

SESSION 1

The Breath of God

Genesis 1:1-2 • Genesis 2:7 • Ezekiel 37:1-14

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Participants discover that the Spirit of God is present on the very first page of Scripture as the breath that gives life: hovering over the waters at creation, breathed into the first man, and promised to a dead and hopeless Israel in the valley of dry bones. Confirmation is not a new idea bolted onto the faith; it is the last chapter of a story that begins on the Bible's first page.

Catholic Touchstone

The Hebrew word *ruah* means breath, wind, and spirit all at once. The Church reads Genesis 1:2 and Genesis 2:7 as the first whispers of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life (CCC 691, 703-704). In the sacrament of Confirmation, the same Spirit who hovered over the waters and filled Adam with life is poured out on each candidate personally.

What You Need to Know

Ruah. Hebrew has one word where English needs three. *Ruah* means breath (the air in your lungs), wind (moving air outside you), and spirit (the invisible life of a person, or of God); context selects the sense, and sometimes the text plays on more than one. One honest precision to carry: Genesis 1:2 uses *ruah* for the Spirit over the waters, while Genesis 2:7 uses a second breath-word, *neshamah*, for the breath of life breathed into the man. Two words, one motif: and Job 33:4, tonight's memory verse, sets them side by side in poetic parallel, the *ruah* of God and the *neshamah* of the Almighty, as two names for the same life-giving act. Life, in the Bible, is borrowed breath. Every living thing lives because God is, in a sense, exhaling.

The shape of this session. You will walk the group through three scenes: the Spirit over the waters before there is any life at all, the Spirit breathed into Adam so that dust becomes a living being, and the Spirit breathed into a valley of dry bones so that a dead nation stands up as a great army. The movement is from creation, to a single man, to a whole people. That last scene, Ezekiel 37, is the group's live discovery this week, so do not name it in advance.

Where this is going. At the end of the session you will lift the curtain for one moment on John 20:22, where the risen Jesus breathes on the apostles and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The gesture is deliberate. Jesus is doing Genesis 2:7 again, on purpose, to launch the new creation. Do not develop this yet; just plant it. It blooms at Pentecost in Session 7.

For the parents in the room. Many parents last thought hard about the Holy Spirit at their own Confirmation, and some will quietly feel they should already know this material. Set them at ease early. Say plainly that this study assumes nothing, and that the goal is for households, not just candidates, to meet the Spirit in Scripture. The paired questions are designed so a parent never has to perform expertise; they only have to tell the truth about their own experience.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

This session lives inside the Old Testament, so the roots are the lesson itself. The fulfillment arc to keep in your own mind as leader (traditional Christian readings, held as such):

- Genesis 1:2 (Spirit over the waters) anticipates the Spirit descending over the waters of the Jordan at the baptism of Jesus (Session 5) and the waters of Baptism itself.
- Genesis 2:7 (God breathes life into the man) anticipates John 20:22, where Jesus breathes on the apostles, and ultimately Pentecost (Session 7).
- Ezekiel 37 (breath makes a dead people live) anticipates the promise of Ezekiel 36:26-27, "a new heart... my Spirit within you," which the group will meet in Session 4, and its fulfillment in the sacraments.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (*Against Heresies, Book IV, chapter 20*)

St. Irenaeus taught that the Father was never without His Word and His Wisdom, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are, he says, like the Father's two hands, and with them God freely fashioned all things, including man. From the first page of Scripture, the Spirit is not a latecomer. He is one of the hands that made you.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Basil the Great (*Hexaemeron, Homily 2*)

Preaching on Genesis 1:2, St. Basil passed on an explanation he had received from an older teacher: the Spirit "moving" over the waters is the image of a bird brooding over her eggs, warming them and cherishing them into life. The Spirit does not hover at a cold distance. He broods over what He is about to bring alive.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Lectures, Lecture 16*)

Teaching candidates preparing for the sacraments, St. Cyril compared the Holy Spirit to water. Rain comes down as one and the same thing, yet it becomes one thing in the palm tree and another in the vine, adapting itself to what each living thing needs. So the Spirit, though one and the same, gives Himself to each person as each one needs. He was saying this to people in exactly the position of your candidates.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 691.** "Holy Spirit" is the proper name of the third Person. The word "Spirit" translates the Hebrew *ruah*, which in its primary sense means breath, air, wind.
- **CCC 703.** The Word of God and His Breath are at the origin of the being and life of every creature.

- **CCC 704.** Quoting St. Irenaeus: God fashioned man with His own hands, that is, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Thread Watch

Thread A: The Breath. Planted tonight. The pattern "God's breath makes the dead live" will return in Session 4 (Ezekiel 36), surface in Session 5 at the Jordan, and resolve at Session 7 when the Spirit arrives at Pentecost with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and Jesus' breath in John 20:22 clicks into place. Do not connect these dots for the group. Let them catch the echo themselves when it comes.

