

SESSION 9

Ephesus and the Foundations

Acts 19:1-7 • Hebrews 6:1-2

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Scripture's own courtroom principle, that a matter is established on the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15), makes a fitting frame, offered as illustration rather than exegetical proof. Last week gave the first witness; tonight gives the second and third. In Ephesus, years after Samaria and hundreds of miles away, Paul, an apostle who was not in Samaria and learned his gospel independently, meets baptized disciples, asks whether they received the Holy Spirit, completes their baptism, and then lays his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit comes on them. Same structure, different city, different apostle: a pattern, not an incident. Then, in the live discovery, participants find Hebrews 6:1-2, where "the laying on of hands" sits in the apostolic Church's own list of foundational, elementary teachings, filed between baptisms and the resurrection: beginner material, known to every catechized Christian of the first generation. The debt promised to Session 5's steelman is paid in full tonight.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church has kept the sign of the imposition of hands, by which the apostles transmitted the gift of the Spirit, in her sacramental epicleses to this day (CCC 699). Very early, an anointing with perfumed oil was added to this laying on of hands, the better to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit (CCC 1289), and East and West carried the one apostolic inheritance forward in their own ways (CCC 1290).

What You Need to Know

Who the Ephesian twelve were. Paul finds about twelve "disciples" who had received only "John's baptism": followers formed somewhere downstream of John the Baptist's movement, sincere, devout, and running on the covenant's last preparatory chapter. They answer that they have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit, which in context most likely means they had not heard that the Spirit had been given, the Pentecost news, rather than total ignorance of the Spirit's existence; disciples of the Baptist, who preached a coming Spirit-baptism, could hardly have never heard the word. Their formation stopped before Pentecost reached them. Paul does not despise the head start; he completes it: they are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and then, as a distinct further act, Paul lays his hands on them and the Holy Spirit comes on them, with prophetic speech as the visible receipt.

Why Paul is the perfect second witness. Paul was not one of the Twelve and was not in Samaria; at the time of Acts 8 he was persecuting the Church. Galatians 1 shows a man emphatic about the independence of his gospel, though it does not tell us how he learned particular practices, so claim only what the texts give: a second apostle, in a second city, years later, reaching for the same instrument, and Luke narrating it as unremarkable apostolic ministry. Two independent narrative witnesses converging on one practice is strong evidence that the practice is apostolic rather than regional.

Paul's question assumes a theology. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" is only a sensible question if receiving the Spirit is a definite, knowable event, distinguishable from believing itself: something that either happened to you or did not, and about which you could be asked. Let the

group feel how strange that question sounds to modern ears trained to treat the Spirit as an ambient assumption, and how normal it evidently sounded to Paul.

Hebrews 6 is the quiet heavyweight. The author scolds his readers for still needing milk, then lists what the "milk," the elementary foundation, contains: repentance, faith, instruction about ablutions, THE LAYING ON OF HANDS, resurrection of the dead, eternal judgment. Hand-laying sits in the foundational instruction of the letter's own audience, filed in the initiation sequence between the washings and the last things. Be honest about the hedges: "ablutions" is plural and debated, and hands were laid for several purposes; tonight's steelman takes exactly that objection head on. The list corroborates; the narratives carry the weight.

For the parents in the room. The Ephesian twelve are the patron saints of everyone whose religious formation just stopped at some point: sincere people running on what they were given, unaware a further chapter existed. Some parents in your room ARE the Ephesian twelve, sacramentalized decades ago and never told what they carry. Paul's move is the model: no scorn for the head start, and no leaving them there either. This study is, for some of the adults present, their Ephesus.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- "Only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained" (Deuteronomy 19:15): Scripture's own standard of proof. Samaria and Ephesus are the two witnesses; Hebrews 6 makes a third.
- Jacob crossing his hands to bless Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:13-16) is the Bible's first laying on of hands: blessing and identity conferred through touch, at the very root of Israel.
- Moses' hands on Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9, last week's Dig Deeper) stands behind both apostles' practice: commissioning through appointed hands is Torah, not innovation.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Hippolytus of Rome (*the Apostolic Tradition, around AD 215*)

The third-century church order traditionally attributed to St. Hippolytus, whose authorship, date, and provenance scholars debate, preserves an early initiation practice: after the washing, the newly baptized are brought to the bishop, who lays his hand on them and prays for God's grace. Whatever its exact origin, it stands roughly a century after the apostle John's death as an early witness that washing was followed by the bishop's hand and prayer.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan (*On the Mysteries*)

