

WEEK 7: EXERCISE #1

Read the story of Peter’s revelation in Acts 11:1–14.

Mark the transitions in this story—where Peter goes, what he hears, how he responds, and so on.

What emotions do you think are underneath the facts of this story? How do you think Peter felt when he was talking to the voice of God? How do you think the apostles felt when they heard the story?

In your own words, tell the story of the conversation between Peter and “the voice.”

The mission of the Holy Spirit is to reveal and glorify God. This is what He does: He shows us the glory of the Father, and He makes Jesus real to people. Whenever Jesus is being lifted up, the Holy Spirit is there, facilitating encounters.

That is what happened the day Peter visited a Gentile home. He’d never done such a thing before. But because of a revelation of the Father, he was beginning to suspect that the kingdom of God was bigger than he thought.

Read Acts 11:15.

Underline the action words in this verse.

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In this one verse, we find a beautiful thought wrapped up in a Greek verb. Peter says that as he began to speak to the people in the Gentile household, the Holy Spirit “fell on them” (ESV). The Greek word for that phrase is *epiipto*. It literally means “to fall upon.” Jack Hayford connects this term with a story Jesus told His followers.¹⁶ Jesus used the same word when He shared the story of the prodigal son coming home to his father. Do you remember that story? A young man takes his inheritance early, goes out into the world, and squanders it. After enough suffering and humiliation, he crawls home, destitute and broken, expecting to be made a slave in his own household. Instead, his father, seeing the son walking toward home, goes running from the house to meet him. The story says he *fell on* his neck, embracing him and all his brokenness in this wild, lavish, loving bear-hug of acceptance.

This word in the story of the prodigal son is the same word Peter uses when he talks about how the Holy Spirit falls upon Cornelius’s household. Hayford says this isn’t a “falling on like something falling out of the sky. This is the picture of a man coming and capturing his long-lost (child) in a grace-filled embrace of gratitude and affection.”¹⁷

Have you ever thought of the Holy Spirit like *that*? What if this Spirit-filled life is not some strange phenomenon but the very picture of an intimate relationship with our heavenly Papa?

And there was Peter, in a houseful of people who always felt as if they didn’t measure up. And to *those* people, the Holy Spirit came running and

fell on them, embracing them and all their brokenness in this wild, lavish, loving bear-hug of acceptance.

Read Acts 11:16–18.

Note Peter’s question: “Who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” Underline this question in your Bible.

Take a moment to meditate on this question. Apply it to your life. We will come back to it in a moment.

Here, Peter remembers what John the Baptist once said: “I baptize you with water for repentance” (Matt. 3:11). Within the context of this idea of “falling upon,” I envision someone falling back into water so that it enfolds and embraces them. John goes on to say, “But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” In other words, “I can lay you into water, but the Holy Spirit will embrace you and enfold you in an acceptance and a completeness that no amount of water can accomplish.”

Read John 7:37–39.

What do you suppose John meant by the last line in this passage: “Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified”?

What do you learn about the Holy Spirit from this passage?

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

Reread Acts 11:17.

Peter's last question to his audience in this story is a profound one: "So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" In other words, who am I to question God's ability to do great and mighty things? For that matter, who am I to stop God from working in my life in whatever way He wants to work? Who am I to question how God intends to use me, or anyone else?

Who am I . . . in the face of the Great I AM!

Are there points along your faith journey where you might actually be standing in the way of God, perhaps because you are reluctant to change?

What decisions do you need to make today, based on your answer to Peter's question: Who am I that I could stand in the way of God?

Encounter

Reread John 7:37–39.

John has connected water and Spirit more than once, so we are wise to learn what we can from that connection.

What do we know about water? In your journal, list all the attributes you can think of.

Now, compare water with the Holy Spirit. What terms seem to translate?

People who are filled with the Holy Spirit learn to *float* because there is a flow to following Jesus. Spirit-filled followers are creative, forgiving, grace-filled, spiritually flexible.

