

WEEK 4: EXERCISE #1

Ravi Zacharias tells the story of meeting a young man who was totally engrossed in the idea of becoming a world-class athlete. This young man was driven to be the best. He got a film of the best track star in action and analyzed the man's stride muscle by muscle. He then trained his body to duplicate what he saw, until he was able to run with the best of the best. He made it onto the Olympic team and then through all the qualifying heats to the final race. This was all he'd ever dreamed of, and now it was becoming a reality.

Well, almost everything. His one disappointment in life was that his father, a difficult man, had unreachable expectations of him. This father had great plans for his son, but those plans had nothing to do with athletics. When his son chose the life of an athlete, the father rejected him. He never attended a single meet, never watched him win a race, never congratulated him on a job well done.

And that fact plagued the young man. The day he toed the starting line at the final race of the Olympics, favored to win, one thought flashed through his mind: *I wonder if my father is watching me.* Because thoughts of his father immediately resurrected feelings of rejection, the young runner's focus was thrown—just enough to put him out of first place in the race of a lifetime.⁶

For many of us, this story sounds far too familiar. Maybe it's your story, and now, after a lifetime of rejection, you've wondered if you could ever internalize that gift of acceptance from anyone, even God. How difficult is it for you to embrace the fact that our Creator is a parent who watches not in condemnation, but in love? After all, He has known you from the

moment of conception. He knit you together and called you His child. He loved you even before you knew His name, and He thinks of you daily *in love*, waiting for you to come looking so He can throw open the doors of the kingdom to receive you. And when you come, He will receive you not as a servant, but as a son or daughter.

God longs to give to His children. It is His pleasure to give us every good gift and that extends to the gift of the Spirit. If you've asked God to fill you with the Holy Spirit, then *God will fill you with the Holy Spirit*. Write that as a heading in your journal. It is a promise from Jesus Himself.

Reread Ephesians 1:13–14.

What does the word “seal” mean to you?

All of us have had experiences of rejection, and they are painful. Another problem is that the feeling of being rejected is hard to contain. It easily seeps into all of our relationships and all of our interactions. Protecting ourselves from rejection can become the underlying force that drives many of our choices and actions. God knows that about us. So, when we believe, He marks us with a seal, the Holy Spirit.

For thousands of years, people in important roles used seals to protect and verify their correspondence. A person's seal on a document indicated its authenticity. Pressing a ring or a stamp into hot wax made the seals. Owners closely guarded their rings or stamps; they were their identification.

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A seal also protected the contents of a letter. If a letter arrived with the seal broken open, the recipient knew someone else had already read or possibly tampered with the contents.

The Holy Spirit, God's seal on us, is a permanent mark of His acceptance, which He longs to give us.

Read Luke 11:5–13.

Circle with one color pen all the directives you're given in this passage (for example, circle the words "ask" and "seek"). In another color pen, underline the promises of God.

Now, with that heading on your journal page—"God will fill you with the Holy Spirit"—make a list of all the ways we participate in that reality (for example, "When I ask for Him, then I must be ready to receive Him.")

Let me say again that the gifts of the Spirit are *not* for the few, the deep, the weird . . . the *others*. According to our Scriptures, *this* is what it means to live a rich, full life. It means being filled with the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is our inheritance. If you call yourself a child of God, He belongs to you and you belong to Him. It is the Father's pleasure to give Himself to us, and we don't have to beg or wonder or even resist. Luke says, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (v. 13).

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Many of us have experienced rejection in our lives, and because of it, we may have missed connecting with our purpose and potential. We may be left feeling vulnerable and unprotected, fractured and easily wounded. Some of us are left unable to progress emotionally from child to adult.

One of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit is the gift of healing. He comes into our lives as both Healer and Comforter, bringing us forward into God's purposes.

Spend some time now in quiet, acknowledging before God some of the memories that have left you unable to connect deeply with God.

In what areas of your life are you operating out of a spirit of rejection? In brief phrases, make note of these memories in your journal.

Who in your life do you need to forgive? Make a list.

Now, make a list of those who need to forgive you.

