

## WEEK 2: EXERCISE #1

As I write this, I'm gazing at the small mountain of food that has collected on our kitchen counter. Not only is it a holiday, but we've also experienced a death in our family. The convergence of celebration and sympathy in the form of sweets is overwhelming. Pies, fudge, cookies, cakes and breads, chocolates of every variety, pretzels drizzled with caramel *and* chocolate *and* nuts. Oh my!

And that's only the sugar-laced offerings. We haven't begun to acknowledge the bounty in our fridge: ham, casseroles, homegrown veggies, dips, more casseroles. We are blessed, indeed, by the kindness of good friends. Their expressions have helped ease the burden of loss. Community is good.

These gracious gifts remind me that there is a difference between the food we *want* and the food we *need*. The food on our counter is comfort food. Those sweets have helped us sense the love and care of people around us, but the fact is, we could live without them (though I'm happy we don't have to). The food in our fridge is survival food. It is what keeps us fed and moving forward. Especially in times of grief and stress, we need good nutrition.

Maybe this is similar to what we discover in the food Jesus ate before His resurrection, versus what He ate after. Before He was crucified, He ate with sinners. He attended parties and was in the homes of those just discovering grace. Usually, the point of those meals was so we'd know the kind of people for which grace was made.

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Jesus also ate after the cross and resurrection, but those meals were different. Those meals were not so much about entertainment as evidence. The post-resurrection Jesus ate with His followers so they'd know He was not a ghost or apparition. He ate so they'd know Jesus was there with them in the flesh. He ate fish on the beach and bread in Emmaus and fish again in a room with a whole group of people, so they'd get it that He was real, the flesh-and-blood Messiah.

It was an important point that needed to be made. Some believers in the first century began to teach that Jesus was never actually here in the flesh. They taught that He was something more like a ghost than a human. That's a huge theological mistake. If Jesus wasn't human to begin with, then what was the point of the cross? And if He wasn't human at the end, what was the power of the resurrection? Ghosts have not overcome death. Jesus *has!*

Here's the point: an encounter with the Holy Spirit begins with faith in the risen, living Christ, a flesh-and-blood Messiah who has come for the sake of our salvation.

Let me say that again: an encounter with the Holy Spirit begins with Jesus.

## **Read Luke 24:36–43.**

Mark any interesting words or phrases you find as you read.

What do you “hear” as you encounter this scene? What do you see? What smells do you imagine?

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How do you imagine Jesus eating the fish?

When this scene opens, the disciples are still talking about what happened on the road to Emmaus, still focused on past events. They are not looking for a living Jesus.

When Jesus stands among the disciples, He greets them with, “Peace be with you.” This is a common Jewish greeting, such as an ordinary “hi.”

His typical greeting inspires a question in me: Do I allow the peace of Jesus to be so present in me that it creates a sense of ordinary even in not-so-ordinary circumstances?

In the midst of your doubts and disappointments, how do you listen for the voice of Jesus?

What practices help you hear Him when He shows up?

Do you have a system of disciplines that helps you intentionally encounter the presence of God? Make a list of things that work for you.

## Encounter

The disciples did not expect Jesus to show up in the way He did. If we want to truly encounter Jesus as the risen Lord, we must give up all our preconceived notions of how He shows up, and we must give up the ways we try to control Him.

Let's start by being honest: What about totally surrendering yourself to Jesus makes you nervous?

Spend a few moments talking to Him about those things.

This is a study about encountering the Spirit, but keep in mind that it is the Holy Spirit who helps us encounter Jesus.

How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? Close and intimate? Distant and cordial? Comforting? Confusing?

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the ways in which you try to control or put limits on Him and His work in your life. Confess these things to the Father in prayer.

Spend a few moments in silence today, listening for the voice of the Spirit. Record in your journal what is revealed. Repeat this process a couple of times today.

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Make a note: you don't want to be captured, tried, and found guilty by your own people.

