

WEEK 1: EXERCISE #1

For some readers, this will come as news: the Holy Spirit is not a course in advanced Christianity. He is not reserved for the few, the deep . . . the weird. *Them*. He is our inheritance as followers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a promise given by Jesus from the moment we believe.

What are we choosing when we choose to surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? Paul gives us a great teaching on this in his letter to the Ephesian church:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

—*Ephesians 1:13–14 ESV*

When we first believe, Paul says, we are marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. No caveat is in that statement. Contrary to what is sometimes implied in spiritual conversations, the Holy Spirit is the rightful inheritance of all who trust in Jesus. To access the power and fullness of this gift, however, is a choice.

Read Paul's word to the Ephesians again, this time circling or underlining every word or phrase that stands out for you as a new thought.

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Now, rewrite this passage in your own words. What is Paul really saying here?

How does it change your understanding of God to know He is with you . . . now? Say something about that.

How does it change your sense of assurance to know you've been guaranteed this inheritance: His presence in your life? Write a sentence or two about the spiritual assurances you've received.

Read Ephesians 1:17–21.

Paul shows us the wealth that is our inheritance when we claim Christ as our Savior and receive the Holy Spirit into our lives. We have the same resources available to us that first-century followers found when they claimed Jesus as Messiah. Like them, we can have the wisdom, revelation, riches, and power of God.

In your Bible, circle or underline all the things Paul tells us we receive when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Then, in your journal or on a separate page, make a list of these things.

Have you experienced these things in your life?

Can you say with assurance that the Holy Spirit is at work within you, given what you read here?

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What does it say in Acts 1:8? “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” It is the same power the Israelites had, who fought with enemies twice their size and won, who found food enough to feed hundreds of thousands of people, who received miracle after miracle of God’s provision. We have those same resources.

What exactly are those resources? And what does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? The purpose of this study is to help you figure out just that. What does it look like in your life to be led by the Spirit? To help you get started on that journey, consider this basic definition: the Holy Spirit centers our lives on Christ. To be filled with the Him, then, is to actively experience the supernatural presence and power of Christ in daily life. It is to be influenced and led by His love, His truth, His guidance, His comfort, His teaching . . . in a word, His help.

When we accept the Holy Spirit into our lives, we are no longer victims, but people with power to move out of our bad circumstances and into better ones. And we have power to move people and resources across deserts and into the promises of God.

Is there a flowing forth in your life? Are you ready to move when God moves?

Encounter

The Holy Spirit is an inheritance for all followers of Jesus. His power and resources are available to all who claim them. So, why don’t we know more about Him?

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Take a moment now to think about the church in which you were raised (if you were raised in a church). What did you first learn about Jesus from your early spiritual formation experiences?

What did you learn about the Holy Spirit?

Would you say you were taught or you caught the Holy Spirit? Was He discussed or experienced? Both? Neither?

Many of us have not developed a worldview or even the vocabulary to use when we talk about the Holy Spirit. You may have already encountered the Spirit but don't even know how to process this or talk about your experience with others.

Which of these scenarios best describes where you are right now in your understanding of the Holy Spirit?

- I know He exists, but I haven't felt anything yet.
- I think I've felt His work in my life, but I'm not sure how to describe it.
- I know He's working in my life, but I'm afraid of what others might think if I start talking about it.

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- He's working in my life, and I'm hungry for more.
- Here's what's going on with me . . .

You might be tempted to move yourself ahead a category (or two) beyond where you know you are. Be encouraged to avoid that temptation. *It is okay to begin where you are.* And where you are is okay! We can only begin the journey when we are honest about where we actually begin. The key is the decision to get started and step forward.

What one thing are you hoping to learn about the Holy Spirit during this study? Write this question in your journal and leave space to record what you learn.

What do you think a fresh encounter with the Holy Spirit might look like for you?

Where do you suppose you might experience change if you had a new and deeper encounter with God?

