



BUILD CHARACTER STAY CONNECTED

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DEFINED

Walks through life in communion with God, listening to the Spirit for guidance and trusting the Spirit for strength.

“God created you to do life with him, right now, moment by moment” - John Burke

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DESCRIBED

As Jesus is preparing His disciples for His impending departure from them toward the end of John's gospel, He makes a surprising statement, *“It is for your good that I am going away”* (John 16:7). What could be better for their lives than to physically walk through life with the Son of God? If they had a question, they could ask Him. If they needed help or guidance, He was with them. Fortunately, He gives them the answer to the question He knew they were thinking. *“Unless I go away,”* He told them, *“the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”* (John 16:7).

Jesus previously hinted at this when He said that this Advocate, the Holy Spirit, *“lives with you and will be in you”* (John 14:17). So, the Spirit that was around them would one day live within them. Jesus later explained that when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they *“will receive power”* (Acts 1:8). Although they did not understand it yet, their experience of the presence of God walking beside them would transform into residing within them. This is why Paul calls us "God's temple" because His very Spirit dwells in us in a more permanent way than it ever did in the man-made temple. This certainly would be an improvement, but what are the implications for today? What do the Scriptures teach us about the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

The presence of the Spirit in a believer's life has many facets and functions, all of which are both wonderful and mysterious. We see in Scripture that the Spirit serves as a "seal" on our hearts, declaring that their owner is Christ and the "deposit" securing our eternal "inheritance" that awaits us (Ephesians 1:13-14). So, the Spirit provides us with assurance of our salvation. As Jesus explained to His disciples, His Spirit is also "The Spirit of truth" who would guide them (and us) "into all the truth" (John 16:13). As our Guide, He leads us in the way of obedience to Christ and as our Helper, He gives us spiritual discernment in what is good, right and true. The Spirit also can be mysterious in how He directs our path. When Paul and his companions were looking for guidance, we learn in the book of Acts that "they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to" (16:7). We don't know how or why the Spirit did this, but it's clear that the Spirit interacts in the world around us, not just our inner life. So, He's not an invisible force- He is real, personal and active!

In another place we're taught to "walk," "live" and "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16, 25), and that when we do, the presence of God's Spirit will produce specific fruit in our lives. This fruit of the Spirit consists of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22). We do not white-knuckle ourselves into this character; the Holy Spirit is both the source and cultivator of this fruit. Our role in this relationship is to pay attention, to invite Him to work in us, to change us and bear fruit that brings life to the world.

Although the Spirit isn't visible, don't think that He isn't powerful. Romans 8:11 tells us that, "And the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you..." As followers of Jesus, the God who raised Him from the dead has given us His very own life-giving Spirit. Jesus left that He might grant us His own powerful Spirit to carry out what He has done in us to the rest of the world. Our journey to being agents of change in the world depends on us abiding in the unlimited strength of God's presence and guidance freely given through His Spirit.

EVIDENCE OF THIS SPIRITUAL OUTCOME IN A PERSON'S LIFE

- Ever-increasing presence of the fruit of the Spirit in one's life.
- A growing conversational relationship with God throughout one's day.
- An identifiable decrease in sin's appeal or grip.
- A growing ability to discern God's guidance throughout one's day.

GUIDANCE

Read each passage multiple times. Then write your observations about the passage and any thoughts you have from the discernment question. What do you notice in the passage, and what does this reveal about your life?

GENESIS 1:2, JOEL 2:28-29

Observations:

Discernment Question: What are your initial thoughts regarding the Holy Spirit? Is the Holy Spirit a new idea or an old friend?

LUKE 3:16, LUKE 11:11-13

Observations:

Discernment Question: How have you experienced the Holy Spirit in your current season of life? If you are not experiencing the Holy Spirit in your life, what might be holding you back? Lack of understanding? Lack of desire?

JOHN 14:15-17

Observations:

Discernment Question: To what extent do you treasure the Holy Spirit? To what extent do you engage the Holy Spirit?

JOHN 15:1-4

Observations:

Discernment Question: To what extent do you have a day by day, moment by moment, dependence on God's presence as a branch depends on a vine?

ACTS 1:8, 4:8

Observations:

Discernment Question: To what extent have you looked to the Holy Spirit to empower you to make a difference in the world?

ROMANS 8:5-17

Observations:

Discernment Question: In your current season of life, does your mind settle more into thoughts of the flesh or thoughts of the Spirit? How do you see this played out in your life?

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

Observations:

Discernment Question: How do you view and treat your body? Do you view it as sacred space and shared space (with the Holy Spirit)? How does this impact what you do with your body, whether positively or negatively?

GALATIANS 5:16-26

Observations:

Discernment Question: How is your life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit? How much more or less is your life characterized by fruit of the Spirit compared to a year ago? Five years ago?