Sealed guesses. The Take-Home sheet you distribute at the end of tonight carries two sealed write-in boxes: candidates guess what the bishop will actually say and do at the moment of Confirmation, and parents write what they remember of their own Confirmation. Collect nothing; they keep the sheets sealed at home until Session 14. Mention it with a little drama. It works.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain that ruah means breath, wind, and spirit, and that Scripture links God's breath with life from its first page.
2. Participants have found and read Ezekiel 37:1-14 themselves and can retell the vision in their own words.
3. Parent and candidate pairs have each answered both Win questions honestly out loud.
4. The group has wrestled with the "mighty wind" translation question and seen how the text itself answers it.
5. Each household leaves with Take-Home 1 and understands the sealed write-in boxes.

Time Note

Full plan runs about 75 minutes. To land at 60, make these cuts and no others: drop Win question 2 (keep question 1), skip the Dig Deeper box, and shorten the steelman chain by presenting the objection yourself in one minute rather than building it with the group. Never cut the live discovery of Ezekiel 37 or the closing glimpse of John 20:22; those carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Come, Holy Spirit. Before there was light, You were there. Before we drew our first breath, You were the One who gave it. Tonight we open the first page of Your book. Hover over this room the way You hovered over the waters. Warm what is cold in us. Wake what is asleep in us. And breathe on these candidates, and on their parents, the breath of life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening Questions

Parent and candidate pairs. Two minutes each question, then a few pairs share with the table.

1. When you hear the word "spirit," what is the first picture that comes into your head? Be honest, even if it is a ghost or a mascot.
2. Tell your partner about one moment in your life when you felt most fully alive. What made it feel that way?

Build: Into the Text

Scene One: Before Anything Lived (Genesis 1:1-2)

Have someone read Genesis 1:1-2 aloud, slowly, twice.

Question 1. Make a list together: what exists in verse 2, and what does not exist yet? Where is the Spirit of God in this picture?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

What exists: the earth, without form and void; darkness; the deep; the waters. What does not exist yet: light, land, plants, animals, people, any life at all. And yet the Spirit of God is already there, moving over the face of the waters. Before there is a single living thing, the Giver of life is on the scene, like a builder standing on empty ground. The Spirit is not a decoration added to creation at the end. He is there before the beginning of everything else.

Question 2. The Hebrew word here is *ruah*, which means breath, wind, and spirit all at once. English has to pick one. What do those three meanings have in common?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

All three are invisible, and all three are known only by what they move. You cannot see wind, only the trees bending. You cannot see breath, only the chest rising. You cannot see a spirit, only a life being lived. Scripture is teaching us from its opening page how the Spirit works: unseen Himself, unmistakable in His effects. Keep this in your pocket; it returns at Pentecost.

Scene Two: Dust Starts Breathing (Genesis 2:7)

Have a different reader read Genesis 2:7 aloud.

Question 3. Two ingredients go into the first man. What are they? Which one turns a body into a living being?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Dust from the ground, and the breath of life (Hebrew neshamah) from God's own mouth. The dust supplies the material; the breath supplies the life. The man does not become a living being when he is formed. He becomes a living being when God breathes into him. In the Bible's picture of the world, your life is not a possession. It is a gift that stays a gift, borrowed breath, sustained every second by the God who first exhaled it.

Question 4. God could have simply spoken the man into existence the way He spoke light into existence. Instead the text gives us this strangely intimate picture, forming by hand and breathing mouth to nostrils. Why do you think Scripture wants us to see it this way?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let the group speculate; there is no single required answer. Draw out this much: the picture is deliberately personal. Light is commanded from a distance; man is handled and breathed into at zero distance. Human beings are the one creature in the story that God gets this close to. The Fathers loved this detail. St. Irenaeus said God made man with His own two hands, the Son and the Spirit. Confirmation, at the end of this study, will turn out to be exactly this close: a hand laid on your head, words spoken over you in particular.

Scene Three: Live Discovery

Do not announce the passage. Read the clue below to the tables and let them hunt. First table to find it stands and reads it. Allow three or four minutes; if they stall, tell them it is in the prophets, then that the prophet was a priest in exile.

DIG DEEPER

The clue. *"A prophet is picked up and set down in a valley. The valley is full of something dry. God asks the prophet a question the prophet is too careful to answer. Then God tells him to preach to the wind. Find the chapter."*

When found, have the discovering table read Ezekiel 37:1-14 aloud.

Question 5. God asks, "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel answers, "O Lord GOD, you know." Is that faith, dodging the question, or something else?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Arguably both, and that is what makes it honest. Ezekiel will not say no, because nothing is impossible for God. He cannot bring himself to say yes, because he is standing in a valley of very dry bones. So he hands the question back to the only One who knows. This is a perfectly good prayer for a Confirmation candidate, or a Confirmation parent, who is not sure how alive their own faith is: Lord, You know.

