

learning to breathe

50 DAYS WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT





LETTER FROM MARK

Breathing is a natural part of our lives, yet how often do we actually consider this incredible, continuous act? It is said that we breathe 22,000 times each day - 22,000 times our life is maintained and sustained by our ability to take in oxygen, replenish our bodies, and exhale that which we do not need. This is a gift we often take for granted.

We are going to spend 50 days considering the purpose and role of the Holy Spirit, and one of the illustrations that the Bible uses to describe the Holy Spirit is that of breath. The Holy Spirit is God's divine respirator for our souls - breathing life into us so that we might become who we were created and called to be. Sadly, many of us live each day without a conscious awareness or dependence upon the Spirit's nearness. We spend our days tired, weary, and short of breath. This was never God's intentions. Instead of living on our own resources and strength, God has given us the Spirit to fuel, inspire, and equip us to live well.

The Spirit is always with us - as close to us as the breath within us. We don't need to find the Spirit or create the Spirit. We need to become more aware of the Spirit nearness, and we need to learn to breathe deeply this sacred, gracious gift from God. We will spend these 50 days exploring what a life in the Spirit means, how we can deepen our relationship with the Spirit, and how we can be gifted by the Spirit to go into this world empowered to make a difference.

I would invite you to join me in these next 50 days as we courageously open ourselves to the Spirit's work in our lives and in our church. Let us learn to breathe together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Charbonneau". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark Charbonneau
Pastor of The Vine

For additional resources including links to tools, weekly sermons, and small group opportunities, go to thevineaustin.org/holyspirit.



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WEEK 1

Introduction: Learning to Breathe

It's a sad truth, but for many of us, we have removed the *Spirit* from our *spiritual* life. This was never God's intent. Though the Spirit has often been absent from our understanding and intentions, the Spirit has never been absent from our lives. The Spirit is here and accessible for you, like the air we breathe. We need to learn how to breathe the Spirit deeply into our lives as it forms our being, fills our souls, and fuels our mission. This week, we will consider who the Spirit is and the role the Spirit is meant to play in our lives.

In this week's materials, we will find glimpses of the Trinity at work within our Scripture. We will also consider what the Spirit is not (not a vague presence or an impersonal force). The Spirit is a Being or a Person for which we can have a deep abiding relationship. And like all beings, the Spirit has a longing: to help us know God, make us more and more like Jesus, and empower us to do what Jesus did.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Each day this week, we will explore the different attributes and elements that shape our relationship with the Spirit. We will read a passage exploring who the Spirit is, and the role the Spirit can play in our life. Then, we will practice a "prayer of invitation," inviting the Spirit to come and enact the unique quality found in that reading.

MONDAY

Prompt: Read Genesis 1:1-2. Notice that the Spirit is found in the very beginning of the story. The Spirit was not added later, grafted in, or given a supporting character role in Scripture. Hovering over the formless abyss, “the Spirit of God” was present. Before the Spirit does anything and before we explore the role the Spirit plays in our lives, we should consider that the Spirit is God – as much as the Father or Christ! What has that meant in your life? Is that something you have denied, ignored or explored? Spend time now, and meditate upon this truth.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Ask that the Spirit could be revealed to you in the Spirit’s fullness. The same Spirit that hovered over the waters at the beginning of time is the Spirit who is with you in your daily life. Invite this presence into your day today.

TUESDAY

Prompt: Read Psalm 139:1-10. What does this verse tell us about the Spirit's presence? Reflect on what feelings you notice in response to the idea that the Spirit is everywhere and always with you.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Take a look at the day ahead of you. Make a list of all the places you will go - work, grocery store, dentist, school, etc. What does it feel like to acknowledge that the Spirit is going to meet you there? Spend some time inviting the Spirit with you as you arrive in those spaces. Invite the Spirit to guide you throughout your day - in the car, running errands, while at work, in conversations, and in the rest of today's details.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: Read Colossians 1:9-12. God does not intend to release you into this world on your own intellect or resources. What does the Spirit give according to this verse? What does the Spirit provide in verses 10-12? As you reflect upon your life, have you ever experienced the Spirit giving you wisdom and understanding? Where do you need wisdom today?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Practice the prayer of invitation today, inviting the Spirit into areas where you need wisdom and understanding. Notice any obstacles that come up for you - whether the fear of what we might hear or the distrust we have in our ability to hear from the Spirit. Invite the Spirit to help you navigate these obstacles with love and grace.

THURSDAY

Prompt: Read John 16:7-15. The word “advocate” can mean different things in different contexts. Spend a couple minutes and look up John 16:7 in a few translations online. Make a list of all the different words that are used to describe the Spirit in the translations. Journal for a few minutes today about how those words strike you, and what they bring up for you.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Select a word from one of those translations (comforter, advocate, helper, intercessor, strengthener, counselor, etc.). Invite the Spirit into this role in your life. The Spirit already holds this role, but our prayer of invitation is a way to affirm that we need the Spirit in this role in our lives.