St. Ambrose, catechizing the newly initiated of Milan in the fourth century, told them that after the font comes the spiritual seal, when at the invocation of the priest (for Ambrose, the bishop at the font) the Holy Spirit is poured out with the sevenfold grace the group met in Isaiah 11: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and strength, of knowledge and piety and holy fear. The gifts prayed over Milan's newest Christians were the ones resting on the shoot of Jesse.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome (*Dialogue Against the Luciferians*)

St. Jerome, no man to spare a custom he thought baseless, records and defends the practice of his day: bishops travel out to those baptized in smaller towns by priests and deacons, to lay hands on them and invoke the Holy Spirit, and he traces the custom to the Acts of the Apostles, to Peter and John sent to Samaria, while adding his own careful note that the reservation to bishops serves the honor and good order of the episcopate as much as strict necessity. Even with the qualification, his root is apostolic: this is what the apostles were sent to do.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 699.** By the laying on of hands the apostles transmitted the gift of the Spirit, and the Church has kept this sign of the Spirit's outpouring in her sacramental prayers.
- **CCC 1289.** Very early, an anointing with perfumed oil was added to the laying on of hands, the better to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- **CCC 1290.** East and West carried the apostolic inheritance forward with different emphases, one practice from the apostles unfolding across the whole Church.

Thread Watch

A debt is paid tonight; say so. Session 5's steelman ended with a promise: "the question that settles it is what the APOSTLES did when they gave the Spirit, and that evidence is exactly where this study goes." When Question 3 lands the two-witnesses point, name the debt and mark it paid: two cities, two independent apostles, one instrument, plus the beginners' list of Hebrews 6. The study keeps its promises on schedule; that is why the group trusts it.

Thread C: The Oil. St. Ambrose's voice tonight lets one word into the room: seal. Do not develop it, and do not connect it to anything. Next session is called Sealed, and the group's first sight of the word should be a saint's, not yours. The oil itself stays sealed until Session 14.

The glimpse changes registers tonight. Every glimpse so far has pointed at story; tonight's points at the candidates themselves (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, "he has put his seal upon us"). From here to the end, the study turns from what God did to what God is doing to them. Feel the gear change; let the room feel it too.

Session Goals

1. Participants can retell the Ephesus incident and name what makes Paul an independent second witness.
2. Participants have felt the strangeness and the precision of Paul's question: receiving the Spirit as a definite, knowable event.
3. Participants have found Hebrews 6:1-2 themselves and located the laying on of hands inside the apostolic beginner's curriculum.
4. The group has faced the "hands mean many things" objection at full strength, with the corroborating-versus-weight-bearing distinction made honestly.
5. Session 5's promised debt has been explicitly marked paid, and each household leaves praying daily for their bishop by name.

Time Note

Full plan runs about 75 minutes. To land at 60, make these cuts and no others: drop Win question 1 (keep question 2), skip the Dig Deeper box on 2 Timothy, and present the steelman objection yourself in one minute rather than building it with the group. Never cut Paul's question, the two-witnesses moment, or the Hebrews discovery; those carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Come, Holy Spirit. You are not a regional custom or a local memory; You gave Yourself through Peter's hands in Samaria and Paul's hands in Ephesus, one gift on two roads. Ask us tonight the question Paul asked, and give us the honesty to answer it. Establish Your pattern in our eyes on the evidence of Your witnesses. 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. What is something in your family that gets passed down hand to hand: a recipe, a tool, a skill, a tradition? Who put it in your hands?
2. Has a single question from someone ever revealed to you that you had missed something big? What was the question?

Build: Into the Text

Scene One: The Question (Acts 19:1-7)

Households read this at home. Have it read aloud now, all seven verses, slowly.

Question 1. Start with Paul's opening question itself: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" What does a question like that assume? Could anyone ask YOU that question and expect a definite answer?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The question assumes that receiving the Holy Spirit is a definite event: something that either happened to a person or did not, distinguishable from believing itself, and knowable enough to be asked about, like asking whether you were ever vaccinated or ever married. Paul is not asking about feelings or vibes; he expects a yes or a no. Let the second half of the question sit on the room without forcing answers aloud: most modern Christians, teens and parents alike, have never once been asked it, and would not know what event they would point to. The apostolic Church could point. By the end of this study, so will everyone at this table.