Question 6. The bones come together, flesh and skin cover them, "but there was no breath in them" (verse 8). Why does the vision happen in two stages? What is God teaching by making the breath a separate, second gift?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A body can be complete and still be a corpse. Structure is not the same as life. The two-stage vision teaches Israel, and us, that being assembled correctly, having all the right parts in the right places, is not enough; the *ruah* has to come from outside, summoned from the four winds, before the host stands on its feet. Hold this thought lightly tonight and do not press it further: Christians have long seen in this pattern a picture of how God gives the Spirit in His own order and His own time. The group will meet the two-stage pattern again in the Acts of the Apostles, and when they do, some of them will remember this valley.

Question 7. Verse 11 decodes the vision: "these bones are the whole house of Israel." So this is not about individual resurrection first of all; it is about a people. What was dead about Israel, and what would coming alive look like for a whole people?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Israel in Ezekiel's day was in exile: temple burned, land lost, hope dried up. "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost." God promises to open the graves of the exile, put His Spirit within them, and place them in their own land. Coming alive looks like a restored, gathered, worshiping people, not just revived individuals. This matters for where our study is going: the Holy Spirit's great work is not private inspiration here and there. It is raising up a people. Keep that word "people" in view; it will matter enormously in a few weeks.

The Push-Back: Just a Mighty Wind?

Build the objection at full strength before answering it. Ask the group to make it as strong as they can with you.

The objection. Some modern translations render Genesis 1:2 not as "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" but as "a mighty wind swept over the waters." The case for that reading is serious: *ruah* really does mean wind; Hebrew sometimes uses "of God" simply to mean "mighty" or "enormous"; and other ancient creation stories feature great winds over primeval waters. On this reading, Genesis 1:2 has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. It is just weather. Christians, the objection goes, are reading their doctrine of the Trinity back into a text that knows nothing about it.

Question 8. Take the objection seriously. If you only had the rest of tonight's passages, Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37, how would you answer it from the text itself?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Three moves, all from the text. First, the verb: the *ruah* in Genesis 1:2 is "moving" or "hovering" (*merachephet*), a word used almost nowhere else in the Bible; its clearest other use is Deuteronomy 32:11, an eagle fluttering over her young. Winds do not brood over anything; living beings do. Second, the pattern: Job 33:4 puts God's *ruah* in poetic parallel with His life-giving breath, and Ezekiel 37, playing deliberately on every sense of the word, ends with God saying "I will put my

Spirit within you" (37:14): in Scripture's own usage, God's ruah is personal and life-giving, not weather. Scripture interprets Scripture, and the pattern points one way. Third, be honest about the remainder: the human author of Genesis did not have the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Church does not claim he did. What the Church claims is that the Holy Spirit who inspired the text planted a seed there whose full meaning God always intended, and which the rest of revelation unfolds. That is not reading something in; it is watching something grow.

DIG DEEPER

Deuteronomy 32:11. Look it up together if time allows. The same rare verb from Genesis 1:2 describes an eagle stirring her nest and fluttering over her young. St. Basil's image of the brooding bird was not sentimentality. It was word study.

One Last Glimpse

Read John 20:21-22 aloud yourself, without introduction.

The risen Jesus stands among His apostles behind shut doors, breathes on them, and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Say only this, and then stop: the only other time Scripture shows God breathing life into a human being, dust became a living man. Now He breathes on men again. Something new is being created. What it is, and what it has to do with the sacrament these candidates are preparing for, is where this study is going.

Send: Closing Questions

1. Where in your life right now do you feel more like the bodies in verse 8, assembled but not yet breathing?
2. Ezekiel was told to prophesy to the breath, to actually ask for it out loud. What would it look like for you to ask for the Holy Spirit this week, in plain words?

Live It This Week

For every household, parent and candidate together. Each morning this week, before leaving the house, pray one sentence together out loud: "Come, Holy Spirit, breathe life into this day." That is the whole practice. Seven mornings, one breath of a prayer. If a morning is missed, no penance and no quitting; just pray it the next morning.

Closing Prayer

Leader: *Lord God, You breathed into dust and it became a living man. You breathed into a valley of dry bones and it became a great army. Breathe into these families. Where our faith is assembled but not yet alive, send Your ruah from the four winds. We are not too dry for You. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Scripture Memory Verse

"The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." (Job 33:4)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 1, in order of use. RSV2CE.

- **Genesis 1:1-2** (Build, Scene One: the Spirit over the waters)
- **Genesis 2:7** (Build, Scene Two: the breath of life)
- **Ezekiel 37:1-14** (Build, Scene Three: live discovery, the dry bones)
- **Deuteronomy 32:11** (Dig Deeper: the hovering eagle, same verb as Genesis 1:2)
- **Job 33:4** (Memory verse)
- **John 20:21-22** (One Last Glimpse: Jesus breathes on the apostles)

Catechism: CCC 691, 703, 704.

Voices: St. Irenaeus of Lyons (Against Heresies IV, 20); St. Basil the Great (Hexaemeron, Homily 2); St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Catechetical Lectures, 16).

Distribute at the door: Take-Home 1, one per household. Point out the two sealed boxes. Sheets stay sealed at home until Session 14.