



## **Theme: A Better Life in the Holy Spirit** **"Communing with the Holy Spirit"**



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### **Weekly Memory Verse:**

***29 In those days I will pour out my Spirit  
even on servants—men and women alike.*** – Joel 2:29

**Meditation Moments for Monday, September 1 – Read Matthew 1:18-21 and Luke 1:28–41.** Let's celebrate Christmas in September! Matthew and Luke both began Jesus' story with a powerful announcement about the Spirit of God at work in the life of an unremarkable peasant couple in the first century. Matthew speaks of a mysterious exercise of God's creative power through the Spirit's work. Clearly, Joseph isn't Jesus' biological father based on Matthew 1:25. The two phrases used by Luke, "*Holy Spirit*," and "*power of the Most High*," both refer to God's presence. The next words to follow those phrases, "*Come over you*," and "*overshadow you*," are parallel terms for God's works that Luke also in Acts 1:8 and Acts 5:15-16 (remember that Luke and Acts are written by the same author.) Luke carefully picks words that don't have sexual overtones but instead refer to a supernatural power. The Holy Spirit brought God into our world in a surprising way--not as a powerful ruler, but as a baby born to ordinary people.



In her culture, Mary was likely in her mid-teens when the angel Gabriel gave her a task she couldn't (and we can't) fully understand. When have you faced unexpected news or challenges? How did you respond? How does Mary's response in verse 38 speak to your heart? Are you willing to surrender to the Holy Spirit's leading, even when that calls for trust that reaches beyond full intellectual understanding?



The angel greeted Mary with, “Rejoice, favored one!” That didn’t mean ease and comfort. Mary’s “favored” life brought huge challenges—explaining her pregnancy to her fiancé and probably her parents, and finally a day at the foot of a cross watching the Romans kill her son. How can you become more attentive to God’s presence and guidance every day? What might change if you approached each day with the expectation that God could use you in extraordinary ways?

**Prayer:** *Holy Spirit, Mary’s mission was a one-of-a-kind event in history. Give me an openness to whatever more “ordinary” (yet vital) missions you call and direct me to live out for you. On this Labor Day, may my work be directed by you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 2** – Read **Psalm 33:6-9 and 18-19; Genesis 1:2 and 26-27**. The Hebrew Bible, what we call the Old Testament, uses the term “Holy Spirit” (*rûaḥ qādoš*) only three times, in Psalm 51:11 and Isaiah 63:10–11. The word *rûaḥ* itself originally denoted air in movement, but by the time of the earliest OT writings it carries a variety of meanings. God’s *rûaḥ* is represented as God’s power in the creation of the cosmos in Genesis 1:2 and Psalm 33:6 for example. It is God’s sustaining power present in all life in Genesis 6:17; 7:15; Job 33:4; and Psalm 104:29–30. *Rûaḥ* is also the invisible activity of God in power through his people, whether in dramatic gusts or a more sustained breeze. Finally, it is God’s presence in many types of revelation, charismatic wisdom and spontaneous speech. The rest of this week’s reading will come from our Old Testament to give us a full picture of the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 33 seems to refer to the Hebrew creation story in Genesis 1. As noted above, the Hebrew word “breath” in Psalm 33:6 is the same as the one rendered “spirit” or “wind” in Genesis 1:2. Long before anyone imagined the word or concept of “Trinity,” the poetic creation liturgy used uncommon plural pronouns to show the one God speaking of creating humans in “our” image, made to resemble “us” in character.




We live in a culture in which many believe our very existence, as individuals and as a world, is a gigantic cosmic accident, free of any divine direction or purpose. The biblical assertions about the meaning of creation point us in a significantly different direction. How does it change your sense of why you exist to believe that the fulness of God (“us”) brought this world, and the scientifically observed life processes that led to you, into being?




Some assume the Holy Spirit didn’t appear, or even exist, until after Jesus’ rose from the dead, and the church was born in Acts 2:2-4. In the Old Testament, the concept of *rûaḥ* is an existential term. At its heart is the experience of a mysterious, awesome power. It is the mighty invisible force of the wind and a power that transforms because of divine energy. How did this suggest that the Holy Spirit is an aspect of the eternal God, not a divine afterthought?

**Prayer:** *Holy Spirit, you are the spiritual air I breathe. During this series, help me to grow more aware of the spiritual strength and vitality you offer me as I make you the “oxygen” of my life with God. Amen.*


**Wednesday, September 3** – Read **Exodus 31:1-5 and 35:30-35**. In the book of Exodus's record about God making a covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, one pivotal point came in Exodus 25:8 as God said, "They should make me a sanctuary so I can be present among them." Nearly all of Exodus 25-30 carried detailed instructions for all the items the sanctuary should be like. At first, the sanctuary was a tent and later would become the Temple in Jerusalem. But who could possibly have the skills to make so many beautifully elaborate pieces?


 We find two construction supervisors are chosen. We are told that the chief supervisor, Bezalel, is filled with the divine spirit and is from the southern tribe of Judah. Oholiab is from the far northern tribe of Dan. Of course, the Sinai Israelites didn't yet live in Canaan, so tribal geography only interested the historians who wrote down the Exodus story. But it mattered that "the divine spirit" was the vital source of the supervisors' skill. What light does that cast on the beautiful settings and music in our worship today?