Question 2. Walk Paul's response step by step from verses 4-7. These men had John's baptism, sincere but pre-Pentecost. What does Paul do first, and then what does he do as a further act, and what happens at each step? Keep the two acts distinct on paper.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

First, Paul completes their initiation into Christ: their previous baptism was John's, a preparation and not yet Christian Baptism, so on hearing his explanation they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and that Christian Baptism truly gave them the Holy Spirit; keep the group precise here. Then, verse 6, a distinct further act with its own verse: "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying." Baptism, and then hands for a further coming of the Spirit with power, the completion the Church would come to call Confirmation. Note what Paul did NOT do: he did not treat the baptism as the

whole of initiation with nothing further to be done, and he did not skip the baptism and go straight to hands. Both acts, in order, each doing its work. Where has the group seen that exact structure before? Let them say Samaria; do not say it for them.

Question 3. Now the courtroom move. Deuteronomy 19:15 gives Scripture's own rule: a matter is established on the evidence of two or three witnesses. Consider what kind of witness Paul is: was he in Samaria? Did he learn his methods from Peter and John? (Galatians 1:11-12 if you want his own testimony.) What do two independent apostles converging on the same practice establish?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul was not in Samaria; at the time of Acts 8 he was still persecuting the Church. And he is emphatic in Galatians that his gospel came by revelation, not by instruction from Jerusalem, with the Jerusalem apostles later confirming rather than sourcing it. So Ephesus is not simply Samaria's custom traveling: a second apostle, absent from the first scene, uses the same instrument, baptism, and the laying on of hands for the giving of the Spirit, and Luke records it as ordinary ministry. Measured by the two-witnesses principle we borrowed as a frame, the pattern stands established as apostolic practice, not an incident or a regional habit. And here, name the debt and pay it: Session 5 ended its steelman with a promise that the question would be settled by what the apostles did when they gave the Spirit. Two cities. Two apostles. One instrument. Paid in full, with one more witness still coming tonight.

Scene Two: Live Discovery

Do not announce the passage. Read the clue and let the tables hunt. Allow three or four minutes; if they stall, tell them it is in a letter, then that the letter is addressed to the Hebrews.

DIG DEEPER

The clue. *"A letter scolds its readers: by now you ought to be teachers, and you still need milk. Then it lists the milk, the foundation every beginner was taught first: turning from dead works, faith, washings, hands, rising from the dead, judgment. Find the list, and find what sits fourth in it."*

When found, have the discovering table read Hebrews 6:1-2 aloud, twice.

Question 4. Look at the company "the laying on of hands" keeps in this list: repentance, faith, ablutions, resurrection, judgment. What kind of teachings are these: advanced electives, or the absolute basics? So what does it tell us that hand-laying made this particular list, and where in the sequence does it sit?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

These are the foundations, the "elementary doctrines," the milk the author is impatient to move past: what this apostolic-era community's beginners learned FIRST. And the laying on of hands sits inside the initiation sequence, right after the washings and before the last things: exactly where Samaria and Ephesus put it in practice, now appearing in the curriculum. This is a third witness of a different kind: not a story about what apostles did once, but a syllabus showing what all beginners were routinely taught. Two honest hedges, given freely: "ablutions" is plural and scholars

debate its exact reference, and this verse names the practice without explaining it, so on its own it corroborates rather than proves. But a practice that made an apostolic-era beginner list was not marginal or optional knowledge for that church. It was milk, and read together with Acts and the Church's Tradition, it corroborates where the narratives carry the weight.

The Push-Back: Hands Mean Everything, So They Prove Nothing

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

The objection. The laying on of hands is the New Testament's all-purpose gesture. Jesus laid hands on the sick to heal them (Mark 6:5) and on children to bless them (Mark 10:16). The apostles laid hands to ordain the seven (Acts 6:6) and to commission missionaries (Acts 13:3); Timothy received his ministry gift through hands (1 Timothy 4:14). Healing, blessing, ordination, sending: hands do everything. So Hebrews 6:2 could mean any of these, and probably means all of them loosely; you cannot pluck one meaning out and call it Confirmation. The Catholic argument finds hands in Acts 8, hands in Acts 19, hands in Hebrews 6, and quietly assumes they are all the SAME hands. That is not exegesis; that is a magnet passing over the text collecting anything metallic.

