

WEEK 5: EXERCISE #1

It's true: Jesus did not come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people live. When we fully embrace this truth, we come to see that it isn't our behavior Jesus wants to change. It is *us*. He wants to reveal who we really are at our deepest core. He has come to make you and me into new people.

Read Ephesians 2:1–10.

In two columns on a journal page, contrast the person Paul describes who is dead in his trespasses with the person who is alive with Christ.

Memorize verses 8 and 9.

How are we saved, according to this passage?

So much of what we think and do springs from an incorrect worldview. We come at life from the bottom up, thinking we have to fight to get “up there” where Jesus is. But listen to what Paul tells the Ephesians:

God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. [Note that this is past-tense language.] And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

—Ephesians 2:4–7

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Folks, experientially, this is possibly the most important principle in Christianity because we cannot get where we want to go until we understand this: in some quite mysterious but real way, we are *already* seated with Christ in the heavenly realm.

Dr. Steve Seamands of Asbury Theological Seminary was the first to introduce me to this principle, and it only took me about ten years to grasp it. I have *already* been given a seat in the heavenly realm, and I am welcome to come at life from that perspective! It is like the difference between being tossed in the ring alone with a heavyweight boxer and being seated in the bleachers surrounded by bodyguards. We have been given this secure place from which to experience life, and it ought to change the way we view . . . *everything*.

Hear me: in Christ, you are *already* loved, you are *already* accepted, you are *already* forgiven, you are *already* justified. Paul says, “God [has already] raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

Three or four years after I left seminary, I found myself in a spiritually dry place. This wasn't the first time I'd been in that place, but it seemed like the driest. I really questioned whether I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I'd prayed for it, but to be honest, this had been an ongoing fear of mine for years—that somehow a secret code had been passed out in seminary and I had missed it. After all, I didn't fall down, my prayers were all in English, and my productivity seemed average.

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This lack of peace led me to call an evangelist friend of mine, Reverend Tom Atkins. I still remember how he approached our conversation. I began by telling him I wasn't convinced I was filled with the Spirit. He responded with great surprise. "What do you *mean*?" he asked. It was almost as if he was asking why I didn't think I'm female, or human. Tom understood that if you've asked God to fill you with the Holy Spirit, *God will fill you with the Holy Spirit*. This is a scriptural promise. If we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will God give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?

Tom said, "I'm going to pray with you, and then when you walk out of here, I don't care how you *feel*. I want you to walk in the Spirit." So I did.

Tom challenged me to begin walking in the Spirit as an act of obedience. He challenged me to change my worldview, to begin seeing the world less and less from the ground up and more and more from the kingdom down. After all, I am already seated in the heavenlies! And this is the best seat in the house!

How do you suppose your perspective on life would change if you were able to grasp the profound truth that you are already seated in the heavenly realm with Christ?

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Read Isaiah 43:19–21.

Circle or underline every reference to water in this passage. What does the image of water teach you about what God wants for His people?

What does this passage promise?

What is the end result of God's work, according to verse 21?

What I hope you are hearing is this: God wants to do a new thing in your life.

*See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland. (v. 19)*

That time has come. Jesus wants to make a river run through the wasteland of your life because when the Spirit flows, people get filled and get healed and get sober and get straight and their wastelands get soaked. And when all that happens, we declare His praise!

God wants to do a new thing in your life. Do you not perceive that?

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Isaiah 43:19–21 is a beautiful picture of hope and healing. Read through this passage again, and journal your reflections. Let the following questions inspire your thoughts:

Why is it difficult to imagine a lush garden when faced with a desert?

What is the desert or wasteland in your life?

What would a stream through your desert look like?

How would it change the landscape of your situation?

What is the Spirit whispering to you about your relationship to Him?

Why does God choose to dramatically change the landscape we are in instead of relocating us to a new place?

What new thing is God doing in your life? Or what new thing do you think He'd like to do, if you allow?

I invite you to end this time of reflection with this traditional prayer to the Holy Spirit:

*Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of Your faithful,
kindle in them the fire of Your love.
Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created.
And You shall renew the face of the earth.
Amen.¹⁰*

WEEK 5: EXERCISE #2

Read John 3:19–21.

