

June: Follow the Spirit

Introduction

If you want to know what the Spirit of God is all about, the best place to start is probably with the book of Acts in the Bible. Acts, the sequel to Jesus' story in the gospels, is actually short for "The Acts of the Apostles," but it has often been said that it should really be called "The Acts of the Spirit." Acts is the adventures of Jesus' followers in the early years of the church, and it turns out to be quite a good handbook on how the Spirit works. If you read it through you'll note many ways that God works through his Spirit.

In Acts 2 it's like a surprise party, bursting onto the scene and creating a ruckus. In chapter 3 it's God's healing power to bring a paraplegic to his feet. In Acts 4 it's simple boldness to speak up for Jesus. In Acts 6 it's the calling for some to look after the poor and vulnerable. Sometimes it's like a signpost, directing people to go somewhere or talk to someone or do something else. In Saul's case it was a sudden redirection, along with a brand new identity. For Peter in Acts 10 it was an eye-opening vision, throwing wide the gates so more people can experience the love and wonder of God. In chapter 13 it was wisdom to know what to do in a tricky situation, guiding people to follow Jesus into uncharted territory. Sometimes it was a simple reminder of the way and words of Jesus, sometimes it was a courageous step in an unexpected direction, sometimes it was a change of heart to become more compassionate and generous to the people around them. These are the adventures of people who follow the Spirit.

The challenge for us this month is to practise the art of walking by the Spirit too. And it will require some practise. It's not something that comes naturally to many of us. It didn't for the early church either. But then again, nobody ever sat down at a piano for the first time and played Mozart (well, except maybe Mozart). The good news is following the Spirit is an art that God himself helps us with. It's like if Mozart himself were your piano teacher, guiding your fingers and helping you learn the necessary skills.

So here are a couple of tips as we head into this month.

Firstly, make sure you really are open to the Spirit's leading. Often we think we already know what God wants us to do, but the Spirit doesn't always work like that. Maybe God wants you to do something new and unexpected that has never been done before! The key is to move with the Spirit, keeping our eyes and ears open to God's leading.

Also, look for the places where God is already working and see if you can join in. A key element this month is discovering what God is already doing among your family, friends, schoolmates and workmates, as well as in the rest of the world.

You might also like to read through the book of Acts this month. Take note of the many ways the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Jesus' followers.

And lastly, one of the key jobs of the Holy Spirit is to empower us to change, reform ourselves and live differently. It's the power to help us develop the fruits of the Spirit and live out the way of Jesus: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, humility, compassion, generosity and so on. See if you can develop more of these gifts this month. Are there any you could use God's help with?

Listen well this month to what God might be saying, and ask the Spirit to do its transforming work in your life. Learn the ways of Jesus, follow the Spirit, and may you slowly become a more striking contrast to the values of the world, and a more true representation of Jesus.

Challenges

There are challenges listed for each version of a Big Year. Please select the challenges that best suit you and your group or family. Also, feel free to rewrite the challenges, or create new challenges to better reflect Jesus' teaching in your day-to-day setting.



ADULTS



MONK

- Write a list of the times in your life when you thought that you felt the presence of something or someone bigger than yourself with you or speaking to you. You might have described it as a hunch, a gut feeling, or a thought that just wouldn't go away. It may also have been a dream or idea, a sudden realisation or epiphany. Is it possible that this could have been God's Spirit communicating with you? Read over your list at the end of the month and see if you have had any similar experiences since writing this.
- Put aside **20 minutes every day** this month. For the first 10 minutes take a paper and pen and write down every thought that comes into your head. Don't let your pen lift or stop moving at any time – just keep writing until you run out of things to write about. For the second 10 minutes sit in silence and just consider that God's Spirit is with you. It might help to consider the idea that many believe the Jewish name for God (Yah-weh) is an attempt to imitate the sound of inhalation and exhalation – meaning that the Spirit of God may be as close to us as our very breath!
- Throughout Scripture, the Spirit of God appears, leads and acts in surprising places. Read one of the selected sections (see further resources) each day over a week, and meditate on God's working in places and ways unexpected.



CHEERLEADER

- Post a story on the Big Year news feed or FB page of an experience that you have had of the Holy Spirit. Something that you have personally experienced.
- When you're planning your social calendar for the month, ask God to show you who to spend time with. Talk about the experience with your Big Year crew and describe how you felt God was speaking to you.
- For one week this month, whenever you walk into your workplace or school, take a moment to try and visualise where God is in that space. Acknowledge the Spirit's presence there and ask God to show you how you can join in with what He is already doing in the lives of people around you.

- Reflect on something that you're naturally good at. Think about what it would mean if you saw that as a gift from God and how you could use it to mend the brokenness you see in the world around you.
- Be on the lookout this month for something you would not normally do and do it. Afterwards, ask yourself if God was in it.
- Whether we like it or not, Jesus' life is marked by supernatural events. In the book of Acts, after his disciples had received the Holy Spirit, supernatural events seemed to be a feature of their lives as well. These gifts of the Spirit are described in 1 Cor 12:7-11. Make a list of these gifts and carry it with you everywhere you go this month. Ask God this question as often as you remember to: "Do you still do stuff like this today and, if so, what does it have to do with me?"



ACTIVIST