language by these uneducated Galileans.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

The first phenomenon was “a sound like the blowing of a violent wind” (Acts 2:2). The second was something that “seemed to be tongues of fire” (vs. 3). The third Pentecost phenomenon occurred when the Holy Spirit filled the assembled believers and each of them began to speak in “other tongues” or languages (vs. 4).

Suggested Answer to Question 5

The assembled multitude consisted of people from “every nation under heaven” (vs. 5). Yet everyone heard what the apostles said in their own native language, even though the apostles were perceived as uneducated Galileans.

The Jewish Festivals

Most of the great agricultural and seasonal Jewish festivals were instituted and observed from early in Israel's history. Others arose to commemorate great events in the nation's later history. Purim, for example, dated from the fifth-century B.C. Persian Empire, while the Festival of Lights or Dedication (called Hanukkah today) was instituted in the second century B.C. under the Maccabees. Celebrations normally took place in the spring, early summer, and autumn. They were occasions for thanksgiving for God's bounty in harvest, for remembering His past acts on Israel's behalf, and generally for expressing joy through important feasts.

Early in Israel's history, during a festival season, men went to their local religious center to present offerings to God. After the seventh century B.C., however, Jerusalem became the only acceptable place for festival observance. Thus pilgrimages to that city were required. During the time of Christ, the population of Jerusalem quadrupled as pilgrims came from all over the Mediterranean world to celebrate important festivals like Passover and Pentecost.

Read Acts 2:38-42 and highlight the following:

- ▶ The sign of tongues caught the attention of thousands of people who listened to Peter preach.
- ▶ As people gathered, Peter preached a sermon, bringing conviction to many listeners.
- ▶ When the people understood that they had crucified their Messiah, they asked what they should do. Peter told them to repent and be baptized. Three thousand people repented and were baptized.
- ▶ Peter also preached that the promise of the Holy Spirit is for all believers.
- ▶ These new believers eagerly gathered to hear the apostles' teaching, for prayer, and for the fellowship of the believers, as well as for the breaking of bread.

The Gift of the Spirit at Pentecost

Acts 2:38-42, KJV

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 2:38-42, NIV

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

In a powerful sermon (Acts 2:14-36), Peter connected the phenomenal miracles of Pentecost with Christ's death, resurrection, and ascent into heaven. These great events, according to Peter, were God's validation that "this Jesus, whom [Israel] crucified, [was] both Lord and Christ" (vs. 36). In other words, Jesus was the promised Messiah.

As Peter's words stunned his hearers, the Holy Spirit convicted their hearts. Their indictment for crucifying the Messiah prompted them to ask the apostles a desperate question: "Brothers, what shall we do?" (vs. 37). In order to "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," said Peter, they must all "repent and be baptized" (vs. 38).

Repentance is defined as a voluntary change in a sinner's mind that results in a turning to God in faith with a corresponding turning away from sin. It includes a change of one's view, feeling, and direction in life. Baptism publicly symbolized the people's act of repentance and acceptance of Christ as their Messiah. This cleared the way for forgiveness of sins and reception of the Holy Spirit. The practice of the early church was to baptize believers immediately following conversion. Thus baptism and reception of the Holy Spirit were closely connected. Peter told the people of Israel that the promise of the Holy Spirit was not only for them and their descendants, but for Gentiles as well.

Peter next exhorted the people to disassociate themselves from "this corrupt generation" (vs. 40), the Israelites as a nation who rejected and crucified their Messiah (see vss. 23, 36). "About three thousand" people repented, accepted Christ as "both Lord and Christ" (vs. 36), were baptized, and added to the rolls of the infant church that day.

These new believers eagerly gathered in fellowship for the purpose of prayer and "the breaking of bread" (vs. 42). "The breaking of bread" probably included both the Lord's Supper and a fellowship meal. These earliest believers also devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. This included doctrine related to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Since the church's formation at Pentecost, Christ's teaching as expounded by the apostles has been the touchstone by which the "Spirit of truth" could be distinguished from the "spirit of falsehood" (see 1 John 4:6b).

6. What did Peter tell the crowd they must do to be forgiven of their sins?

7. What gift did Peter say was promised to those who received Christ and to whom was the promise made?

8. How many people were added to the church that day?

'The Promise Is for You'

The Greek word for "promise" in Acts 2:39 had a very special meaning in classical Greek culture. It was used in connection with public announcements concerning events of concern to everyone. It was used, for example, in the announcement of public games and sacrifices to the gods. In essence it implied some type of *emphatic* public announcement. The implication in Acts 2:39 is that here was a promise that was made emphatically and publicly (not quietly and privately) for the benefit of all believers of all ages.

A central characteristic of this word was of a promise given voluntarily, a promise offered freely and without coercion. Furthermore, this kind of promise involved no mutual or conditional agreement such as, "I promise to do such and such, if you promise to do so and so." The Greek language had a different word entirely for that type of promise. With only two exceptions (see Acts 23:21 and Mark 14:1, where human promises are being made), this special word for promise was used consistently of the promises of God.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

Peter told the people that in order to receive forgiveness for their sins they must "Repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ" (vs. 38).

