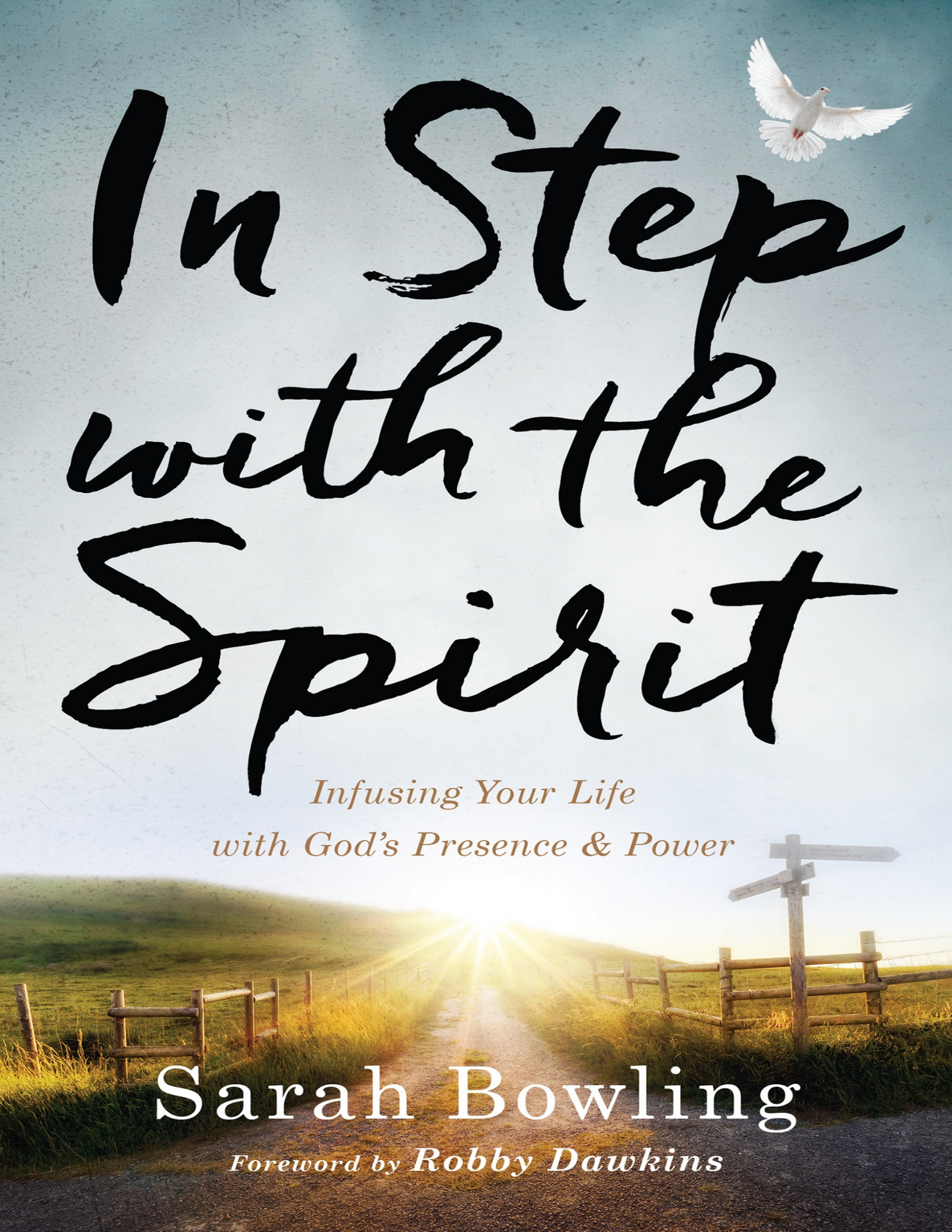

In Step with the Spirit
Infusing Your Life with God's Presence & Power
Sarah Bowling
Foreword by Robby Dawkins

In Step with the Spirit

Infusing Your Life
with God's Presence and Power

Sarah Bowling



Chosen
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

© 2017 by Sarah Bowling

Published by Chosen Books
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.chosenbooks.com

Chosen Books is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Ebook edition created 2017

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017941778

ISBN 978-1-4934-1169-6

Unless otherwise indicated Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations identified NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Some names and details of stories included in this book have been changed in order to protect identities.