Use this list as a prayer guide, naming before God each memory and name and asking Him to come into those circumstances and bring healing.

How could these memories be transformed if God's acceptance was able to seep in?

Close your prayer time with this prayer of invitation:

Holy Spirit, thank You for knowing me, even from the moment of my conception. Thank You, Father, for knitting me together and calling me Your child. Jesus, thank You for loving me even before I knew Your name and for thinking of me daily in love. Thank You, my Redeemer, for waiting

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for me to come looking so You could throw open the doors of the kingdom to receive me. Thank You for knowing me and for helping me to know who I am in You. Thank You for receiving me not as a servant but as Your child. Break through every barrier I erect to hold You back, and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

How does it feel to know that God has claimed you as His own?

WEEK 4: EXERCISE #2

On the day Pope Benedict XVI was elected to the papacy, he was overcome by the immensity of it. Later, as he recalled the moment, he said that as the votes were counted and it became evident he'd be elected, a fellow cardinal passed him a note. The note simply reminded Benedict of what he'd preached only days before, about Christ calling Peter to follow Him even if he didn't want to go.

Benedict said the note was a sober reminder. After all, he didn't want to hear this call from God to become pope, not at seventy-eight years of age. "At a certain point," he even said, "I prayed to God, 'Please don't do this to me.'" And yet, there he was, facing the opportunity to accept the nomination. In response to this profound call on his life, Benedict made this statement: "The ways of the Lord are not comfortable, *but . . .* we were not created for comfort, but for greatness."⁷

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-2.

What do you think Paul means by "mute idols"?

Are mute idols taking up space in your spiritual life, leading you places you didn't intend to go?

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In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he reminds them they were made for more. They were being called beyond the life they had as nonbelievers—blindly following things with no life to them—to a life reflecting the glory of God through Jesus Christ. They were being called to a life of greatness.

As it turns out, the way of Jesus is not about making oppressed people comfortable or even about making bad people good. The way of Christ is ultimately about making dead people live. It is about moving us beyond the false worship of lifeless idols to a living and vital worship of the living God. And everything beyond that moment of spiritual resurrection is about making comfortable people great.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. True greatness according to kingdom standards is not a performance or an achievement. It is a journey into an intimate and loving relationship where the Holy Spirit lives in us and we live in Him. He empowers us by giving us the kinds of gifts or abilities and passions that make our lives both meaningful and valuable. We are useful and fulfilled.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14–20.

Here, Paul gives us a sin to avoid, an example to follow, and a promise to claim.

Are you guilty of believing your gifts amount to nothing or that you have nothing to offer? Is it possible that your feelings of inadequacy might actually be a denial of the power of God?

How often have you compared your gift to others and felt as if it doesn't measure up?

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A sin to avoid is thinking in these ways. When we judge our spiritual gifts inappropriately or compare our gifts with others, we deny the truths found in the Bible. We are promised gifts when we are given the Holy Spirit (and we are promised the Holy Spirit when we ask!). When we refuse the gifts, or refuse to use them, we not only hurt ourselves but others who are depending on our gifts to complete the work.

Paul further teaches us the importance of encouraging each other and building each other up for the glory of Christ. By appreciating the variety of gifts we bring, we value each person as Christ has valued them even in dying for them.

How are you letting those around you know they are important? How are you encouraging them in the body of Christ?

Finally, we have a promise to claim. According to Paul's word to the Corinthian church, God has arranged every part, so that they fit perfectly together within the body of Christ. If that's so, then what do we have to fear? He has made us in His image! He has created us for His purposes and has called us into His church to build faith, hope, and love on earth.

How are you allowing the Lord to use you for His glory? Make a list of the gifts you think you have to offer. Make another list of gifts you may not be using to their full potential.

Where has fear kept you from taking steps of faith in love?

How can you claim this promise and share it with others?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27–31.

God has designed it so that we are partners in this gospel. You are the body of Christ. If it is going to occur, it will be through you. The church starves for people who will practice the gifts that heal the sick, cure disease, cast out demons, and reach the lost. We need *all* the gifts.