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. The Spirit is described here as the part of a person that knows themselves most accurately, most truthfully. Let's think for a moment about the promises of this passage: the Spirit helps us understand God. Think about what you've noticed about the Spirit's personality this week. Remember - the Spirit of God knows the deep things of God more accurately and more authentically than any pastor, teacher, human, or angel ever could.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Invite the Spirit today to be your guide to knowing the truth about God. This can feel scary for some of us, and if that fear is there for you - just invite the Spirit into that as well. Invite the Spirit to take you on a journey for these next weeks into trusting God more and more.

SATURDAY

Prompt: *Away/Toward* At the end of each week, we want to spend some time reflecting on what the Spirit is moving us **toward** and what the Spirit might be moving us **away** from. Spend some time reflecting on what you've noticed about the Spirit this week. In light of this, what do you want to move away from in the coming week? What do you want to move toward?

AWAY

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TOWARD

Practice: As you look at what you have written, invite the Spirit into this process. For each of the things you want to move away from, invite the Spirit to help you make new habits and choices. For each of the things you want to move toward, invite the Spirit to help you notice these things and to feel more and more pulled towards them.



WEEK 2

The Holy Spirit as Breath

This week we are exploring the notion of the Spirit as breath. In both Jewish and Greek languages, the word “spirit” is interchangeable with “breath” and “wind.” This provides us with a picture of the Holy Spirit as God’s respirator for the soul – sustaining us, renewing us, and bringing us to life again.

In Ezekiel 37, God breathed the Spirit upon God’s people to bring them back to life. But that wasn’t just a one-time experience. For many of us, we might have a robust religious life and devotion, but we are living with shortness of breath. We are living off of our own resources, abilities, and strength. This is not how God intended it to be for our lives. In John 3:1-21, Jesus has a conversation with Nicodemus around the necessity of rebirth in the Spirit. Though Nicodemus was devout and religious, there was something Jesus wanted him to learn: to breathe in a new way; to have a new source of life. As this man learned to breathe through the Spirit, he would be brought to life again.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

This week, we are exploring the concept and practice of breathing the Spirit. Primarily, we will do so through the practice of “breath prayers.” Breath prayers are deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, designed to recenter your heart and mind in the Spirit throughout your day.

Breath prayers have been around for hundreds of years, as early as the 3rd century. The idea is that by speaking a few words on an inhale of breath, and a few words on the exhale, the body is united in prayer. The words themselves can change as you reflect upon your own needs and desires, drawing on Scriptures or using a guided breath prayer.

MONDAY

Prompt: Read Ezekiel 37:1-10. Take a scan of your life; consider your dreams, your relationships, how you're spending your life, how you feel about your life. What are the places of your life that feel dry? Where do you feel like you might need new life breathed in?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Before you start the breath prayers, take a few minutes and just notice your breathing. Take a deep breath in and then exhale. Do this a few times. Become mindful of the presence of God. Imagine God leaning in to listen to your prayers.

Imagine those areas of your life that feel dry. On the inhale of your breath, speak (silently or out loud) the first part of the prayer: *Come, O Breath...*

On the exhale, speak the second portion: *And breathe life.* Repeat as long as you feel led, visualizing the Spirit breathing life into you.

TUESDAY

Prompt: Read John 20:19-22. Jesus arrives to find the disciples hiding in fear. Their world, their plans, their standing had just unraveled, and Jesus came to breathe peace upon them. Consider where your life feels unsure and chaotic. Where is anxiety and fear present? What would it be like for Jesus to enter into those places with you?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: For today's breath prayer, let's imagine the breath – that is, the Spirit – being breathed into us by Jesus.

Inhale: *Jesus, breathe on me*

Exhale: *and give me peace.*

Try setting an alarm for noon or whatever time you take lunch today and practice this breath prayer again.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: How often in your day do you notice breathing? The body is designed to breathe, with or without our conscious attention. But, as science has taught us, breathing with intention has the ability to entirely change our experience of the world, helping us regulate emotions and heal trauma. Consider the Spirit for a moment: the Spirit works in you whether you notice the work or not. But noticing the Spirit in you isn't just an exercise in gratitude or awareness – it deepens our relationship with God and changes our experience of the world. Consider the past few weeks. Where are some moments that the Spirit was at work that you might have overlooked?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today we will practice noticing the Spirit by noticing our breath. Try practicing the following breath prayer throughout the day:

INHALE: *O Spirit, my Breath*

EXHALE: *You are with me.*

Instead of using alarms to help you remember to pray throughout the day, try setting “anchors” to trigger your mindfulness of the Spirit with you. Anchors are events that happen in our day that can function as psychological “alarms” reminding us to do something. For example, as you sit down to eat, could that be a reminder to notice the Spirit? As you get in your car? What are those moments you can use as “alarms”?

THURSDAY

Prompt: Consider the many functions of your breath. It sustains your life – taking in oxygen and exhaling waste. It enables you to make sounds: to form words and be known by others. It allows you to sing, to smell, to laugh, to cry out. Our breath regulates emotions and our central nervous system, calming and soothing you.