 Of course, building the elaborate sanctuary was more than a two-person job. Exodus said Bezalel and Oholiab not only had wonderful God-given skills themselves but also had "the ability to teach others" in Exodus 35:34. In your work and other areas of service, what things are you best at doing? What ways have you found (or could you find) to share your ability with others who could benefit from learning from you?

**Prayer:** *God, shape in me a heart willing to hear your call, willing to see all the skills you have given me, and willing to do wholeheartedly on my own or with others whatever you set before me. Amen.*

**Thursday, September 4** – Read **1 Samuel 10:5-9 and 16:13-14**. 1 and 2 Samuel are a history of Israel's monarchy. As a united kingdom, Israel had only three kings: Saul, David and Solomon. Today's Scriptures show some distinctive ways Old Testament historians spoke about God's spirit. The claim that "God gave [Saul] a different heart" doesn't fit well with the sad history of his failure as king and God's rejection. And after saying the Lord's spirit came over David, 1 and 2 Samuel will never speak of the activity of God's spirit on David again. God will work much more through what he could "naturally" do.


 The history tells us that Saul is given a different heart. The theme of the heart seems important to understanding God's actions. The suggestion is that the heart of God and the heart of God's king should be aligned, and that happens through the activity of the Spirit. The presence of God's Spirit did not relieve either Saul or David from personal responsibility for their own moral choices. How can you ask God to shape and guide you without wanting to blame God for any bad choices you make?


 The Hebrew Bible views all events as originating from God, even the dangerous mental states of Saul. It wasn't what God desired, and we read in 1 Samuel 15:35 that God regrets Saul's actions. We shouldn't expect perfect alignment in the way Bible writers viewed God. Human understandings of God changed over

time, and the Biblical writings reflected that. How does that fact make it important to study the Bible as a whole, not just bits and pieces here and there?

**Prayer:** *Dear God, I choose to be open to your Spirit's presence with me. Help me never to use that as an excuse for my unwise choices, but as a reason to keep listening for your guiding voice. Amen.*

**Friday, September 5** – Read **Psalms 51:8-13 and 139:5-10**. We often read Psalm 51 through the lens of Jesus' and the apostle Paul's Holy Spirit teaching. But it was written centuries earlier. God's breath and spirit is the source of all human life. The phrase God's *holy Spirit* does not carry the developed ideas it has in the New Testament. Only here and in Isaiah 63:10 and 11 is the phrase used in the Hebrew Bible. Psalm 139 also recognized God's presence in all of life.

 God creates life out of nothing by the power of his Spirit which hovers over the waters in Genesis 1. The threefold repetition of "spirit" in the Psalms suggests that new life is possible for us when we are forgiven. Holy spirit seems here to designate the living and life-giving presence of God. Have you ever had the crushing sense that God couldn't possibly forgive something you have done? How does this earnest poetic prayer of repentance tell you that is never the case?

 Psalm 139 said to God, "You surround me." "Surround" has a double-edged quality. We can find strength as we remember that we can never get beyond the realm of God's care for us. Amos 9 uses the same language in speaking of people going down to *Sheol* or going up to the heavens, and of God's hand being able to reach them there. It reminds Israel that it cannot escape God's judgment, or God's love. What helps you to trust more than fear the God who surrounds you?

**Prayer:** *O God, when I need your forgiveness (as I too often do), give me a mind willing to face the truth, and a heart willing to humble myself before your holiness and trust fully in your goodness, not my own. Amen.*

**Saturday, September 6** – Read **Isaiah 11:1-5 and Joel 2:25-29**. Much of what the Old Testament said about God's spirit was not as full and clear as what we'll see in coming weeks in Jesus' and Paul's teachings. But even in their hardest times, God's Old Testament people clung to the trust that God would ultimately defeat evil. And New Testament Christians eagerly linked passages like today's to their experience of Jesus. When they read prophetic passages like Isaiah 11, they were confident that Jesus was fully the coming King, God in the flesh, filled with the Spirit of wisdom and power the prophet had looked for. When the promise Jesus makes in Acts 1:8 came true just 50 days after Jesus' crucifixion, the apostle Peter in Acts 2:14-24 joyfully declared that finally the prophet Joel's promise had become reality. Guided by God's spirit, in the Old Testament a future is awaited in which all Israel will share in the Spirit of prophecy we read about in Joel 2:28. At the heart of the promise people hoped for lies universal and immediate knowledge of God.



Part of Israel's Old Testament hope was that the Messiah would bring "the day of the LORD" promised in Isaiah 2:12-18. In the New Testament, "the Day of the Lord" we read about in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 is the **second** coming of Christ. Jesus defeated death, but the religious and political leaders in Rome went about their business seemingly unaffected. So, a major part of the Old Testament hope came true in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, but another part remained unrealized for God's people to cling to. We live in what some call "the time between the times," grateful citizens of God's kingdom yet eagerly looking ahead to the day when God declares, "Look! I'm making all things new," as we read in Romans 8:18-25 and Revelation 21:5. How can God's spirit give you hope like the hope your Old Testament ancestors in the faith held?

**Prayer:** *Lord God, thank you for those who knew you and followed you centuries ago. Send me your Spirit to sustain and energize my walk with you as he did for them. Amen.*