Do you think of yourself as flexible or rigid? Is your spiritual life forced, or does it seem to float on a power greater than your own? Journal on this question.

How would you describe the Spirit's presence in your life: as flowing, or something more like _____?

What is the invitation here in this passage in John, for those who thirst?

Now read Isaiah 55, slowly and aloud (remember: this is a devotional exercise, not a race!). Do the same with Psalm 42.

Isaiah 55 begins with these words: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters." This chapter is often entitled "The Compassion of the Lord." Why do you suppose that is?

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Psalm 42 begins, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.”

Using these three passages (John 7, Isaiah 55, and Psalm 42), journal about the connection between water, thirst, and life in the Spirit.

What do you learn about a vital, living relationship with God from these passages?

Now, bring those thoughts into your own spiritual life: Does your soul thirst for God?

How does your spiritual life compare to that of the psalmist? What needs to change?

Write a prayer based on the stirrings in your spirit after reading these passages.

WEEK 7: EXERCISE #2

Think what it must have been like for Peter! When Jesus first called him, Peter (whose name was Simon when Jesus met him) knew nothing of ministry or preaching. He probably wasn't particularly educated; fishermen wouldn't have been. He must have had the gift of faith because Jesus chose him early on. Given what we see of him around Jesus, we gather that he was a bit impassioned, sometimes to a fault. He tended to speak before he thought. Yet, in every list of disciples in the New Testament, Peter's name comes first. Peter and John are the only disciples often referenced; most of the rest get little more than one mention.

Read Luke 5:1–11.

If you are studying this passage with a group, pair up and take a few moments to tell this story to your partner, with your Bible closed. See how much of it you can remember without looking at the text.

In verse 4, underline the phrase Jesus used: "Put out into deep water."

What significance might this request have had for Peter, spiritually speaking?

Jesus called Peter first. He was given a remarkable invitation: to stop fishing for fish and start fishing for people. We have discussed the gifts of the Spirit in previous exercises. Here, we see sanctification being lived out, as Jesus calls Peter to begin using his gifts and skills for kingdom purposes. Jesus wants to anoint Peter for a higher purpose.

Have you had a conversion of purpose, such as Peter's?

Do you have a gift or skill that could be used more directly for kingdom purposes?

Read Luke 5:8.

In this verse, we hear Peter's cry of confession in the light of God's holiness: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

What do you suppose Peter had to confess?

Given what you read in this story, how is confession related to a calling from Christ?

Can you remember a time in your life when you were so impressed by the reality of God that you were left confessing your own sinfulness in light of His perfection? Describe that time.

How does Jesus respond to Peter's confession?

Reread Luke 5:8–11.

In this part of the story, we note three important elements of a conversion of purpose:

1. When Peter encounters Jesus as Messiah, he is immediately overwhelmed by the reality of his own sinfulness.
2. Peter hears Jesus' invitation to a new purpose, including the encouragement, "Don't be afraid."
3. Peter surrenders his old life and begins to follow Jesus.

The pattern is this: *encounter, invitation, surrender*. If we have a living faith, this pattern will occur over and over again on our journey with Christ. This is how the Holy Spirit grows us; we are called to an ever-widening circle of faith. It is what the writer of Hebrews called being "taken forward to maturity" (Heb. 6:1). It is what we've been calling sanctification. It means moving on from the basics of the faith to those deeper spiritual waters where healing occurs, where fruitfulness comes about, where the kingdom of God takes root, where an intimate, mature relationship with our Father flourishes.

It is critical, as we grasp this concept of God's call and our purposes, that we rightly interpret the relationship. God is our Father, not our employer. He calls us as His children, not His slaves.

Read Romans 8:15–27.

Circle the word "children" or "child" or "sons" every time they appear in this passage.

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Mark every use of the word “suffer” or “suffering.”

Mark every use of the word “Spirit.”

Paul reminds the Romans that God’s intention is not to treat us as slaves or servants, but as children. As His children, we are not guaranteed a pain-free journey, but we are guaranteed the presence of the Spirit to help and guide. We are assured that even when we don’t exactly know what we are doing, we can follow confidently, knowing the Spirit is with us.