NEXT STEPS

What are practical next steps you will do based on what you have discovered in this survey of Scripture about staying connected to God's Spirit? Include insights offered from others in your Life Group that could be applied in your own life, as well.

MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

John 15: 4-5, NIV

Remain in me [Jesus], as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Galatians 5:22-23a, NIV

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.



BUILD CHARACTER STAY CONNECTED

THE CARNIVAL

The young boy stands in the midst of the carnival's chaos. A bag of cotton candy dangles from one hand, a string of tickets from the other. Prospective thrills beckon him to every stand, every ride, and every game. His eyes are wide with excitement. He races through the maze of people. His time is limited. He doesn't want to miss a bit of it.

He tosses rings at the ring toss. He hopes to win a bear. Close, but not quite. He races to the merry-go-round. He hopes to ride the blue one. Purple will do. He throws balls to dunk the clown. Three balls per ticket. Four tickets burned.

The carnival is fun, but it is frustrating. The fun drives him on. The frustration leaves him lonely. As he races to the next thrill, he hears a voice cutting through the chaos.

He stops.

The voice is familiar. Even more, the voice is wanted.

It wasn't wanted at first. At first, he wanted to run free, to run alone. But the reality of the carnival changed all that. Now he welcomes the voice. He can't quite place the direction, but he hears it again. To his frustration, blaring bells from a ride beside him drown the voice out.

Where is he? Was that him? I think it was him.

He turns.

Through the crowd before him, he thinks he catches a glimpse of him. The crowd shifts, and his view is obstructed.

Was that him? I think it was him.

He stops and listens. Rather than the hundreds of voices around him he listens to the one familiar voice calling his name.

It is not loud; it need not be. It's a trusted voice that cuts through the chaos.

To his surprise, he does not discover the voice by running to the distant corners of the carnival. The voice is found as the boy stops and listens.

He pauses and looks to the towering presence standing calmly beside him.

There he is. That's my dad!

THE CONSTANT PRESENCE

A familiar voice is powerful. It doesn't have to be the loudest voice in the room; familiarity beats volume. The wise know this. They listen for the quiet truth in that voice they've grown to recognize: *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:27).

When Jesus physically walked this earth, there was a critical moment when He pulled his closest followers aside. The cross was imminent. In a matter of days, circumstances would change dramatically. These followers had lived closely with Jesus for several years. They walked side by side; they shared meals; they slept in the same fields, the same rooms.

This makes one of Jesus' final statements to them either desperately odd or powerfully intriguing. He said, *"...It is for your good that I am going away"* (John 16:7a).

Good? What could be better than having the face-to-face interaction they had with Jesus every day? If they had questions, they turned and asked Him. If they were sick, they could walk across the room and experience His touch. How could it be good that He was leaving them?

Jesus explained, *"Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you"* (John 16:7b).

This must have caused confusion.

What advocate? If You're sending someone else, most certainly this Advocate can't be better than You. How can it be good to get this advocate? You seem to be implying that this will be a better situation than the one we have right now. That's not possible.

As stunning as that sounds, that is precisely what Jesus was saying. He would leave, and His leaving would be good because having the Advocate present would be better for them than His own physical presence. It would take time for His closest followers to be convinced. It would actually take the Advocate coming to them for them to truly get it. *A spiritual presence is a constant presence not limited by physical realities.*

When Jesus walked closely with His followers, He would also have times of absence. He was a physical being and willingly limited Himself by this. Scripture describes times when, to His disciples' frustration, He slipped away: *"Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'"* (Mark 1:36-37).

Such is the reality of the physical world; but the Advocate would be Spirit.

After the cross and resurrection, Jesus again met with His followers. Prior to His ascension, He made a statement that, once again, must have sounded odd. Later His disciples would look back on this statement and piece it together. He tells them, *"...I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20).

This Jesus, this being who died and then rose, now promises His perpetual presence. But wasn't it the Advocate who would be present? How is Christ to be present until *the very end of the age*?

This Advocate, this ever-present Spirit, would later be referred to as the *"Spirit of Jesus."* One early follower of Christ wrote, *"Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance"* (Philippians 1:18b-19)

The young boy at the carnival is not emboldened by finding detailed instructions on how to navigate the carnival. He did not find a map or a list of rules. Boldness for his battle is embodied in a person stronger, wiser, and more experienced than Himself. Release from his fear comes when his father, leaning down, whispers, *"I'll stay close. Stay close to me. We'll do this together."* The memory he will savor most as he goes through life will not just be the carnival itself, but the person with whom he experienced the carnival.

And so it is with the Spirit of Jesus. God's method is not to just download Scripture to your mental hard drive, sit back, fold His arms, and wonder if you'll make the cut. Rather, He lives within us, strengthens us, leads us, and interacts with us. He wants to do this life, this carnival, together. And here as well, the memory we will savor for all eternity will not just be the carnival itself, but the Person with whom we experienced the carnival.