Compare light and dark in this passage.

What does John teach us here about human nature?

What do you learn about yourself from this passage?

According to John, what do I have to do in order to live in the light?

Chonda Pierce, a Christian comedian, tells the story of how Adam and Eve came to confront their own sin in such a beautiful, grace-filled way.¹¹ Before they sinned or ever talked to that serpent, the Bible says they were naked and unashamed. There was no sense of judgment or condemnation. No fear of rejection. No shame. Then came the temptation of Satan to be something they were not, then that terrible fall from grace. That's when a human first saw himself, saw herself, as somehow not good enough. Their response to that sense of inadequacy was to clothe themselves. Those fig leaves were their weak attempt to fix a broken spirit. It must have broken the Father's heart to see His beautiful children experience such shame, such dis-grace.

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After the fall, God went looking for them in the garden. Because they were covered, He asked, “Where are you?” Adam and Eve answered, “We were afraid because we were naked, and so we hid ourselves.” In God’s reply, you can hear the grief of the Father. “Who told you that you were naked? Who told you that you had something to be ashamed of? Who spoke that word into your life? Because *that* word is a lie.” And *that* word is the very word our Jesus has come to heal. Jesus came to heal *that* word of dis-grace, a lie someone along the way has spoken into our lives to make us feel ashamed. God came to heal that word.

What does this have to do with the Holy Spirit? The work of the Spirit is to bring into the light anything in us that separates us from the heart of the Father. The Holy Spirit is that voice within that helps us know right from wrong. And it is the voice that reveals to us those areas of dis-grace that are crying out for healing. The Holy Spirit pours light into darkness, healing both sin and wounds.

Baptism in the Spirit is about everything that baptism with water is about. It is about cleansing and restoring and getting our lives in line with our created purpose.

What is that word over your life that God needs to heal so you can soak in His Spirit?

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But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light

—John 3:21

One of the best gifts of the Holy Spirit is the voice He brings into our lives to help us live more freely.

Do you know that voice yet?

Have you heard it within?

When we invite Him in, the Holy Spirit will lead us and be our teacher and speak things into our lives that no human is going to be able to say. Learning His voice is important.

This is important, too: the voice of the Spirit convicts us of sin but doesn't speak shame. When we've sinned, we are guilty, and our sense of guilt reminds us we've done something wrong that needs to be confessed. Guilt says we've *done* wrong; shame says we *are* wrong. If you're hearing the voice of shame, that is not the voice of God. If you have that sick feeling of disgrace and you can't point to a specific sin in your life, that's probably the voice of the enemy trying to derail you. Shame tells us the lie that our brokenness will keep those who know who we really are from loving or accepting us. Shame wants to keep us hiding in the dark far away from Jesus.

Use this encounter with the Spirit to journal about that inner voice.

What is the Holy Spirit teaching you right now about the things in your life that need to be brought into the light?

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What do you imagine healing looks like in this area?

What would be a good first step for you?

Where in your life are you experiencing feelings of shame? Where are you hearing quiet voices that condemn you, not for what you've done, but for who you are?

Will you reject those voices right now?

As you close this time of reflection and prayer, I want to invite you to take hold of grace and reject shame. The following confession, from Lewis B. Smedes' book *Shame and Grace*, is worth making as we continue on this encounter with the Spirit.¹²

Will you speak aloud the following confession of faith?

I believe that the only self I need to measure up to is the self my Maker meant me to be.

I believe that I am accepted by the grace of God, and it has nothing to do with whether or not I deserve it.

I believe that I am accepted along with my shadows and the mix of good and bad I breed in them.

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I believe I am worthy to be accepted.

I believe grace has set me free to accept myself totally, and without conditions, though I do not approve of everything I accept.

I believe nothing I deserve to be ashamed of will ever make me unacceptable to God.

I believe I can forgive anyone who has ever infected me with shame I do not deserve.

I believe I may forgive myself for anything that I have ever done to shame myself or another person.

I am gratefully proud of being who I am and what I shall be.