Consider the Spirit as breath as you read through that list of things again. What resonates with you?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: For today's breath prayer, try creating your own breath prayer inspired by today's prompt. For example:
O Spirit, my breath... let me speak. Or, O Spirit... help me sing.

What anchor did you set yesterday to help you remember to notice the Spirit within you? How did it go? Try using the same anchor again today!

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read Job 34:10-15. Within this verse we see our dependence on the breath of God – we are helpless to cause it and unable to exist without it. But notice also our dependence on the intention of God. We are safe because it is not God’s intention to withdraw God’s Spirit – God’s breath – from us. It is God’s intention to give life through the Spirit. Reflect today on your dependence on God’s intention of life for you. Do you feel confident in God’s intention for you? What experiences have shaped your response to that question?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: For today’s breath prayer, pick whichever of the below options seems the most appropriate for what you are feeling today:

O Spirit, my breath...I trust you to sustain me

Breathe in me again... and give me life.

I depend on your breath...help me to trust you more.

I breathe in your goodness...and let go of lies.

Think about the event you will use as an anchor today to remind you to practice your breath prayer. Visualize that moment ahead of time and imagine it reminding you to notice the Spirit through your breath.

SATURDAY

Prompt: *Away/Toward* Spend some time reflecting on what you've noticed this week as you've practiced being more mindful of the Spirit within you through your breath. Has this week highlighted anything you want to move away from in your life? What would you like to move toward in the coming weeks?

AWAY

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TOWARD

Practice: As you look through what you have written, pick one thing on the "away and toward" list that you want to focus on today in your breath prayers.

Create your own breath prayer. On the inhale, focus on what you want to move toward - breathing it in. On the exhale, let go of what you want to move away from - breathing it out.



WEEK 3

Walking in the Spirit

We are exploring Galatians 5 this week. Paul shares two great barriers to experiencing a life with the Spirit: the law and the flesh. Empty rule-keeping and disordered self-centeredness cuts us off of a life connected to the Spirit. We have been set free to now walk with the Spirit, led by the Spirit, for the Spirit's purposes. But how do we know when we are walking in the Spirit? Thankfully, Galatians 5 gives us the fruits of the Spirit. When we walk with the Spirit of Jesus, these fruits are the natural by-products of a life with God.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

The weekly practice will be to utilize the Prayer of Examen. The Prayer of Examen helps us review and consider God's presence in our daily life. If our goal is to learn to walk in the Spirit, we will need to deepen our awareness and experience with the Spirit in the moments of our days. This prayer will help us consider when we were mindfully living in the Spirit and the fruits of the experiences in our day.

Usually the Prayer of Examen is done in the evening or at the end of the day. Below are the steps to guide you in this practice:

1. Find a place to be quiet and reflect. Become aware of the Spirit's presence with you. You may spend a few minutes saying hello to God, or simply focus on breathing in and out to quiet your inner spirit.

2. Pick a time frame or event to review in the presence of the Spirit. We will give you guidance on this each day this week.
3. Review with the Spirit the event or time period. Each day this week we will offer questions to guide you through this reflection.
4. Look forward. In your Prayer of Examen, you want to look ahead as well as behind.
5. Close your time of prayer resting in the Spirit's presence.

MONDAY

Prompt: Read Galatians 5:13-16 and Galatians 5:25-26. What do they teach you about the desires of the flesh? Walking by the flesh is about leaning on your own actions/behaviors to earn your sense of worth. Why do you think that would play out in the kind of relational elements seen in these verses? Have you seen this in your life?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: For our first practice of the Prayer of Examen, let's reflect on a relationship in your life. Begin by being still and becoming aware of the presence of God. Ask the Spirit to call to mind a relationship in your life, and then reflect on that relationship over the past few weeks.

- What emotions have you experienced in that relationship?
- When did you experience the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)?
- When did you experience a desire to challenge, envy, or use the person in some way to gain a sense of security around your worth?
- Visualize the Spirit assuring you of your worth. You are fully secure, nothing to earn or prove.
- Dream for the future of that relationship: how would that assurance set you free to love that person? Imagine the relationship - what does it feel like when you imagine moving forward in freedom?

TUESDAY

Prompt: Read Galatians 5:22–23. Draw, write out, or just read through that list of the fruits of the Spirit and notice what comes up for you.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today we will practice the Prayer of Examen with our day yesterday (if done in the morning) or today (if done at night). So, get settled with God, and then practice reflecting on the day. Where did you notice love? Joy? Peace? Patience? Kindness? Goodness? Faithfulness? Gentleness? Self-control? Where did you notice emotions counter to those? Retrace the moments you noticed the fruit of the Spirit, and try to be mindful of the Spirit's presence, leading you in those moments.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: For some of us, the call to walk by the Spirit instead of the flesh might call to mind the idea that our bodies themselves are in some way evil, or our emotions and desires are not to be trusted. "Flesh" does not mean body. It is clear that the work of Christ is to heal and restore the body as well as the soul. Reflect on this today. What ideas does the phrase "the flesh" call to mind for you? Do you believe that God cares for your physical flourishing as well as your soulful flourishing?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: In today's Examen, we will use our hands to guide us in our practice.

