

## WEEK 6: EXERCISE #1

To put it mildly, Paul has concerns.

He has been in Ephesus for nearly three years, but he has heard rumors about the church in Corinth that distress him greatly. These folks sound like a mess. Paul's first letter to them attempts to bring order to the chaos.

Why do you suppose these church leaders might be asking Paul for help when he is no longer with them in person? Consider a few reasons why his opinion might matter to them.

By 1 Corinthians 12, Paul is describing the bones of church life. Here's how it works, he explains: the body of Christ functions much like the human body, with various parts responsible for various functions. When people are operating in the flow of the Holy Spirit, He empowers them with gifts that advance the kingdom. When everyone is operating in their Spirit-given gifts, they experience joy and the church flourishes.

But there is a catch. Gifts without love are useless, Paul warns, similar to a bicycle with a rusty chain. The oil that makes the parts work together smoothly, that creates forward movement, is love.

### **Reread 1 Corinthians 13:1–8.**

In your journal, simply list the traits of love as defined in this passage.

Compare this list with the one from Galatians 5, which we listed in Week 5, Exercise #4. What similarities do you find? What differences?

What do you learn about love and the Holy Spirit from this comparison?

You'll often hear this particular passage (1 Cor. 13) read at weddings. It is some of the most beautiful poetry in Scripture. Funny, though. When Paul wrote this bit on love, he was not writing love poems to passionate couples who were all sunsets and roses. This passage is part of a letter sent to one of the most divided, dysfunctional churches of the first century. The Corinthians had a commitment problem. They called themselves believers, but they still ate at pagan temples. They met together as a church, but yelled at each other when they got there. Some among them were still wrestling with issues of immorality. Others were plain ol' disorderly. So Paul's letter is to a community of folks who were at one another's throats and in serious need of practical solutions to spiritual problems.

First Corinthians 13 was written for people who were genuinely doing their best (but falling short) to live together according to God's standard of love. When Paul spoke into that mentality, he was hoping to help them to understand that kingdom relationships are built on a foundation of love, a kind of love rooted in humility, commitment, and servanthood. What Paul advises those trying to live in community and those trying to live as one flesh is this: not only when you feel like it or when it's easy or when the other person is lovable, but all the time, and especially when it is difficult.

Being patient and kind, gentle, and others-focused is not something most of us are naturally good at. I argue that no one is *naturally* good at

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it; it's the stuff we can only accomplish by the power of the Holy Spirit. No wonder the mark of the Holy Spirit is a supernatural ability to love!

Where can you point to evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in your relationships?

Considering the traits of love offered in 1 Corinthians 13, where do you see love being displayed supernaturally in your behavior or in the behavior of those you know? Keep these comments positive!

## **Encounter**

Take a few moments in silent prayer now to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit within you.

Now, ask the Holy Spirit to help you sense His love for you. Sit in this moment, and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself.

Our culture gets love all wrong. We want it to be about romance and happy endings. In 1 Corinthians 13, God gives us the real scoop on love; it's about getting ourselves out of the way so others can be served and God can be lifted up.

Turn again to the text of 1 Corinthians 13:1–7, and slowly read this passage aloud.

Listen for any new thoughts as you read, and jot those in your journal.

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Read through this passage a second time, replacing the words “love” and “it” with “Holy Spirit.”

How does this change your understanding of the Holy Spirit’s character? Journal about that.

Now, read through this passage a third time, replacing the words “love” and “it” with your name. This gives us a sense of just how deeply we need the Holy Spirit’s perfecting power. On our own, we are doomed to spiritual poverty.

How does this change your understanding of the Holy Spirit’s work in you? Journal about that.

Finally, in the presence and light of the Holy Spirit, give thanks for your imperfections and also for the ways He is perfecting your ability to love. Release your fears into His care, and receive His love for you.