WEEK 1: EXERCISE #2

To bring into the world the critical piece of an unfolding plan that was written at the beginning of time, God used normal, ordinary, even sometimes-weak people. And those people were His *choice*. It wasn't as if the Creator of the universe was limited in His options. He had a world of people to choose from, and He chose to offer His presence and power to average people whose only outstanding feature was their ability (through faith) to see where God was at work. As author Brennan Manning said, God's eye is on the little guy, the back-page story, the teenage girl with a toddler who, He knows, holds a tremendous amount of potential for changing the world.

The word in Hebrew for this brand of person is *anawim*.² It means something like “poor” or “humble” or “meek.” What defines the *anawim*—aside from a low estate—is complete devotion to God. “Blessed are the meek [*anawim*],” Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, “for they will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). In God's kingdom, the meek are the ones who are content to live their lives without any assumption of value except for the value given them by God. These are ordinary people with extraordinary trust in the will of God. *Anawim*.

Mary and Joseph fell into that category. So did the shepherds who came to the stable the night Jesus was born. Ordinary people with extraordinary trust in the will of God. So did Simeon and Anna, who met the holy family at the temple about a month after Jesus was born. Mary wanted to present herself for the rite of purification. According to Jewish law, that's when a woman was pronounced ritually clean after childbirth, and it usually

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occurred about forty days after delivery of the child. They also wanted to present Jesus at the temple to dedicate Him to the Lord. So when Jesus was only a little more than a month old, they all packed up and went to Jerusalem as ordinary people living out their faith in God.

Read Luke 2:25–26.

I picture Simeon as a wrinkled, weathered, wise man glowing with the Spirit who lived this faith as an adventure and leaned on God as his Everything. Before the Holy Spirit was poured out on all flesh (Acts 2), Luke tells us Simeon was already filled with the Holy Spirit and in touch with the Spirit's voice. What a deep connection with God he must have had! Where God pointed, he went. He hungered for more of God; he yearned to know Him, to know how He works in the world, to see Him come as Israel's Redeemer.

Somewhere, I heard a story (I can't vouch for its authenticity; Snopes says it is at least partly true) about an incident that took place at the Tucson, Arizona Gem and Mineral Show. That show has been in existence since the mid-twentieth century. According to people in the trade, half the gemstones for sale in the world are at this show each year. The story is told that one year a gemstone dealer was walking the aisles of this show when he caught sight of a blue-violet stone about the size and shape of a potato. He picked it up, looked it over, then as calmly as possible asked the vendor, "You want fifteen dollars for this?"

The seller said, "Well, I'll take ten." The dealer gave the guy ten dollars, then immediately took the stone to an appraiser, who said the 1,905-carat sapphire was worth 2.28 million dollars.

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The real end of the story says the sapphire may not have been worth quite that much, maybe something more like a few thousand dollars. True or not, there is an interesting moral: there is a world of difference between the guy who has enough interest in treasures to have a table at the show and the guy with an eye for what's really valuable.

Simeon had an eye for what's really valuable; it was a Spirit-gifted eye. He was constantly looking for where God was at work in the world; he literally lived for it. Here was a man who was genuinely passionate about God's plan for the world and who lived his life by constantly staying in tune with the Holy Spirit. Because Simeon practiced the presence of God in his life, he was able to recognize this treasure of a Messiah when His parents presented Him at the temple.

How would it change your life if you began to practice the presence of the Holy Spirit within you?

What would it look like in your life if you began to look regularly for signs of God's in-breaking Spirit?

Encounter

We need to admit that the Holy Spirit represents a deeper mystery of God. If you were to ask a group of Christians which member of the Trinity—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—they were most familiar with, I suspect an

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overwhelming majority would point toward Father or Son. The irony is that the Holy Spirit has revealed to us everything we know and have experienced about the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit empowers us to encounter God.

Maybe it would help to remember that the characteristics that describe the Father are also true of the Holy Spirit. While the three parts of the Trinity are distinct in personality, God is unified in purpose. He never contradicts Himself!

In your journal write, “God the Father is _____,” and fill in five words or thoughts.