Cover design by Darren Welch

“Sarah Bowling is an amazing teacher who has put together an authentic manual to set you up with a strategy to actually live a life in step with God’s Spirit! *In Step with the Spirit* is not only a great read but also a tool to inspire the ingredients to live a life of fullness in the presence of God!”

Shawn Bolz, TV personality; author, *Translating God*; www.bolzministries.com

“The Holy Spirit enables us to live the Christian life, yet many people don’t understand who He is. In her new book, *In Step with the Spirit*, Sarah Bowling beautifully explains who the Holy Spirit is and how to walk in the Spirit. This is a must-read for everyone!”

Robert Morris, founding senior pastor, Gateway Church; bestselling author, *The Blessed Life*, *The God I Never Knew* and more

“Learning to follow the Holy Spirit is the only way to fully experience God’s amazing plans for our lives. Sarah’s message gives eye-opening insight and practical steps to help people discover how to live by faith in Him.”

Joyce Meyer, Bible teacher and bestselling author

“Finally, a practical book on how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. A must-read for you to be normal—normal as defined by the Bible.”

Sid Roth, host, *It’s Supernatural!*

“I love and appreciate the vulnerability, authenticity and absolute ‘realness’ of Sarah Bowling. She writes *In Step with the Spirit* with refreshing candor and practically breaks open a profoundly spiritual subject. I highly recommend this book to those who are hungry to pursue a Spirit-directed life.”

Patricia King, founder, Patricia King Ministries

“Sarah Bowling brings a fresh insight into how to be led daily by the Holy Spirit. Going beyond books that just teach on the gifts of the Spirit, Sarah offers practical keys that will greatly bless and encourage you.”

Joseph Prince, bestselling author, *Destined to Reign*, *Unmerited Favor* and more

“Sarah Bowling has penned a practical guide to help us achieve total trust in and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Combining prayers and exhortations, Sarah zeroes in on the importance of keeping Him front and center in our daily routines to see divine, supernatural results. *In Step with the Spirit* will help you cultivate a deeper intimacy with the Holy Spirit, experiencing His presence and power daily.”

Rabbi Jonathan Bernis, president and CEO, Jewish Voice Ministries International

“Chances are you’ve already read three good books on the Holy Spirit, but are you ready to read one that will take Him from mystical to practical? *In Step with the Spirit* will awaken you to ways the Holy Spirit is already operational in the navigation of your everyday life while wooing you into an even closer walk with Him, step by step.”

Laura Harris Smith, bestselling author, *The 30-Day Faith Detox* and *Seeing the Voice of God*

“Sarah Bowling is the real deal. Her heart for God is genuine, and in a time when so many are confused about the will of God, this book is full of inspiration and the practical how-tos of being led by the Holy Spirit in every aspect of your life.”

Holly Wagner, pastor, Oasis Church; founder, GodChicks

"*In Step with the Spirit* provides a clear, practical and easily understood manual for Christian living in the Holy Spirit that removes the fog from the contemporary discussion of this issue! We need a voice that speaks with clarity, insight and power on fundamental issues, and this is it! I highly recommend this book to every believer who seeks a deeper walk with God."

Joan Hunter, author, *Healing Starts Now!*; healing evangelist; joanhunter.org

Contents

Cover 1

Title Page 3

Copyright Page 5

Endorsements 6

Foreword by Robby Dawkins 9

Acknowledgments 11

1. Tiptoe through the Trash 13
2. Help Yourself 25

Part I: Holy Spirit Navigation 41

3. Spirit-Led Direction 43
4. How to Handle a Closed Door 61
5. Keep On Keeping On 77
6. Ingredients for Revolution 95

Part II: Holy Spirit Relationships 113

7. Having a Supernatural Family 115
8. Who's Your Friend? 131
9. The Supernatural in Daily Life 151

Part III: Holy Spirit Power 171

10. Sidestep the Land Mines 173
11. Defy the Impossible 193
12. Life in the Spirit 209

Epilogue 227
Notes 231
About the Author 233
Back Ad 234
Back Cover 235

Foreword

Sarah Bowling is my good friend. And what I value so much about her is how deeply she wants everyone to know and have an intimate connection with her closest friend, the Holy Spirit.

