



Leader Guide for *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives* By Lois Malcolm

About this Guide

This Leader Guide and companion **Participant Handout** offer the tools needed for a one-hour discussion on the theme of the Holy Spirit's work—the focus of *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives*, by Lois Malcolm.

The guide also provides suggestions for expanding the one-hour general discussion of the Holy Spirit to a series of sessions based on each chapter of Malcolm's book. For a more in-depth study of *Holy Spirit*, see "Digging Deeper" at the end of this guide.

To get out the word about an upcoming study of *Holy Spirit*, download the **Publicity Flyer** and customize it to fit your needs.

Pre-Session Preparation

Prior to the session, read *Holy Spirit* and the Bible passages identified as the basis for each chapter of the book. Also reflect on the "Key Points" presented in the box at right. Read through the Leader Guide and the Participant Handout and choose options from the materials presented to use with your group. Gather the materials you will need for the study:

- Bibles
- Copies of the Participant Handout (a companion piece available on this website)
- A white board, large pad of paper, or other writing surface (helpful but not essential)
- Name tags, if desired
- Copies of *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives*. (Participants will get the most out of the conversation if they have read the book, but the one-hour session is designed so that you can welcome and include guests who haven't done the reading.)

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Key Points

- The Old Testament reminds us that the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and lives among us is the same Spirit who created and continues to create, who works within individuals and societies, and who fulfills God's promises.
- Jesus was God's chosen child, anointed with the Spirit's power to bring the kingdom of God. Through our faith in Jesus, the Spirit also makes us children of God.
- The stories in Acts show what happens to the Christian community when the gift of the Holy Spirit is given. That experience included a commitment to teaching, prayer, healing, and sharing in order to care for one another's needs. Individuals grew in their devotion to God and in love for one another.
- We receive the Holy Spirit not through our works but by faith. Only God's Spirit, which has been "poured into our hearts" (Rom. 5:5), has the power to make us righteous.
- We become spiritually more mature as the Spirit forms in us the mind of Christ. We use our spiritual gifts for the good of the whole community, bound together in love.
- Life is difficult; we live in the tension between the *already* and the *not yet*. During that interval, we have been given the first fruits of the Spirit, which gives us boldness to cry out to God even as we place our hope in God's promises.

"The Lutheran Voices series is tapping into the rich resources of the church and bringing us together to talk about issues and ideas that shape our present and future."

Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA

Single-Session Plan

The following ideas suggest how to use the **Participant Handout** in leading a one-hour discussion of *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives*.

Opening (2 minutes)

Introduce yourself and welcome the participants. Pray the opening prayer together, or invite someone to lead the prayer.

Getting Started (10 minutes)

Invite the participants to briefly introduce themselves and to answer this question: *Where have you seen God at work in the world this past week?* (If respondents have difficulty answering, try some specific angles: *Has God's love [or power or mercy] been at work through people around you?*) If the group is large, have participants introduce themselves and respond to the question within smaller groups of 4–5 people rather than to the entire group. The focus is on inviting everyone to speak, not on giving the “right” answer.

Points to Ponder (45 minutes)

Use questions from the Participant Handout as a framework for discussion.

- *Questions 1–2 (5 minutes)*: These questions, along with the opening question in Getting Started, aim at identifying the extent to which participants are already thinking about (or experiencing) the Holy Spirit in their day-to-day lives. You may need to distinguish between doctrine about the Trinity and the likelihood that individuals encounter God in different ways at different times in their life. For instance, someone may tend to pray to Jesus as a trusted life companion; this expresses a genuine experience, if not a full description of how the Triune God is present in that person's life. If participants (like the author's seminary students) haven't thought much about the Holy Spirit, note that this session is a chance to add to their view of God.
- *Questions 3–4 (20 minutes)*: For each pair, have volunteers read the Bible passages, and then encourage discussion of them.
 - **Option**: Bring Post-It notes for participants to use to flag the pages as they look up the pairs of Bible verses in question 3, so they can flip back and forth for making comparisons.
 - **Option**: If participants are engaged enough with these passages that you will not have 20 minutes for the remaining questions, stay with these questions, but allow a few minutes to note that the verses in questions 5–7 describe the Holy Spirit working in us in three ways: by creating faith, love, and hope. Instead of exploring those ideas in this session, you could offer additional sessions using the “Digger Deeper” ideas beginning on the next page.
- *Question 5 (5 minutes)*: This question intends to draw attention to the theme of the Spirit creating faith. Note that faith here is expressed in terms of an intimate, trusting relationship with God (see *Holy Spirit*, p. 55).
- *Question 6 (5 minutes)*: This question intends to draw attention to the theme of the Spirit creating love. All the “fruits of the Spirit” serve as qualities that help us love our neighbors.
- *Question 7 (10 minutes)*: This question intends to draw attention to the theme of the Spirit creating hope. Note that Paul's hope is for the future, but that hope makes him confident and fearless in the present. God's work is fully completed in the future, but it already has an impact on us in the present (the “first installment”; 2 Cor. 1:22).