Now write, “Jesus is _____,” and fill in five words or thoughts.

Next, write, “The Holy Spirit is _____.” Do you find yourself using the same words or thoughts for the Holy Spirit as for the Father and Son? If not, why not? Now try filling in this blank using the same words as for the Father and Son. How does that change your understanding of the Holy Spirit?

How does it help to know that God wants to be present with you?

In what situations have you felt His presence most strongly?

WEEK 1: EXERCISE #3

Read Exodus 40:34–38 in two or three different versions of the Bible. (Make at least one of them a contemporary version like *The Message*.)

As this passage teaches us, once the tabernacle was complete, God came into the house and filled it. A cloud rested over the house by day, and fire was in the cloud by night so that all the people could see it.

How do you imagine the cloud pictured in this passage? Is it big, such as a building? What size building—your house or the Empire State Building?

Is it thick? Dense, like a fog? Or transparent, such as netting? Is the fire a flame or something more like a glow? We aren't told, so let your imagination flow as you envision this cloud of glory.

When the cloud moves, how do you imagine it moving? Fast? Slow? Does it seem animated when it moves, as if it is a living thing, or does it seem more mechanized?

This is a key feature of God's cloud: it moves. And once it settled over the tabernacle, the assumption was that when the cloud moved, the tabernacle was to move with it. In fact, the Lord told the people, "When the cloud moves, *you* move."

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Recall from the video teaching that the Hebrew words for *tabernacle* and *journey* sound a lot alike. That hints at a kingdom truth: from the beginning there has been a relationship between the presence of God and the journey of faith. God's tabernacle was meant to move. That spiritual principle is still true today. God's tabernacle (now people who follow Jesus) is designed to move when God moves, always in the direction of His promises.

Read Matthew 3:11–17.

What do we learn from this scene about the nature of God's Holy Spirit?

What do we learn about the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? Between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

When Jesus was baptized, what did He receive along with the Holy Spirit?

Read Acts 1:4–5.

Rewrite this passage in your own words.

What have been the key words, in your experience, associated with the presence of Holy Spirit?

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What do you believe it is like to have the Holy Spirit “come upon you,” as Jesus said in Acts?

What do you believe it is like to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? Why do you suppose the Scripture uses this word—*baptism*—when referring to a personal encounter or filling with the Holy Spirit?

In your own words, what would you say is the difference between believing in Jesus as your Savior and being baptized in the Holy Spirit?

I heard a story of a little church in Indiana. One Sunday a biker came to visit that church, and frankly, he stuck out like a sore thumb in that place. The church decided to love him as he was, though, and came alongside him and showered him with acceptance. That biker eventually became a Christian.

One odd thing about this biker was that he wore a long-sleeve shirt all the time, even in the summer. Finally, he broke down and told his pastor why. His problem was a tattoo on his forearm. And not just any tattoo, but a tattoo of a naked woman. It was a remnant of his days before Christ, and since becoming a believer, he'd grown embarrassed about it. The pastor understood and showered the guy with love and acceptance, assuring him the tattoo was a nonissue.

A few weeks later, the biker strode proudly up to the pastor and asked, “Want to see my tattoo?” With that, he rolled up his sleeve, held out his forearm, and exclaimed, “I had the tattoo artist put clothes on her!”

This is the promise of the Father! He takes our past life with all its raw and naked sin and covers it with the righteousness of Christ, then clothes it with power from on high. The promise of the Father for all who believe is the clothing of the Holy Spirit.

Read Luke 24:44–49.

For what does Jesus ask them to wait?

Why do you suppose He uses this language? What significance might this language of “being clothed” have had for those first believers?

Read Ephesians 1:13–14 again: “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed [clothed] with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (ESV).

Glory indeed! We are new creatures, with new clothes! When the Holy Spirit comes upon us—when we are sealed with Him, baptized in Him, clothed in Him—we become His tabernacle. *We* are now the tabernacle of God. *We* house the Holy Spirit. And as His temple, we are called to a journey. *When God moves, we move.*

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Compare the words “sealed,” “clothed,” “baptized,” and “tabernacle.” What do you learn about an encounter with the Spirit from the combination of these words?