This book is powerful because it takes a deep look into the moments you can allow the Holy Spirit to walk with you, whether they are the most difficult times or the most glorious times. Sarah captures a total understanding of what it looks like to invite the Holy Spirit into every aspect of our lives.

She helps us experience the reality of the Helper that Jesus told His followers about, leading us into Jesus' introduction of the Holy Spirit as part of His last words and instructions before He experienced His crucifixion. Can you imagine the clock ticking and the pressure Jesus felt, knowing He had only that short time to reveal and release the Helper who would impact us for all time? He wanted to implant in them an expectancy for this great outpouring and friendship that was crucial to His whole mission. Sarah relates how that same expectancy needs to be in us as it was in them.

I appreciate how practical this book is. It leads us to expect the Holy Spirit to be with us in every area of life. Chapter 4, which teaches how to handle a closed door, demonstrates how we can look for God's providential movement and be at peace, knowing He has control of every situation we face. Chapter 5's emphasis on perseverance is so crucial, as we can so easily become stuck in difficult circumstances and relationships. Chapter 9 invites us to live that naturally supernatural lifestyle, and chapter 11, on defying the impossible, is a must read, for it is how we live.

In Step with the Spirit makes you desperate for more of the Holy Spirit. It helps you know the Holy Spirit is there for you. Open your heart as you explore with Sarah her experience of the past and present that can birth in you a hunger for the future the Holy Spirit has for you.

This book is not just a teaching. It is not just a history. It is an encounter! And it awaits you here in its pages. So, come on—let's delve into this adventure of staying in step with the Spirit, our heavenly help.

Robby Dawkins, author and international speaker

Acknowledgments

My heartfelt thanks go out to loads of people because I could never write a book without help.

Thanks to my friends Diane and Joe, who did lots of extra work to make this book reader friendly. Thanks to Jody for giving me a place and ample time to prayerfully write in a perfect and secluded setting. Thanks to our church and ministry team, who afforded me plenty of time to focus on this project.

Massive thanks to my husband and kids, who support my writing efforts every day, not just with my book writing but also with my daily writing discipline. You guys rock.

Most of all, thanks to the Holy Spirit for talking and walking with me on this journey. Onward and upward!

1

Tiptoe through the Trash

Should I drop the camera to help her, or should I keep shooting?

This is what my cameraman said was going through his mind when, right in front of his eyes in a dump in Cambodia, I was sinking into piles and piles of garbage. Sewage was seeping into my pants, and horror was written all over my face. For me, it seemed like time came to a complete stop as I tried to figure out my next literal step.

My mind flashed to the trash compactor scene in *Star Wars*, when Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Princess Leia and Chewbacca got stuck in a murky dump and felt an underwater creature slither past their feet. I was in trash and sewage up to my thighs and hoping with everything inside me that no creature was down there, about to brush against my leg before I could figure out how to extract myself from the situation. My friends who were with me, including the camera guy (who had the camera running), were stunned by this development.

You might ask, "Why were you rummaging around at a trash dump in Cambodia?" We were on one of my mission trips there, and my friends and I were looking for neighborhoods that scraped out a living from scavenging the trash. I was mired in sewage because I had been walking ahead of everyone else and assumed the ground was solid. Before I knew what was happening, I took a step and plunged into a smelly concoction of waste. When I finally pulled myself out of the mess, I looked and smelled like everything else around me—well, except for my friends, who learned quickly from my misfortune and sidestepped the unpleasant experience for themselves.