This is a spiritual principle worth memorizing: *spiritual revelation is an invitation to every Spirit-filled person to enter into the will of God.* The Spirit-filled life is a deep, rich, joyful experience. It is an invitation into the deep places where God’s will is being revealed and activated. It is a choice to join God, confident that He will lead.

And it is *not* for the few, the deep . . . the weird. It was an essential part of the life of the first followers, and it is an expectation of the Christian life. God promises it; it is ours to receive.

Reread Romans 8:26–27.

What does this passage teach you about communication with the Father?

What does this passage teach you about the will of God?

How are you preparing yourself spiritually to enter into God’s will for this season of your life?

Encounter

Begin this encounter with five minutes of silence. Center yourself on God.

Encounter, invitation, surrender. This is the recurring pattern of the ever-deepening Spirit-filled life. It is much easier to identify these stages after the fact than in the midst of them. In fact, when we are in the middle of an encounter or invitation, we can feel uneasy and uncomfortable without knowing why. We may very well feel like the psalmist, who wrote, “I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me” (see Ps. 69:1–3).

The key, as with swimming in deep water, is to relax and move with the tide, not against it. In other words, remain in the moment and trust that God is working out His will for you.

With this thought in mind, where do you need to flow with the Spirit right now? What words or nudges is He giving you these days?

Are you in a season of spiritual transformation now? How would you describe this experience? Have you yet surrendered? Journal about this.

Read Psalm 69:1–3, and journal about its relevance for your life right now.

Do you have a story of conversion of purpose, having heard a call from God to leave one kind of life for another?

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How did you experience that season? Was the decision a difficult one? Can you describe it, using the three terms we've mentioned—encounter, invitation, surrender?

End this encounter by reading Psalm 69:30–33. Make this your own prayer of praise, for the seasons of spiritual growth through which the Lord has carried you.

WEEK 7: EXERCISE #3

I want to ask you to put your hand at the back of your head, where it meets your neck. This is the fear center of your brain. When you're faced with a threat, all your thinking moves back to this place. This part of your brain knows nothing but survival. Some of us visit this place every once in a while. Some of us have taken up residence there; we've purchased a condo and moved in.

What are the fears that send you back to this place?

Now, put the heel of your hand to your forehead. The front part of our brains is the most developed part. This is where rational thinking happens. This is also where our identity center is. This is where our life purpose is worked out. They say this is also where personal faith is developed. It is far from our fear center. Remember that.

Joyce Meyer tells the story of Elisabeth Elliot, whose husband was killed along with four other missionaries in Ecuador in the 1950s.¹⁸ After that tragedy, Elisabeth's life was completely controlled by fear. She wanted to continue her husband's work, but was paralyzed by horrible and irrational feelings of fear brought on by the trauma of his murder. Then a friend shared a thought with her that seemed to change everything. She said, "Why don't you do it afraid?" It sounded simplistic, but on that advice, Elisabeth went on to evangelize the Indian tribes of Ecuador, including the tribe of those who had killed her husband.

Being stuck in fear—worried about possible outcomes and afraid to step out—keeps us far from the place where faith develops. So maybe you're feeling uneasy about having a genuine encounter with the Spirit. Maybe you're worried about what it will look like, about what God might ask of you. So what? Why not do it afraid? Even if our mouth is dry and our knees are shaking, when we step out in faith, we are deciding that our lives will not be ruled by our fears. This is how the kingdom comes—not when we do it perfectly, but when we do it faithfully.

Reread Luke 5:9–11.

What is Jesus' response to Simon (v. 10)?

In your journal, make notes of other places in Scripture where you remember hearing these words (“Do not be afraid”).

Do a search online of the phrase “Do not be afraid” (add the word “Bible” to limit the search to scriptural references).

A mark of the Spirit-filled life is the ability to go with God without fear. When Peter was challenged by Jesus to a new purpose, Jesus challenged him, “Don't be afraid.” This is a common refrain in Scripture, especially when someone is being called to a new spiritual place. In fact, the command to “not fear” is the most repeated command in all of the Bible!