Closing (3 minutes)

Invite the group to pray the Closing Prayer aloud together. If you plan to continue the discussion of *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives* after this session, announce the place and time for the next meeting. Ask participants to prepare by reading the chapters you plan to cover at the next meeting.

Lois Malcolm, in her introduction (p. 10), urges readers to keep a journal as they read. Suggest that participants record their personal reactions to the chapters they read, as well as answer the questions listed under “For Further Reflection” on the Participant Handout. **Option**: If you won't be continuing with this topic, invite participants to use the ideas under “For Further Reflection” in their personal devotions.

Suggestions for subsequent discussions begin on the following page, “Digging Deeper.”

Digging Deeper

After working your way through the single-session plan, use the following suggestions along with the chapter questions in *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives* to dig deeper into an understanding of the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. These suggestions provide a framework for a chapter-by-chapter discussion of *Holy Spirit*, though it's your decision as to how many chapters to address each time the group meets.

Additional Bible Passages

- Each chapter in *Holy Spirit* cites many Bible passages. In addition to using the following discussion ideas, you could look up the other passages cited and discuss your reactions to them.

Chapter 1: The Spirit in the Old Testament

- As an opening prayer, read Ps. 104:27-30 aloud together. Recall that the same Hebrew word *ruach* means spirit, breath, and wind. Ask: What is the importance of breath/spirit as expressed by the psalmist in verses 29 and 30? Compare the image here with the role of *ruach* (wind, breath) in Gen. 1:2 and 2:7 and Job 33:4. Ask: In what sense(s) does your life depend on God's Spirit?
- Read 1 Sam. 16:1, 11-13 (the prophet Samuel anoints David as king) and 2 Sam. 7:8-15 (God's promise delivered by the prophet Nathan to King David). Ask: Why do you think it was important for the king and for the nation that God's spirit came upon the king when he was anointed? In 2 Sam. 7:14, what do you think it meant for God to "be a father" to David's son? How does this compare with Jesus as God's Son? How does it compare with us being children of God? Note that all of these relationships are possible because of the work of the Spirit.
- Read Isa. 11:1-10, a passage associated with prophecy about the Messiah. Ask: How does the work of the Spirit, as described in this passage, affect this ideal leader promised by God? How is that work of the Spirit active in the world today? Compare verses 2-3 with the prayers for the baptized person in the service of Holy Baptism (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 231) and the blessing of each person in the Affirmation of Baptism (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 236). Ask: How can it be that a promise we associate with Jesus is also a promise applied to us?
- Read Joel 2:28-29. Ask: What would it be like if *everyone* knew and spoke God's messages to one another? Where and when has this promise begun to be fulfilled? When have you ever shared God's word with someone? How did the Holy Spirit help you do that?
- Encourage participants to continue keeping journals. Suggest that they include reflections on where they have seen or are seeing people who exhibit wisdom, peace making, speaking the truth in love, and other signs that God's Spirit has been poured out on them.