That was the fate of a soldier who fought in one of the Boer Wars—a series of two relatively short wars at the turn of the twentieth century between British and South African armies. Captured by his own people, this soldier was charged with the crime of discouragement. He committed this crime while a battle was raging in the South African town of Ladysmith. While his fellow soldiers were fighting hard to defend the city, this soldier marched up and down the battle lines breeding discontent. “Look how strong the other guy is!” he declared. “No way we'll be able to fend off these giants! We're goners!”

This soldier never lifted a weapon against the enemy, but he created casualties on his own side with the weapon of discouragement.

If that weapon has ever been leveled against you, you understand how devastating it can be. Maybe you've experienced the unrealistic expectations of a boss or the hurtful words of a parent who told you you'll never amount to much. Or maybe you've had the challenge of having to stand up for something few others understand. Criticism from unexpected sources can feel like sniper fire. If we are not prepared, we will fall victim quickly.

Perhaps that's why Jesus was reluctant to let the disciples go forth before they were equipped both mentally and spiritually. He wanted to make sure they were ready for those in the world who were slow to believe this good news of the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ.

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## **Read Luke 24:36–44.**

Do an internet search of Old Testament prophecies, and read a few of those you find.

Consider why Jesus pointed His followers back to the prophecies spoken about Him in the Old Testament. How might this build their confidence?

How did it help the disciples to trust in the coming of the Spirit by being pointed toward the promises of their own Scriptures?

How does it build your confidence to know God has been at work from the beginning to bring Jesus into the world for the sake of our redemption?

## **Read Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6–7; and Micah 5:2.**

How does each of these prophecies point toward Jesus?

How do these prophecies encourage you in your faith?

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How might you use them to encourage someone struggling with doubts?

Those in the Wesleyan theological tradition often talk about prevenient grace, the grace that pursues us from the moment of our conception to the moment we confess faith in Christ. God comes after us, even before we know His name. Old Testament prophecies are a form of prevenient grace, in that they reveal to us our Father's relentless pursuit of humanity. He has always had a plan for our redemption and has never left His children alone.

Never once.

How does that thought encourage you today? How would it increase your trust in a fresh move of the Holy Spirit in your life?

## Encounter

Don't you wish you could tell the future? We all wonder about it. What will I be when I grow up? What kind of job is coming next? How will my children turn out? What will retirement be like? When it comes to our careers, families, and finances, we invest a lot of care in what's ahead. But what about our spiritual lives? Do you have a plan for moving forward spiritually?

Take a moment to dream. Where do you want to be—spiritually speaking—six months from now? A year from now? Ask God to give you a vision of what you are striving toward.

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What might your life look like after walking with the Spirit for five, ten, or fifty years? What do you hope for? How will you spend your time? Write your responses in your journal.

What are your goals for your relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Where are the gaps in your understanding right now? Make notes about this.

What do you hope to change?

What spiritual disciplines do you hope to master in coming seasons?

How do you hope to use the spiritual gifts God has given you?

Who is the person you most want to be at peace with? Who do you want to forgive?

What habit or hang-up will you conquer?

What painful memory are you seeking healing for?

If these are your hopes, what steps can you take this week toward making them a reality . . . now?

## WEEK 2: EXERCISE #3

**Read John 14:25–27. Then read John 15:9–11.**

Yes, I cook. But I have discovered there is a big difference between a person who cooks and a person who *is* a cook. I am a person who cooks. I am always barely skating on the edge of knowing how. If it isn't salt or pepper, I am not sure what it goes on or in. I don't know the theory behind flavors and spices, so I'm doing good just to get a basic meal on the table. I *can* cook things. I *can* feed my family. But I can't say I *enjoy* cooking. I like eating so I cook, but it isn't how I enjoy spending my time.

A real cook, on the other hand, not only knows the vocabulary of good food, but enjoys the process of creating. A cook—a *chef*—is creating an experience for people to enjoy. His love of cooking overflows onto others, and his gift is a joy!

That's something like what Jesus meant when He told His disciples, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). He is talking about the kind of joy that overflows onto others when we are truly connected in a passionate way to the Father through the Holy Spirit.

I like nothing better than when someone else's cooking overflows onto me. And when someone else's Jesus overflows onto me, well . . . that's powerful and wonderful and attractive!