A friend recovering from a methamphetamine addiction is learning to take authority over her spiritual gifts. In an email conversation with me about the journey she's on since leaving prison and learning to live the Spirit-led life, she writes:

My feelings of inadequacy stem from a place that is not of God. Sometimes I must remind myself that my purpose, though not as grand as I desire it to be, is a grand purpose, indeed. I may not be educated (yet) or qualified (yet) or have the means (yet) to do all the things I hope to do for the kingdom; however, I am educated enough, qualified enough, and have the means enough to do what I can do. And I can do my part well! There are no small jobs in the kingdom of God, and there are no big jobs either. There is only work to be done and each person is designed for their task in a unique way.

Have you allowed the Holy Spirit to do in you and through you those things that will build His kingdom?

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The first step in using your gifts may be discovering what they are, or *recovering* what they are. Search online (use the phrase “spiritual gifts

inventory”) to discover resources to help you uncover your spiritual gifts. You will find a wealth of options; choose one to take, or complete a couple of them and compare notes.

Do the gifts that surface in these inventories sound true to your character and passions?

As you continue to explore the gifts of the Spirit in your life, here are four steps to get you in line with God’s heart for you:

1. Pray—Ask God to reveal what gifts He has placed in you. Surrender those gifts to Him even before you know what they are. Commit to using your gifts for His glory.
2. Consider—If you have served in the past, what brought you joy? What felt natural? Did serving in that way energize you? Do you look forward to serving in that role again in the future?
3. Ask—A trusted friend or church leader can be a great resource as you figure this out. Ask for their feedback. Where do they see you serving well?
4. Jump in!—Don’t wait until every question has been answered. Sometimes the best way to discover is to try. Find an opportunity to serve in a short-term capacity. Look for roles that partner you with someone who can train and provide feedback on your service. If it’s a fit, great! If it’s not, finish your commitment and try again. God is honored by your desire and commitment to the process.

WEEK 4: EXERCISE #3

When I first met Brian, he was agnostic at best. He struggled to understand the things of God but had a hunger for serving, so we began there. Brian began to serve through the church and over time became more open to the idea of Jesus. His experience had been limited, but he was a quick learner. We had a number of conversations, and eventually, Brian gave his life to Christ and got baptized. A year later, he traveled to India with a mission team. Here is Brian's story, in his words:

I will never again doubt God's existence. The Lord's power is indescribable, but what I can tell you is that the Lord still speaks and He still answers prayers. While I was in India I felt the Lord's presence stronger than I ever have before. People were speaking in tongues and praying boldly and I thought it was the coolest thing ever. It was consuming.

A few weeks leading up to the trip I started praying to God that He would use me for His glory in a way that He wanted me to be used. That He would work through me. I said, "The door is open and only You have the key, God. I am ready for anything You want to use me for." I kept praying that a lot. The first Sunday in India, Carolyn preached on the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31-32. It says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." That taught me about having BOLD faith in God. That even though I am small, God can still do great works through me.

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That night we had a prayer and gospel meeting and our team leader, Patti Nemazie, preached and after she preached she asked if anyone wanted prayer and if they did, to come up to us and we would pray over them. I had gotten into a group with Patti and a guy named Shawn and people started coming up to be prayed over. Even though I have never done anything like that before, I put oil on my hands and started praying over people. I didn't know what to pray for, so I started to pray boldly for things, for healing, for releasing and binding of evil spirits, and I believed what I prayed. Then a woman came up to us and Patti and Shawn started praying and I went blank. I couldn't figure out what to pray for so I squeezed the cross in my hand and the woman's shoulder I was holding, and it poured out of me, but I didn't understand what I was saying and I had no control over my own mouth. My mouth was moving, but I wasn't moving it, and I could hear my voice, but I wasn't speaking, then I realized that the Holy Spirit was interceding, He was speaking through me. Then Shawn and Patti put their hands on me and Shawn said, "Now it's about to come." Then I felt an indescribable joy that brought me to tears and then to the ground. I was baptized in the Holy Spirit.