Chapter 2: The Spirit of God in Jesus

- Read Mark 1:9-11. Ask: When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, what did Jesus see and hear?
 - Ask: How was Jesus' experience a model for our own experience of baptism? How confident are you that you are God's "beloved"? What messages might we receive if we take time for listening to the Spirit? (Or what have you already learned from the Spirit?)
 - Note that the Spirit's work in Jesus was not always so pleasant. Read Mark 1:12-13 to read what happened to Jesus immediately after his baptismal experience. Ask: What are the challenges and blessings of being "driven by" the Spirit?
- Read Luke 1:30-35. Ask: What was the distinctive work of the Holy Spirit in this passage? What does this tell us about Jesus? Compare that understanding of Jesus with the description in John 1:10-13. In what sense are Christians "born . . . of God" (John 1:13).
- Ask: How could people tell that Jesus was filled with the Spirit (Luke 4:14)? Encourage a variety of answers, and list them on the board. For ideas (described on pp. 26–29), look up Luke 6:20-26; Matt. 11:4-5; Matt. 7:28-29; Mark 1:23-27; Luke 4:40-41; Mark 2:3-12; and Mark 10:50-52. **Option:** Assign each of these passages to individuals or groups of two or three; have them review the passage and then report to the whole group what they learned.
- Comment on this statement: "What the Spirit gave Jesus was a profound sense of his intimacy with God" (p. 32). Ask: How important was this understanding to Jesus' ministry? To what extent do you allow the Holy Spirit to draw you close to God as a valued child? Identify the ways in which Jesus experienced intimacy with God in the following passages: Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; Luke 11:5-9; Mark 14:32-36.
- Offer this idea for journaling: Reflect on Jesus' life and teaching, and identify ways he allowed the Spirit to work in him. Ask yourself how you can better follow Jesus' example; note what ideas you try and what results (if any) you experience.

Chapter 3: The Spirit of Christ in Community

- Read Acts 1:6-8. Ask: What kind of “power” do you think Jesus had in mind when he made this promise? What kind of power do you think the disciples might have been expecting? What kind of power do you think God wants *you* to have?
- Read Acts 2:1-18. **Option:** Have one volunteer read the words spoken by Peter, the remainder of the group read in unison the words of the devout Jews, and a second individual read the remaining text as the narrator.
 - Ask: What was the initial evidence that the disciples had received the Holy Spirit? Why was speaking in various languages important in this situation? What was the outcome of their speaking and Peter’s preaching? (See verses 37-41.)
 - Read verses 43-47, and list on the board other ways that the disciples were affected by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Ask: Which of these signs of God’s Spirit do you think were most significant? Why?
- Read the following passages, and list on the board additional ways the disciples were affected by the Holy Spirit: Acts 4:5-10; 6:1-6; 7:54-57; 11:22-24; 11:28-29; 13:2-3; 16:6-10; 20:17-23. **Option:** Either have the whole group look up all the passages together, or divide the group and have individuals and subgroups look up each passage, then report what they learned to the entire group. Ask: Which of these kinds of activities does the Holy Spirit still engage in today in our community or around the world? How can we be more open to the Spirit’s work, so that the Spirit can accomplish more in our community today? (For ideas, see pp. 39–42).
- Read the following passages, and add to the previous list more ways in which the Spirit affects us, according to John’s Gospel: John 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:13-14; 14:20.
 - Ask: Which of these kinds of activities does the Holy Spirit still engage in today?
 - Invite reactions to this statement: “Although we are distinct from Jesus, when we abide in Jesus, we are in Jesus, and Jesus is in us. But that also means that through the Spirit of truth, we are not only in Jesus but also in the midst of the *relationship* he has with the Father” (p. 46). (See John 14:10 for background.)
- Offer this idea for journaling: Reflect on how the Holy Spirit is at work in our community today.

Chapter 4: The Spirit Creates Faith

- Read Romans 5:1-5. Ask: In what sense is the Holy Spirit an expression of God’s grace, according to Paul? In verse 5, how does Paul describe the manner in which the Holy Spirit is given? Does this sound like a fair exchange with God, or is it more generous? (See verses 6-8 for more insight.)
- Read Romans 8:12-17. Ask: How does the Spirit change our relationship with God? How is this new relationship different from a relationship based mainly on obedience to God’s law?
- Ask: What happens to our identity when the Spirit makes us “children of God . . . and joint heirs with Christ” (vv. 16-17)? Are we more like Jesus? The same as Jesus? Still unique?
- Ask: As our relationship with God becomes more intimate through the Spirit’s work, how would you expect that to influence our relationships with other people?
- Offer this idea for journaling: Recall times when your faith has been strong and times when it has been weak. Consider whether strong faith is purely a matter of will, and reflect on how you might turn to God for help in strengthening your faith.