Suggested Answer to Question 7

Peter said the gift of the Holy Spirit was promised. And the promise was intended "for you and your children" (meaning the Jews) "and for all who are far off" (meaning the Gentiles) (vss. 38-39).

Suggested Answer to Question 8

"About three thousand were added to their number that day" (vs. 41).

Identify ways the Holy Spirit is at work transforming lives

You can photocopy this page, cut out the boxes, and give the instructions to each group. Put up the poster from your resource kit for the group using it.

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► Discussion Group

Read “Real-Life Turning Points” and respond to **Questions 9, 10, and 11**. There may be someone who was delivered from an addiction or spiritual oppression. Let these people testify to what happened. Unless you have permission to share someone’s story, use only well-known testimonies. Talk about external evidences of the inner change that has taken place (for instance, quit smoking, began tithing, is more joyful, etc.). Use your own past and present testimonies to recognize/recall the Holy Spirit’s power at work in your lives.

► The Holy Spirit Times

In groups of two, interview one another about how God’s Spirit has transformed/been transforming your lives. Write brief news articles from the interviews, and make these into a *Holy Spirit Times* newspaper.

► Holy Spirit Changin’ Me

Use your collective testimonies to compose a song or rap that glorifies God by telling what His Spirit has done or is doing to transform your lives.

► Poster: ‘Breathe in Me’

Read the quote on the poster and discuss how the Spirit is or is not working in your lives to make you more holy. Then read the poster together as a prayer that the Spirit will continue to work in your lives to make you more holy.

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Real-Life Turning Points

Turning Point Community Church puts out a monthly newsletter with a column inside called “My Personal Turning Point.” The column consists of the testimonies of people who have been transformed by the power of God’s Spirit. Here are some recent testimonies:

Ray had an alcoholic father, and as a teenager became addicted to alcohol as well. When he gave his life to Christ, God’s Spirit delivered him from alcoholism and changed his entire character. Today, Bill is a gentle, strong, faithful man, ministering to youth as a profession.

Naomi had been pretending to be a strong Christian, but she was shattered inside. After attempting to commit suicide, she felt even more shame. During a time of prayer and worship one morning at church, Naomi experienced spiritual warfare in her physical body. But once the battle was over, she was free. Now she has joy, peace, and purpose.

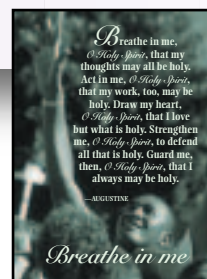
Arthur had a secret. It was a secret, that is, until police caught him . . . soliciting a prostitute. Once in jail, Arthur reflected on how he had become so spiritually handcuffed by sin. He was a Christian man who had a wife and children. As Arthur called on God to help him get victory, God’s Spirit led Arthur step by step to his freedom. Submitting to boundaries, accountability, godly counsel, and restorative discipline, God gave Arthur the courage and strength to be transformed on the inside, set free from his addiction.

9. *Can you relate to any of these stories? Explain.*

10. *As a group, identify three people in your congregation who have been powerfully changed by God’s Spirit in the past year (people whose testimonies are known). What changes have marked their lives?*

11. *How has God’s Spirit changed your life, or how is He changing your life right now?*

LESSON FOCUS:
The Spirit has the power to transform lives.



Testify to Transformation

God calls us today to testify concerning His great power and grace at work in our lives. Has God changed your life? Tell someone! It may be just what they need to hear

► *Think of someone you know who needs to know about the transforming power of God's Spirit. Write that person's name in the space below, asking God for an opportunity to share your personal testimony with them in the coming week. If you cannot think of a name, write the words "divine appointment," and ask God to arrange a conversation in which you could share your testimony. Then be watchful because God's Spirit is not only powerful but faithful, too.*

KEY VERSE

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. —Acts 2:38, KJV

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." —Acts 2:38, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

September 5 through 11

- Mon.** Deuteronomy 15:4-8—Share with Those in Need.
- Tues.** Isaiah 55:1-7—A Special Invitation.
- Wed.** Luke 12:13-21—Guard against Greed.
- Thurs.** Luke 12:22-34—Do Not Worry or Be Afraid.
- Fri.** Acts 2:43-47—The Believers Grow in Faith Together.
- Sat.** Acts 4:32-35—Be of One Heart and Mind.
- Sun.** Acts 5:12-16—Many People Are Healed.

Testify to someone of the transforming power of God's Spirit

When God's Spirit came in power at Pentecost, the believers testified to the crowd in Jerusalem. The pattern is still the same for us today. When God's Spirit moves in our lives, God is glorified when we tell others about what He has done. When our lives and our words match up, our testimony carries authority and weight. Changed lives are undeniable evidence, and people will begin to listen as we speak up.

Have the class read "Testify to Transformation" in their student books. Allow time for completing the follow-through activity there. Finally, encourage them to remain alert this week for an opportunity to tell someone about how God's Spirit has transformed their lives.

End the lesson with a closing prayer. Praise God's Spirit for His transforming work in each life present in your classroom. Ask Him to alert and embolden class members to speak up in the coming week whenever they have opportunity to testify. Thank God for sending His Spirit to change us from the inside out.

For next week, read Acts 2:43-47 and 4:32-35. Ask your students to consider this question during the week: "What happens when Christians isolate themselves from Christian fellowship?"

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form lives.*