If we are to authentically know and love God and experience His transformation in our daily lives, then we must lean into the presence of God's Spirit. We must learn to discern the voice of truth calling through the carnival of chaos.

How does this work? How do we truly live by the Spirit? How do we experience God's presence? How do we hear God's voice?

Let's discuss the essentials.

THE PERSONALITY OF THE SPIRIT

As a starting point, we must recognize that this Spirit is not an inanimate *force* or *energy* in the universe, but a *personality*. Yes, it has force. Yes, it has energy. But, *it* is not an "*it*;" *it* is a *Person*. The implications of this are profound. We are not just pulled along by a colossal magnet. The Spirit of Jesus is not a cosmic hit of super-charged caffeine. We are inspired and strengthened by the presence of a powerful and personal being with emotion, perspective, and presence. This Spirit "*searches all things, even the deep things of God*" (1 Corinthians 2:10b). This Spirit "*... helps us in our weakness ...*" (Romans 8:26). This Spirit "*... intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God*" (Romans 8:27). This is a living personality that interacts and intercedes.

One of the more fascinating statements on this comes from a man who literally walked with Jesus. John was one of Christ's closest followers. He referred to himself as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" (John 13:23). Without question, this was a man who would have treasured the physical presence of Jesus. He sat with Him at dinner. He walked with Him, and later, along with the other disciples, He is referred to as Christ's friend (John 15:15). This man knew Jesus well.

Years later, John writes to followers of Christ who did not experience Jesus' physical presence. He draws attention to the physical experience he and others were fortunate enough to have when he writes that Christ is the one "*... which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched ...*" (1 John 1:1). Why would he say this? It's as if he's rubbing in the fact that they weren't there. Won't his readers hear him saying, "*You missed Him! He was here, and you missed Him! Let me tell you what He was like, since you missed Him!*" We might expect this. It's the kind of gloating common in our world. John does something quite surprising though.

When John writes, he writes with a stated purpose. So as to be certain nobody misses this, he tells them plainly that his purpose in writing is "*we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ*" (1 John 1:3-4a).

John writes about what was "*seen and heard*" (the physical presence of Jesus), so that "*you also may have fellowship with us*" (the spiritual presence of Jesus). So as to be certain there is no mistaking what he means by this fellowship, he describes it in detail: "*Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*"

His fellowship is an ongoing fellowship. He's so passionate that we too experience this that he tells us next, "*We write this to make our joy complete*" (1 John 1:4b). It's as if he's saying, "*Yes, I've experienced Him, but so can you! You must know this! It's not too late! You didn't miss Him! He's still here and longs to fellowship with you! We are called to relate to a being, a person, who once walked physically and now offers His perpetual presence spiritually.*"

If there is a spiritual fellowship available to us, how do we experience this fellowship? How do we get the Holy Spirit? How do we both discern and recognize His presence in our lives? Even more, how are we to recognize God's voice through the many competing voices that surround us? How do we know it's God?

GETTING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Some of us may not give much thought the Holy Spirit at all. That's understandable. The idea of God as Father and Jesus as Son might be easier to conceptualize than God as Spirit. The good news is, we don't have to perfectly understand who the Spirit is to receive Him. The Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are a packaged deal. To receive Jesus is to receive His Spirit and to receive His Spirit is to receive God's presence in our lives for eternity.

After Jesus had died, was raised, and been taken into heaven, Peter, one of Jesus's disciples, said to a crowd of people, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). When we recognize that we have done things our own way and have not submitted to God as King of our lives; when we ask for forgiveness of our sins and for Jesus to come in and lead our lives, we automatically receive the gift of His Spirit. The Spirit comes to live in us, permanently. That's it. It's that simple.

Now just because we have the Holy Spirit doesn't mean that we know how to hear Him. It doesn't mean that we are living in a relationship with Him. It just means that we can. That it is possible.

Just like a child learns to recognize their father's voice and distinguish it from their mother or a sibling's voice, so we too have to learn to identify and listen to the Holy Spirit.

So, then how do we learn to hear, experience, and obey the Holy Spirit?

ASK

Scripture gives not only important guidance but a powerful promise.

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? (Luke 11:9-12)

This promise regarding prayer is often taken out of context and does more to frustrate prayer than to inspire it. "I asked for a pony," the young girl says, "and I didn't get it." She's confused because it seems like a reasonable request. But would it be good for her if God answered "Yes" to her every "pony request?" Every parent knows better. This promise for answered prayer is not a vending machine promise where if we put money in we'll get whatever we select.