- Spend a moment to be quiet with the Spirit. Become aware again of the Spirit's presence in your life.
- Now, look at your hands. Notice the cracks, scars, wrinkles. Consider how rarely we look at our hands and yet how important they are to us.
- Reflect on the people God has used to hold your hand. What were their legacies? How have you been shaped by them?
- Now reflect on how you used your hands today. Who did you serve? What did you hold onto? What was the fruit of their actions?
- Look forward to the future. How might the Spirit move you to use your hands in the coming day? How could you use your body to walk in the Spirit?

Thank the Spirit for serving you, knowing you, and walking you hand-in-hand through life.

THURSDAY

Prompt: Read Romans 8:12-17. In this passage, Paul compares the flesh and the Spirit by comparing the spirit of adoption vs servitude. Consider the differences in these two experiences. What do they feel like? Why would one produce the fruit of the Spirit and one the fruit of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-23)?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: For today's Examen, let's reflect on our day yesterday. Be still and reflect on the events of Wednesday. What emotions do you notice throughout the day? Where do you see the fruit of the spirit of adoption? Press into those moments and notice your confidence in your Father's provision. Where do you see the fruit of the spirit of slavery? Press into those moments and notice the ways you might have been fearful, or trying to earn, or felt in bondage.

FRIDAY

Prompt: Sometimes, in our desire for control and the fear of making mistakes, we trade being led by the Spirit for being led by a clear instruction manual. Do you relate to this? Why do you think some of us would prefer being told what to do instead of the inside-out prompting of the Spirit?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today's Examen is a chance for us to build our trust that we know how to be led by the Spirit if we listen.

- Quiet yourself before God.
- Ask the Spirit to bring to mind a moment when you made a choice you are proud of, without any clear signs from the outside. Reflect on that moment. Which fruit of the Spirit do you see from that choice?
- Now, reflect and ask the Spirit to bring to mind a moment when you made a choice that you are not proud of, that you might look back with sadness or sorrow. What prompted that choice or decision? Spend some time reflecting on your ability to listen to the leadership of the Spirit.
- As with any living thing, it takes time to learn to walk well. So it is with our life in the Spirit. We will stumble and fall as we figure out how to discern the Spirit's guidance in our life. Spend time releasing your regrets to God and invite the Spirit to continue to strengthen you as you continue to walk with God.

SATURDAY

Prompt: *Away/Toward* Spend some time reflecting on what you've noticed this week. As you've practiced the Prayer of Examen, what patterns did you notice? What narratives have emerged? How do you see walking in the Spirit differently now than you did before this week?

Finally, what do you want to move away from as you desire to walk in the Spirit? How can your life be more guided by the Spirit than the flesh? What are some next steps to walk towards in your life with the Spirit? What fruit of the Spirit do you long to develop in your life?

AWAY

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TOWARD

Practice:

- Look at your list of away/toward responses. Spend some time with the Spirit, seeking one or two that resonate with you deeply today. Ask the Spirit to increase your longing for the Spirit's fruit in your life.
- Now consider your day/week ahead. What events are on the horizon? What circumstances are you facing? Who will you see? Where will you go? Imagine the Spirit inhabiting those places and pulling you toward the Spirit's fruit and the sensations and narratives that you long to move toward in your life.
- Ask the Spirit to help you let go of the things you want to move away from, and visualize letting those things go as you trust the Spirit of adoption within you.



WEEK 4

The Holy Spirit as Guide

An honest reading of the book of Acts displays the Spirit instructing, guiding, and inspiring people towards participation in the Kingdom. But what about today? This week, we consider how to be guided by the Holy Spirit's leadership in our own lives. We will consider practical instructions of discerning the Spirit and being led by the Spirit.

Consider Ephesians 5:16-18: Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

The focus here is to be filled with the Spirit so that we live with wisdom, making the most of each and every day. Specifically, Paul instructs the church to avoid being drunk on - or influenced by - wine but instead be filled with - or influenced by - the Spirit. Perhaps we should broaden this concept. Instead of being drunk on wine, what about, do not be obsessed with approval, do not be distracted by your devices, do not over-identify with this world's labels, or do not be numbed by consumerism? All of those things distract us and deaden us to the Spirit's guidance within us.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Last week we focused on tuning into the Spirit's desires for our lives. This week we will practice pressing into the Spirit's specific leading in our lives. God wants to interact with us uniquely, specifically, and clearly through the Spirit. This week's practice is to listen to and respond to the Spirit's promptings in our lives. This has two-parts: 1) unplugging from the things that direct our days (as Paul says wine does) and 2) seeking to be led by the Spirit who can guide our days. We've provided daily prompts and practices to help us live with greater attentiveness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit within the day and to courageously follow those prompts.