Read John 18:15–27.

Describe Peter's mood and the state of his faith in this scene.

Why do you think Peter was so adamant in his denial of knowing Jesus? Why do you think he repeated that denial three times?

What do you learn about the power of fear from this scene?

Peter may have experienced some of his worst fears in the days during and after Jesus' death. His denials of Jesus in the moments after Jesus' arrest are famous.

But after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, Peter had a conversion of courage. In Acts, chapter 2, after Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit, we watch him take authority over the good news and about three thousand people encounter Jesus in a single day.

Read Acts 2:14–33.

Pay attention to the Old Testament scriptures Peter quotes in his first public sermon.

Make an argument for why he quotes from these particular scriptures.

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What words of encouragement or assurance would his audience have found in these scriptures?

How do you see these scriptures being lived out on the day of Pentecost?

How is the Holy Spirit present in this event?

What do you learn about the power of the Holy Spirit from this event and Peter's teaching?

What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit, courage, fear, and Satan?

We learn something important here about the enemy of our souls. He is lazy. He won't try any harder than he has to in order to get us off track. He doesn't have to make us evil; he only needs to make us afraid.

Read that again: *the enemy of our souls doesn't have to make us evil; he only needs to make us afraid.*

Fear sends us into survival mode, where we will make decisions based on a negative emotion rather than courageous faith. How do we counter

that kind of attack? The same way Peter countered it the day he got out of the boat and began to follow Jesus. The same way Elisabeth Elliot countered it the day she went back into the jungle to share Jesus.

Whatever it is God is calling you toward, why not do it afraid?

How can the Holy Spirit help you conquer your fears? How can you participate in His desire to do so?

Encounter

What is the one thing you would do if you weren't afraid? Tell your friend about Jesus? Share your story in front of a group? Distance yourself from a relationship that is holding you back?

What if you were to go ahead and do the thing without waiting for courage? What if you do it afraid?

Maybe we should view courage as a spiritual discipline. We aren't necessarily skilled at it from the beginning, but we can choose to practice it anyway. We can practice being brave in the Spirit's power.

In your journal, make a list of things you might do if you had the courage for it. Include spiritual, physical, relational, and emotional challenges.

Now, choose one thing on that list, and begin thinking of the steps you need to take in order to move toward your goal. Write as many steps as you can think of.

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What is the first step you listed? Will you be willing to take that one step?

As you step out in faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit, remember Jesus' words to His friends as they entered into a new season:

"I'm telling you these things while I'm still living with you. The Friend, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send at my request, will make everything plain to you. He will remind you of all the things I have told you. I'm leaving you well and whole. That's my parting gift to you. Peace. I don't leave you the way you're used to being left—feeling abandoned, bereft. So don't be upset. Don't be distraught."

—John 14:26–27 *THE MESSAGE*

WEEK 7: EXERCISE #4

Read all of Acts 10.

Describe the role of Cornelius in this story. Why is he important to the story?

Compare the role of Cornelius in Peter's story to the role of Barnabas in Paul's conversion story.

What does this teach us about God's intention to use others as He reveals Himself and His purposes?

Reread Acts 10:9–23.

Describe the state of Peter's faith in this portion of the story. Where do you see his faith displayed? How does he practice faith?

We've mentioned before that Spirit-filled followers are spiritually flexible. How do you see this idea lived out in this story?

How about you? Have you had an experience of radically changing your direction based on a word from the Lord?

We've already read Peter's retelling of this story. Now, we read the account as it occurred. It is unusual that this story appears twice in the book of Acts, but we understand. When something amazing happens to us, don't we tend to tell and retell our account of it (until our friends are rolling their eyes with that "there she goes again" expression)? We retell things that make an impact on our lives. We retell the important stories, the ones that astonish us, that change us. That is surely what the writer of Acts is doing here—telling then retelling a story that changes everything.