But what is the promise? Clearly it is a promise that God wants what is best for us, and if we ask, He will respond with what's best in His own timing. What's missed in this context, though, is the very last line of this teaching, which mentions explicitly asking for the Holy Spirit: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).

If a child asks for a pony, it may or may not be best to actually give the pony, but it will always be best to give the Holy Spirit. There isn't a scenario where God would respond to this request by saying, "I know you'd really like the Holy Spirit, but I have a better plan for you that you'll understand later." There could be no better plan. Any alternate plan would be inferior.

The starting point for experiencing the Holy Spirit in our lives is to simply ask God for the Holy Spirit. Jesus teaches us to do so.

SEEK

Once we ask for the Holy Spirit, the natural tendency may be to demand something unusual to happen. We want proof! We want to know God really is present with us. We want Him to do something we couldn't explain any other way. The truth is, when we ask God for the Holy Spirit, ironically, this ask is evidence that the Holy Spirit has already been active in our lives. The Spirit has brought us to Jesus and is leading and teaching us even though we may not have recognized this as God's Spirit. God has done something amazing beyond our imagination in the very act of giving us His Spirit! We can also look back and see the ways we are different since giving our lives to Christ. What desires changed in us? How are we more loving, patient, forgiving? How much do we hunger to be in God's Word and our hearts are pricked when we are taught from the Scriptures or how much is our love stirred for Jesus when we sing worship songs? We cannot receive the Spirit without experiencing miraculous change in our very nature. This means that there is only more room for growth in the Spirit as we get to know Him.

So, the experience of the Holy Spirit is not unlike the experience of a new friend. Our experience of that friend grows over time. Initially, there's an introduction. In time, there's a conversation. Much later, there are shared experiences and possibly even adventures together.

It's for this reason that Scripture exhorts us to be "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:18b). In another place we are taught to "*come near to God and he will come near to you*" (James 4:8a). As we seek God and His Spirit we will be more aware of His presence, just like we increase our experience of any friendship the more we pursue that friendship.

Speaking of our interaction with God, Scripture tells us, "*For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known*" (1 Corinthians 13:12). If interaction with the Spirit of God seems simultaneously real and mysterious, then the experience is an accurate reflection of what Scripture describes. This could be misunderstood. Scripture does not tell us to set a low expectation of our experience with God and minimize His presence in our lives. Rather, the experience of God's presence can be both powerful and profound. But, if we don't allow this experience to grow over time, we may miss the powerful and real experience of God's Spirit genuinely available to those who both ask and seek.

Once we ask and seek, we then understandably wonder, *How do we recognize the voice of the Spirit in our lives?* This leads to the important concept of *discerning God's Spirit*.

DISCERN

The boy at the carnival knew his father's voice because it was a voice, he had heard countless times. He recognized the voice in the midst of hundreds of competing calls because this was a voice he knew and trusted. It is at this place where we lean into our experience with Scripture.

Scripture trains the ears. Those who train their ears by hearing God's voice through Scripture are much more capable of hearing God's voice in their life experiences. In the midst of the carnival's chaos, the young boy might have heard the booming voice of another grown man. The pitch might have been similar. It might have gotten his attention for a brief moment, but very quickly he would dismiss it. "That's not my dad that's not what he sounds like." We may not yet experience God face to face. We are in a season where we "know in part." But through Scripture we are given example after example, life after life, story after story, familiarizing us with the heart and passion of God.

A second tool for discerning the Spirit of God is community. It is critical that we surround ourselves with others who also are experiencing the presence of God and are further along in their faith. Their experience serves the incredibly important purpose of balancing and refining our own experience. "Yes!" the friend says, "I affirm what you're sensing. I, too, am convinced God is doing that in your life." Or "Slow down, friend, I see why you may think that, but I sense caution; you may be a few steps ahead of God at this point." Or even sometimes a friend may say, "What I hear you saying doesn't line up with what we see in the scriptures. I don't think that God is wanting you to go that way."

Scripture emphasizes the wisdom of doing life in community as we see in Ecclesiastes -

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (4:9-12).

Two or three followers of Christ will refine each other, protect each other, and pick each other up when they fall. Going before God together will be greater than the assumptions they make alone. For, notice, the cord mentioned has three strands, not two, implying that there is strength in numbers when God's presence is there as well.

PAUSE

Pause.

The carnival of chaos bellows with noise and confusion, which leads to another critical aspect of living by God's Spirit.

We must pause. We must stop.

We must stand in the midst of the chaos and listen.

Proverbs reminds us, *"Desire without knowledge is not good — how much more will hasty feet miss the way!"* (Proverbs 19:2).

Psalms reminds us to *"be still, and know that I am God ..."* (Psalm 46:10).