Indeed, I became part of my surroundings in both appearance and odor. I smelled and looked so bad that later, when we went to visit Mother Teresa's work in Phnom Penh, the nun who greeted us at the door refused to let me in unless I first washed off the smell and muck!

This event happened several years ago, and I learned many valuable lessons from the mishap. The first is that we either blend into our communities and

environs with the steps we choose for daily life, or we avoid the common odors and messes of daily life by staying in step with the Holy Spirit. While I am learning that walking with the Holy Spirit does not guarantee I will not walk through "garbage dumps" or challenging seasons, I do not have to let the sewage seep into my soul or sabotage the steps of my life and the destination of my journey—and neither do you.

Additionally, staying in step with the Holy Spirit is a supernatural adventure that we cannot concoct with our natural thinking. As you read through this book, you will find lots of personal examples of this supernatural adventure from my life and the lives of people I know. You will read about my friend who raised a person from the dead, about the time my husband supernaturally recovered from a freak stroke and how the Holy Spirit directed my steps when my daughter entered kindergarten. (I will share that last story with you later in this chapter.)

But I will also share what it looks like when we do not walk in step with the Holy Spirit. I will tell you about the honest struggles I have faced over the years to walk with the Holy Spirit in this way. I share these kind of stories in addition to the successful ones because I believe that while we gain great encouragement from the testimonies of supernatural events, we often learn more from life's failures and shortfalls.

In fact, let's spend a few moments right now with that very question: What does it look like to be out of step with the Holy Spirit?

Out of Step

To begin, when we do not walk in step with the Holy Spirit, we may be thirsty and not realize it.

I see this happen when I snowboard in the mountains of Colorado, which I do quite often. It is common for someone from a low altitude to visit Colorado to ski and then complain about a pounding headache. The first thing the ski patrol does is give that person a massive quantity of water to drink. The headache is the first indication that the person is dehydrated, but they are usually oblivious to their water deficiency.

The same principle rings true for followers of Jesus. Consider what Jesus said in John 7:37–39 about our not being thirsty:

> Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

In these verses, Jesus says His followers will have rivers of living water flow from their innermost being, by which He means the Holy Spirit. But in the modern church, there can be a deficiency of the Holy Spirit flowing through many followers of Jesus—and, indeed, many believers can themselves *be* a headache because they lack a vibrant relationship with the Holy Spirit. It seems much of modern Christianity skips over cultivating a vibrant and transformational relationship with the Holy Spirit, such that we can be altogether oblivious of the rich intimacy that anchors genuine love deep in our hearts and expresses the supernatural power of God.

Not walking in step with the Holy Spirit can also show up in our lives in other ways. One of those ways is the absence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are named by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and include words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, healing, the effecting of miracles, prophecy, the distinguishing of spirits, tongues and the interpretation of tongues. The absence of these gifts is evident when God's supernatural power is not demonstrated in unexplainable ways in our lives.

I have never appreciated the importance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their vitality in my daily life more than I do now, raising three teenagers. There are innumerable occasions when I will have supernatural discernment about something they are involved in that could be harmful. Several times over the course of any given month, I will usually have a word of wisdom or word of knowledge for one of them. And it warms my heart to know they love to pray for healing for their friends, people at church, teachers and others. They see some incredible results from those prayers!

One example of how vital these gifts can be happened to me a few years ago. My husband and I were jolted out of a deep sleep around 1:30 a.m. to find our daughter having a grand mal seizure on her bathroom floor. She had been having seizure symptoms for several months but nothing as severe as a grand mal.

I will never forget sitting on that bathroom floor in the middle of the night, holding her in my lap and feeling entirely helpless. My husband and I began to pray in English and quickly ran out of words. Then he began to pray in the Spirit, and I immediately followed his lead.

After what seemed to be an eternity, the seizure subsided and we got her into bed. I slept the rest of the night on the floor by her side, hoping we could figure out the next steps in the morning. In those moments of helplessness and frantic anxiety, I cannot begin to express how helpful it was to pray in the Spirit and to sense the comfort and strength of the Holy Spirit sitting with me in those hours.