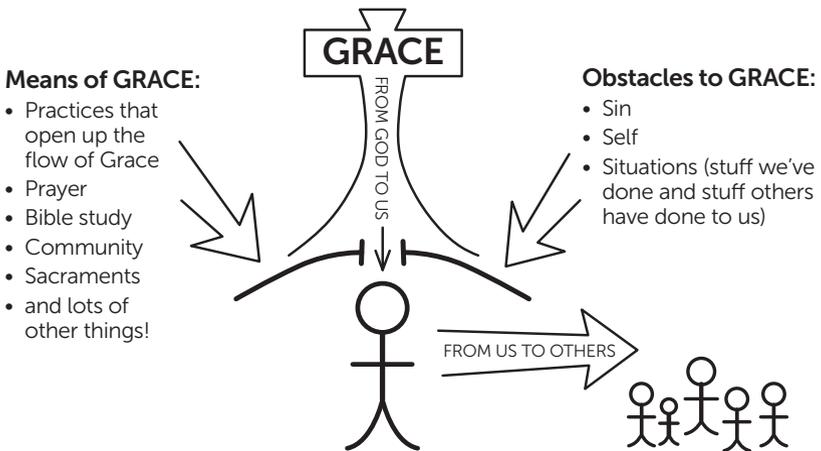
It seems impossible that we could attain the character of love Paul defines, but Scripture assures us this is the goal—to love as God loves (1 John 4:18). That is the work the Spirit wants to do in you—to make those statements true in your life.

## WEEK 6: EXERCISE #2

Love looks a lot like grace. To live graciously is to learn patience and kindness. To show grace toward others is to practice hope in the face of what irritates us. Grace allows us to look past the faults of others, acknowledging that we have them too. Grace empowers us to pray God's best over one another.

In short, grace on our own steam is impossible. It can only flow through us as the Holy Spirit gains access to our hearts, minds, and attitudes.

Take some time to study this simple drawing that diagrams the flow of grace.



Grace flows down. It originates with God, our Father, who desires to fill us with His Holy Spirit. It flows through us to others but only as we surrender ourselves to this flow. Because we are people of free will, we can choose to block the flow of grace, just as we can choose to block the flow of the Holy Spirit.

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Here is a key thought: as followers of Jesus, we are called to be not grace factories but grace funnels. We are channels of grace!

There are many obstacles that block the flow of grace. This is part of the human condition. We tend to rebel against the very things that are good for us. We are caught up in this spiritual battle for control of our souls. That tension we feel and that pull toward things that aren't good for us is indicative of the battle. Things like generational brokenness produce sins in us like perfectionism, fear, shame, and anger.

Any of us can fall prey to the threes: sin, self, and situations. The big sins, we can name. But what about less obvious sins, such as self-satisfying behavior? Addiction, even to legal substances (like the Internet)? Chronically anxious behavior that leads to a need for control? These are all things that can make it hard for us to absorb the grace flowing from God.

What are the things in your life that block the flow of grace?

## **Reread 1 Corinthians 13:1–7.**

You've made a list of the traits of love in your journal. Now, make a second list of the opposite of those terms (for example, the opposite of patience is impatience).

Drawing from what we learn in this passage, we can assume that the opposites of things that define love will stand in the way of the free flow of grace. If love is patient, kind, and never haughty, jealous, boastful, or

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proud, then impatience, unkindness, haughtiness, and boastfulness will surely stop grace from flowing into or through us. If love does not demand its own way, yet I find myself often stubbornly needing things to be as I want them, then I'm heading upstream rather than flowing with the Spirit.

Trusting God's grace is how we get past the obstacles that keep us from salvation. This is what it means to be justified. Justification says, "Jesus, I see You and acknowledge You as the only one with power to overcome my spiritual enemies, and I trust You to fight those forces that pull me down."

God rescues, we respond, and grace is activated through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Honestly evaluating your life right now, would you say you are acting more like a grace factory or a grace funnel?