Ecclesiastes tells us *"do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few"* (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Yes, there is a time and a place to kick it into high gear. But when that time is *all* the time, and when that place is *every* place, we run the risk of getting swept into the chaos of the carnival rather than experiencing God's presence in the midst of the swirling realities around us. We will establish greater awareness as we cultivate a contented spirit, with ears tuned to hear God's voice. God can and will speak in any moment. Many of these moments can and will occur as we are moving swiftly through life. But this does not mean that our internal rhythm must match our external haste.

KEEP IN STEP

The young boy and his father begin to walk. The chaos swirls around them, but the cadence of the boy's steps now matches the long, but adjusted strides of his father. While the boy was once frantically running around, now he walks with steady intention. The father gently guides him. In one place, he affirms the son's excitement for the thrill of one of the rides. In another place, he encourages the son to step out, even though the boy is scared. In still another, the father encourages the son to wait. A few more inches of growth will give him what he needs for that one. Through it all, the son experiences a critical lesson: To make the most of the carnival, it's best to walk with his father.

Scripture puts it like this: *"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"* (Galatians 5:25).

Imagine how this might positively impact the boy's character. When alone, he runs frantically through the carnival. This disposition leads to selfishness, impatience, and anger. Once with his dad, though, he is able to relax. Yes, there are times his dad holds him back, and this frustrates him, but as his trust in his dad increases, his experience of the carnival is one of greater peace, greater joy, and greater kindness.

It's no wonder, then, that when Scripture exhorts us to *"keep in step with the Spirit,"* that it's this very same passage that we get a description of fruit of the Spirit. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (Galatians 5:22-23a).

The greatest evidence that we are walking with God's Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit ever-increasing in our lives. The impatient become patient. The harsh become gentle. The bitter become forgiving. It's for these reasons we must take this seriously. Staying connected to God's Spirit is not just a matter of gaining important counsel in our lives, this impacts the very essence of who we are and, in turn, greatly impacts the world. For, when we walk by the Spirit, we become "the aroma of Christ" to those around us (2 Corinthians 2:15).

THE WISE

In closing, consider a simple observation:

The foolish scream. The wise whisper.

Scripture says as much: “*The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools*” (Ecclesiastes 9:17). Wisdom has intrinsic weight that does not need volume. Foolishness needs help to be convincing. Wisdom is believed by the quality of the message. Foolishness needs the shout of the messenger.

With this in mind, consider Elijah’s interaction and discernment of the voice of God in his own life.

The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave...

(1 Kings 19:11-13).

The Spirit of God is not a shouter. He doesn’t need to be. The wise will learn, though, to listen for His quiet but powerful presence. When we do so, we will be transformed into the people we were created to be. We don’t need to do this carnival of chaos alone. There is a divine Presence who waits for us to ask, seek, and listen for His guidance.



BUILD CHARACTER STAY CONNECTED

TRY IT OUT

Whether we are new to thinking about the Holy Spirit or have connected with Him for years, there is always more available to us in knowing and relating to Him. Here are just a few things that are available to us through the Holy Spirit:

Romans 8:11 - "And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you."

- If you believe in Jesus, in the same way God raised Jesus from the dead, you can trust that He has raised you to new life through the very same Spirit that dwells in you. This is also a promise that you will one day experience the same physical resurrection when Jesus comes again!

John 14:26 - "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you."

- The Holy Spirit not only brought remembrance to Jesus' disciples of everything He had said to them while on earth, but also gave insight into the significance of His words. In a similar way, the Spirit is the one who personally illuminates our eyes and hearts as we read God's Word so that we might see Jesus for who He truly is and believe all that He said.

Romans 8:26 - "...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans..."

- We can find help and comfort in the indwelling presence of God who continuously prays for us.

Acts 1:8 - "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"

- The Holy Spirit helps us share our faith with others.

John 16:13 - "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

- The truth that can guide us is available through the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17 - "...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

- Freedom to what? To have bold access to the Father! The Spirit brings us into God's powerful, transforming presence.

Romans 15:13 - "...so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

- Hope comes through the Spirit's power working in us

John 16:8 - "And when he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment"

- The Spirit brings conviction AND righteousness (right living and standing with God).

Romans 5:5 - "...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

- We experience God's love and a loving relationship with Him through the Spirit

Genesis 1:2 -“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

- The Spirit was present and active in the creation of the earth.

Titus 3:5-6 -“he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,”

- Here we see the beauty of the Trinity at work! Salvation is a gift of God that He accomplishes in us by the regenerating work of His Spirit that comes to us through Jesus Christ.

John 14:16 -“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever”

- For our whole lives we can always, no matter the circumstances, have God with us through the Holy Spirit!

Go through the list of scriptures above and put stars next to each of the verses that describe an aspect of life with the Holy Spirit that you HAVE experienced.

Take a few minutes to write about what comes to mind when you do this (what memories arise, what can you celebrate?).

