



IN THE SCHOOL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

BY FR. JACQUES PHILIPPE

Prepared by Lynn Dery
RCSpirituality.org

Produced by Coronation
coronationmedia.com

OVERVIEW

IN THE SCHOOL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

SUMMARY

This Study Circle Guide is designed to accompany the small book by Fr. Jacques Philippe, *In the School of the Holy Spirit*. Like almost all of his books, this one has become a kind of modern classic, translating age-old Catholic wisdom about spiritual growth into language and concepts applicable to our contemporary lives.

CATEGORIES OF INTEREST

Prayer and Spiritual Growth

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF SESSIONS

The book is divided into an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and four appendices. The Study Circle Guide follows that structure, dividing up the material into seven sessions.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Each participant should have a copy of this Study Circle Guide.
- Each participant should have a copy of the book, *In the School of the Holy Spirit*.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Anyone. The book is written in a very simple style and does not require advanced knowledge of the Catholic faith. Because its focus is on the day-to-day living of the faith, the discussions that happen in a Study Circle about this book will tend to be very personal. Participants will have to share personal comments in order for this Study Circle to work well in a small group.

HOW MUCH HOMEWORK?

The Study Circle Guide is designed for each participant to read the relevant section of the book and answer individually the Study and Reflection Questions before coming to the session. The Study and Discussion Questions can be distributed all at once, or week by week.

At the beginning of every individual session, in the group setting, the moderator distributes a copy of the Discussion Guide (outline) to each participant. They all read through this outline together, taking turns reading out loud. The purpose of the outlines is to re-enforce the most important points of the lesson and lead participants into sharing and discussing their answers to the Study and Reflection Questions. The outline will periodically suggest stopping to answer the questions or going back and re-reading important parts of the text. This approach seeks to move the important information from short-term into long-term memory through repetition.

NOTES



SESSION I STUDY AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

CHAPTER I: HOLINESS IS THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (PAGES 9–25)

QUESTIONS

1. If we have a well written Program of Life and significant courage, patience, and will power, can we become holy? Why or why not?
2. “Holiness is only revealed to us by degrees, as we journey on, and it is often something very different from what we imagine...” Do you have any concrete examples of this from your own life?
3. List some of the ways/means that the Holy Spirit uses to show us His will as presented in Chapter One.
4. What does Father Jacques Philippe mean when he says on page 20, “God calls us to perfection but he is not a perfectionist”?
5. Explain why the Holy Spirit is often called a “consoler”. Do you have any concrete examples from your own life of how the Holy Spirit had the ability to console you during a trying time in your life?

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SESSION 3 STUDY AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 2: SECTIONS 6–10 (PAGES 35–43)

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the guidelines that the author gives us about detachment in Section 6? *(Pages 35–37)*
2. Read the top paragraph from page 37, (“Our wisdom and God’s practically never...”) and be prepared to discuss if you have had concrete experience with this.
3. According to Section 7 in Chapter 2, what is the greatest harm that can come to us when we allow ourselves to get upset and agitated by negative circumstances in our lives?
4. The author links “maintaining peace to the practice of silence”. What are some examples of “noise” that we can let overtake us and disrupt our silence?
5. In section 8, the author allows us to see the connection between prayer and hearing God speak. Take time to analyze your prayer life and see how the Holy Spirit may be asking you to “bump it up” or fine tune it so that it becomes more effective in hearing God speak.
6. Section 9 allows us to examine various movements of our hearts. What are some of the “disordered” movements we can experience?
7. Section 10 of Chapter 2 sheds light on Spiritual Direction. Give some of the reasons why having a Spiritual Director may be helpful in the spiritual life. For those who already have a Spiritual Director, be prepared to share concrete examples from your own life in how a Spiritual Director helped you to discern God’s will in certain situations. *(Page 43)*

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SESSION 4 STUDY AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 3: PAGES 44–54

QUESTIONS

- 1. What does it mean (Page 47) that an inspiration cannot contradict Scripture or the teachings of the Church? Give examples of what he means by this.
- 2. An inspiration, if it comes from God, cannot ask us for something that contradicts the duties in our state of life. What is your vocation and what are some of the duties in your state of life that our Lord wants you to possibly put more effort into?
- 3. If an inspiration comes from God, it will produce sound fruit. What are some of these fruits?
- 4. In the section on “Discernment of Spirits”, we learn that turbulence can lead to peace, if it comes from the Holy Spirit. Can you share a time when God was asking something of you that initially filled you with anxiety or sadness, but ultimately led you to peace once you followed the inspiration?
- 5. Try to take all the information you learned from this lesson and summarize it in a few sentences. Has it helped you discern anything about a situation you are currently seeking guidance about?