This is Peter's third conversion, a conversion of heart. First, Peter was hungry for purpose. Then he became hungry for truth. Now, he is hungry for souls. Peter discovers what it means to love people. He begins to experience life on God's terms, to see things and people as God sees them. He receives that mark of the Holy Spirit—a supernatural ability to love even the ones his culture has given him permission not to love.

Peter has now begun to trust that voice of the Spirit in his life, like deep calling to deep (see Ps. 42:7). He discovers a partnership with the Holy Spirit. This is more than a conversion; it is an *immersion*. This is where Peter finds his peace with the mystery and the mess of this glorious follower's life. He finds out he doesn't have to explain it. He only has to be willing to encounter it. He has to be willing to let the Holy Spirit fall where He will, as a father on a long-lost son, as a mother on a child who was lost but now found.

Following requires an ability to hear and respond to the Spirit's leading. Have you taken time yet to explore this yet?

Encounter

Reread Acts 10:19–20, then Acts 10:30–32.

Peter sees a vision and hears the Spirit. Cornelius sees a man before him and hears a voice. Two great men of God encounter the supernatural and trust their experience enough to act on it. These encounters can only take place by the power of the Holy Spirit.

How does God usually communicate with you?

Have you taken time yet to explore what the voice of the Holy Spirit sounds like in your life? As best you can, describe what it is like for you? How does the Holy Spirit most often reveal Himself in your life?

Have you had an experience of hearing the Spirit, or do you know someone who has? Can you tell about that experience?

In the introduction to this guidebook, I shared a bit about my own experience with journaling:

I often journal in two colors, writing my own thoughts in black or blue ink, and what I sense may be Spirit-inspired thoughts in red. When I come across a thought that seems profound (“smarter than I could have thought

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of myself,” as Asbury professor Dr. Bob Tuttle would say), I note that thought in red, just like the words of Jesus in my Bible.

Sometimes I’ll even write a question at the top of the page, then journal everything I hear in red. I don’t try to analyze it; I just listen for the voice of the Spirit and write what I hear. A week or so down the road, I may come back to that entry to see how it sounds with the benefit of a little time and perspective. Often, I am amazed at how helpful those entries can be to my journey with Jesus. I do believe He still speaks into our lives. I have encountered Him in the practice of journaling. I hope you will, too.

What I’m describing here is a conversation with the Holy Spirit. Why not try this now? In your journal, write a question that’s been on your mind. Now, listen. Give the Holy Spirit space and time to respond, and write what you hear. Don’t judge what comes, just write. Maybe you’re hearing from the Holy Spirit, or maybe you’re only hearing your stomach growl. Either way, it is okay! You can always come back to it in a week or so to see whether it sounds true to your experience of the Spirit.

Begin a regular practice of allowing God room to speak into your life. Trust what Jesus told us, that God longs to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. So . . . why not ask?

WEEK 7: EXERCISE #5

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16–17. Then read Ephesians 2:17–22.

Are you going someplace spiritually? Are you closer to God's promises for your life than you were when we began this study? Are you closer than you were a year ago? Five years ago? Or are you still out there in the desert of indecision, waiting for one more sign?

Here's the whole thing with the Spirit-filled life: it is designed to move. That's where we began this journey. We began in the desert, where we discovered God's Spirit hovering over the tabernacle, guiding the people through the wild and into His promises. Out there in the desert, we learned that *when God moves, we move*.

What I learn from my desert ancestors in Exodus changes what I understand about the nature of both the spiritual life and the church. If "church" is a noun, then it is something I come to and sit in. But if "church" is a verb, then it is not a monument but a movement. After all, nouns sit; verbs go. So consider your own church, and especially your own life in Christ. Are you a noun or a verb?

Nouns view church as a place to go. Verbs understand that church is what we are.

Nouns believe someone somewhere is supposed to provide the programs we come to. Verbs get it that we are a functioning part of a body together with a whole lot of others.

Nouns think passively about faith. Verbs see themselves as a partner in shaping their spiritual growth.