Chapter 5: The Spirit Creates Love

- Read 1 Cor. 3:1-3. Ask: What evidence does Paul offer to show the Corinthians that they are being led by the flesh, rather than the Spirit? What attitudes and behavior is Paul looking for but failing to find?
- Read 1 Cor. 12:4-6. Ask: What do these verses tell us about the nature of the Christian community? When you look around at the people in your community, do you see people with gifts? Why or why not?
 - Read 1 Cor. 12:8-11, and then list on the board the gifts that are named in this passage.
 - Read 1 Cor. 12:28, and list on the board the additional gifts that are named in this verse.
 - Ask: How are these and similar gifts present in our own community? Which gifts do we need to honor and uncover? How does recognizing that the Spirit gives different gifts to different people affect our relationships? How *should* it affect us?
- Read 1 Cor. 12:12-26. Ask: Which members of our community are suffering? How does their suffering affect us? Who is honored? How do we join with those members to rejoice?
- Read 1 Cor. 12:31–13:7. Ask: What is the “more excellent way” that Paul is referring to? When has the Spirit helped you to love as Paul describes?
- Offer this idea for journaling: Reflect on situations when loving others has been easy and situations when loving others has been difficult. Consider how you might call on the Spirit for help when love is difficult.

Chapter 6: The Spirit Creates Hope

- Read each pair of verses, and identify what thought is different: Rom. 5:1 and Gal. 5:5; Rom. 3:24 and Rom. 8:23; Gal. 3:27 and Rom. 13:14; Rom. 8:15 and Rom. 8:23. (In each pair, the first verse is the “already,” and the second verse is the “not yet.”) **Option:** Type out the pairs of verses ahead of time, and distribute them so participants can review the verses side-by-side. Ask: How can both verses in each pair be true at the same time? (For ideas, see pp. 79–80.)
- Read Rom. 8:18-25. Ask: What does it mean that the creation was “subjected to futility”? What is futile in this world?
 - Ask: In what areas of your life have you suffered and longed for God to set you free? Responding in a way that respects others’ privacy, who else has been suffering, here or elsewhere? (Participants may identify individuals—withholding names as appropriate—or groups, such as those suffering from poverty, war, or injustice.)
 - Ask: The passage refers not only to people, but to “the whole creation” (v. 22); what else besides people has been suffering? (Possible examples might be endangered species, polluted water, and any living thing subject to violence, mistreatment, and death.)
 - Ask: The passage uses the metaphor “groaning in labor pains” (v. 22); how is crying out during labor a different experience from crying out in despair? (Labor pains involve suffering for a purpose—that is, a hoped-for birth of something new.) What is the something new that God has promised will follow the “labor pains”?
- Read Romans 8:26-27. Ask: How does the Holy Spirit help us as we wait for the complete fulfillment of God’s promises? What is the advantage of the Spirit interceding for us? (See v. 27, in which our requests are aligned with God’s will.)
- Read Romans 8:31-39. Ask: What is Paul’s hope? How does it compare with *your* hope?
- Offer this idea for journaling: Reflect on situations where you have begged God for something. Ask yourself: Did you wish for your will or God’s? How might wishing for God’s will change you? How might it give you hope?
- Close by praying Psalm 31:1-5 together.



Deeper Still: Further Resources to Explore

We hope you enjoyed your study of *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives*. The Lutheran Voices series includes over 40 books focused on faithful living, global issues, healing and wholeness, Martin Luther’s teachings, and church revitalization and leadership. Free, downloadable study materials are available for select books. For a complete list of titles, go to www.augsburgfortress.org or call (800) 328-4648, in Canada: (800) 265-6397, ext. 215.