

## Bible Study: The Holy Spirit and Fire

### **Bible Study – The Holy Spirit** **By William Gavin**

*“I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you always, the Spirit of truth” John 14:16-17*

#### **Leader Notes:**

*Focus: The Holy Spirit and his presence in our lives, with particular attention to the reality of fire and God’s making of himself known through fire and light.*

*Instruction: Anything written in italics is a direction or suggestion for the leader. Whatever is written in regular text should be read aloud. When possible, have the young people in your group do these readings.*

*Preparation: Read through the study ahead of time, familiarizing yourself with its content. Pray with the readings from Sacred Scripture. Have Bibles ready to go (or print out the passages below). Ask your teens to bring their own and have extras available, if possible. We recommend actual Bibles to be used as putting the Bible in the hands of young people is always preferable.*

“When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.” Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-4

Let’s begin with the commonly known prayer to the Holy Spirit. Instead of praying it just once though, we are going to read it through three times. Each time listen to how the Holy Spirit is enlightening your heart and mind to His word.

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

Could anyone share what stood out to them after praying this three times?

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For thousands of years mankind has marveled at fire. There are many aspects of fire that are fascinating to reflect upon. Here are just a few:

- Fire is a chemical reaction that releases light and heat.
- Fire is always changing, and each fire is unique – there has never been a fire that is exactly like any other fire that has ever existed
- Fires require fuel, oxygen and heat to burn.
- Fire is an event or occurrence, not a thing.
- Earth is the only known planet where fire can burn. Everywhere else there's not enough oxygen.
- Researchers now understand that fire became an essential part of human history, particularly enabling mankind to cook food.
- Finally, fire has been used ritually through the use of incense, candles and, most importantly for Jews and Christians, as the means by which ritual sacrifice was offered to God in the Temple in Jerusalem (c.f. Leviticus 6). The first example of this occurs in the book of Genesis where we read: "Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac. He himself carried the fire and the sacrificial knife, and the two of them walked on together" (Genesis 22: 6-7). Later, one of the first 'theophanies', or appearances of God occurs to Moses through the bush of fire that was not consumed (Exodus 3:2). Here, Moses learned the name of God, I am who I am (or Yahweh).

We are now going to look at some other key passages from the Scriptures that point to the God who associates Himself with fire.

*Have teens pick a passage from what is listed below and have them look it up in their Bible. Select teens to read the passage to the group. Perhaps read each passage more than once.*

Psalm 78:13-15 He divided the sea and led them through;

he made the water stand up like a wall.

<sup>14</sup> He guided them with the cloud by day  
and with light from the fire all night.

<sup>15</sup> He split the rocks in the wilderness  
and gave them water as abundant as the seas;

Jeremiah 20: 9 But if I say, "I will not mention his word  
or speak anymore in his name,"

his word is in my heart like a fire,  
a fire shut up in my bones.

I am weary of holding it in;  
indeed, I cannot.

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### Matthew 3:11

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” – St. John the Baptist

### John 1: 1-5 (not directly about ‘fire’, but what fire produces)

**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:5

You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

### Acts 1:8

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.

### Questions for discussion:

1. Fire is a source of energy – the key ingredient for cars, trains and any engine. Engine combustion is only possible with fire and heat. Why is fire, then, a good symbol for the Holy Spirit? What are some of the ‘powers’ that the Holy Spirit gives us?
2. (*If you’re outside on a starry night*). Look up – what is the only thing you can see in the sky? The answer is, of course, the stars and the moon. Stars are suns that, via fire, shine their light throughout the entire universe. The ‘light’ of the moon is actually the reflection of the sun’s light off of the moon which then travels to earth (at the speed of light – roughly 185,000 miles per second). Why is the main thing associated with fire – namely light – a good symbol of the Holy Spirit? How does the Holy Spirit “en’light’en” us? Give specific examples.
3. Fire also produces heat and warmth. How, again, is this a good symbol of the nature of the Holy Spirit for our lives? What are some specific examples of this ‘warmth’ that the Holy Spirit offers?
4. Fire always draws us. There is something about a fire that pulls us towards it. – we are attracted and fascinated by fire. How is this a good and appropriate symbol of the Holy Spirit?

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5. Finally, though fire can destroy, fire can also cleanse. If you have ever gone camping in the backcountry, you may have had to boil water to purify it. If you have ever had a splinter, you may have used fire to clean a needle from bacteria. How is thinking about the cleansing or 'refining' (Malachi 3) nature of God appropriate? How is God a cleansing fire through His Holy Spirit? What are some key ways that we are 'cleansed' as Catholics by the fire of God's love?