This experience was not only a rude awakening in the middle of the night, but also one that challenged me to let the gifts of the Holy Spirit flow through my

daily life with greater freedom. I would like to provoke you, my friend, to allow these gifts to flow more freely in your life, too.

So, there can be an absence of the supernatural gifts when we are not walking in step with the Holy Spirit, but we must pay premium attention to the fruits of the Holy Spirit, too. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, as Galatians 5:22–23 teaches. When we find ourselves getting impatient, being unkind, flying off the handle or being fretful or hopeless, we would be wise to look at the quantity and quality of our interactions with the Holy Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit show up in our lives as a consequence of our fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Here is one way it can look when we get out of step with the Holy Spirit and lose the evidence of the Holy Spirit's fruit in our life. One time I came home from a taxing ministry trip and was extremely tired. Things only got worse because I landed back home at one of the busiest times of the year, when huge expectations were being made on my time and attention. The last straw came when I instructed my kids to take care of some housecleaning while my husband and I attended an obligatory event that lasted several hours. When we came home, they had not done what I had told them to do, and I hit the roof! Later, when I calmed down, the kids teased me that I had turned into Medusa Mama.

We all have seasons that make intense demands on our lives and press us beyond our natural strength or ability. When that happens, let's be attentive to keeping our fellowship with the Holy Spirit as a premium priority, in order to prevent our own versions of the Medusa Mama syndrome.

Thankfully, there are loads of occasions when I know the Holy Spirit is working these fruits in my daily life. I am grateful for the times when I am given that extra dose of self-control to hold back a snarky comment or when I sense an extra boost of patience given to me, even though my body and brain are tired from all I am doing to keep up with my responsibilities. I especially love those times when I should be discouraged but sense a joy in my heart that defies logic. I appreciate all of the fruits of the Spirit because I am altogether convinced that the Holy Spirit helps me to be my best self—not the Medusa Mama!

Twice In Sync

Now let's consider a few practical ways we can stay in sync with the Holy Spirit. In the simplest application, I see two ways of doing this well: *direction* and *pace*.

Direction is the first marker that we are keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. I think about this concept of direction when I reflect on the supernatural

experiences I had with the Holy Spirit the week before I was married. Prior to that week, I was firm in my plans to pursue a graduate degree in history and then employment as a university professor in that field. As a backup plan, I was somewhat open to international missions work, but I considered that a remote possibility. I was definitely *not* interested in devoting my life to teaching the Bible or serving in ministry.

Then came a startling change in direction. Well, it was more like my plans were derailed and the Holy Spirit set me on a different trajectory entirely. The week of my wedding, the Holy Spirit confronted me and shifted the direction my life would go.

I was in a church service and ended up on the floor, overpowered by the presence of God. The fullness of that experience of God's presence altered me in a fundamental way. Whereas before I was determined to be a college professor and certainly not go into ministry, afterward I felt eager to join God's work in any way I could. I am active in the ministry to this day and writing this book for you now because of that massive shift of direction that happened in that pre-wedding week long ago, led by the Holy Spirit.

We have to reflect with vulnerable candor on our willingness to let the Holy Spirit direct our steps. It is easy to give religious approval to the idea of divine direction but still not let the Holy Spirit shape the actual steps we take and the direction we go in our daily life.

For example, even though I can tell you about the week of my wedding as a time when I let the Holy Spirit direct my steps, I can also give you loads of examples of when I did not allow the Holy Spirit to direct my steps. One such example happened more than ten years ago in one of my friendships. I was enjoying the friendship, but it had some bad ingredients that were unhealthy. There was a lot of dependency between us, and we relied too much on the emotional support we gave each other. Rather than accentuating Jesus, the friendship revolved around staying attached to each other.

There were multiple times I sensed the Holy Spirit endeavoring to direct me away from this friendship, but I resisted this direction and held fast to my own preferences. There were a few occasions I did missions work overseas and knew the Holy Spirit had directed my steps there not only so I could minister to the people there, but also so I could give that friendship some space. I resisted the natural pause those trips provided, though, and stayed in communication with my friend throughout the duration of them.