I believe that the grace of God heals the shame I do not deserve and heals the shame I do.

I believe grace is the best thing in the world.

WEEK 5: EXERCISE #3

One summer, the women of our church hosted an in-town mission trip. Every day, we visited a different mission location and served in whatever way we could. The last day, we worked in the home of an elderly woman who lives in some of the worst oppression I've experienced. She lives alone. It was evident that she was dealing with some mental illness, but she had a beautiful, sweet spirit and a great strength that allowed her to keep pressing on. She didn't walk and spent most of her time in a wheelchair, which, understandably, limited what she could do around the house.

The house was condemnable. It needed more work than we could possibly have completed in a day. We went there, we thought, to wash her dishes and clean her stove and do what we could to fix up her kitchen. But by the end of the day, it was clear to all of us that we weren't really there to clean a kitchen. We were there to encounter the Spirit.

One of our team members, a nurse, decided to clean the bathtub and offer this woman a bath. The woman said it had been a long time since she'd had one, so she was thrilled by the offer. We lowered her gently down into the tub and gave her time for a long soak. Clearly, it was medicine for her soul. I've never heard such beautiful singing as I did from that bathroom while she was in there. She sang, "Near the cross, near the cross, be my glory ever . . ." and then, "Jesus loves me, this I know . . ."

When they helped her out of the tub and back into her chair, I have never heard such great laughter. It came from deep within her; it was glorious. It had been so long since she'd had a bath that she forgot how

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good it could be. She reveled in this experience. At the end of the day, we prayed together, and when she prayed, I felt the unmistakable presence of the Holy Spirit. We were bathed in it.

I wonder: How long has it been, spiritually speaking, since you've had that kind of bath? Maybe you've never let yourself go there. Maybe, as Adam and Eve, you've spent all your energy trying to cover yourself instead of letting the Father bathe you. Maybe you've been sitting alone in your own shame for so long that you've forgotten there are options. Have you forgotten that the same Holy Spirit who poured out rivers of blessing over Jesus as He bathed in the Jordan stands ready to pour out rivers of blessing over you? Have you yet received the River that wants to run through your desert?

Read John 7:37–39. Then reread Isaiah 43:19–21.

Underline or circle all the words relating to water. Who does John say Jesus is talking about in this passage?

Compare these two passages. What do these two passages together teach you about the work of the Holy Spirit?

We've said already that baptism in the Spirit is about everything that baptism with water is about. It is about cleansing and restoring and getting our lives in line with our created purpose. But I think we can get so used to life *without* that we forget just how glorious life *with* can be. We get so used

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to dispensing the Holy Spirit with an eye-dropper that we forget a river is flowing forth that is our spiritual inheritance.

Being baptized—immersed, soaked, covered, *washed*—in the Holy Spirit is a glorious gift. I absolutely believe the Father wants to build a pathway through your wilderness. Jesus wants to pour a river into your dry spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to release you to be a worshipper, to be a laughter, to be a peace giver.

Pray this prayer, earnestly, as an act of worship: “Jesus, fill me with Your Holy Spirit.”

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Reread John 7:37.

Did you notice that John is quite careful to record that when Jesus made this invitation He stood up and gave it in a “loud voice”? Close your eyes and imagine the scene.

Why did Jesus stand and use a loud voice?

Are you able to see yourself as someone Jesus is inviting to come and drink?

In your journal, write your response to Jesus’ invitation. Be sure to include a “thank-you” for including you on the list of invitees. How will you respond to Jesus’ invitation today?

WEEK 5: EXERCISE #4

Great news! We have been called to live in freedom! The war over our souls has been won. The enemy has been defeated. All that is ahead for us now is living headlong into the kingdom. This, in fact, is the biblical definition of freedom: *true freedom is permission to live headlong into the values of God.*

Read Galatians 5:13–26.

In this section of Paul's letter to the Galatians, he is asking them to separate the good fruit in their lives from the bad. He wants them to get serious about God's vision for their lives. What is the biblical response to this call to freedom (v. 13)?

According to Paul, what is the tension that lives within us? What are the opposing desires?