## **Read Hebrews 12:1–3.**

What does the writer tell us to do in this passage?

Underline the action items (i.e., “throw off everything . . . and sin,” “let us run,” etc.).

In this passage, the writer gives us a brief recipe for sanctification, using joy as the goal. He shows how to run the race of life so that we go someplace spiritually.

Start cooking, and one day you may find you’re not only cooking; you’ve become a cook who is joyfully feeding other people. Start following Jesus, and one day you may find you’re not just going through the motions, but living the life of a disciple who is joyfully making other disciples.

## **Read 1 Corinthians 2:12–16.**

This is part of what it means to be sanctified. It means taking time to understand the things given to us by God, setting aside the temptation toward quick fixes and isolated experiences, and instead making a commitment to journey with Jesus over time. Paul calls it having “the mind of Christ” (ESV).

John Wesley described the grace of God as a house into which we are all invited. The porch of the house is prevenient grace, the grace that calls us to Christ before we know Him. As long as we stay on the porch, we have not accepted that invitation to come into the house. Some of us dangle our

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toes off the porch while we look off into the cornfields. Others are taking a snooze in the rocking chair. Still others get up the nerve to peek into the windows; inside the owner of the house is waving us in. But even if we are peering through the windows, we are not part of what's inside.

Justifying grace occurs the moment we step through the doorway. In that moment, we accept an invitation that was mailed to us some two thousand years ago. When we step through that door, all our sin is forgiven (or *justified*) and we join the party.

Now, all the rooms on the inside of the house are designed for *sanctification*, and the decorator is the Holy Spirit! By exploring the house, we learn the mind and heart of the Owner. We not only learn about the kinds of things He loves, but as we walk through the house, we learn to love as He loves. Sanctification is the process of opening ourselves more and more to the work of the Holy Spirit, so that we love more and more as Christ does. The design of this spiritual house is to develop our capacity for loving God and others.

In what ways have you grown as a follower of Jesus? How has your heart grown in love toward others?

## Encounter

Sanctification occurs slowly over time—day after ordinary day. Sometimes looking back can help us see how far we've come.

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Draw a timeline in your journal, and label it “My Spiritual Journey.”  
Make it look something like this:

Birth ————— Death

Now add some spiritual milestones or seasons you have experienced. Mark things such as baptism dates or the date you began attending a church.

What other significant spiritual milestones have you experienced? Were there retreats along the way that opened spiritual doors for you? Mentors who walked with you and helped you see more of God’s plan for your life?

Can you point to “the door”—the moment you came to believe in Christ as your Savior?

Is there a point at which you experienced a work of the Holy Spirit? What other revelations did you encounter?

Where did you struggle with significant questions or doubts? At which points did you grow weary?

Share your timeline with a close friend or family member. Ask them to share their insights on your growth. Here are some questions they might use to spark conversation:

- How are you different than you were a year ago?
- What victories seem to come easier for you now?
- What are you doing today that you had not expected to be doing?

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How often in our lives can we read the same Bible stories over and over again and still miss the point? If that has been your experience, I hope it helps you to know you're not alone.

Jesus opened the Scriptures to His disciples and helped them understand prophecies that had been spoken about Him hundreds and even thousands of years before. We have to wonder how often Jesus shared these teachings with them before He was resurrected. How many times, in synagogues, did He teach these things and amaze those listening, yet the disciples still did not understand?

And how often does the Holy Spirit reveal Himself to us today, and we still do not understand?

I have a dear friend who recently experienced a fresh move of the Holy Spirit in his life. He grew up in a denomination that taught a version of the Holy Spirit who was powerful, but distant—a force out there somewhere. Several years ago, the Holy Spirit broke into his life and did a new work. He found his heart “strangely warmed,” much like John Wesley. (If you haven't read about Wesley's Aldersgate experience, Google it and enjoy.)

But much more recently, my friend came to experience the Holy Spirit in a deeper way. He finds himself saying, more and more, “I thought He was some kind of force beyond my reach, something we call on but aren't in touch with. I didn't realize He is within me! I didn't realize He wants to fill me!”

