



GIFT WRAPPED

UNWRAPPING GOD'S GIFT TO US



Small Group Discussion Guide



PREPARATION

STUDY

Spend the week studying Joel 2:28–29, Isaiah 44:1–5, Ezekiel 36:26–28, John 14:15–31 and 16:12–15. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

DETERMINE

Determine which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

LANDING POINT

God's Spirit dwells in me to transform me.



GROUP DISCUSSION

❑ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

❑ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

❑ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

❑ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Around this time of year, you hear a lot about the “spirit of Christmas.” Perhaps the spirit of Christmas is a spirit of goodwill toward others. There’s something about Christmas that makes us think of those less fortunate and in need. Maybe it’s a spirit of joy in celebrating the holidays with those you love. But what if there’s a deeper meaning to the spirit of Christmas?

During this series your group has looked at prophecies about Jesus the Messiah in the book of Isaiah. Each prophecy represents a gift God wants to give you this Christmas. You have already discussed three gifts—hope, blessing and forgiveness. But there’s one more gift under the tree—transformation. God promises to send His Spirit through the Messiah’s coming. God’s Spirit would make His home in the heart of everyone who puts their trust in Jesus. The true spirit of Christmas *is* the Spirit who dwells in believers to transform them.

Q: *Think of popular Christmas books or movies. How do they explain the spirit of Christmas?*

Q: *How would you explain in your own words God’s gifts of hope, blessing and forgiveness?*



LEARN

Select 2–3 questions to discuss as a group.

THE COMING SPIRIT

Already in this series you've seen that Isaiah is filled with references to the coming Messiah, Jesus. But there are also a number of references to the Holy Spirit in Isaiah. Through this prophet, God promises to pour out His Spirit on His people. What's so special about the Spirit being poured out? It's God's way of restoring His relationship with humanity that was broken through sin. Isaiah tells us that God wants the best life possible for us, and that is a life in relationship with Him. Therefore, He will turn our hearts toward Him.

Isaiah isn't the only prophet to predict the Spirit's coming. Joel also speaks of the Spirit being poured out. Through Ezekiel, God makes a remarkable promise. He promises to give His people a new heart and a new spirit. Instead of a heart of stone that's unable to respond in faith and obedience toward God, God will give them a new heart that loves God and seeks after Him. He will put His Spirit in the hearts of believers, which will empower them to obey God.

God's heart is for a relationship with His people. For that to happen, God has to take the initiative. He does that by giving His Spirit, who changes us from the inside out.

READ: *Joel 2:28–29, Isaiah 44:1–5 and Ezekiel 36:26–28. Why is a changed heart necessary for transformation?*

Q: *Share one way God has changed your heart recently.*

JESUS AND THE SPIRIT

Jesus also speaks of the Spirit's coming. On the night of His arrest, He tells His disciples, "If you love me you will keep my commands. But I won't leave you to do this on your own. I will ask the Father to send you a Helper. This Helper is God's Spirit. He is the Spirit of truth, and He will dwell in you. This Helper is a teacher. His job is to glorify me and remind you about everything I have taught you. This Helper is also a guide. He will guide you in all truth so you can know how to live the life I want for you."

Q: *What do you learn from Jesus about the character of the Holy Spirit?*

Q: *Name some of the ways you experience the work of the Spirit in your life.*



LIVE

Select 2–3 questions from this section to answer.

THE GAZE OF YOUR HEART¹

The Spirit changes the gaze our hearts—what captures our attention and affection. It's that something or someone we spend our time thinking about and desiring. Naturally, we're selfish, so the gaze of our hearts is on us and our needs and wants. But the Spirit changes the heart. It turns the gaze of the heart off of self and on to Jesus.