Now go back through and put a circle next to all the verses that talk about the works of the Holy Spirit that are less familiar to you. Then write about what feelings, thoughts, or questions come up for you as you do that here:

We are all on a journey of faith. None of us is in the same place. This is due to the fact that our relationship with Jesus is just that, a relationship. We all have experienced God differently at different times. We've pursued knowing and living in relationship with Him at times and ignored Him at others times.

We also all came to believe and follow God at different points in our lives. Just like we heard in the Read section of this outcome, in any relationship in life, growth and intimacy happen over time.

Through this exercise we want you to pick your path. If you are new in relating to and recognizing the Holy Spirit, then work through **Exercise A: Connecting with the Holy Spirit**. If you are familiar with walking in step with the Spirit, then move on to **Exercise B: Letting the Spirit Lead You**.

Remember our definition of Staying Connected is one who “Walks through life in communion with God, listening to the Spirit for guidance and trusting the Spirit for strength.” So lean in. There is more available to you than you are experiencing now. There always is.

Exercise A: CONNECTING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Connecting with the Holy Spirit is both simple and requires effort. It is simple, because God doesn't hide Himself from us, and because He longs for us to know and follow Him. It requires effort because we have all kinds of things that get in the way of connecting to Him. We have our ideas of what it "should" look like; we have many distractions that block us from connecting or fight for our attention, and we struggle with apathy and even caring about putting in the effort to connect.

So, the first question is, do you want to connect with God and hear from Him? If yes, talk to God about that here. If you aren't sure or have fears/reservations, write those out as well.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)

God isn't stuck inside a human body, so He doesn't have to use His voice to speak to us. He is all-powerful God, so He can just put His thoughts into our minds. When this verse talks about us "listening to His voice" it doesn't mean that His voice is audible. It could be a thought we have, a verse or idea that pops in our minds, an action we feel like we should take, or a feeling of peace or encouragement that is almost tangible.

Is this perspective on "hearing from God" new for you? What does it do for you to think about God communicating with us like this?

In light of this description, write about a time you might have "heard" from God.

- Did you listen and follow what you heard? What was the result?

In the reading it said:

"The young boy at the carnival is not emboldened by finding detailed instructions on how to navigate the carnival. He did not find a map or a list of rules. Boldness for his battle is embodied in a person stronger, wiser, and more experienced than Himself. Release from his fear comes when his father, leaning down, whispers, **I'll stay close. Stay close to me. We'll do this together.** The memory he will savor most as he goes through life will not just be the carnival itself, but the person with whom he experienced the carnival."

Have you experienced the Holy Spirit's closeness in your life recently? What did knowing this do in you?

We do not always always feel the Holy Spirit's presence with us. Our feelings are fickle and are affected by many things. So, relying on a feeling to determine if God is with us isn't an accurate evaluation.

Have you ever invited God to be with you in an activity and then sat in that moment knowing that no matter if you feel Him or not, He is with you?

- If you've had an experience like this, what was it like?

- If you've never done this, take this as a next step and try it out this week.

DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE:

The reading talked about two ways that we hear God's voice. One is through reading Scripture and the other is through being in community with people who are pursuing God. Let's look at the first way we hear from God.

Scripture Reading:

Have you ever read a passage of scripture and...

- felt convicted about something?
- were reminded of something?
- gained clarity on something you've been confused about?
- noticed yourself go from fear or feeling overwhelmed to peace?
- discovered something about God that opened your eyes to an aspect of Him you didn't know was there?

If so describe it here:

All of those are examples of Scripture helping us hear from God and become more aware of His presence and truth. The reading said, "Those who train their ears by hearing God's voice through Scripture are much more capable of hearing God's voice in their life experiences."

Let's work through an example.

Sam has had a long week and feels tired and stressed. She has a full evening- making dinner, calling her sister, cleaning up the pile of dishes that have been sitting in the sink for a day (ok, maybe two), switching the load of clothes into the dryer, putting away the folded clothes from the last load of laundry, taking a shower, and brushing her teeth before falling into bed. She takes a deep breath as her mind starts racing through all the things on her plate. She decides to stop and pray for everything weighing on her mind. As she begins praying she feels shame. She feels like God is maybe telling her that she shouldn't be so overwhelmed and that there is so much more He wants her to be doing for Him. After praying for a few minutes and feeling worse, her eyelids get heavy and she starts to fall asleep.

Question:

In the scenario above did Sam "hear" from God? Was God conveying shame?

This is where reading and listening to Scripture teaches us to know, listen and obey God's voice. So, let's see what scripture says. Look up the verses below and write down observations about what you read.

1.) Matthew 11:28-30:

2.) Philippians 4:6-7:

3.) Romans 8:1-2:

4.) 1 John 1:9:

So, what truths about God do we learn from these Scriptures?