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It isn't as if my friend had never heard about the filling of the Holy Spirit. It simply didn't register until recently that this encounter with the Spirit is a deep, personal reality. He is discovering, as I did and as so many others have, that this fresh revelation of the Holy Spirit comes only *through* the Holy Spirit. I believe the Holy Spirit is constantly at work revealing Himself, but until our hearts are open we may struggle to understand the revelation. How precious that God continues to pursue us, never relenting on His desire to see us encounter the Spirit!

## **Reread Luke 24:44–49.**

What new word do you hear as you read this part of the story this time?

What does this scene teach you about Jesus? About His disciples? About our relationship to God?

*Stay*, Jesus said. After He showed them again what was written in the Scriptures, He assured them of the Father's promise, but asked them to stay where they were until they received the Holy Spirit. Can you imagine how difficult it was for them to simply *stay*? To wait on the Lord?

Back in the '60s and '70s, a sociologist named Walter Mischel conducted a series of experiments involving children and marshmallows. The goal of the experiment was to understand the link between patience and success in people.

Mischel placed four-year-old children, one at a time, in a room with a bell and a marshmallow. If they rang the bell, he returned and they could eat the marshmallow. If, however, they were able to wait fifteen minutes without ringing the bell, they were promised two marshmallows. Ring the bell, and get one marshmallow. Wait, and get two.

The experiment is on video (you can find it online by searching for Mischel's name), showing these precious children watching that marshmallow with great anticipation—squirring, drumming the table, hiding their eyes, doing whatever it took to hang in for the payoff. Some didn't make it. Some broke down and ate their marshmallow almost immediately. Others lasted as long as it took to get two marshmallows (I am confident I would not have been in that group).

What Mischel discovered by tracking these children's lives into adulthood was that a correlation existed between the ability to wait and the success they experienced in life. Those who waited longer for their marshmallow were the ones who also scored higher on college-prep tests. They were accepted by better colleges and had, on average, more productive lives.

Waiting, as it turns out, has its own reward; learning to wait is a key to character development.

Isn't this the story of Job? God left him on earth with a world of pain and allowed him to decide how to handle it. Job ranted and raved, questioned and doubted, but the one thing he was unwilling to do was give up. The payoff for Job's patience was a life fully restored.

## **Read Galatians 5:16–24.**

We are learning that even our ability to connect with God comes through the Holy Spirit. Notice that one of the fruits of the Spirit is patience—the supernatural ability to wait on the Lord. It is a great gift of God to have the power to wait for His purposes to be revealed. Staying put when we want to move ahead is hard. It may help to remember that staying is not a passive exercise. Whether we are “staying” or “going,” God gives purpose and meaning in every season of life. Waiting on the Lord is a key to the process of sanctification.

## **Read Romans 5:3–5.**

What does this passage teach us about waiting?

What are the positives of learning how to wait? What are the negatives?

How have you learned to wait on the Lord, to sit in His presence and listen for His voice?

Waiting invites sanctification. As we learn to wait in the Lord, He reveals Himself in ever-deepening ways.

## Encounter

Spiritual disciplines are a systematic way of learning to wait. They are practical ways to open our lives to God and His work in us. Practicing spiritual disciplines is a way of inviting God to change us from the inside out. This is one quite powerful way to prepare the spiritual soil of our lives for the Holy Spirit.

If you are unfamiliar with spiritual disciplines, the following list provides a summary of a few you may want to start exploring first:

**Prayer**—Do you have a regular routine for prayer? For practicing His presence daily? Prayer is a way to talk honestly with God about your hopes, fears, shortcomings, and anything else that is on your mind. Be sure to include time for telling Him all the things you love about Him. And include time for listening, which is probably the more valuable side of the conversation.

**Silence**—We get little of this in our distracted world! Find a time and place where you can be in total silence—no television, radio, or interruptions. Turn your phone off. Is there a chore or task you normally complete with background noise? Turn it off, and see what stirs in your mind. To really get the benefit of silence, make a daylong retreat with a commitment not to speak for the duration.