In the video session, I mentioned a conversation I once had with a young woman who is coming into the good life in the most precious and powerful way. When we talked, she was in the midst of a marvelous season of spiritual awakening. As we talked about what it takes to move from the old life to the new one, she said a couple of things that struck me as wisdom. She said, "God will let you roll around in your sin, but He will

also reveal Himself in it.” That is a great truth. Because we are people with the gift of free will, we are welcome to choose darkness at any turn. But at every turn, God will be there to reveal Himself, to pursue us, to continually offer us an alternative. God wants us to get passionate about defeating the enemies of our soul.

Paul teaches us in Galatians that God’s values are built on the foundation of love. Any other foundation will crumble under pressure, but the love of God frees us from things that seem good but, in the end, limit us. The love of God is the Great Divider, challenging us to decide between the kingdom of Self and the kingdom of God.

Paul isn’t telling us anything we don’t already know. We all have these two sides: the “us” we want to be and the “us” we are. On our good days, we aspire toward our better nature, the “us” we want to be. But a little stress, a little too much worry, or the wrong thing said in the wrong way, and the “us” that we actually are shows up.

The answer, according to Galatians, is in the power of the Holy Spirit. “Let the Holy Spirit be your guide,” Paul says. Then he shows us the options. He actually lays them out side by side, with the fruit of the Spirit set in contrast to the counterfeits offered by the world. Note the similarities and differences in these two lists taken from our Galatians passage.

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Fruit of the Spirit	Counterfeits Designed by the Enemy of Our Souls
love	sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures (empty)
joy	jealousy (constant comparisons steal our joy)
peace	quarreling, outbursts of anger (at war with others)
patience	restlessness (needing it now)
kindness	dissension, division (putting self before others)
goodness	selfish ambition (a wrong heart and wrong motivation)
faithfulness	sorcery, idolatry (unfaithfulness)
gentleness	hostility (an inability to be patient with others' weaknesses)
self-control	envy, drunkenness, wild parties (I don't think I have to explain!)

As we consider these two lists, we do so with the knowledge that we cannot earn our way into holiness. We can only follow the Holy Spirit's leading. This is what people who walk in the Spirit have learned. They know we can't force holiness anymore than a tree forces an apple. By becoming passionate in our pursuit of the Holy Spirit, allowing our lives to be immersed in Him as He fills us, we discover ourselves naturally (or maybe supernaturally) bearing good fruit.

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You are not alone. All of us struggle with the war within, between the two sides of ourselves. We are all both the person we want to be and the person we really are. And just when we think we've made progress—about the time we think we've pulled the two sides of ourselves together—we get a little tired or a little stressed or a little sick and out pops the side of us we thought we'd conquered.

How do we make progress in this reality?

Make a list of the characteristics of the person you want to be. Make another list of the characteristics of who you really are under pressure. Be as specific as you can. Here's an example:

Who I Want to Be	Who I Really Am
A team player at work	When things are stressful, I start to blame others.
A wise and loving parent	Quick-tempered, no patience for my kids' mistakes.

Using the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Paul's letter to the Galatians, begin to pray into specific areas of your life, asking the Holy Spirit to heal the wounded or broken parts of you so His fruit can be evident in your life.

WEEK 5: EXERCISE #5

I've had a few jobs over the years. My first job (I was seventeen) was at a drugstore. Then I taught aerobics for a while before getting a “real job” as a patient representative in a hospital. I actually did that job in two different hospitals. I've also delivered papers, waited tables, and mastered the skill of building sub sandwiches. I was even a phlebotomist for a while in graduate school (extra points if you know what that is). And I briefly ran a preschool program, which is really funny to think about now. Oh, and I also sold weight loss programs for a time.

And those were only my college jobs.

Obviously, none of them was my long-term goal; I was just a poor student trying to pay the bills. I guess my most interesting job (excluding this one) was working in a radio station when my husband and I lived in Japan. There is something sort of surreal about speaking English for four hours a day to people who don't understand a word of it.

