

Home Group Notes 23 Sept 2018 Led by the Spirit Acts16

The book of the Acts of the Apostles or the Acts of the Holy Spirit? The story of how the gospel spread from 11 men cowering in fear in a locked room in Jerusalem – to the worldwide church... they were willing to be led by God's Spirit. Opening question:- Where were you when you first responded to the gospel and who shared the news of Jesus with you? - in what ways were they led by the Spirit?

1. Images of the Spirit :Dove.

See Genesis 8:- After the wrath of God in judgement on sin, Noah sends out a dove who returns with a leaf - the dove is the sign that wrath has passed and a new chapter of hope & re-creation can begin.

The Spirit appears 'like a dove' in John's account at the baptism of Jesus. A sign of purity and hope - of another new chapter of re-creation beginning in the Spirit-empowered ministry of Jesus. Many scholars understand that the bird he is referring to would have been the rock pigeon, often used by the poor in the sacrificial system in the temple . Ancient Celtic Christians saw the Holy Spirit as a "wild goose." :- a tendency to disrupt and surprise, wild and unpredictable. See John 3 v8.

What biblical images or metaphors of the Spirit are you most drawn to and why? Which ones resonate least and why? Does this challenge you to broaden your experience or appreciation of the Spirit?

2. The importance of LOVE

In the bible being 'led by the Spirit' has a couple of uses.

a. being prompted by the Spirit , being told by God somehow to do something. Can you think of examples in the Bible? Recall Dawn's testimony from Sunday. Were you struck by anything she said? Do you have a similar or a contrasting experience of being prompted by God to do something costly?

b) But also being led by the Spirit refers to how we are opening up our character to the refinement of the Spirit. See Rom8 and Gal5. If God is love, if the Spirit is God, then we should expect love to be at the absolute heart of all that the Spirit leads us into. Are we Spirit-led Christians? One way to find the answer is to look at the love that we show - all the fruit of the Spirit can be seen through the lense of the love of God. We are not by nature *loving* . We are by nature selfish. We need the Spirit to lead us into a life of Godly-love, and this will not be easy.

Recall Oli's testimony from Sunday. Were you struck by anything he said? Do you have a similar or contrasting experience of being spoken to by God, through Scripture, to be more holy?

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3. Shove! Shove is not a good heading. The Spirit doesn't shove, but sometimes he directs the course of events pretty powerfully.

In the book of Acts we see many instances where the Spirit led people out into mission in the world. The Spirit leads the apostles in all manner of ways - in dreams, through scripture, in prayer, through experiences of hearing the voice of God, through signs, through circumstance, through angels, through promptings, Here in Acts 16 it is a passage packed full of the leading of the Spirit. - we see here the great big NO of God. the closing of a door /the blocking of a path. See Acts 16 - Paul and his planting team when to the Phrygian/Galatian regions. But look what happened: Verses 6-7 - see how God blocks their progress. Like a loving parent installing a stairgate to protect their toddler, the Spirit leads them elsewhere for another purpose. We are not told how the Spirit closes the door to Paul's plans.

And when we experience a 'closed door' in our lives, there is always a discernment needed - is this from God or from the enemies of God? Is it a blockage that we need to battle against, or yield to?

Does anyone have an experience of God 'closing a door' or 'blocking your plan'? How did it feel at the time? How did you know that it was the Spirit leading you another way?

Then Paul had a night vision of a man from Macedonia begging, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (Acts 16:9) Paul and his team were in Asia. Macedonia is across the sea in Europe. This is another culture, another language, another continent. But Paul still responded to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He didn't force his way through closed doors. He was obedient. humbly allowed God to guide him and lead him, even to surprising places Look again at Acts 16:10, "After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." So - the Spirit works in the whole team - to give them unity, clarity, obedience and off they go, setting sail across the Aegean Sea. As a consequence of their following the leading of the Spirit, the gospel is taken to Europe, and has been passed down to us here today.

Is it time for us to be more eager for the leading of the Spirit in our daily lives? To hear the voice of God, to respond to his promptings, to ask him to speak in dreams or visions or in prayer. To powerfully direct our daily lives to use us to get the gospel out of the church and into the neighbourhood. *Is it time for us to be more hungry for the refinement of the Spirit - for his loving fruit , for his character to be more and more evident and on display?*

As we read of Paul and his Missionary Journeys in Acts. Take time as a Home Group to thank God for those who brought you to faith, and to pray for our World Mission Partners following the call of God overseas. For more details see the World Church newsletter on our website.