MONDAY

Prompt: One of the functions of “too much wine” is to help people cope with their lives. Sometimes the world seems to be too much, and we don’t want to slow down and feel the reality. We don’t want to notice our apathy or loneliness or fear, so we numb ourselves. What is one circumstance or sensation in your life that you might want to numb yourself from? What is one thing in your life that you are currently using to numb yourself?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: It seems like step one of having the experience of being led and filled by the Spirit, is to make ourselves hospitable hosts for the Spirit. By resisting the urge to numb and distract, we make space for our senses to be aware of the Spirit’s presence. Pick one thing you could “fast” from this week in order to make more space for your soul to be open and in tune to the Spirit’s leadership. Maybe it’s resisting the urge to put the radio on in the car. It could be refraining from alcohol or social media. Allow that space now to be filled with a hunger for the Spirit.

TUESDAY

Prompt: Today we will reflect on a few key moments that might have shaped how you perceive the Spirit can guide our lives:

- Think of a moment you have sought guidance from the Spirit for a decision that didn't go well. What happened? What was that experience like?
- Think of a moment you have heard someone else claim to hear something from God. What emotions come up for you as you reflect on that moment? Resistance? Fear? Anger? Envy? Shame?
- Think of a moment you have experienced the guidance of the Holy Spirit in a decision. How did that guidance present itself?
- Reflecting on your life, do you think God has spoken to you directly through God's Spirit? Notice what thoughts/feelings come up for you as you consider that question.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Make a list of all the people you're going to interact with today. Pray through each one of them. Try to cultivate an openness - inviting the Spirit to lead you in that prayer. The Spirit knows what each one of these people is dealing with and processing. Ask for insight as you pray through the names. Is there anyone on this list who needs encouragement today?

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: Read 1 Kings 19:11-13. What do you notice about how God spoke to Elijah? We often have pictures of God that remind us of his greatness, strength, or power, but in this moment, we see that God is a whispering God. Consider your life: is it quiet enough to hear a still small voice? What obstacles are in the way of that?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today we're going to practice inviting the Spirit into the open space we've made by stepping back from distractions. Set a timer for 2 or 3 minutes and sit quietly and alone. Try to tune into the still small voice of the Spirit, remembering this is the Spirit of Jesus - you know this Spirit. Begin by asking: what would you like to say to me today? Write down any thoughts/narratives/feelings that arise - even the ones that you are tempted to dismiss.

THURSDAY

Prompt: Read John 14:25-27 NIV. Notice the words “all” and “everything.” Does this feel true in your life? What do you wish you could be taught about in your life right now? Where do you need guidance and direction?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today, spend some time alone with the Spirit. Try to quiet your own spirit so that you can listen for the still small voice of God. Ask the Spirit for guidance in the areas you listed above. Begin a conversation of listening. Notice the obstacles that come up. (NOTE: learning to be led by the Spirit is a process. We must practice. Remind yourself and listen as the Spirit reminds you - with gentleness and patience - that practices are for learning.)

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read the quotes below. What stands out to you?

“People are meant to live in an ongoing conversation with God, speaking and being spoken to.” – Dallas Willard

“The problem is not that Jesus isn’t speaking, or even that you aren’t hearing, it’s that you don’t believe you are hearing.”
– Tony Stoltzfus

“We make this hard because we want proof that what we heard is really God. We may mistakenly think that if God spoke to us we would automatically know who is speaking, without having to learn. But this is simply a mistake. And one of the most harmful mistakes for those trying to hear God’s voice.”
– Dallas Willard

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Look at the weekend ahead. Make a list of what is on your agenda. Now lay this list before God, and ask the Spirit, do you want me to know anything about this weekend? Listen. Are there any people you are going to encounter that the Spirit wants you to be mindful of? Are there things left off the agenda that the Spirit would like to lead you toward?

SATURDAY

Prompt: *Away/Toward* Learning to listen to the voice of God is an act of sacred listening that takes courage, humility and trust. As you think back on this week, what attitudes do you want to move away from? What fears do you want to let go of? What noisy distractions do you want to take a break from to make more room for the Spirit's voice? Write these in the "away" column. As you think back on this week, what do you want more of? Invite the Spirit into this conversation as well - what does the Spirit want to lead you toward in this relationship?

AWAY

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TOWARD

Practice: As you look at your away/toward lists, open these things up to the Spirit. Highlight or circle anything that is jumping out to you as a starting point. What is one action item you could take this week to move toward the changes you want to seek in your life as it relates to leaning into the leading of the Spirit?



WEEK 5

The Holy Spirit as an Instrument of Justice

In Luke 4, we see Jesus inaugurate his public ministry. He stands up, in front of his entire faith community, and essentially proclaims his purpose. He chooses to quote Isaiah:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Throughout the fullness of the Scripture, God's passion is so clear: he is a God of reconciliation, restoration, redemption, justice, and mercy. God longs to see the entire world restored to goodness and rightness. As God becomes flesh, we see in Jesus the embodiment of this desire. And as Jesus departs, he makes two wild promises: the same Spirit that anointed him for this work will be within us, and through that Spirit we will do even greater works than he.