What's the answer to our obstacles? We all know that even after we've come to know Jesus, we can still have obstacles to grace in our lives. Stuff other people have done to us and stuff we choose to do can create obstacles to spiritual growth. Over the centuries, people who worship God have discovered ways to break through the obstacles. We call them means of grace. Things such as prayer and fasting and Bible study and community and worship—these things all have a kind of power about them. They restore the flow of grace when it has been interrupted.

Go back to the lists we explored in Week 2, Exercise #4 and also in Week 5, Exercise #5. These lists give some explanation of several of the means of grace.

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The theological term for this process of being transformed through the presence of the Holy Spirit within us is called *sanctification*. Think of it this way: justification is grace activated, and sanctification is grace motivated. Sanctification is about surrendering to the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It is about trusting more and more of ourselves to more and more of the Holy Spirit.

Sanctification is the process of letting God win us over, bit by imperfect bit, until we're all His. And here's the thing about sanctification: it cannot occur outside the power of the Holy Spirit. Lasting change happens at the spiritual level. I can change my behavior, but it takes the Holy Spirit to change my heart.

Oswald Chambers says, "Sanctification is an impartation not an imitation."<sup>13</sup> It is almost like having a whole new hard drive installed into our system! I need the Holy Spirit to take control of my mind. I need Him to sanctify my thoughts. I need Him to show me how to love people. I need Him to make me wise. I need Him to help me navigate the choices and voices that battle for my soul.

Are you beginning to grasp this concept: The Holy Spirit intends to live within you, to transform you, to make you into a different kind of person?

## Encounter

My stick figure illustrations are famous around our church! Clearly, I'm no artist, but it helps me sometimes to visualize abstract concepts by

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making simple images. Grace is an abstraction, but it works itself into our lives in practical ways.

Redraw the graphic in this exercise, without the words.

Let's begin to personalize this graphic. Write your name somewhere near or on the stick figure.

Now, ask God to reveal what things and experiences make up your "umbrella."

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Some things will be easy to identify. Others are so deep we will not be able to identify them on our own. Listed below are some of the categories of grace blockers that were discussed in the exercise. Pray through each category, and ask the Spirit to reveal what is in the way. Our job is to surrender while the Spirit heals.

- Hurts
- Generational Brokenness
- Addiction (including self-satisfying behaviors)
- Sin
- Self
- Situations

What are the things blocking grace in your life? What is blocking the flow of the Spirit? As the Spirit reveals, begin to label your umbrella, as I did in the list on the right side of my illustration.

This part of the process is painful and unsettling. Take comfort! Your Great Physician will gently examine, diagnose, and treat. What He removes, He replaces with Himself.

It is up to us to begin the process of dismantling what is blocking the flow of God's grace to us. The means of grace are practices that poke holes in our umbrella and open us to God's transforming work. Be reminded again of the lists found in Week 2 Exercise #4 and Week 5 Exercise #5.

Now, focus on the things that help break through that barrier to grace and the free flow of the Holy Spirit.

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What means of grace are at work in your life currently? What means of grace do you want to learn to practice? Make this list to the left of the drawing, as I did in my illustration.

Before leaving this exercise, spend some time thinking about those people to whom grace flows when it flows through you. Who are the recipients of God's grace flowing through you? Consider your spouse, your children, co-workers, neighbors, and those you worship with.

In what ways does it affect your motivation to remember how these persons will be touched through this process?

Close this time with prayer, thanking God for His grace and for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit who makes spiritual progress possible.

## WEEK 6: EXERCISE #3

### Read 1 Corinthians 2:13–16.

What if all our wanting is for something Earth doesn't have?

That's how Mark Buchanan poses the question in his book *Things Unseen*.<sup>14</sup> What if our addictions and our debt and our serial relationships are all about this yearning for God even when we don't realize that's what we're after? What if the answer to our brokenness is God's holiness? And it's not only some mental idea of God we're after. It's an encounter.

Think of it almost like homesickness. We were made for something we're trying to get back to. We want to encounter God because this is what we're made for. But there is a difference between an encounter with the real, living God and the religion to which many of us have grown accustomed. An authentic encounter will leave us changed. It may even leave us with a limp (see Jacob's story), but at least it will be a God-given limp.