NOTES



SESSION 6 STUDY AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

APPENDICES I AND II FROM PAGES 69–78

QUESTIONS

1. From Appendix I, if we take the advice of the author and pray this prayer, meaning all that we say, what can we expect to find as a result in our life?
2. From Appendix 2, list the main means for achieving the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Which one(s) do you need to work on more in this stage of your journey?
3. What does this author pose as the greatest evil? What does he say is the cause of us “dirtying or weakening” the inspirations of the Holy Spirit?
(Page 76)
4. Which is more helpful in growing in holiness/ sanctification: good works or purification of the heart? Why?
5. The author tells us that we ought to receive each inspiration as a word of God. How is God’s word powerful? *(Section 5, Page 77)*
6. Try to take all the information you learned from this lesson and summarize it in a few sentences. Has it helped you discern anything about a situation you are currently seeking guidance about?

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SESSION 7 STUDY AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

APPENDICES III AND IV FROM PAGES 79-90

QUESTIONS

1. There are some choices we have to make that are considered "small change". What does he mean by this? What lessons can we take away from this teaching? What kinds of decisions, on the other hand, are not considered "small change" decisions?
2. On pages 83-84, the author uses an analogy of water flowing down a river. What do the foaming waters that hit rocks represent? Why is Our Lady compared to the water that flows quietly and with minimal effort? What can we learn from this/from her?
3. Name the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. What are 1-2 concepts that you learned or were enlightened about regarding at least one of these gifts?
4. Unlike teens (who yearn for autonomy), young children don't mind being dependent on their parents for everything, because their dependence is an exchange of love. How can this help us better understand how our dependence on God can actually help us to become more free?
5. Which point in Appendix IV best helped you understand how human freedom and submission to God's will can merge?
6. Try to take all the information you learned from this lesson and summarize it in a few sentences. Has it helped you discern anything about a situation you are currently seeking guidance about?

NOTES



SESSION I DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER I (PAGES 9–25)

INTRODUCTION

- The purpose of this book and study is to describe simple and concrete ways to live docility to the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is essential to our Christian life and is needed to progress on the path on which God leads us. The author, Jacques Philippe, uses many examples from modern life to illustrate his points.
- Read the Introduction together as a team/group, taking turns reading. *(Pages 9–11)*
- Pray the prayer from Appendix I on page 69, “Holy Spirit, soul of my soul...”

CHAPTER I: HOLINESS IS THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- There are infallible means for obtaining holiness; the important thing is to know what they are. This chapter will address some of them.
- If we have a well-written Program of Life and significant courage, patience, and will power, can we become holy? Why?
- Scripture confirms that holiness can only be obtained through the fruit of God’s grace.
- Read St. Louis de Montfort’s words on page 14, “What an admirable...”
- We do not have to become saints by our own power; we have to learn how to let God make us into saints. This does not mean, however, that we don’t have to make any effort.
 - What it does mean is that we should fight to open ourselves as fully as possible to His grace, which sanctifies us.
 - In order to do this, we need to develop the virtue of humility.
- The good news is that our powers are limited but God’s are not.
 - There are as many forms of holiness as there are people. For God, each person is absolutely unique.
 - No individual knows what his own holiness consists of. Only God is capable of creating totally unique masterpieces.
 - It is important to understand that what God is asking of me in particular, He may not be asking of anyone else.
 - “Holiness is only revealed to us by degrees, as we journey on, and it is often something very different from what we imagine...” Do you have any concrete examples of this from your own life?
 - List some of the ways/means that the Holy Spirit uses to show us His will as presented in Chapter One.
 - What does Father Jacques Philippe mean when he says on page 20, “God calls us to perfection but he is not a perfectionist”?
 - We will obtain grace to be faithful in the important things that at present we find impossible, by dint of being faithful in the little things within our grasp, especially when those little things are the one ones that the Holy Spirit asks of us by calling to our hearts with his inspirations.
 - Read together the last paragraph in section 2 on page 21, “Finally, there is...”
 - Read together the text from St. Faustina on pages 21–22, “This evening, I...”
 - This text illustrates a central point that each act of fidelity to an inspiration is rewarded by more abundant graces, especially by more frequent and stronger inspirations.
 - The soul is then drawn steadily on to greater faithfulness to God, a clearer perception of his will, and greater ease in accomplishing it.
 - Thus we see that our faithfulness to grace draws down for us additional graces.
 - God rewards us as generously as only He can.