Spiritual growth and life change happen when the gaze of your heart is on Jesus. You can't do that on your own. You can't make yourself grow spiritually. What you can do is incline your heart toward Jesus as the object of your gaze. You can do that through:

- Scripture
- Prayer
- Relationships
- Worship
- Thankfulness

Q: *How do you think and act when the gaze of your heart is on yourself?*

Q: *What's one thing you can start doing this week to incline your heart toward Jesus?*

GOD'S TRANSFORMING WORK

If you have put your trust in Jesus then God's Spirit dwells in you. You've already received His gift and His transforming work has already begun in you. What does this look like practically? The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 1:7 that God didn't give us a spirit of fear, but one of:

- *Power* – The ability to do all God has for you.
- *Love* – To no longer live for self but to love God and others.
- *Discipline* – To be Spirit-controlled and know how to live by God's wisdom.

♀: *Describe how someone with a spirit of fear lives.*

♀: *Where in your life would you like more power, love and discipline in the Spirit?*



LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

THE BEST YEAR EVER

These prophecies you've discussed in Isaiah remind us that God wants to give you His best. The best He can give is Himself. He does that by sending His Spirit. God's Spirit points you to Jesus and His redemptive work on the cross. Forgiveness is available. God blesses you with a new heart and a spirit to love and obey Him. God's Spirit also gives you hope for the future. God has begun His transforming work in you and will carry it on to completion (Philippians 1:6).

What would it look like for you to receive all God's gifts this Christmas and beyond? What if 2020 was your best year ever? What if 2020 was the year when you lived to be hopeful, blessed, forgiven and transformed? It's possible with God's help. Submit to His Spirit and let Him fix the gaze of your heart on Jesus.

Q: *What does it mean to submit to the Spirit?*

Q: *Split into pairs and describe what the best year ever would look like for you. How would you be different? How would you experience God's gifts for you?*



PRAY

Spend time thanking God for His gifts of hope, blessing, forgiveness and transformation. Ask Him to turn the gaze of your heart off of yourself and on to Jesus. Admit your inability to live the transformed life. Pray for the Spirit to be your helper and guide. Receive the promise that the Spirit gives you power, love and discipline to live the transformed life.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read 2 Corinthians 3–5 and reflect on what it means to live the transformed life.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



PROPHECY FULFILLED The outpouring of God’s Spirit in Isa. 44:1–5 has two results: (1) abundant life and blessing (v. 4), and (2) a desire to identify with God (v. 5).² The desire to identify with God extends beyond Israel to include Gentiles. The statement “I will pour out my Spirit” (v. 3) reminds us of Joel 2:29, with its fulfillment at Pentecost [see Acts 2] and the Gentile evangelization that followed it.³

THE NEW COVENANT “The heart and the spirit [referred to in Ezek. 36:26–28] are the location of the thoughts and the will that underlie actions. Israel’s transformation will not just be external but internal as well. [. . .] Note that these changes come as the result of divine initiative and not human effort. Jeremiah describes the new covenant in the same way (cf. Prov. 3:3; 7:3; Rom. 2:15, 29; 2 Cor. 3:3).”⁴ The wonder of God’s new covenant promise with humanity is that He will do something no human being can do—change the heart.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT “The Spirit’s work is not just individual but also cosmic in nature. Paul speaks of this in Rom. 8:18–23 “where the renewal of the suffering creation is promised in the “firstfruits” of the believers’ renewal (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13–14). The latter, personal aspect is dominant in Paul’s doctrine of the Spirit’s work. In the first instance the Spirit indwells the hearts of believers as the presence of Christ within them, initiating a radical transformation from death to life. Thus the Spirit of God can be called the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9–11; cf. 1 Pet. 1:11). The Spirit’s work, however, is not merely individual; rather the individual believer, being now “in Christ,” is brought into a new whole which is the new creation of the Spirit, exhibited in the body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 12:13; cf. Eph. 2:19–22; 4:4).”⁵

ENDNOTES:

1. Adapted from Peter Mead, “Glorious Transformation: One Key Ingredient for Spiritual Health” (lecture, European Leadership Forum), <https://foclonline.org/talk/glorious-transformation-one-key-ingredient-spiritual-health>.
2. D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1405.
3. Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III, Garland David E., vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 751.
4. R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (2015 Edition) (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1438.
5. Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 498.