What we are after is the mind of Christ, the ability to imagine what God sees; this is the great gift of the Holy Spirit. One work of the Spirit is the shaping of our character and the development of wisdom. *He gives us the mind of Christ*. What does it look like to have that kind of mind?

**1. We begin to think more of God than ourselves**, which is a *huge* mental shift. It doesn't happen overnight, but over time we begin to see Jesus as a more important value. Oswald Chambers says, "Sanctification is not something Jesus puts in me—it is *Himself* in me."<sup>15</sup> This is what it means to be filled.

**2. Even as we are being sanctified, we will still experience the limits of sin.** This is what makes the life-changing message of forgiveness as important for a Spirit-filled person as it does for one who just got saved. The difference between a sinner and a sanctified person who sins is this: we are not *controlled* by our sin anymore; we are controlled by a desire *not* to sin.

**3. We experience life on God’s terms.** Yes, we still sin, but we want Jesus more than we want to protect our trigger finger.

**Read Ephesians 4:17–24 ESV.**

What does it mean to “walk . . . in the futility of [our] minds,” according to verses 17–19?

What does it mean to be “renewed in the spirit of your minds,” according to verse 23?

In verse 20, Paul reminds the Ephesians of how they “learned Christ.” What does it look like to “learn Christ”? Consider this phrase in light of its context in this passage.

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Can you honestly evaluate your life and comment on the places where you are not yet mature?

Paul says we see things differently when the Spirit controls our minds. Where is your head? Where is your heart? Is it rooted in your needs, in your sin, in your weakness? Or is it rooted in the things of God? This is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and it is available to all of us. It is the desire to think more of God, less of ourselves, to want His values lived out in us, and to experience life on His terms.

What has to change in your life if you are going to flow in the Spirit? Have you made a total consecration to Christ?

## **Encounter**

Take a few moments now to sit before the Lord in prayer, asking Him to make you open to His word for you in this encounter. Ask Him to help you put on the mind of Christ.

Ephesians 4:22 instructs us to “put off your old self.” In case we are confused about what makes up our old self, Paul provides a pretty specific list in Ephesians 4:25–32. In this same section, he also explains what the opposite of these behaviors looks like.

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In your journal, divide a clean page into two columns:



In the Old Self column, list all of things we are to put off.

In the Mind of Christ column, list all of the things that are representative of a mind controlled by the Spirit.

Are the examples in these columns behaviors or attitudes or both?

Many of these characteristics are expressed in community. How will putting off the old self and being controlled by the Spirit affect your relationships?

It is tempting to wonder how the mind of Christ relates to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Be reminded of Paul's word in Ephesians 4:4–6:

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

As you close this encounter, write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the unity that comes through the Holy Spirit, who draws the fractured parts of us under His healing care.

## WEEK 6: EXERCISE #4

What does it mean to be free?

No debt? No obligations? No claims on our time? The ability to say what we want to say, own what we want to own? One hundred years ago, it may have meant a discussion of voting rights for women or minorities. Two hundred years ago, it surely meant, in our country at least, a debate over the issue of slavery.

What one thing would make you feel free in this moment? Take a few minutes to journal about this.

In the first century, freedom may well have led Jews to consider the laws Moses gave to the people of Israel. Those laws had become perverted over generations to the point that the people were slaves to performance. Nothing was ever good enough.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 3:12–18.**

In your journal, make a list of questions raised by this passage. Question any concept you don't understand, as well as any questions you think a first-century audience might have had when they first heard this word from Paul.

Look back briefly at Matthew 27:51, and note what happened to the curtain in the temple at Jesus death. How is this relevant to this passage in 2 Corinthians?

In the exercise before this one, we talked about those who live in the futility of their minds, and in that case it was a moral issue. In this passage, Paul refers to those whose minds are hardened, and in this case it is an issue

of religious mindset. The unbending, ungracious rule of law had enslaved the very people it meant to set free.