God showed me that all things are possible in faith. So just have faith, even if it's a little, and Jesus can work. Just have faith and in you, God will do great things.

Watching Brian come alive in the Spirit was such a high privilege. He preached his first sermon in India (I say "first" because I'm convinced he will preach many more over the years); he prayed with hundreds of people. It was not what he expected to do on that trip or what I expected to see, but

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I want to remind you (because I know this is moving into a sensitive area) that what Brian experienced is in line with the Word of God.

Let me say that again: *what Brian experienced is in line with the Word of God*. It may not be a usual thing in your experience, but it is a biblical thing. Look what happened to Paul the day the Spirit of Christ appeared to him. Look what happened at Pentecost!

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–11.

Underline all the gifts of God listed in this passage. How have you experienced these kinds of gifts?

Paul talks in this passage about the great variety of gifts, service, and activities. Why do you suppose he used three different words to talk about what the Holy Spirit gives us?

How would you define each of these three terms?

What makes them different from one another?

In verse 7, Paul mentions the “manifestation of the Spirit.” I think of manifestations as experiences designed to build faith, much like what Brian experienced in India. When these kinds of experiences show up in the Bible—stories of someone having a vision or being caught up into the heavenlies or experiencing great joy or great revelation—the writer is usually talking about something occurring on the spiritual plane that activates a new level of faith. Sometimes, God may use a supernatural experience such as this to reorient a person’s heart. That’s what occurred with Paul on the road to Damascus; that’s what manifestations accomplish. When a mature, surrendered heart receives them, they accomplish deep, spiritual things. I have learned to trust these experiences and welcome them. They build faith.

Reread 1 Corinthians 12:27–31.

Underline all the offices listed in this passage, then underline the gifts listed. Which gifts correspond with offices listed?

If manifestations are about building faith, then gifts are about building the kingdom. You’ll notice that even while he has experienced them personally, Paul rarely focuses on the manifestations. In fact, sometimes he gets irritated with the communities that do. He counsels the Corinthian church to “eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31a). The greater gifts, according to Paul, are things that build up our ability to participate in what God is doing in the world.

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The real lesson of Brian's story is that Jesus is Lord and the Holy Spirit is always at work, always inviting us to join Him. God has called each of us for a purpose and has a great plan, but to carry it out in our lives, He must be Lord.

The Holy Spirit is a dividing fire. He separates our wants from His purposes. He separates our unholy ambitions from our holy ones. So what does this mean for you? I suggest you start with Brian's prayer. In fact, you might want to write this down and put it someplace where you can begin to pray it regularly:

*"The door is open and only You have the key, God.
I am ready for anything You want to use me for."*

Encounter

Have you experienced a manifestation of the Spirit? Describe the experience in your journal. Be sure to include the circumstances leading up to and following the event.

What benefit did the experience have in that season of your life?

If you have not experienced a manifestation of the Spirit, are you open to the possibility?

What about the possibility makes you nervous?

What makes you excited?

WEEK 4: EXERCISE #4

It all began in 1901, when a young woman named Agnes Ozman was listening to a sermon on the power of the Holy Spirit by a man named Charles Parham. During that worship service, Agnes began to speak in tongues. By the end of that week, three dozen of her friends were also speaking in tongues. Parham began to spread the news that the Holy Spirit was doing a new thing. He was filling people and the evidence of it came in the form of speaking in tongues. News spread quickly, and by 1906, similar spiritual outbreaks occurred in several places around the country. In a house on Azusa Street in California, a revival broke out that lasted for years.

They called this spiritual wave Pentecostalism, and today it is the fastest growing family of Christians in the world, growing at a rate of 13 million a year, or 35,000 a day. The largest church in the world is a Pentecostal church in Korea: the Yoido Full Gospel Church (with more than 800,000 members⁸). Two Pentecostal churches in Buenos Aires attract a combined total of 150,000 persons each week. The Pentecostal tradition offers a spirit of joy and freedom in worship rooted in the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit.