Why do you suppose God entrusts His Spirit to us as His tabernacle?

Encounter

The tabernacle provides a beautiful picture of what it looks like when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in a person. How kind of God to give us images we can cling to when the theology is difficult to grasp!

If we are going to be a tabernacle, though, we need to fully understand the privileges and responsibilities that come along with the arrangement. We are committing to the fun, power-filled parts as well as the uncertain “it’s time to move again!” reality.

Go to the next blank page in your journal and draw a line down the middle of it.

On the left side of the page, list all of the privileges of being a tabernacle.

On the right side, list all of the responsibilities of being a tabernacle.

Are you ready to accept the challenge of being the tabernacle of God?

WEEK 1: EXERCISE #4

Read Acts 1:6–8.

Imagine this scene: Jesus and His followers are on the Mount of Olives. They can see Jerusalem from where they stand. They are not far from the hill on which Jesus was crucified. Watching Him suffer was nearly unbearable. Thinking they'd missed the signs and chosen the wrong guy for Messiah was shame producing. Discovering the empty tomb and meeting the resurrected Christ was stunning. By now, the bond is deep and emotions are running high. And now, just when they are getting used to Him being among them again, Jesus tells them He will ascend to the Father.

What do you imagine the disciples were thinking when Jesus told them this news?

What emotions do you suppose they felt? Fear? Excitement? Confusion? Doubt?

What comments might they have made among themselves? What thoughts might they have been afraid to voice, even to one another?

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How would you respond if Jesus told you that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you? Not “if” but “when”? Write out a one-sentence response that captures your honest feelings.

With Jesus’ ascension, the Father is brokering a spiritual transaction. When Jesus ascends, the Holy Spirit descends. In this moment, God creates a portal for His power, and now the people must make a choice.

Read Esther 4:14.

In your Bible, underline the question at the end of this verse. What do you suppose Mordecai meant by “for such a time as this”?

The followers of Jesus who experienced Pentecost were the people God chose to take authority over the gospel message. In the face of such an invitation, they had a choice to make: Would they step up and lead, “for such a time as this”?

That phrase comes from the story of Esther, another biblical personality who had to make a choice. The book of Esther relates the tale of how an ordinary person is placed in a position of great influence for the cause of furthering the kingdom of God (Esther is an *anawim!*). It is an awesome and humbling place to be. Intimidating, even. Esther feels the weight and importance of her unlikely position, and even wonders if she’s up to the

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task. Then Mordecai sends her a word of advice: “Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” In other words, what if the whole reason you are where you are is to participate in God’s plan for His people?

What a question! What if the whole reason *you* are where *you* are—at this moment—is to participate in God’s plan for His people? What if God intends to fill *you* and use *you*, as surely as He used Esther, as surely as He used His first followers, as surely as He often uses ordinary, sometimes rough-around-the-edges people who are in tune with His purposes?

What if God intends to fill you with the Holy Spirit so He can use you for such a time as this?

As William Temple says, no one who is filled with the Spirit of God can keep that Spirit to himself. “Where the Spirit is, he flows forth. And where there is no flowing forth, he is not there.”³ In other words, *the Holy Spirit is meant to move*. There is a deep connection between the tabernacle and the journey.

So the *real* question for you and me is: *Are you spiritually positioned for participation in the plan of God?*

Encounter

Mordecai’s challenge to Esther is the same for all who seek to follow Jesus. You have been placed where you are “for such a time as *this*.” God put you in your family, your office, your church, your neighborhood for this exact time. Your circumstances are not an accident or a “let’s make the best of this” exercise.

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Prayerfully, think through the situations you are facing. Make a list of some of the more significant things happening in your life right now.

How would it change your perspective to consider that God put you right where you are, in the circumstances you're facing, "for such a time as this"?