The rest of the Roman Empire was living inside an economic system fueled by slavery. In the ancient world, slavery was not for only one race or one kind of person; anyone under the right circumstances could become a slave. And slaves lived a difficult life. They could be sold or rented at the whim of their master, and they were usually branded and often beaten.

One interesting feature of first-century slavery, though, gave hope. Slaves could be freed. Either they could buy their freedom, or someone could buy it for them. Sometimes, an owner might even free a group of slaves for no apparent reason. That made the psychology of first-century slavery quite different from the psychology of American slavery. First-century slaves always had a light at the end of their tunnel. They had the possibility of freedom.

This was the mentality into which Paul spoke when he wrote his letters to the Corinthians. His audience may have felt the oppression of Jewish rules or the uncertainty of a Roman indentured system of slavery. To both these groups, Paul spoke the hope of freedom through Jesus Christ. This was a hope based not on social status or behavior or economics, but on grace. This was a promise from God: if we believe, He makes us right by grace through faith. Through believing.

Paul wanted the people of Corinth to know that if they knew the truth, the truth could set them free!

And yet, even this new spiritual freedom Paul preached was not without focus. Remember Paul's words to the Galatians: "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh" (Gal. 5:13). The end goal of New Testament freedom is not anarchy but sanctification.

**Reread 2 Corinthians 3:12–18, looking for signs of hope.**

Underline all the words and phrases of hope in this passage. What is the promise in this passage?

We've mentioned the term "sanctification" quite a bit in recent exercises. It is worth the time we've taken to understand it because this is a profound work of the Holy Spirit. He is constantly at work in us, making us more like Christ.

Sanctification refers to everything God is doing in my life to make me more Christ-like. Remember the house? Before I come to Christ, I am on the porch, and the Father is constantly inviting me in. The moment I cross the threshold I am justified. I am accepted into the house just as I am because of my faith in Jesus Christ. All that occurs inside the house is a work of sanctification (a work of the Holy Spirit). Each room of the house is a different work, or means of grace, designed to move me ever closer to the heart and mind of Christ.

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God begins the work of transformation from the moment I step across the doorway into His house. But that work continues as long as I draw breath. I am continually being renewed, strengthened, restored into the image of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul says, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit ” (2 Cor. 3:18).

It is the Holy Spirit at work in me that helps me gradually grow in grace, moving me from one degree of glory to another. Sanctification is very much a process of hope. We submit to it with the assurance that the best is yet to come. As someone’s t-shirt says, “I may not be who I want to be, but thank God I am not who I was!”

## **Reread 2 Corinthians 3:17.**

Where in your life can you celebrate the freedom you’ve found in Christ? In other words, where is the Spirit of Lord at work in your life?

## **Encounter**

Begin this encounter with this prayer:

*Lord, in my desperate attempt to control everything and everyone in my life, I have failed to surrender to the One who has power to transform my life and circumstances. I’m sorry. I now see my need to let You lead, and I give myself to the process of being renewed. Amen.*

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The word *sanctification* literally means “to make holy,” and Scripture tells us it occurs in a life through the power of the Holy Spirit. It isn’t something we generate; it is something generated within as we surrender ourselves to the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

The problem with us as fallen humans is that we prefer to control things ourselves. Often times we recognize our need for sanctification, but instead of surrendering to the process and patiently awaiting the results, we develop a self-improvement plan. We get ahead of God in the work.

Are you ready to let God lead?

Now, as objectively as you’re able, journal those relationships and situations you’re wrestling with right now. Where are you struggling for control?

Journal about those areas of your life that you’ve tried to tackle on your own. How is that working for you? What were you hoping the results would be? Are you getting there?

Are you now willing to surrender those difficult issues in your life to the sanctification process?

End this time of reflection by praying the same prayer we began with in this encounter.