- Another spiritual law, which is worth taking note of and that is confirmed by experience, is that the path of docility to the motions of the Holy Spirit may be very demanding, because “the Holy Spirit breathes where he will,” but it is a path of freedom and happiness.
- Explain why the Holy Spirit is often called a “consoler”. Do you have any concrete examples from your own life of how the Holy Spirit had the ability to console you during a trying time in your life?
- There is more happiness in giving than receiving.
- Here we find another great law of the spiritual life: what is really able to satisfy our hearts is not so much the gifts we receive as the good that God inspires and that we practice.

INTRODUCTION

- This first chapter has served to show us how fruitful it is to welcome and follow the motions of the Spirit, but it leaves many more questions for us about how to do it.
- One of those questions is “How can we foster the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual life?” This question will be addressed in the next chapter.
- To prepare, read chapter 2 from page 26–35 (first 5 sections) and answer the questions.

NOTES



SESSION 2 DISCUSSION GUIDE

CHAPTER 2: SECTIONS 1–5 (PAGES 26–34)

INTRODUCTION

- This chapter will give us advice for how to foster inspirations from the Holy Spirit. We will learn what specifically will enable inspirations of grace to take place in us and what conditions are conducive to their appearing in our souls.
- Pray the prayer from Appendix I on page 69, “Holy Spirit, soul of my soul...”
- God loves everyone with a unique love and inspires very different paths for different people to take in order to lead us all to sanctity.
- This means that the frequency and characteristics of the inspirations of grace will differ from one person to another, but God will grant each person at least the inspirations he needs for his sanctification.
- Read the quote from St. Francis de Sales on the bottom of page 26, “Those who keep...”
- What is the primary aim of the “gifts of the Holy Spirit”?
- Every Christian should desire and pray for these inspirations of grace.
- Are following the inspirations of the Holy Spirit an optional extra in the spiritual life? Why or why not?

PRACTICE PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

- What prevents us from receiving more abundant graces from God may be quite simply our not being sufficiently grateful and not thanking him for the graces he has already given us.
- There is no doubt that if we thank God with all our heart for each grace received, especially for the inspirations, He will grant us more.
- Read together the advice from St. Therese of Lisieux on the bottom of page 28, “What draws...”
- How does having ingratitude toward God imprison us within ourselves and close us to His grace? (Page 29)

DESIRE AND ASK FOR THEM

- One of the petitions we should make to God most often should be: “Inspire me in all my decisions, and never let me neglect any of your inspirations.”
- On page 29, the author recommends going on a retreat at times in our lives. Why is this? Have you thought about attending a retreat this year?

RESOLVE TO REFUSE GOD NOTHING

- What matters more that conscious, explicit prayer on this subject is that we should have a strong and constant determination to obey God in everything, both big or little, without exception.
 - The more God sees this disposition of total docility in us, the more He will favor us with His inspirations.
 - Read together paragraph 2 (in section 3) on page 30, “This is not to say that in fact...”
- We should “love obeying more than we fear disobeying” and be mindful that the enemy never use our docility to get us upset or discouraged over our inevitable failures.

PRACTICE FILIAL AND TRUSTING OBEDIENCE

- To obtain more inspirations, we need to begin by obeying the ones we receive.
- If we want God to reveal more of His will to us by His inspirations, we need to start by obeying His wishes that we already know. From section 4, what are some examples of fulfilling God’s will through that which we should already be doing?
- If we ignore inspirations of the Holy Spirit, what is there a danger of happening?
- We must obey God rather than men, but it would be an illusion to think we were capable of obeying God if we were incapable of obeying other people.



- The same obstacle has to be overcome in both cases (obeying men who are in authority over us... or obeying God): attachment to ourselves and to our own will.
- If we are never prepared to renounce our own will (our ideas, our tastes, our attachments) for other people, what guarantee is there that we'll be able to do so when God asks us to?

PRACTICE FILIAL AND TRUSTING OBEDIENCE

- Section 5 has to do with “obedience to events”. In your own words, what does “obedience to events” mean and what does it not mean?
- In this section, we learn that after we have done everything in our power to resolve certain situations we are put into, we are invited to practice an attitude of abandonment and filial trust toward our heavenly Father.
- Read the third paragraph on page 34, “What most prevents us...”
- *The author exhorts us “to choose all; to decide to choose what we have not chosen...”*
- *Externally, it may not change anything about the situation we are in, but interiorly, it changes everything... for it enables God to draw good out of everything that happens to us, whether good or bad.*

PRACTICE FILIAL AND TRUSTING OBEDIENCE

- This lesson has taken us through the first 5 conditions (from Chapter 2) that are conducive to the inspirations of grace appearing in our souls.
- Lesson 3 will cover the other 5 conditions.
- For next session, read page 35–43 (Sections 6–10) and answer the questions.