1.) Matthew 11:28-30:

2.) Philippians 4:6-7:

3.) Romans 8:1-2:

4.) 1 John 1:9:

Back to our question then, was Sam hearing from God?

Based on what we read in scripture, NO! Her feelings of shame were not coming to her from God. Maybe those feelings were coming from pressure she puts on herself due to the way she was raised, or potentially the things she thinks she "should" be able to accomplish each week. Or maybe she is just listening to lies spoken to her by the father of lies, the devil (1 Peter 5:8-9, John 10:10).

If we are aware of what God "sounds" like through reading Scripture, then we can discern in our lives the things we are hearing or feeling that are from God and the things we are hearing or feeling that are not.

This hopefully brings SO MUCH clarity and peace.

I can hear you thinking it, so let's talk about it. You may be thinking, "But I don't know all of the Bible!" or "The Bible can be confusing and sometimes I'm not sure about what God is saying in a passage I read." Of course, this will not always be the case as you devote yourself to reading and studying Scripture. This is an opportunity to bring your questions to those who are further down the road in their faith and understanding of Scripture. You are not meant to do this alone.

That leads us to the second tool in learning to discern God's voice...

Christ-Following Community:

The reading said:

"It is critical that we surround ourselves with others who also are experiencing the presence of God. Their experience serves the incredibly important purpose of balancing and refining our own experience.

"Yes," the friend says, "I affirm what you're sensing. I, too, am convinced God is doing that in your life." Or, "Slow down, friend, I see why you may think that, but I sense caution; you may be a few steps ahead of God at this point." Having two or three followers of Christ walk closely with one another will refine each other and purify each other's understanding of God's presence in their lives. Going before God together and seeking His wisdom through Scripture will be greater than the assumptions they make alone.

In Sam's story above, if she had a Spiritual Running Partner or a Life Group that she could talk to about the things she thinks God is saying to her, they would be able to speak truth to her as well and help her to put aside lies and sharpen her ability to truly hear from God.

Community can only be as powerful as God intends for it to be if it is a Christ-seeking community. There are lots of little "t" "truths" in the world that aren't actually God's Truth. Some of the things this world would tell us aren't the things that God would want us to believe and follow.

The second thing needed for community to be a powerful source of truth in your life is vulnerability. You have to speak up and share your thoughts, struggles, confusions, and things you are sensing. If you don't speak up, your

community can't be a sounding board for you.

- Do you regularly bring your thoughts, struggles, and confusions to your group? If yes, how has that helped you to hear from God? If no, why not?

Learning to discern God's voice takes time spent in the Bible getting to know the God you want to hear from. Look up and make notes below on these verses: Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 7:7-8.

Learning to discern God's voice takes time being quiet so there is room in your mind and heart to hear. Look up and make notes below on this verse: Psalm 46:10.

What is your next step to grow in hearing God's voice? Spend some time here journaling about what you want to try out this week. Once you write down your thoughts, share what you discover with at least one other person.

Exercise B: LETTING THE SPIRIT LEAD YOU

Once we have learned to "hear" God's voice the question is, are we inviting Him to speak to us regularly and show us truth? Galatians 5:25 says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." The Greek word in this verse that conveys, "keep in step" here means to live under the Spirit's control. Basically, if it is the Spirit that generates our new lives, it makes sense that we conform to His way of living.

One Bible commentator explains, "Life by (or 'in') the Spirit is not an occasional influence of the Spirit, but an abiding state, wherein we are continually alive... If we are continually alive it means that we are continuing to grow in knowing God, letting Him change us, and therefore becoming who we were created to be."¹

We aren't going to stay the same. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" We have new life because we have chosen to follow Jesus and He has given us His Spirit. That new life is both ours to have right now, AND we will continue to grow into it and take hold of it more.

What does it look like for us to walk with the Spirit, hearing and following Him? Look up these verses and make observations:

¹Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, . "Commentary on Galatians 5 by Jamieson, Fausset & Brown." *Blue Letter Bible*. Last Modified 19 Feb, 2000. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/jfb/Gal/Gal_005.cfm

Philippians 3:12:

Galatians 5:22-23a:

2 Corinthians 2:14-15:

Galatians 5:16-17a:

From these verses, what does it look like for us to walk with the Spirit and live out our New Creation self?

Through the rest of this Apply we will explore how walking more and more regularly in relationship with the Holy Spirit causes us to **Grow, Change, and Become** who we were created to be in Christ.

GROW:

Make observations as you read through these verses:

Ephesians 3:14-21, "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

Amen."

OBSERVATIONS:

1 Corinthians 2:6-10, "We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written:

"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—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

OBSERVATIONS:

Psalm 16:5-11

Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.
I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I keep my eyes always on the Lord.
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.
You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

OBSERVATIONS:

What from the above verses have you experienced as you walk in relationship with God?