I'm pretty sure I didn't make any kind of significant impact on the world by being a deejay in Tokyo, but that job helped me get a foot in the door at a radio station when we returned to the states. And that radio job got my foot in the door with a nonprofit as a director of public relations. And it was while I was working there that I began to open up again to the voice of the Holy Spirit, which is how I finally heard and responded to God's call on my life to become a preacher—the work I believe I was created for.

I thank God I was once a deejay in Japan, so I could eventually hear what God had for me half a world away.

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Learning to listen to the Spirit and live by the Spirit is a journey and a discipline. Read what Paul has to say to the Galatians.

Read Galatians 5:25–26.

In your journal, write out these two verses. What three behaviors does Paul list here that are not in step with the Spirit?

In these two verses, Paul gives us a vital key to Spirit-filled living: living by the Spirit is a *choice*. He tells the Galatians and us that if we are going to live by the Spirit, we must also “keep in step with the Spirit.” In other words, we play a part in this partnership. Keeping in step is a daily choice, a discipline. It doesn’t depend on our emotional readiness or our comforts. It is a conscious decision to listen for the voice of the Spirit and, in obedience, to follow that voice.

The Hebrew word for obedience translates “to hear.” The translation of the Greek word takes it a little further: to hear *and listen with submission*. We all know the difference between hearing and listening, right? It is the difference between hearing the voice of your mother telling you to clean your room (think of that old Charlie Brown teacher voice) and actually understanding what she’s asking, then doing it.

Obedience can also mean “to trust” or “to pay attention.” Obedience is paying attention to the voice of the Spirit so we can join God in His work. A decision to live obediently is a decision to begin seeing things from God’s perspective, not ours.

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It makes me think of our dog and our kitchen floor. I think of our kitchen floor (if I think of it at all) as something to hold me up as I move from the refrigerator to the stove. It is a floor; that's all. But for our dog, that floor is an adventure, especially when I'm cooking (I use that term loosely). Because I'm a messy cook, my dog thinks of the floor as her plate. The whole floor is a plateful of opportunity to catch and consume things that have fallen from above.

For too many of us, our walk in the Spirit is merely a place to put our feet as we move from earth to heaven. That is a flat definition, and not nearly what the Scripture calls us toward. When we think of our life in the Spirit as nothing more than a ticket to heaven, we miss so much. We miss the feast, the opportunity, the wonderful things falling from above.

How are you obediently keeping in step with the Spirit?

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Let us keep in step with the Spirit.

—Galatians 5:25

In the last exercise, I mentioned a friend who was experiencing a spiritual awakening. I asked her to tell me what she did to get her life in step with the Spirit, and these were some of the steps she took that worked for her. Maybe you will be helped by these suggestions, too:

- 1. Read books related to the Christian life.** Learn from people who have experience. If you need some suggestions of good books to read, check out www.seedbed.com.

- 2. Listen to good music that speaks to your spirit.** In my town, we have an excellent Christian radio station so we're blessed with good music. If your town doesn't offer that option, try listening to a few artists online. When you've found some you enjoy, create your own station by downloading music onto your phone. This has been a great source of inspiration for me.
- 3. Stay close to people who are in the River.** My friend belongs to a group, and she says it really helps. If you have issues that could benefit from a twelve-step approach (in my opinion, everyone could benefit from a twelve-step approach to life), go online and look for a Celebrate Recovery group in your area.
- 4. Read the Bible.** If you don't already have a reading plan, go to www.youversion.com and pick one. They have hundreds to choose from.
- 5. Pay attention to God's timing.** Timing is God's business. No wonder the psalmist came back to this refrain often: "Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!" (Psalm 27:14 ESV). We wait for His leading because all of this, ultimately, is about God.

What needs to change in your life if you are going to go with God?

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What necessary changes might offend or inconvenience others around you?

And if others don't understand your encounter with the Spirit, are you okay with that?

The list above offers ways to stay tuned in to the Spirit's steps. My guess is that we do things that distract us from paying close attention to the Spirit. These things are probably not evil or wrong; they just eat up valuable time and energy, making us numb to the Spirit's work.

What things are distracting you from your walk in the Spirit these days?

Are you willing to surrender the things that distract and embrace a few disciplines that might focus you, for the sake of keeping in step with the Spirit?