NOTES



SESSION 3 DISCUSSION GUIDE

CHAPTER 2: SECTIONS 1–5 (PAGES 35–43)

INTRODUCTION

- This lesson is from Chapter 2, which continues to give us advice for how to foster inspirations from the Holy Spirit. We will learn what specifically will enable inspirations of grace to take place in us and what conditions are conducive to their appearing in our souls.
- Pray the prayer from Appendix I on page 69, “Holy Spirit, soul of my soul...”
- Last lesson discussed the first 5 conditions which we will briefly review:
 - Practice praise and thanksgiving in order to receive more graces from the Holy Spirit.
 - Desire and ask for the graces often.
 - One of the petitions we should make to God most often should be: “Inspire me in all my decisions, and never let me neglect any of your inspirations.”
 - Resolve to refuse God nothing (big or small).
 - Practice filial and trusting obedience (begin by obeying God in the areas that we should be doing already (Church teachings, Scripture, Commandments, duties of our state in life, obedience to those in authority over us).
 - Practice abandonment (to the situations we are put in with a good attitude).

PRACTICE DETACHMENT

- We cannot receive the motions of the Holy Spirit if we are rigidly attached to our possessions, our ideas, or our point of view.
- What are some of the guidelines that the author gives us about detachment in Section 6? (Pages 35–37)
- Read the top paragraph from page 37, (“Our wisdom and God’s practically never...”) and be prepared to discuss if you have had concrete experience with this.

PRACTICE SILENCE AND PEACE

- The Spirit of God is a spirit of peace, and He speaks and acts in peace and gentleness, never in tumult and agitation.
 - The Holy Spirit is a gentleman and will not clobber us over the head with His will.
 - To hear the voice of God, we need to have a sort of calm zone of silence and peace.
 - If our inner world is noisy and agitated, the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit will find it very difficult to be heard.
- When we experience difficult moments, the effort we make to remain at peace in spite of everything does a lot of good and will be most profitable for us in our situation.
- Read together the quote from St. John of the Cross on page 38, “Take care to preserve...”
- According to Section 7 in Chapter 2, what is the greatest harm that can come to us when we allow ourselves to get upset and agitated by negative circumstances in our lives?
- The author links “maintaining peace to the practice of silence”. What are some examples of “noise” that we can let overtake us and disrupt our silence?
- The silence that Father Philippe discusses is not an empty silence; it is peace, attentiveness to God’s presence and attentiveness to others waiting in trust and hope in God.

PERSEVERE FAITHFULLY IN PRAYER

- All of these attitudes discussed already, which facilitate the Holy Spirit’s motions, can only be acquired little by little; and an absolute requirement for acquiring them is faithfulness to prayer.
- Analyze your prayer life and see how the Holy Spirit may be asking you to “bump it up” or fine-tune it so that it becomes more effective in hearing God speak.



EXAMINE THE MOVEMENTS OF OUR HEARTS

- Inspirations can come from 3 sources: ourselves (our nature), the devil, or the Holy Spirit.
- By learning to take account of the various movements of our souls that we will learn to recognize the Holy Spirit's motions.
- We should live in such a habitual disposition of desire for God, inner calm, prayer, and attentiveness to what is happening within us that, if a movement of grace is born in our hearts, it is not swamped or lost in the "background noise" of other things competing for our attention, but can emerge into our consciousness and be recognized as divine inspiration.
- Section 9 allows us to examine various movements of our hearts. What are some of the "disordered" movements we can experience?
- A key thing to analyze is "What affect does the inspiration leave us with?"
 - Those that leave peace and joy are probably from God.
 - Those that leave fear, doubt, confusion, or anxiety are probably not from God.

OPEN OUR HEARTS TO A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

- We will find it much easier to discern the action of the Holy Spirit if we have the possibility of opening our hearts to someone who can give us spiritual guidance.
- Section 10 of Chapter 2 sheds light on Spiritual Direction. Give some of the reasons why having a Spiritual Director may be helpful in the spiritual life. For those who already have a Spiritual Director, be prepared to share concrete examples from your own life in how a Spiritual Director helped you to discern God's will in certain situations. (Page 43)
- Confession should never be neglected, even if it does not lead to Spiritual direction because it is a source of purification of the heart and gives light to understand the things that happen in our souls.