What from the verses above do you want to experience (for the first time, or maybe just more often)?

God is infinite. There are always new aspects of Him to be discovered as we walk in relationship with Him. Think about your best friend. When you first met them and began your friendship you got to know things about them, like what they enjoyed doing on the weekends, music they listened to, topics that interest them. But, to get to the deeper stuff in a relationship, like fears, what shuts them down or lights them up, their hopes for their future, it takes time and trust.

It's the same for us with God. Spending time engaging with the Holy Spirit grows our relationship and opens the door for us to discover more of who God is which causes us to trust Him more and act on the things we hear. These are things that enable us to change and become who we were made to be.

Do you spend time regularly connecting with the Holy Spirit? If so, what does that look like? If not, what's a next step for you to create space to regularly do that?

Oftentimes when we pray (one of the ways we can connect with God), we do all the talking. Imagine if you acted that way every time you talked with a friend, spouse, or child. That probably wouldn't go well over time.

It wouldn't really be a relationship, would it? A relationship is two sided.

We share our loves, laughs, and sorrows with the other, and just as important, we attentively listen as they share theirs. In a relationship, we long to know the other person and a big part of that knowing comes from asking questions and listening to their answers.

It's similar with God. The difference is He already knows everything about us, but he still loves to hear us tell Him things! When we have questions, He wants us to ask, and then listen for what He might say in response.

God does have things he wants to talk to us about!

Growth comes through regularly listening to God as we spend time with Him in prayer and scripture reading, and then respond to what He is saying.

At Gateway, we have put this into practice through something we call a 60/60 experiment (stop every 60 min for 60 days). Maybe you have done it with us before?

The basic premise is to set a timer to go off every 60 minutes during daylight hours to remind you to STOP and acknowledge God. This interruption in our day helps us remember that God is there and gives us the opportunity to invite Him into what we are doing. It looks something like this:

- 1.) Watch or phone beeps
- 2.) Stop what you are doing (literally put it down)
- 3.) Acknowledge that God is there with you
- 4.) Talk and listen to him
 - a.) Tell Him what you are doing and ask for His wisdom or help, then sit and listen to see if He has anything to say.
 - b.) Invite Him to give you His perspective on your situation at that moment, then sit and listen to see if He has anything to say.
 - c.) Talk to him about something that is weighing on your mind, then sit and listen to see if He has anything to say.
 - d.) Turn your attention to gratitude and thank God for anything that comes to mind, then sit and listen to see if He has anything to say.

What becomes available for you if you regularly interrupted your day to do something like the 60/60?

CHANGE:

Have you ever had anyone say to you something to the effect of, "Well, I might as well just accept _____. I'm (or they) are never going to change." Many of us have mixed emotions about the idea of growing and changing. Making a decision to pursue change is hard and can feel scary.

As Christ-followers who are connected to the Spirit of God, we have the power of the Creator of the universe available to us. Spiritual growth and change are actually dependent on God to be involved. Sure, we can have behavior modification in our lives, but without God's help that change is short lived, or surface level. To truly change at the heart level and become more of who God has created us to be requires God's power. Look up these verses:

1 Corinthians 3:5-8

In this passage Paul is talking to a group of people who believe in God. He is telling them about what being mature in faith is and how people grow. He makes it clear that people help us as we grow up in faith and become more and more who we were created to be, BUT it is God who causes the growth.

Jesus himself tells us that if we want to produce spiritual fruit (those listed earlier in this Apply from Galatians 5:22-23) we have to stay connected to Him. We can't force ourselves to change by trying really hard.

John 15:4-5

BUT, change is possible in our lives as we invite God to talk to us about our lives and stay connected to Him. He brings about growth and change.

BECOME:

There is one last thing to discuss. God doesn't force change on us. As we regularly practice listening to God through Scripture, prayer, and our Christ-seeking communities, we have a choice to make: will we put into practice the things we hear, or just acknowledge them and do nothing.

Responding to the things we hear God say might mean having to stop doing something we really like. Sometimes it may mean starting something new that feels uncomfortable or requires sacrifice. Sometimes it might mean asking for help, because we can't take the next step alone.

Circle or Highlight words and phrases in the verses below that talk about what is involved in becoming who God has called you to be and how the Holy Spirit is involved.

Romans 12: 1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

2 Corinthians 3:17-18: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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."

Staying connected to the Spirit brings deep and meaningful relationship with God that results in us being able to grow, change, and become more like Christ. This is a lifelong journey that is worth all the time and effort that you will put in. So dig in. Take a new step.

Wrap up this section by answering these questions- What do you want to see God do in your life? What do you want Him to change in you?

Write out a prayer talking to God about what you discovered through this Apply:

