God’s Word to You

A Summary of the Bible

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel’s behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God’s people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the Person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and to restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ’s work to the world. Empowered by God’s Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. Repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God’s judgment and live joyfully in God’s presence for all eternity. God’s message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.
The one true God over all creation is a sending God. He sent forth His word in the beginning and created everything; His word accomplished what He sent it out to do (Isa. 55:11). The Lord sent Abram to a foreign land to become the father of many nations and a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. God faithfully sent prophets to His wayward people with “the word of the Lord” to call them to repentance and a renewed faith in the Lord their God. The Father even sent His Son to this wayward people that through His death and resurrection on behalf of sinners, He would bring salvation to the world. And God’s Word does not return to Him without accomplishing what He sent Him to do (John 1:1,14). But God’s sending nature does not end there.

Upon Jesus’ ascension, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, to dwell in all believers in Christ and empower them for yet another sending—“The Church on Mission.” The beginning stages of this gospel mission for the church are the focus of this volume of *The Gospel Project*, and there is so much here to mold and shape us for our own part in this mission. Jesus told His disciples to go and make more disciples. The early church obeyed and experienced hardship and struggles along the way. We should expect no less, but we go with God’s Spirit and God’s Word that accomplishes what God sent it to do.

If you’ve been using *The Gospel Project* for any length of time, you know that every session comes with a “missional application.” This is our way of asking, “How does this passage we are studying equip us to live on mission for God’s kingdom?” Gospel-centeredness is tightly tied to mission because the gospel is the story of a God with a missionary heart, a God who loves this world He has created and desires all to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). To be gospel-centered isn’t just about getting the gospel right; it’s about getting the gospel out. We are to show and share the love of God.

This volume of *The Gospel Project* focuses heavily on the mission efforts of the early Christians. They were filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit to go out into the world and make disciples. We see in these sessions a church on fire for God and His mission. We meet apostles who grow and learn how God’s embrace reaches across cultural dividing lines. We see how the apostles were broken over the lostness they saw in the world around them but also how they engaged and confronted with boldness the world’s idolatry by showing the power and beauty of Jesus. Our prayer is that this volume of *The Gospel Project* will increase your confidence and passion in sharing the gospel. We are sent by God to the world around us. Let’s not miss one single moment to live on mission and bring glory to God our Savior!
Unit: 1

**Mike Cosper** is the founder and director of Harbor Media, where he develops podcasts that help Christians navigate a post-Christian world. Previously he served for 16 years as one of the founding pastors of Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky, where he oversaw Sojourn Music—a collective of musicians writing songs for the local church. He is the author of four books, including (most recently) *Recapturing the Wonder*.

**Katie Orr** (special session), creator of the FOCUSed15 Bible study method, is passionate about equipping busy women to experience God daily. She is a teacher, speaker, podcaster, and prolific writer for blogs, magazines, and Sunday School curriculum. A former Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ) staff member and mother to three young children, she and pastor-husband, Chris, are part of the church revitalization movement.

Unit: 2

**Jason C Dukes** (sessions 7-9) has been a church starter, a church renewer, and tries to be a disciple-maker. He’s currently the Multiplication Minister with Brentwood Baptist Church near Nashville, Tennessee. He has authored books and periodically blogs, which you can learn more about at LiveSent.com. He and his wife, Jen, are thankful for their seven children.

**Daniel Im** (sessions 10-12) serves as the Director of Church Multiplication for NewChurches.com at LifeWay Christian Resources. He is also a teaching pastor at The Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee, and author of *No Silver Bullets: Five Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry* and *Planting Missional Churches*. He is married to Christina, and they have three children, Victoria, Adelyn, and Makarios.
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A Journey Through the Storyline of Scripture

Fall 2015
The Story Begins
God the Creator (Genesis 1–11)
God the Covenant-Maker (Genesis 12–50)

Winter 2015-16
God Delivers
God the Redeemer (Exodus)
God the Lawgiver (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)

Spring 2016
The Promised Land
God the Savior (Numbers, Joshua)
God the Judge (Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel)

Summer 2016
A Kingdom Established
God the King (1–2 Samuel)
God All Wise (1 Kings, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)

Fall 2016
Prophets and Kings
God the Revealer (1–2 Kings, Isaiah)
God the Pursuer (Prophets, 2 Chronicles)
Winter 2016-17  
**Exile and Return**  
God the Sustainer (Daniel, Ezra)  
God the Provider (Esther, Nehemiah, Malachi)

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Spring 2017  
**The Rescue Begins**  
God the Son (Gospels)  
God Among Us (Gospels)

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Summer 2017  
**Stories and Signs**  
Jesus the Storyteller (Synoptic Gospels)  
Jesus the Miracle-Worker (Gospels)

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Fall 2017  
**Jesus Saves**  
Jesus the Savior (Gospels)  
Jesus the Risen King (Gospels, Acts)

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Winter 2017-18  
**The Church on Mission**  
The Spirit Who Empowers (Acts)  
The God Who Sends (Acts)

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Spring 2018  
**Letters to God’s People**  
The God Who Directs His People (Epistles)  
The God Who Changes Us (Epistles)

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Summer 2018  
**Come, Lord Jesus**  
God’s Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)  
The God Who Makes All Things New (Epistles, Revelation)
1

Read the session in preparation for group discussion. Record any insights or questions you may want to discuss during the group experience.

2

Gather with your group to discuss and learn together what God has to say. Contribute to the conversation and activities.

3

Apply the truths of the session by working through “His Mission, Your Mission” with your group or by yourself.

Visit GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content related to the study.
Visit GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources for links to podcasts, articles, and blog posts related to each session.
Memory Verses

And Peter said to them, “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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

—Acts 2:38-40

Writers

Mike Cosper is the founder and director of Harbor Media, where he develops podcasts that help Christians navigate a post-Christian world.

Katie Orr (special session), creator of the FOCUSed15 Bible study method, is a teacher, speaker, podcaster, and prolific writer for blogs, magazines, and Sunday School curriculum.
The Spirit Comes

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** The church’s mission to the nations is made possible by the Spirit.

On a gorgeous spring day about a decade ago, I found a gift on my front porch. I had been out walking my old dog when I found it—a simple brown paper gift bag containing a loaf of really great bread, butter, jam, some pricey cheeses, and a book, also wrapped in brown paper. It was genuinely one of the most thoughtful gifts I’ve ever received, and it clearly came from someone who knew me well. They knew I liked weird modern fiction, crusty bread, and good butter, they knew where I lived, and they knew it was my birthday.

Gifts are powerful things. The trouble with my gift, though, was that it was anonymous. Whoever gave it to me did not leave a card, a signature, nor any clear signs as to whom it came from. My wife and I puzzled over it that evening as we tore the bread into pieces and smeared it with butter and strawberry preserves. “Who sent it?” we asked a thousand times. Neither of us had a clue, nor do we know to this day.

**?** When have you received a gift that was unexpected?

**?** What are the pros and cons of an anonymous gift? Of a gift from a known giver?
Unlike my anonymous gift, we don’t have to ask who sent the gift of the gospel. The gospel not only comes from God, it’s spread by God’s own handiwork. While the Book of Acts communicates the spread of the gospel from “Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8) through the apostles and the churches they planted, the primary Actor in the Book of Acts—spreading the gospel, building up the church, and healing the sick—is God Himself, specifically in the person of the Holy Spirit, giving gifts of life and redemption and advancing God’s kingdom.

Not only does God reconcile us to Himself in Christ’s death and promise us eternal life in His resurrection, He gives us the greatest gift we can imagine in the Holy Spirit—the gift of Himself: The Holy Spirit comes to indwell every believer in Christ, to empower the spread of the gospel throughout the world, and to build the community of faith. He has come to point sinners to Christ and to strengthen Christ-followers for Christlike living in the world and to the ends of the earth.


During Jesus’ final days on earth, both before His crucifixion and up to His ascension, He began promising the disciples that another Counselor would come to carry on His work. He said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:15-17).

This is a wonderfully trinitarian statement—the Son asks the Father to send the Counselor. But before we get the wrong idea and somehow think that these three Persons are somehow independent of one another, Jesus adds, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). Just as the Son and the Father are one, the Son and the Spirit are one.
So when Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, He was also promising Himself. This makes sense of the fact that Scripture tells us Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:20; Heb. 8:1; 12:2) and He is with us always, “to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). When the Holy Spirit is sent to us, God is present, and that, of course, means that Jesus Himself is present with us.

How should the revelation of God as Trinity shape the way we pray? The way we worship?