CONCLUSION

- Chapter 2 has taken us through the 10 conditions that are conducive to the inspirations of grace appearing in our souls.
- Our next lesson will help us to better understand how we can know that an inspiration comes from God.
- For next lesson, read pages 44–54 (first half of Chapter 3) and answer the questions.

NOTES



SESSION 4 DISCUSSION GUIDE

CHAPTER 3: PAGES 44–54

INTRODUCTION

- This lesson is from Chapter 3 and will help us to better understand how we can know that an inspiration comes from the Holy Spirit and not confuse it with what may be the fruit of our imagination, wishful thinking or from the enemy.
- Pray the prayer from Appendix I on page 69, “Holy Spirit, soul of my soul...”
- The criteria that the author gives which we are about to explore will be helpful, but he makes it clear that it is impossible for us to discern with certainty the will of God with the suggestions he makes. They are great guidelines to follow, however.

PROGRESSIVELY ACQUIRE A “SPIRITUAL SENSE”

- Ultimately what will help us to recognize and respond to God’s motions most easily and promptly is the interior development of a sort of “spiritual sense.”
- This “spiritual hearing” is a kind of ability to recognize, among all the multiple, discordant voices that we can hear inside us, the unique, unmistakable voice of Jesus.
 - This sense is like a loving instinct that makes it easier and easier for us to distinguish the voice of the Spouse, in the chorus of sounds that greet our ears.
 - The Holy Spirit uses, for each of us, a ‘tone of voice’ that is His alone.
 - Sometimes, however, the devil can try to imitate the voice of God.
- The Holy Spirit cannot, in his inspirations, asks us for anything that contradicts His will as expressed by the more usual means: the Word of God, the teachings of the Church, and the demands of our vocation, which we will explore next.

CONSISTENCY WITH SCRIPTURE, THE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH AND OUR VOCATION

- What does it mean that an inspiration cannot contradict Scripture or the teachings of the Church? Give examples of what he means by this. *(Page 47)*
- Beyond Scripture and Church teaching, a whole collection of demands are derived from our own vocation as a married person, a parent, a priest, a religious, etc, and from our situation in life (our professional duties, etc); and these demands are God’s will for us.
- An inspiration, if it comes from God, cannot ask us for something that contradicts the duties in our state of life. What is your vocation and what are some of the duties in your state of life that our Lord wants you to possibly put more effort into?
- It sometimes happens, on the other hand, that we make our family or professional duties into a comfortable excuse for not doing what the Holy Spirit asks of us.

INTERNAL CRITERION: A TREE IS KNOWN BY ITS FRUIT

- If an inspiration comes from God, it will produce sound fruit. What are some of these fruits?
- This is opposed to inspirations that come from our flesh or the devil for they will be sterile or even bear negative fruits, such as sadness, bitterness, pride, etc.
- This criterion is an important one, but its big disadvantage is that it can only be applied in retrospect. Once it has been followed, its consequences can be measured.
- Building up our Experience:
 - Despite the disadvantage of seeing things in retrospect, this criterion is not at all useless for it lets us gain experience.
 - Sometimes, even before putting the decision



into effect, certain fruits may already make themselves apparent within us—the fruits of peace, joy, and so on.

- While the “spiritual sense” we have discussed is a definite gift from God, it is, nonetheless, developed and strengthened by experience.
- Read the 4th paragraph on page 50, “We need to know that in the spiritual life, even...”
- Review quickly as a group what is meant by the term “infallibility”.

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

- While we already mentioned this, it is worth repeating this general law of discerning spirits:
 - What comes from the Spirit of God brings with it peace, joy, tranquility of spirit, gentleness, simplicity, and light. (the devil could never produce these in a lasting way).
 - The most characteristic of all is: PEACE!
 - What comes from the spirit of evil brings sadness, trouble, agitation, worry, confusion, and darkness. (the most characteristic of all is agitation).
- To understand how turbulence can lead to peace (if it comes from the Holy Spirit), read the 4 paragraphs in a row, starting on page 52 with “In practice, however, things are more complex...”
- In the section on “Discernment of Spirits”, we learn that turbulence can lead to peace, if it comes from the Holy Spirit. Can you share a time when God was asking something of you that initially filled you with anxiety or sadness, but ultimately lead you to peace once you followed the inspiration?
- Read the third paragraph on page 53 to see how we will feel if an inspiration comes from the devil or the flesh, “By contrast, if an inspiration comes from...”
- *In review (as this is a key principle in the spiritual life): A divine inspiration can disturb us to begin with, but to the extent that we do not refuse it, but open ourselves to it and consent to it, little by little it will establish peace in us.*

CONCLUSION

- Try to take all the information you learned from this lesson and summarize it in a few sentences. Has it helped you discern anything about a situation you are currently seeking guidance about?
- Our next lesson will help give us more criteria for having a better understanding of how we can know that an inspiration comes from God.
- For next lesson, read pages 54–66 (last half of Chapter 3 along with the Conclusion) and answer the questions.