For a few moments, consider how God might be using your present situation for His purposes. How are you uniquely qualified to negotiate the circumstances you're in?

Where do you see God at work in the list you've made? Make notes in your journal.

If you aren't seeing it now, in which of your circumstances do you want to apply the Spirit's power? The temptation is to answer, "All of them!" But be challenged to be specific. Where are you experiencing ordinary results but want to experience supernatural results?

How does it feel to operate under the Spirit's power versus your own? (If you haven't experienced it, imagine what the difference would be like.)

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Write down some “feeling” words that express what you believe life in the Spirit is like.

Now, write down some “obedience” words that express what you believe life in the Spirit is like. For example, you may feel joy; but as an act of obedience, walking in the Spirit may be a matter of courage.

End this encounter with a prayer for the Holy Spirit to make Himself known in the circumstances of your life.

WEEK 1: EXERCISE #5

In quite an important way, Acts is the rest of the story that began in Exodus. God took the laws and commandments of Moses, put them into the person of Jesus Christ, and calls us to receive Christ into our hearts. Then as He did with Christ, He fills us with His presence, making *us* into His tabernacle. So it really is true: I am the church and *you are the church!* In God's community, saints are the building blocks, and Jesus is the cornerstone. Now *we* are the tabernacle of God.

In Exodus, it was not a person but a community that moved out of bondage and toward the promises of God. And it was that same community that built the tabernacle. In Nehemiah, it was a community that built the temple and restored the wall. In Acts, it was a community that received the Holy Spirit, which then flowed out into the streets, building that community from a dozen or so to a few thousand in one day.

The filling of the Holy Spirit is not *first of all* an individual, emotional experience but something given to the community to strengthen and empower it for the work of the kingdom.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16–17.

Make notes, either in the margin of your Bible or in your journal, of all the things you learn from this passage about yourself as a Spirit-filled believer. For instance, you are God's temple; God's Spirit dwells in you. What else do you learn about yourself from this passage?

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We are designed to follow God *in community*. If this is true (and I believe it is), then the Christian life is not a “me and Jesus” thing so much as an “us and Jesus” thing. Wherever the church is being built, we are that church. God’s church is made up of saints and sinners, people like you and me. We are God’s temple, His sanctuary, in which His spirit dwells.

We are meant to be in this together, and when He moves, we move!

How are you meaningfully connected to a community of faith, as a building block in God’s tabernacle?

In that community of faith, are you serving or sitting? What would you say is the difference?

Reread Ephesians 2:20–21. Then read Isaiah 28:16.

Google the word “holy” and make some notes about its meaning.

When Paul tells us we are holy, what is he saying about us?

What emotions does the word “holy” conjure up for you? Do you attach positive or negative feelings to this word?

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Why do you suppose, of all the words that could have described “Spirit,” God chose to use the word “holy” to most commonly describe His Spirit? What does that teach you about God’s view of holiness?

According to Paul, who is the “cornerstone” the prophet Isaiah refers to?

Encounter

The story of God teaches us that we are the building blocks of God’s community, with Christ as the cornerstone. We are designed to follow God in community. That includes the journey we are on to encounter the Spirit.

If you are connected to a community of faith, what role does that community play in your journey?

How do you experience the Holy Spirit at work in your church?

If you are not going through this study with a group, here are some suggestions for creating an informal community:

- Meet a friend for coffee, and tell what you’ve learned about the Holy Spirit this week.

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- Get a group of three or four people together, and ask them to share what they learned about the Holy Spirit as they were growing up or when they were first learning about God.
- Use social media to post something you are learning, or ask people to interact with one of the Encounter exercises.
- Circulate by email or text a few verses that describe or mention the Holy Spirit. Encourage your friends and family to add to the list.

God wants to use what you are learning and experiencing to encourage and inspire others. As you begin to talk about your encounters with the Spirit, others will hear your excitement and begin to have their hearts stirred too.

This week, be challenged to have one conversation with someone beyond your group about the Holy Spirit. Journal that conversation, and share it with your group when you meet next.