As followers of Jesus we are Spirit-sent ambassadors: sent to a broken world with the goal of making peace - true restoration. Anywhere we find pain, suffering, unjust systems, oppression - we are compelled by the Spirit within us to seek God's Kingdom, here and now, through caring for the world around us.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

This week, we will explore the practice of embodying mercy in the margins.

This might be one of the most challenging practices we've identified so far. Why? Going to the margins requires a measure of courage. It is easier to remain in our places of comfort and control. It is easier to attend small groups, serve inside church walls or with folks who look like you. But when we show up in the margin, we feel vulnerable.

But we are not alone. We are practicing embodying mercy in the margins *through* the Spirit. The same Spirit who anointed Jesus for this work has anointed us. As we practice embodying mercy this week, let us be mindful of the Spirit motivating us, empowering us, and bearing fruit through us.

MONDAY

Prompt: Begin today reflecting on how you might answer this question: the Spirit anointed Jesus to do what? Now, read Luke 4:16-21. Make a list of what the Spirit has anointed Jesus to do. Make a list of who these actions are for. If caring for those in the margin was such a central part of Jesus' life, why do you think we have so often made it a minor part of the life of a Christian?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today we will begin our practice of embodying mercy in the margins by becoming more aware of the margins. So often we have set up our lives to avoid the marginalized - but in our city, the marginalized are everywhere.

As you go through your day, note when you engage with anyone who might fall in these categories (HINT: all of us do in some way):

- Those in need: Who are those living in poverty of resources of any kind: material, emotional, spiritual, financial?
- The prisoners: Who are those in the world around you who face prison, bondage, or some kind of exclusion from society?
- The blind: Who are those in the world around you today who face limitations or exclusions through disability or accessibility?
- The oppressed: Who are those in the world around you who are burdened by systems and power dynamics that keep them from moving in freedom?

TUESDAY

Prompt: We can all value the rightness of caring for the world around us. We all long to see the wrong-ness around us set right. What are some of the obstacles that get in the way of living out this value in our lives?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: One of the obstacles is often our busyness. Our frantic lives leave no space for interruptions. What would it look like to approach your day today expecting the Spirit to interrupt you with opportunities to extend mercy? Look at your schedule. Is there something you need to take off your plate so you have room for those interruptions? Now, go into your day – with eager eyes to see where the Spirit might be ready to care for others through you.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: One of the obstacles some of us may face in embodying mercy in the margins is our sense of exhaustion. We are weary. Read Isaiah 58:6-12. What promises do you find in this passage? How might the Spirit within you change the experience of caring for others?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today, lean into Isaiah 58:10-12. Leaning into the Spirit, not your own energy, do one small thing for someone who is afflicted or hungry in some way. Notice how you feel afterwards. Pay attention to see if you can sense the fruit of the Spirit.

THURSDAY

Prompt: One obstacle we may face in caring for others is that the world seems too broken, too overwhelming. What is one area of systemic brokenness in the world that overwhelms you when you think about it? Today, instead of avoiding the heartbreak of that area, let yourself grieve with the Spirit today. And spend some time praying for the power of the Spirit to restore that area of brokenness.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: What is one practical way the Spirit is nudging you to take action in that area of brokenness? Do you have a friend you could invite into this area with you? Text or call them today and make a plan for how you can engage this area that is in need of change.

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read Isaiah 61:1-4. These are the verses Jesus is quoting in Luke 4. What do you notice about how the Spirit longs to reverse the world's brokenness? Reflect on what it means not just that God longs to do these things but that God longs to do them through the Spirit who is in you. Listen to that Spirit now and notice: which of these promises stirs your own heart? What would it feel like to be a part of seeing this come to fruition? Write that verse on a post-it and put it on your mirror or somewhere you will see it as a reminder of the work you are anointed to do.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Consider your community at The Vine today. Do you know of those at The Vine who are in need? Who are the brokenhearted or mourning? Who are bound in some way or have a faint spirit? What might it look like to be a part of the Spirit's desire to comfort, to bring provision, to bring gladness and praise? Today, do one thing to move toward that. Maybe it's initiating a meal calendar, sending a text to grab coffee, or sending a card.

SATURDAY

Prompt: *Away/Toward* Spend some time this morning getting quiet before God and trying to notice the Spirit moving with you. After this week of reflection, where is the Spirit longing to break free and move towards change in this world? Can you feel the nudge of the Spirit moving you away from some obstacle - whether it be logistical (like busyness) or emotional or a narrative that keeps you from acting?

AWAY

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TOWARD

Practice: Reflecting on that list, what is one lasting change you would like to make in your life that would help you move in the Spirit's anointing to make the world around us look more like the kingdom of God? What would it take to make that change? What are the steps? Who is one person you can share this with and ask for support in this journey?