## WEEK 6: EXERCISE #5

If you put some flies in a jar, they'll try to escape. For a while, they'll try hard. They'll bang their heads against the lid of the jar over and over, desperate for a way out. If you keep the lid on the jar long enough, the flies will eventually stop trying and make peace with their limits, settling to the bottom of the jar. They say you can even take the lid off once they've settled down and they'll stay right there. They'll circle around inside the jar, and maybe one or two will manage to find the way out, but most of them will not go near the opening again. Somehow, they've come to the conclusion that it is useless to keep trying.

Hopeless.

Inches from freedom, they are convinced that their past failures are the final word on their little fly lives. They will die inside that jar because of that belief.

How many of us live in that same way? How many of us fly around inside our lives assuming we know everything there is to know? We assume we've been as far as our minds will take us, and there's nothing beyond that worth fighting for. Why bang your head against the lid? We might as well stay in our own jar, keep our eyes on our own flight pattern, and forget about the top, right?

### **Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.**

What new things do you learn about Paul from verses 1-5?

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How does Paul describe how he came to the Corinthians?

What is his one qualification for proclaiming his message (v. 4)?

## **Read 1 Corinthians 2:6–17.**

What does Paul come to impart?

How does he know what he knows (v. 10)?

What does the Spirit of God enable us to do?

How does a person without the Spirit receive the message of Christ?

How does a person with the Spirit receive it?

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How does this passage change your understanding of how spiritual things are understood? Write a sentence or two around this thought.

## **Look more closely at 1 Corinthians 2:9–14.**

What specific things does the Spirit reveal to us?

How does this glimpse into the spiritual realm change how you face today's challenges?

Paul reminds us in this passage that there is more than what we know and that the secret to sanctification—growing in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit—is found in a willingness to see beyond the natural. Those who grow spiritually are willing to search for the things God reveals through the Spirit. They are the ones willing to go beyond the lid of the jar!

## **Focus on 1 Corinthians 2:9.**

In verse 9, Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13:

*“What no eye has seen,  
what no ear has heard,  
and what no human mind has conceived”—  
the things God has prepared for those who love him—*

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He goes on to explain that these things are revealed only through the Spirit, who searches the depths of God.

Rewrite this verse in your own words.

What do you learn from this passage about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father?

What do you learn about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and divine revelation?

In your own words, explain our link to divine revelation through the Holy Spirit.

## **Read 1 Corinthians 2:7.**

Here, Paul speaks of “God’s wisdom,” a mystery hidden from human understanding but revealed to those who desire to be lifted into God’s presence. The Greek word for wisdom (*sophia*) in this passage refers to the true nature of things. God is willing to share with us how things actually are, and as Jesus said, this is the source of true freedom: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free!” (John 8:32)

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Where in your life—as a means of self-protection or maybe even spiritual laziness—are you avoiding the whole truth?

Have you invited the Holy Spirit to speak truth to your spirit? If not, find a quiet place now and make that your prayer, then listen for the still, small voice of the One who loves you more than you can imagine.

## Encounter

There is a difference between learning and experiencing. It could be tempting to work through this material as an intellectual exercise, without ever getting around to actually encountering the Spirit.

Still, an encounter with the Holy Spirit is the only way to understand what is really going on in the spiritual realm. Without the Spirit's revelation, we are trapped like flies in a jar.

I want to invite you into a worship encounter. You'll need to choose a time for this when you can be present to God for at least fifteen or twenty minutes. If you're doing this study as part of a small group, plan to enter into this time of worship together (and reverently) as a group.

Use your phone or computer to listen to at least these two songs (feel free to find others online):

- “Holy Spirit” by Jesus Culture (or Bryan and Katie Torwalt)
- “Where the Spirit of the Lord Is” by Hillsong (there is more than one song by this name, so be sure to find the one by Hillsong)

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After listening to these songs, spend a few moments with your journal listening for the voice of the Spirit. If you have a question in mind, write it at the top of your page, then listen for the Holy Spirit's answer. Write what you hear.

Reread 1 Corinthians 2:12–16. Use the words of these verses to inspire a prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Close this time by thanking God for His assurance that if we ask for the Holy Spirit, He will come. That is a promise!