The central call of Pentecostalism is to *be filled* or baptized with the Holy Spirit because it is the power of the Holy Spirit that binds us to Jesus. My tradition agrees. In fact, Pentecostalism has its roots in Methodism. Pentecostals took John Wesley's understanding of sanctification (growth in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit) and made that the cornerstone of their theology. For Wesley, to be sanctified meant a continuing desire, after salvation, to grow deeper and deeper into the life of Christ.

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Pentecostals depart from Methodists on the point of what reveals the presence of the Holy Spirit in a life. Pentecostals might say the mark of the Holy Spirit is the initial sign of speaking in tongues. A Methodist might say that the mark of the Holy Spirit in a life is a desire to share faith in Christ because of a supernatural love for the Savior and His people.

Reread 1 Corinthians 12:21–26. Then read 1 Corinthians 13.

Memorize this scripture: “God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:24b–25 ESV).

Now, state this sentence in your own words.

Using the descriptive words in 1 Corinthians 13, make some notes about how we can use love to build unity in the body (for example, “I build unity when I am patient with someone who cuts me off in the middle of a conversation”).

Paul teaches us two critical attitudes here. He teaches us to honor every part of the body, especially those parts that may seem less significant. How does your church reflect this attitude? How does your church honor those who clean, cook, fold bulletins, fill communion cups?

Then he teaches us the attitude of unity. A desire for unity is an effect of the Spirit-filled life. It occurs as we honor one another deeply. In very

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practical ways, it is only accomplished as the Spirit empowers us, giving us a supernatural ability to love even those who are difficult to love.

Maybe this is why Paul begins his famous love passage with these three words: Love is patient! Only as we are empowered by the Spirit can we love those who are wounded, who try our patience. No wonder we need the Holy Spirit in our lives! How else could we accomplish unity in the body? Only by the power of the Spirit are we not offended by those with sharp-edged personalities. Only by the power of the Spirit are we driven instead to share the love of Christ with the “least of these.” Only by the power of the Spirit can we become so filled with compassion that all we really want is the other person’s joy.

For the Spirit-filled Christian, this is what it means to be fruitful. It is not so much about interesting manifestations (though they can be faith-inspiring) as it is about obediently practicing a love that works itself out daily in acts of witness and compassion.

If you want to learn to worship God in freedom, if you want to be released to joyfully love even the unlovable people in your life, ask God to give you everything He has for you. Ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit.

Where in your church is a Spirit-empowered ability to love being manifested in ways that honor and bring glory to Christ?

If the mark of the Spirit-filled life is a supernatural ability to love, can you confidently say you have been filled with the Spirit? If so, what fruit are

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you bearing? If not, will you pause now and pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit, with a sign of love to accompany His presence?

Encounter

If the conversation about love and unity has got you thinking about a really challenging relationship, I have good news for you! That's where the power of the Holy Spirit truly shines. The transformation can begin when you turn, "This relationship will never be reconciled" into, "Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can this relationship be reconciled." Try this prayer encounter to begin experiencing a breakthrough:

In your journal, write the initials of someone with whom you have a challenging relationship.

In this moment, with that relationship before you, you have an opportunity to encounter the Spirit. Most likely, He will not expect you to solve anything or give up anything right now. He is only asking you to be present and open.

Ask the Spirit to speak to you, and begin to write the things you are hearing about that person, yourself, and the relationship.

Pray to be made ready to let the Spirit begin working in that relationship. You are not praying for answers; you are simply praying for the Spirit to make you open and ready.

Ask yourself: What attitudes might I have to surrender in order for this relationship to be made whole? Make notes in your journal.

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End this time of prayer by saying, *“Lord, I ask You only for Your very best for this person, for me, and for our relationship. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”*

Repeat this process for several days. As God reveals the next step, be obedient.

WEEK 4: EXERCISE #5

The mark of the Holy Spirit is a supernatural ability to love.

Read Galatians 5:14–15, then Galatians 5:22–26.

Paul taught the Galatians to “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16). Then he goes on in verses 22 and 23 to describe what the Spirit-led life looks like. What is the first word in this list? Love!