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SESSION 5 DISCUSSION GUIDE

CHAPTER 3 AND CONCLUSION: PAGES 54–66

INTRODUCTION

- This lesson continues from Chapter 3 and will give us further insight to better understand how we can know that an inspiration comes from the Holy Spirit and not confuse it with what may be the fruit of our imagination, wishful thinking or from the enemy.
- Pray the prayer from Appendix I on page 69, “Holy Spirit, soul of my soul...”
- The last lesson gave us some insights that we briefly want to review:
 - We should progressively acquire a “spiritual sense” (God’s tone of voice), which will help us to recognize and respond to God’s motions more easily and promptly.
 - The inspirations from God should be consistent with Scripture, the teachings of the Church, our vocation, and the duties with our state in life.
 - The Inspirations should bear good fruit.
 - If the inspirations are from God, they should foster peace, joy and tranquility of spirit, while those of the enemy lead us to fear, agitation, doubt, anxiety, or confusion.

COMPLEMENTARY SIGNS: CONSTANCY AND HUMILITY

- One of the characteristics of God’s Spirit is **CONSTANCY**, while that of the flesh or devil is unstable and changing. Read the first paragraph in this section on page 54, “One of the ...”
- Because God’s inspirations are stable and unchanging, it is Ok to not be too overly hasty in following an inspiration (especially in really important matters), in order to verify that it doesn’t soon vanish completely, (for if it does, it probably wasn’t from God).

- Another characteristic of God’s spirit is that He imprints our souls with a deep sense of **HUMILITY**. He makes us do good in such a way that we are happy to do it, but without any presumptuousness, self-satisfaction, or vanity.
- What is one of surest tests of true humility is the spirit of obedience. Towards whom should we be obedient?

IS GOD’S WILL ALWAYS THE CHOICE THAT IS MOST DIFFICULT

- God’s will, and thus the inspirations of His grace, often do go in the opposite direction from our immediate tendencies, as we usually desire toward selfishness, comfort, laziness, etc.
 - Thus, oftentimes following God’s inspirations might be difficult, however, God the Father, is not an executioner. He lets us choose what path to take. When He requires something difficult of us, it is to help us grow in love.
- Discuss whether this statement is true or false: *What God requires from us in every circumstance is the most difficult thing.* Give reasons for your answer.
- One of the criteria for discerning a vocation is whether the person is happy in it.
- In summary, God’s will is where there is the maximum of love but not necessarily the maximum of suffering. There is more love in resting if trust than making ourselves suffer through worrying.

DIFFERENT REACTIONS DEPENDING ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INSPIRATIONS

- It is important to do our best not to neglect a single one of God’s inspirations. Something that seems insignificant to us may be more important than we imagine.



- It is important to note that one small act of obedience to God can sometimes cause us to make more progress spiritually than years of effort according to our own plans.
 - Fidelity to small graces draws down bigger ones.
 - It is also obvious that we should treat inspirations differently depending on their importance.
 - St. Francis de Sales: “You don’t count small change the way you count gold ingots.”
 - Matters, like gold nuggets, have to be weighed carefully, whereas, small change shouldn’t take up too much of our time or energy.
 - Read the first main paragraph on page 61, “Sometimes a suggestion comes to us...”
 - What advice does this author give us about discerning major life decisions, such as our vocation, or a change in the direction that our life is taking?
- Read the third paragraph on page 65 into page 66, “Mary is our mother in the order of grace...”
 - Try to take all the information you learned from this lesson and summarize it in a few sentences. Has it helped you discern anything about a situation you are currently seeking guidance about?
 - Our next lesson will come from the Appendices and include useful advice from those who have gone before us who had a good understanding of how to discern God’s holy will and be faithful to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.
 - For next lesson, read Appendices I and II from pages 69–78 and answer the questions.

BEING UNRESPONSIVE TO GRACE

- We should do all we can to avoid being unfaithful to God and His will, but at the same time we should believe that when we fail, it is by no means irremediable.
- Read the second paragraph on page 63, “Our Lord is always ready to lift us up again...”

CONCLUSION

- To sum up, we could say that divine inspirations are recognizable by these criteria:
 - They establish in us peace
 - They are not changeable
 - They impress on us a sense of humility
- The conditions listed thus far in our study are incomplete without filial love for our Blessed Mother, who lived her entire life in the shadow of the Holy Spirit, perfectly consenting to all the operations of the Spirit within her.

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SESSION 6 DISCUSSION GUIDE

APPENDICES I AND II FROM PAGES 69–78

INTRODUCTION

- This lesson guides us through the first two Appendices, which give us more insight into the “School of the Holy Spirit”.

APPENDIX I: A PRAYER BY CARDINAL MERCIER

- In this Appendix, we are shown a secret about holiness and happiness...making time to pray daily to the Holy Spirit to ask for His guidance and give Him permission to accept whatever He asks of us.
- In short, if we follow God’s will by following the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, we will indeed find the secret to lasting holiness and happiness.
- Pray the prayer from Appendix I on page 69, “Holy Spirit, soul of my soul...”
- From Appendix I, if we take the advice of the author and pray this prayer, meaning all that we say, what can we expect to find as a result in our life?

APPENDIX II: QUOTATIONS FROM FATHER LOUIS LALLEMANT

- Father Lallemand was a Jesuit formator who lived in the 17th Century; among his students were American martyrs, Isaac Jogues and Jean de Brebeuf.
- At the heart of his teaching, he showed the connection between docility to the Holy Spirit and detachment. This appendix will guide us through some of the conferences he gave regarding this matter.
- **DOCILITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:**
 - Once we truly abandon ourselves to the Holy Spirit, he will take us on a journey and guide us. At the beginning of our journey, we will not know where we are being led. As the Christian matures, more and more light will be shed and it will be easier and easier to see where God is leading them.

- A great analogy, a visual image, is given for us to think of as we journey through our lives, being completely led by the Holy Spirit. Read the top paragraph on page 71.
- **MEANS FOR REACHING DOCILITY:**
 - It is important to note that there are many wishes of God that we do not know, for we are filled with ignorance but God will only call us to account for the things He has given us to know. If we make good use of these, He will give us more.
 - If we accomplish what he has already made known to us of his designs, He will then show us the rest.
 - From Appendix 2, list the main means for achieving the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Which one(s) do you need to work on more in this stage of your journey?
- **RESPONSE TO CERTAIN OBJECTIONS TO DOCILITY:**
 - When you are being led by the Holy Spirit in your decision making process, how should it affect your obedience to those in authority?
(Section 3 of Appendix II)
 - Discuss whether this statement is true or false and why. “If you are being led by the Holy Spirit, then over time, it will make you need the advice of men, even holy men, less and less.”
 - When people object that they cannot seem to hear or understand the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, these are some plausible reasons why:
 - They may not be in a state of grace
 - They may be remaining on the superficial layer, instead of digging deep inside where the Holy Spirit resides.
 - Read the last paragraph on page 73, “The answer to these people...”



- People will come to know the guidance of the Holy Spirit if they take the trouble to develop the necessary dispositions:
 - Follow faithfully the light that is given to them: then it will grow steadily.
 - Cut back the sins and imperfections that, like so many clouds, robs them of the light: they will see more clearly, day by day.
 - Never allow their external senses to go astray and be directed by sensuality: if they can do this, God will open the senses of their souls to hear his voice.
 - If possible, never go out of their inner selves or return there as soon as possible.
 - Sincerely reveal the whole depth of their hearts to their superior or spiritual director: a soul that possesses this candor and simplicity will never fail to be favored with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- **MOTIVES FOR DOCILITY: PERFECTION AND EVEN SALVATION DEPEND ON DOCILITY TO GRACE:**
 - The two elements of the spiritual life are purification (i.e. cutting away what there is in it that opposed grace) of the heart and guidance of the Holy Spirit. These are the two poles of the whole spiritual life that will help us reach perfection.
 - What does this author pose as the greatest evil? What does he say is the cause of us “dirtying or weakening” the inspirations of the Holy Spirit? (Page 76)
 - Which is more helpful in growing in holiness/ sanctification: good works or purification of the heart? Why?