Here’s how the Book of Acts describes the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4:

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.
2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.
3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.
4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

How bewildering it all must have been for the disciples as they obeyed Jesus’ final words. For the next ten days following His ascension into heaven, the disciples gathered together in an upstairs room in Jerusalem and prayed and waited for the Father’s promise to be fulfilled (Acts 1:4-5,12-14). And then, without warning, the Spirit rushed into the world, rushed into the room, and rushed into their hearts as He manifested Himself in what appeared like flickering flames of fire resting on each one of those present in the room.
In the coming of the Spirit, Jesus’ promise to be with us always makes sense, as does the prophet Joel’s promise that one day God would pour out His Spirit on “all flesh” (Joel 2:28). Likewise, the coming of the Spirit reveals the unique role that Christ’s followers will play in the world—not merely as a faithful group that exists to remember what Jesus did but as God’s agents for good in the world and as the very vessels God will use to carry out His mission. God’s kingdom will continue to advance as God continues His work through His church in His world through His Holy Spirit.

What thoughts or expectations do you have regarding the filling of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life?

How should the indwelling of the Spirit change the way believers live?


The apostle Peter, filled with the Spirit, stood before a massive crowd that gathered because of the sound and preached this sermon found in Acts 2:22-40:

22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25 For David says concerning him,

Voices from Church History

“[H]as the whole church ever, since the days before Pentecost, put aside every other work and waited for Him for ten days, that that power might be manifested? Has there not been a source of failure here? We have given too much attention to methods, and to machinery, and to resources, and too little to the Source of Power; the filling with the Holy Ghost.”

–J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905)
“I saw the Lord always before me, 
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; 
my flesh also will dwell in hope. 
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. 
You have made known to me the paths of life; 
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ 
“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 35 "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, 
until I make your enemies your footstool."") 36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” 37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 And Peter said to them, “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 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

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<th>What implications should this sermon have on how we share the gospel?</th>
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14 Personal Study Guide
Peter couldn’t contain himself. He nearly exploded with this sermon, urgently pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, the One who came to liberate Israel from the oppressive burdens of sin and death. “Jesus is Lord and Messiah,” Peter told them, “and He rose from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father.” But this wasn’t simply Peter talking here, it was Peter filled with the Spirit. At the Spirit’s urging, the words flowed from Peter’s lips. He wove together the story of Jesus with passages from their Scriptures, which we call the Old Testament, and laid out the gospel for all to see.

What we learn by looking at the Book of Acts is that the Spirit compels us to speak out. The mission of the church—to go out into the world and share the good news of God’s reconciling work in Jesus—is a reflection of the heart of the Holy Spirit, who is more eager than anyone to celebrate the work of the Father and the Son.

Knowing this should dramatically shift the way we think about sharing the gospel. If you’re like me, you might find yourself struggling at times to speak up, to know when to share your faith, or to initiate conversations about Jesus. Often techniques are suggested for making those conversations easier; in fact, many churches offer whole classes on the subject, and that’s not a bad thing at all. But at its most basic level, perhaps the easiest way to be more bold in sharing the gospel is by seeking to be filled with the Spirit (see Eph. 5:18-19; cf. Acts 13:50-52).

What are some struggles that keep Christians from sharing the gospel with others?

How does the filling of the Holy Spirit overcome these struggles and empower our evangelism?

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.
42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

In this passage, there are many signs of God’s grace and God’s work. There are signs and wonders, referring to miracles such as healing the sick and casting out demons that characterized both Jesus’ ministry and the ministry of the apostles, but there are more subtle miracles as well. These believers shared their possessions, they sold what they had in excess in order to give away the proceeds to those in need among them, and they met regularly and shared meals.

When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, we begin to overflow with love for God and love for our neighbors, especially those who share our faith. These twin loves for God and others fuel the whole of the Christian life. It is love of God that leads us to bear witness to the gospel around the world, and it is love of our brothers and sisters that leads us to develop rich, deeply committed relationships with God’s people.

Voices from the Church

“[W]ill God ever ask you to do something you’re not able to do? The answer is yes—all the time! It must be that way for God’s glory and kingdom. If we function according to our ability alone, we get the glory; if we function according to the power of the Spirit within us, God gets the glory. He wants to reveal Himself to a watching world.”