Knowing what Paul has already said about love to the Corinthians, we know love is not only one among a bunch of traits of this Spirit-led life. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he called love “the most excellent way” (1 Cor. 12: 31). Love is the headwaters, the place where the river starts. Spirit-led joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control flow out of a loving center. All those things flow from a heart filled with love. And our ability to love is not self-generated or self-taught. It comes from the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 9:1–22.

This is the story of Paul’s conversion to Christ.

How do you characterize Saul/Paul as he is described in the first few verses of chapter 9?

In your Bible, mark the major transition points in the story.

Be reminded of the transitions mentioned in the video teaching:

- from Saul to Paul⁹
- from one worldview to another
- from anger and hatred to love
- from spiritual blindness to physical blindness
- from spiritual blindness to spiritual enlightenment

What other significant points do you find in Paul's story? Who are the people who help him along the way? What are the prevalent emotions or moods in this story?

How do you describe, in your own words, what occurs in Paul's life?

Are there transitions in Paul's life to which you can relate? What spiritual transitions can you mark in your own journey?

The great transformation in Paul occurs at the heart level. His worldview changes from one where the value is being *right* to one where the value is *being* right. Do you hear the difference? When he is filled with the Holy Spirit, scales fall from Paul's eyes, and suddenly he gets it that life is not a scorecard; it is a dance card!

Read Acts 9:23–30.

Note what happens to Paul's relationships in this passage.

What dynamic does he face as he moves within the world of the Jews or within the world of the disciples?

Paul learned what many of us discover when we encounter significant spiritual transformation. Sometimes, when we make big changes, it takes a while for the folks around us to get used to the new you.

How did Paul navigate this season?

What was Barnabas' role in Paul's early walk with Christ?

What might have been different if Barnabas hadn't been there with Paul?

What would be the advantage of pairing a mentor with a new believer?

- for the new believer?

- for the mentor?

Read 2 Kings 4:8–37.

This is the story shared in the video teaching of the Shunammite woman who gave a room to Elisha the prophet. Every time he passed through her town, she extended hospitality to him. In return, Elisha sought the Lord on her behalf, asking God to bless her with a child.

The Shunammite woman's husband was old. She'd long ago lost hope of having a son and didn't want those hopes resurrected now. Nonetheless, the man of God prayed, and she became pregnant and bore a son. The rest of the story describes her grief when the child dies, as well as Elisha's response to the situation.

Describe in your own words the three responses of Elisha. What is the difference between each?

What does Elisha seem to learn from this experience? What do you learn from his experience?

Do you see a connection between the two stories of Elisha and Paul?

Elisha's miracle only occurred when he laid his own life next to the boy's. Paul's entry into ministry came about when Barnabas set his own life next to Paul's. Paul was ineffective until Barnabas came alongside him, stood up for him, and walked with him into this new life.

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This is what it means to do discipleship in the Spirit. It doesn't occur through prepackaged material that leaves a newly filled person at home alone, wondering how to make this work in real life. For us who follow Jesus, who are filled with the Spirit and lead others into this life, it is eyes to eyes, hands to hands, voice to voice. It means being Elisha to someone who is coming into life from death. It means being Barnabas to someone navigating new relationships.

It happens as we genuinely love one another. And *that* can only occur in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Encounter

One size fits all doesn't mean it fits everyone *well*. Yet, we try to make unique individuals with specific sets of life circumstances fit into one-size-fits-all discipleship methods. Why do you suppose we are tempted to try this approach?

How were you discipled?

What were the positive and negative effects?

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God is much more concerned with effectiveness than efficiency. Discipleship through relationship is often time-consuming and messy.

Why do you think this is God's chosen approach?

Who were the most influential people in your life, spiritually speaking? Make a list in your journal of those who—through the years—have positively impacted your walk with Christ. Describe how each one contributed to your faith.

Begin to pray about someone you can disciple. It does not have to be scary. Simply come alongside and share with them what you are learning. Tell them what it means to encounter the Spirit!

What are three things you are learning or experiencing at this point in your journey that you could share with someone else?