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Nouns sit and wait for someone somewhere to provide them with mission opportunities. Verbs say, “What motivates *me* ought to *motivate* me.”

Nouns assume the church owes them something. Verbs believe that, if anyone owes anyone anything, we owe Jesus. Not to earn salvation, but because of what He’s done for us. Verbs proclaim, “My mission is defined by what Jesus has done for me.”

Nouns are always looking for what we used to have. Verbs look ahead.

Nouns say, “Its not *my* job.” Verbs say, “It *is* my opportunity.”

Nouns believe a church is bricks and mortar. Verbs believe a church is *unbound* and *outbound*.

Nouns say, “You come here, and we’ll show you Jesus.” Verbs say, “We’ll come to you and *be* Jesus.”

Nouns say, “Let’s *go* to church.” Verbs say, “Let’s . . . just . . . go.”

Verbs believe that when God moves, we move—whatever the cost, whatever the commitment—because it is only in moving with the Holy Spirit that we find our pleasure, passion, and purpose, and bring pleasure to God.

A deep connection exists between the tabernacle and the journey. It is in the Presence that the flowing forth occurs. So the *real* question for you and me is: *Are you a noun or a verb?* In other words, is there a flowing forth in your life?

The Bible tells us we are tabernacles for the Spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit who activates our life in Christ, who creates spiritual movement in and through us. In Exodus, it was not a person but a community that moved out of bondage and toward the promises of God. And it was that same

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community that built the tabernacle. In Nehemiah, it was a community that built the temple and restored the wall. In Acts, it was a community that received the Holy Spirit and then flowed out into the streets building that community from a couple dozen to a few thousand in one day.

The filling of the Holy Spirit is not *first of all* an individual, emotional experience but something given to the community to strengthen and empower it for the work of the kingdom. That's how we've been designed by God. We are designed to follow Him *in community*.

Exodus teaches us that the tabernacle is important to God. It is both where we meet and how we know when to move. Acts teaches us that we are now the tabernacle of God. We house the Holy Spirit. And as His temple, we are called to a journey. *When God moves, we move.*

Are you going someplace spiritually? Will you move when He moves? If you will, answer a holy yes.

Encounter

Read Luke 24:44–49, then Acts 1:4–8.

In the introduction to this study, I referenced Luke 24:49, where Jesus admonishes His followers to “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” This warning is repeated in Acts 1:4–5: “Wait for the gift my Father promised. . . . For John baptized with water, but . . . you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

I end this study with a challenge to flow with the Spirit. If you have received Him into your life, go with Him.

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Have you encountered the Spirit? If so, where has it occurred for you?

What concepts have most helped your understanding of God's work in your life?

If you are meeting with a group, take time to share the highlights of this study. If you've had a personal encounter during this study, share that with your group.

Conclusion

I want you to know that as you move on from this study, my deepest hope is that you will continue to surrender daily to the work of the Holy Spirit. Because the fact is, lots of people believe in Jesus, but not as many people are willing to follow Jesus through the grave, into resurrection, and then into the Spirit-led life. Not as many are willing to die to whom they've allowed themselves to become so they can experience the *whole* gospel. Not many will hunger and thirst after love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, and self-discipline. Being baptized in the Holy Spirit is about getting immersed in the whole gospel, not only the part that gets us to heaven, but the whole gospel.

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Early on in the story of Jesus when John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing people, folks wondered if he might be the Christ. He said to them,

“I’m baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He’s going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.”

—Luke 3:16–17 *THE MESSAGE*

In that brief sermon, John explained the power of the Holy Spirit. He is a fire who changes us from the inside out. He is a sanctifier who burns away the bad and purifies the good in us. And right now, the same Holy Spirit who poured out blessing over Jesus as He bathed in the Jordan stands ready to pour out blessing over you. He wants you to surrender, to believe Him when He says, “You are my son, my daughter, chosen and marked by My love, pride of My life.”

Today, right now, be filled with the Holy Spirit! Receive Him by faith, and let your life be led by the Spirit.

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

—Revelation 22:17 *ESV*