WEEK 6

The Holy Spirit and the Church

This week, we will consider God's incredible longing to be *with* God's people. The notion of *with* or *with-ness* is central to understanding the character of God. Going through Scripture, we can see the different ways in which God was with humanity – leading, guiding, comforting, and instructing them as they navigate this world. The culmination of this *with-ness* began when Jesus physically came to walk with humanity as one of us, but that was not the end. God desired more. Before leaving Jesus told his followers, "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you... When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth..." (John 16:7,13).

The Spirit's presence in and among God's people is now one of the greatest ways in which God continues God's *with-ness* in this world. When we gather together in Christ's name, the Spirit of Jesus is here, among us (Matt. 18:20). This is the primary calling of the Church. Followers of Christ are now God's faithful and enduring presence in this world. The question is: are we living like that?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Our weekly practice is focused on us being an expression of God's presence in this world. The theme this week is missional and evangelistic in the traditional sense.

A major concept we will explore is adapting and exploring the prayer of epiclesis. In some churches, this prayer is said over the elements of communion. The pastor or priest asks God to take these common elements (bread and wine/juice) and to turn them into God's sacred presence. Instead of saying this over the communion table, we can say this prayer over our workplaces, homes, coffee shops/cafes, or places of need. In this prayer, we devote and dedicate these relationships to God's presence and ask that the Spirit would bring about sacred moments.

MONDAY

Prompt: The Spirit is the with-ness of God going into the world. Reflect today: does it feel like God is with you in the world? What thoughts or feelings come up for you as you consider that question? What would you want to be different in your experience of God with you as you go out into the world today?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: What is one space or environment you have facing you in the week ahead that you are nervous or anxious to go into alone? Pray the prayer of epiclesis over that space. That prayer can be something like the following:

“Holy Spirit, I give you _____. I pray that you would take what happens in that space and make it sacred. May we foster your nearness, and may I bear witness to your goodness. Come Holy Spirit, come.”

While there, imagine this truth: you will carry God with you into that space through God’s Spirit. You will not go alone. Ask the Spirit to make that space holy and sacred - with a felt experience of the presence of God.

TUESDAY

Prompt: In Matthew's Gospel, the final thing Jesus told his disciples is what many call "The Great Commission." Consider the bookends of this commandment:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:18,20).

Jesus, the one with all authority, doesn't just send us into the world on our own or with our own resources. Jesus promises to be with us. Take some time this morning to reflect on your day ahead. What people, relationships, and places might need the presence of the Spirit to breathe fresh life into them? Where are the fruits of the Spirit needed?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Pick one of the spaces you will be in today and spend some time asking God to make that space holy and sacred by bringing God's presence into it. Create a breath prayer that you can pray as you enter that space today, (e.g., "Spirit, here I am here... send me" or "Come Holy Spirit... and restore all things.")

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: One of the greatest roles we can play in this world is to be peacemakers. Where is there conflict in your world? It may be conflict that you are a part of, or it could be conflict that you know about but aren't directly involved in. Identify a conflicted space or relationship that you would like to invite the Spirit into. Visualize that space or relationship, and just spend a moment asking the Spirit to show up, to reconcile, and to restore.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Consider how you can carry the peace of the Spirit into that conflicted situation. It could just be praying for it throughout the day. Or you might have a direct action to take – a call, a visit, or an apology to make.

THURSDAY

Prompt: Look at what is on the agenda for your day. Is there a place or relationship where you have relational favor? This is a place where you have opportunities to build and deepen relationships. Spend time imagining the day ahead as specifically as possible, visualizing how you might approach it differently with a mindfulness of the Spirit's presence with you. Remember God longs to be with all of God's people - including those around you. They are God's beloved children whom God longs to draw near. Perhaps, you will be the expression of God's mercy that is available to them.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Pick one common space you encounter on a regular basis - your car, your kid's school, your kitchen, etc. - and pray the prayer of epiclesis over that space, asking God to make it sacred with the Spirit's presence. Create a breath prayer that can help you be mindful of the Spirit's presence you carry into that space as you enter it.

Before you enter that place today, pray the prayer of epiclesis and invite the Holy Spirit into that place as you step in. Ask the Spirit to help you identify opportunities to speak blessing or give blessing to others.

FRIDAY

Prompt: Listen to the song “Holy Spirit”.



Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Go to a private space you are in a lot – your house, your car, your bedroom. Play the song again and use the lyrics to pray for the Spirit to flood the place with the Spirit’s presence, marking it as sacred.

SATURDAY

Prompt: *Away/Toward* Spend some time reflecting on what you've noticed this week as you've pressed into the with-ness of God with you and the with-ness of God with others in this world through you. What did you learn this week? What is the Spirit nudging you to move away from in your life? What is the Spirit nudging you toward?

AWAY

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TOWARD

Practice: Tomorrow we will join together with others who carry the same Spirit within them for our Sunday worship service. Spend some time praying the prayer of epiclesis over the TexFed building. Ask God to send God's Holy Spirit upon that place so that we might experience the unity of the body of Christ and the fullness of God's character.