–Henry Blackaby and Melvin Blackaby
What’s displayed in Acts 2 comes as a result of the gift of God’s Spirit. It cannot be controlled or manipulated or manufactured. It only comes when open hearts, stirred to faith by the gospel, receive this gift from the Father and the Son and are filled by Him. And so we seek this Spirit-transformed life not merely by imitating these behaviors but by seeking God’s presence, by asking Him to fill us with His Spirit and renew our love for Him, His Word, and His gospel.

How have you experienced the deep community of faith in the name of Jesus and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

What are some ways we can contribute to this Spirit-filled community of faith?

Conclusion

While receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is a once-and-for-all occasion when we put our faith in Jesus, being filled with the Spirit is the lifelong responsibility of the believer, turning to God in faith and joy and learning to live with a deeper and more abiding trust in Him. As we are filled, then, we should overflow—to our friends, our neighbors, our families, and more—with the love and joy that come from abiding in the gospel of our Savior. This is our greatest way of bearing witness: not the begrudging “I-should-do-this-though-I-feel-awkward” kind of evangelism but the natural reaction of a joy-filled heart to redemption. This comes only as a gift, only as we’re filled with the Spirit, and only as we turn our own attention to this good news.

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** Just before His ascension, Jesus instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Father’s promise—the Holy Spirit, who would empower Christ’s disciples to be His witnesses on earth. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus.
MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to rely on the Holy Spirit as we share the gospel, call people to repentance and faith, and live in community.

1. What are some ways we can grow to rely more and more on the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily living?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

2. Where and with whom is the Holy Spirit leading you to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with boldness? How will you prepare to obey this calling?

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________________________________________________________________________

3. What are some needs in your group/church that your group could meet? What steps must be taken to meet those needs?

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SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SPECIAL SESSION—CHRISTMAS

SESSION 4

SESSION 5

SESSION 6
To download this quarter’s recommended playlist of songs, go to LifeWayWorship.com/GospelProject.
Get the following collection of great songs and artists:

“Holy Spirit”—Francesca Battistelli
“O Church Arise (Arise, Shine)”—Keith and Kristyn Getty
“More Holy Spirit”—Covenant Worship
“We Stand as One”—Greg Sykes
“All the Poor and Powerless”—All Sons & Daughters
“His Mercy Is More”—Matt Papa
“O Sing My Soul”—Matt Boswell
“You Alone Can Rescue”—Matt Redman
“Lay It at the Cross”—Jaci Velasquez
“Overflow”—Evidence
1. **PROMOTE GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION, NOT BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION**
Every session points participants to the gospel of Jesus Christ as the source of life-transformation and the foundation for spiritual growth.

2. **SEE HOW THE WHOLE BIBLE FITS TOGETHER**
From Genesis to Revelation, understand how the entire Bible reveals God’s plan of redemption through Jesus Christ.

3. **UNITE EVERY AGE IN CHRIST-CENTERED STUDY**
For churches that wish to align all ages, *The Gospel Project* provides Christ-centered study for babies through adults.

4. **COMPEL MEN AND WOMEN TO LIVE ON MISSION**
Every session challenges participants to consider how the gospel compels them to live on mission every day.

5. **UNDERSTAND THE KEY THEMES OF CHRISTIANITY**
Helps men and women identify and understand 99 essential theological doctrines of the Christian faith as they are found throughout the Bible.
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The Father sent His Son into the world so that the world might be saved through Him—through His crucifixion and resurrection in the place of sinners. But God’s plan to save the world didn’t end there; more sending needed to be done. So the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in and empower Jesus’ followers for their mission to go and make disciples to the ends of the earth. To this end, the Spirit gives boldness, gives words, gives encouragement, gives endurance, and gives guidance to believers that the name of Jesus would be proclaimed throughout the world.

The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to continue the work of the gospel through conviction, conversion, sanctification, and calling to mission. But the Holy Spirit does not accomplish this work alone. He works through the people of God—those who believe in Jesus—to spread the good news of Jesus everywhere and to all kinds of people. Whether a person seems close to faith or violent against it, the Holy Spirit draws people to faith in Christ, and the followers of Jesus are sent to them with the Spirit and the message of salvation.

What’s Next?

SPRING 2018
Volume 11: Letters to God’s People
The God Who Directs His People (Epistles)
The God Who Changes Us (Epistles)

SUMMER 2018
Volume 12: Come, Lord Jesus
God’s Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)
The God Who Makes All Things New (Epistles, Revelation)

SOME OF OUR UPCOMING WRITERS
Katie Orr
Jared Wilson
Robert Smith Jr.

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