**Community**—Did you notice that when Jesus appeared to the disciples in Luke 24, they were *together*? See verse 33. They were

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talking about all of the amazing things that were occurring. They were comforting one another. That is the purpose of community. Being together with others on the journey to share, encourage, learn, serve, worship, and grow together is not an option for the follower of Jesus. It is essential to our spiritual formation.

***Bible Study***—The Bible is God’s gift to us. The Holy Spirit inspired it when it was written thousands of years ago, and the Holy Spirit inspires it when we read it with intention. You can find good reading plans online. (Try [www.youversion.com](http://www.youversion.com) for a plan that suits your needs.) Don’t feel pressure to understand everything when you first begin reading or to read a significant amount. It is tempting to speed through chapters and books with a sense of accomplishment. Slow down and meditate. Read a section over and over. Pay attention to what words or phrases stir in your soul.

***Personal Worship***—In addition to community worship, take time to sit in the presence of God while listening to the kind of worship music that stirs your soul.

Which of these disciplines is the most intimidating to you? Which discipline are you the most comfortable with?

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What is one step you can take today to move forward in each of these disciplines?

Think of a time when you were forced to wait for God to reveal something to you. Journal about that experience.

What memories do you have of listening for the whispers of the Holy Spirit? Journal about that. Compare your experience with that of someone you trust.

## WEEK 2: EXERCISE #5

In all spiritual transactions, there is a swap. God will ask us to surrender something in order for Him to impart something better. That's where Pentecost begins. It begins with people sitting in a room, being told by Jesus they could not go forward until they had received the Holy Spirit. But before they could get more, it meant giving up the life they had. Those first followers were learning this spiritual principle: something has to be given to God in order for us to receive the Holy Spirit. And as we place more and more of ourselves into God's care, He gives more and more of the Holy Spirit in return.

This is a risky proposition. We much prefer the life we know to what might be ahead if we surrender. As we said in the video lesson (and in the introduction to this guidebook), we don't know what we don't know. I have been following Jesus for nearly twenty-five years. In those early days of my walk with Christ, it never occurred to me that all these years later I would still be surrendering pieces of my old self to Jesus. Yet, here I am . . . still discovering things to give up, still finding out that every time I give, it gets better.

### **Reread Acts 1:8.**

Jesus invites His followers to *be empowered* because it is the power of the Holy Spirit that binds us to Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who grows us, and it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us for ministry.

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Notice what Jesus tells His followers they'll do when they receive this power. He tells them they will be His witnesses. This isn't an option. They *will* be His witnesses. Those who encounter the Spirit have what my mother used to call "a bad case of the can't-help-its." When we are filled with the Spirit, we can't help but tell people what Jesus has done for us!

## **Read John 16:5–13.**

Jesus says His followers are sad because of what He's told them. Why are they sad?

How does Jesus respond to their sadness? What does He tell them?

What is the advantage to us of the risen Jesus ascending into heaven? Why is it better for us as believers for Jesus to ascend rather than staying in bodily form?

Before the disciples could receive the gift of the Spirit, they had to witness Jesus' return to heaven. Letting go of something familiar is quite difficult especially when we don't know what we will get in return. Your willingness to participate in this exchange is a sign of trust and readiness for what's next.

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What do you need to surrender right now, in order to receive what God has for you?

## **Encounter**

Find a quiet spot to pray. You may want to kneel or raise your hands. Let your body surrender along with the rest of you.

You may have an idea of what God is asking you to surrender. Quiet your assumptions, though, and enter into a time of prayer with an open heart and mind. The Spirit may reveal something new or deeper.

Begin by confessing your current condition. What are you feeling? What questions or doubts do you have? In what area(s) are you failing? What patterns of behavior need to change?

Now state your intentions and desires. Do you want to be healed? Do you sense a need for growth in a specific area?

Are you willing to completely surrender? If so, make this commitment aloud to God.

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Finally, express your commitment to the process. Are you willing to stay until He moves you? Are you ready for a lifelong journey? Does this take priority over everything else in your life?

End with a time of silence, as you practice the presence of the Holy Spirit. Offer signs and words of praise.