Question 5. The survey of uses is completely accurate, so grant it. Then ask the sharper question: when a gesture has many uses, what tells you which use a given text means? Apply that to Acts 8, Acts 19, and Hebrews 6 in turn.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Grant it all: hands are the Bible's universal sign of conferral and transmission, blessing, healing, office, mission, and that breadth is not an embarrassment; it is WHY the gesture fits the giving of the greatest Gift. But ambiguity of gesture is resolved the way all ambiguity is resolved: by stated purpose and stated result. In Acts 8 the purpose is explicit before the act ("prayed for them THAT they might receive the Holy Spirit") and the result explicit after it ("they received the Holy Spirit"); in Acts 19 the result is in the same verse ("the Holy Spirit came on them"). Nobody is guessing what those hands were for; Luke says. The honest concession lands on Hebrews 6:2 alone: by itself, its "laying on of hands" is genuinely underdetermined, and a Catholic overplays the verse by treating it as a proof text. Its real work is corroboration by placement: in an initiation sequence, between the washings and the resurrection, the natural referent is the initiation-completing hands the narratives just showed us twice, and that is how the Church that received the letter read it. So state the architecture plainly, because it is honest and it is strong enough: the weight-bearing texts are the two narratives with stated purpose and stated result; Hebrews 6 corroborates from the curriculum; and the unbroken practice of the generation after the apostles, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, confirms which reading the actual heirs of the apostles thought obvious. The magnet only collected what was already labeled.

DIG DEEPER

2 Timothy 1:6-7. If time allows: Paul tells Timothy to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands," adding that God gave us a spirit not of timidity but of power and love and self-control. The context is Timothy's ministry, ordination rather than initiation, and say so plainly; but the principle underneath is for everyone at your table: a gift given through hands

can go banked and drowsy, and the owner's job is to rekindle it. Some parents in the room are carrying exactly such a gift. The verb Paul chose means to stir a fire back to flame.

One Last Glimpse

Read 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 aloud yourself, without introduction.

Paul writes: it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put his SEAL upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. Add one footnote-truth the group has earned: the Greek behind "commissioned" is echrisen, literally "anointed," as the RSV2CE's own note records. Say only this, and then stop: anointed, sealed, guaranteed. Three words from the world of contracts and kings, applied to ordinary Christians in a real city. What is a seal, what does it do, and can it be broken? Next week is about the mark you cannot see.

Send: Closing Questions

1. Paul's question, put to you: did you receive the Holy Spirit? Whatever your honest answer is tonight, what would need to happen for you to be able to answer it the way the Ephesians could by verse 7?
2. The Ephesian twelve were running sincerely on an unfinished formation. Where might your own formation have simply stopped at some point, and what would letting God finish it cost you?

Live It This Week

For every household, parent and candidate together. The bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation, a successor of the apostles, and whether he or a priest with the faculty confirms these candidates, the bishop stands behind the sacrament in your diocese. Find out his name this week if you do not know it (the parish bulletin or website will), and pray one sentence for him together each day: "Lord, bless our bishop, N.; make him holy, and prepare him and us for the day of Confirmation." You have spent two weeks watching apostles travel to lay on hands. Pray for the man who holds their office among you.

Closing Prayer

Leader: *Lord God, on the evidence of two witnesses You establish a matter, and You have shown us two: Samaria and Ephesus, Peter's hands and Paul's, one gift on both roads. Thank You that the pattern still runs, and that hands are already appointed for these candidates. Finish every unfinished formation in this room. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Scripture Memory Verse

"And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them." (Acts 19:6)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 9, in order of use. RSV2CE.

- **Acts 19:1-7** (Build, Scene One: Ephesus; read at home this week)
- **Galatians 1:11-12** (Build, Scene One: Paul's independence, optional lookup)
- **Deuteronomy 19:15** (Build, Scene One: the two-witnesses rule)
- **Hebrews 6:1-2** (Build, Scene Two: live discovery, the foundations list)
- **Mark 6:5; Mark 10:16; Acts 6:6; Acts 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14** (Push-Back: the many uses of hands)
- **2 Timothy 1:6-7** (Dig Deeper: rekindle the gift)
- **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** (One Last Glimpse: anointed, sealed, guaranteed)

Catechism: CCC 699, 1289, 1290.

Voices: St. Hippolytus of Rome (the Apostolic Tradition); St. Ambrose of Milan (On the Mysteries); St. Jerome (Dialogue Against the Luciferians).

Distribute at the door: Take-Home 9, one per household.