THE EXCELLENCE OF GRACE AND THE INJUSTICE OF OPPOSING IT:

- The author tells us that we ought to receive each inspiration as a word of God. How is God’s word powerful? (Section 5 on Page 77)

CONCLUSION

- Try to take all the information you learned from this lesson and summarize it in a few sentences. Has it helped you discern anything about a situation you are currently seeking guidance about?
- For last lesson, read Appendices III and IV from pages 79–90 and answer the questions.

NOTES



SESSION 7 DISCUSSION GUIDE

APPENDICES III AND IV FROM PAGES 79–90

INTRODUCTION

- This lesson guides us through Appendices III and IV, which give us more insight into the “School of the Holy Spirit”.

APPENDIX III: QUOTATIONS FROM ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

- **CRITERIA FOR THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS:**
 - The Holy Spirit comes as mighty wind and as heavenly thunder, but he does not knock the apostles down, he does not upset them; the fear they had in hearing the sound was momentary and was immediately followed by sweet assurance.
- **OBEDIENCE, SIGN OF THE TRUTH OF INSPIRATIONS:**
 - St. Francis de Sales concludes with the three best and most assured marks of lawful inspirations. What are they?
- **BRIEF METHOD OF RECOGNIZING GOD’S WILL:**
 - St. Basil reminds us of a few more principles to follow when making decisions:
 - We know God’s will by following the ordinances and commandments of God and the Church.
 - The advice of a Spiritual Director is beneficial
 - There are some choices we have to make that are considered “small change”. What does he mean by this? What lessons can we take away from this teaching? What kinds of decisions, on the other hand, are not considered “small change” decisions?

- **THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKED IN OUR LADY WITHOUT ANY OBSTACLE:**
 - On pages 83–84, the author uses an analogy of water flowing down a river. What do the foaming waters that hit rocks represent? Why is Our Lady compared to the water that flows quietly and with minimal effort? What can we learn from this/from her?
- **THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:**
 - The gifts of the Holy Spirit play a key role in the spiritual life.
 - They are not inseparable from charity but are the key principal virtues, properties, and qualities of charity.
 - Name the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. What are 1–2 concepts that you learned or were enlightened about regarding at least one of these gifts?

APPENDIX IV: FREEDOM AND SUBMISSION

- This Appendix helps us see the balance between human freedom and submission to God. The author points out that “the more we are subject to God, the freer we are.” Here are some points that will help us better understand this truth:
 - Docility to God does not make us puppets or make us fly on autopilot.
 - It means that we don’t use our freedom by being random or being guided by our whims but instead by cooperation with God’s grace.
 - God is the source of our freedom; the more dependent we are on God, the more that freedom flows forth from its source.
 - Being dependent on things or other humans to make us happy will certainly come with limitations.



- On the contrary, God's has no limits in His methods for making us happy in life.
 - God's will is never opposed to what is good in us
- To figure out what freedom truly is, let us explore what it isn't:
 - The opposite of freedom is slavery. Sin is a kind of slavery. Anyone who has ever become a "slave" to certain addictive sins will truly understand this concept.
 - Satan is a very cruel master.
 - It does not mean giving free reign to whim.
- What does true freedom do?
 - It enables what is best, most beautiful, and most profound in ourselves to emerge, instead of being stifled (or imprisoned) by more superficial things.
 - This will make room for all that is genuine in us to emerge.
 - Submission to God may very well prune some things away in us but will never, ever get rid of the best that is in us: our deep, positive aspirations.
 - Just the opposite: it awakens and strengthens them, orients them, and frees them from obstacles to their fulfillment.
- From experience, people who walk with God just feel free...period.
 - They come to realize that all things work together (whether good or bad circumstances) for their good; thus bad things don't enslave them, like they do other people. They are not subject to conditions.
 - Nothing can separate them from the God they love; and they feel that even if they were in prison, they would be just as happy, because there is no way that any power in the world could take God away from them.
- We can't understand this balance between freedom and submission to God's will with mere philosophy.
 - Unlike teens (who yearn for autonomy), young children don't mind being dependent on their parents for everything, because their dependence is an exchange of love. How can this help us better understand how our dependence on God can actually help us to become more free?
 - Nothing but love can resolve the contradiction between freedom and submission to God's will. Only love enables these two to merge freely.
 - Read together the last section (#6) on pages 89–90, "All this means that if we..."
- Which point in Appendix IV best helped you understand how human freedom and submission to God's will can merge?

CONCLUSION

- Try to take all the information you learned from this lesson and summarize it in a few sentences. Has it helped you discern anything about a situation you are currently seeking guidance about?

NOTES



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