WEEK 7

The Holy Spirit's Power within Us

This week we're pressing into the power of the Spirit in and amongst us. It's hard to overstate the power of the Spirit - who works miracles among us and is able to do even more than we can dream or imagine. And the Spirit has chosen to work this power not just around us but *through* us. The Spirit inhabits each one of us uniquely, giving us different gifts that have a supernatural impact in this world. When we come together, the Spirit uses our gifts to fulfill God's promises to care for those around us.

This power of the Spirit is so different from the power we see in the world. The Spirit's power does not exercise control or dominion over us. Instead, the Spirit empowers us to bring freedom and restoration to the world around us. The Spirit's power also doesn't work like most of the power we've seen. It isn't demonstrated through autonomous or self-sufficiency, but it is displayed through dependence and faith. The Spirit's power is made perfect within us through our weakness.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

This week, for our practice, we will complete an inventory helping us explore the unique shape the Spirit takes in each one of us. The Spirit has gifted us uniquely, and is at work in power through these gifts in us to help God's Kingdom come in the world around us. We'll explore the specific way our gifts and our passions intersect to guide us toward the

places the Spirit may be working through us. Using the QR code below - or by going to thevineaustin.org/holyspirit - you will find an inventory tool that we will walk through to help us with this process.



Spiritual Gift Inventory Tool: God's Power Within You

MONDAY

Prompt: What is one moment in history where you perceive God's power most clearly? Creation? The parting of the Red Sea? The resurrection? Which feels most like a display of "power" to you? What about it most captures the picture of "power" to you?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today we'll begin our engagement with exploring our unique design, by reading through the list of spiritual gifts in the first section of the inventory found in the appendix. As you go through this list, mark or highlight any gifts you have seen used in your life to produce the fruit of the Spirit in the world around you.

TUESDAY

Prompt: Look at what you wrote about yesterday. That same power, the power of God, is in you through God's Spirit. You! What comes up for you when you read that? Is that hard to believe? Easy? Confusing? Uncomfortable?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Continue into the next section of the inventory. Today you will reflect on your abilities: these are skills or talents you possess that often help channel our spiritual gifts. Mark three abilities that jump out to you the most. At the end of this week, you will summarize the way you see your abilities and gifts interact.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (NIV). Make any observations you can about the word “same” or “one”? Make observations about the word “different” or “another”?

Are you ever tempted to belittle your unique role in the world by thinking your gifts are the same as someone else’s? Are you ever tempted to feel like there is less power or purpose in your life because you have different gifts? How is the Spirit speaking into that through this passage?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: We have not only been given unique gifts and abilities, but we also have been given areas which draw out our compassion. As musician Matthew West wrote, “Father, break my heart for what breaks yours.” God has instilled in each of us part of God’s compassion and heart for this world. Today, continue the inventory, by reflecting on your “heart” experiences in the third section.

THURSDAY

Prompt: Read Galatians 3:2–5. In verse 5, can you name the two different perspectives used for how the Spirit’s power moves among us? Consider those two different perspectives. How would they play out differently in your life? How would they change the experience of seeking the Spirit’s power? What feelings would each bring if you lived with that perspective?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: The Spirit’s power longs to manifest in you and flow through your gifts and abilities to bring an experience of peace, love, joy, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control to the world around you. Today, complete the fourth section of the inventory, reflecting on where your heart longs to see the Spirit move in power.

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read 1 Corinthians 12:7 again. What is given? Why is it given? The power of the Spirit has a different agenda than the power we so often see in the world around us. What do you think the Spirit wants to use power to accomplish? How is that distinct from how you have seen power used in your life?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today we will notice the ways your heart and your gifts/abilities intersect. Pay attention to that intersection by completing the grid you'll find in the inventory and dreaming about what the Spirit could do through you.

SATURDAY

Prompt: *Away/Toward* Spend some time reflecting today. What has the Spirit revealed to you this week about God's power within you? What is the Spirit calling you to move toward? An increased faith in the Spirit's power within you? A greater awareness of your gifting or understanding of how to use it? A specific person or place? What attitudes, obstacles, distractions do you need to move away from in order to follow the Spirit's leadership?

AWAY

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TOWARD

Practice: Identify one action step that you need to take to move toward what the Spirit is wanting to do through you. Some ideas are listed at the bottom of the inventory. If you feel comfortable, send this action step to a friend for support or to a leadership team member at The Vine so we can help!



FINAL REFLECTION

Over the past 50 days, regardless of how you've engaged with this journal, or engaged with God – the Spirit has been with you, at work within you and around you and through you.

Sit with a few moments from the past two months of your life and reflect:

- Where do you notice the fruit of the Spirit in your relationships? Thank the Spirit for this evidence of God's movement in these relationships.
- Where do you notice the work of the Spirit in the world around you? What movement do you see that is evidence of God's work?
- Where do you sense the fruit of the Spirit within your own heart? What new freedom and peace has the Spirit brought?

We are grateful to have been on this journey with you, and we pray that the Spirit continues to breathe life into you in new and powerful ways.



*May you find God in each breath.
May you learn to live in God's Spirit through every breath.
May you continue to learn to breathe with the Spirit.
May you continue to learn to breathe.*



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