To make a long story short, the friendship unraveled and ultimately became a painful experience for me. It left behind some trash in my soul that the Holy Spirit had to clean out for many years. Learning to follow the Holy Spirit's

direction has since become vital for keeping my soul clear of emotional clutter, destructive consequences and wasteful detours.

Pace is another way of marking our in-sync steps with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we can go faster than the Holy Spirit is leading or lag behind the Holy Spirit, not going fast enough to keep up. Personally, I struggle more often with going faster than the Holy Spirit's leading.

One of those times was when my daughter was first starting kindergarten—a momentous turning point for any parent. Since I was keen on ensuring an excellent education for my kids, I had put her name on a waiting list at a nearby charter school almost three years before she was to start school. I was both prayerful and hopeful that after a few years, her name would be high enough on the list for her to get accepted.

When August rolled around, she was still eight spots from getting accepted, and I was disappointed. On the first day of school, she attended the neighborhood public school instead. I tried to keep an optimistic outlook and endeavored to volunteer at the neighborhood school as a helpful parent. But the more days that passed with her attending that school, the more unsettled I felt in my heart about her education there.

Rather than follow the Holy Spirit's pace, I jumped ahead and began working at a feverish pitch to get her into another school. But, alas, all the schools I tried were filled and could not immediately accept her transfer. I talked with my husband about my concern, and we got into a heated argument.

I became frustrated with all of these roadblocks.

Eventually, I brought this stressful ordeal to the Holy Spirit and asked what to do about my daughter's education. I felt the Spirit challenge me to trust Him and not send myself into a frenzied spiral of stress. With exasperation, I threw up my hands in surrender and agreed with the Holy Spirit that He knew what was best.

Less than a week later, the original charter school to which we had applied three years earlier called and said they had an unexpected opening. They asked if I would still be interested in enrolling my daughter, even though school had already been going for a few weeks. I readily agreed and transferred her there, and the school has been a huge blessing to each of my kids and their educational development.

In short, my attempts to run ahead of the Holy Spirit left me frustrated and frazzled. When I relinquished control to the Holy Spirit, everything lined up in divine order for a supernatural outcome.

While this story gives a good example of what can happen when we try to speed up the pace of the Holy Spirit, consider the other side of the coin: when we lag behind the pace at which the Spirit is leading. I have a friend who

struggles with this. She tends to drag her feet when it comes to keeping up with the Holy Spirit's leading. This wonderful friend is always patient and gracious, but she will readily tell you she struggles to keep in sync with the Holy Spirit's cadence because of her desire to understand everything and to be in control. Thankfully, she grew up in a home that recognized the importance of the Holy Spirit, so she is aware of her struggle and keeps herself surrounded by people and communities that prioritize the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

These two indicators—direction and pace—can work wonders for keeping us on track with the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives.

Moving Forward

In the next chapter, we will take a look at who the Holy Spirit is, based on Jesus' teachings in John 14–16, as it is critical that we gain a fundamental understanding of the Holy Spirit if we are going to walk in His presence and power.

Then we will move into a section of the book that explores the Holy Spirit as our compass. You will learn how the Holy Spirit can direct you, how to navigate closed doors and how to discern and be persistent in the ways you are being led.

Next, we will look at the ways the Holy Spirit can help us with our relationships. This important section will look at the Holy Spirit's impact on our families, how the Holy Spirit can help us in difficult relationships and what to do when we feel out of step with the people around us.

Finally, the last section of the book will help you with the critical life tasks of avoiding deadly land mines, doing the impossible and walking with the Spirit throughout your daily life.

At the end of each chapter, I include a prayer that I encourage you to pray aloud and agree with in your heart. This prayer can be a starting point for more dialogue with the Holy Spirit about the contents of the chapter and how its teaching can apply to your life. Additionally, each chapter includes reflection questions that can be useful for individual meditation or group discussion. They can also be used as journaling prompts, helping you think further about the personal application of the ideas to your life.

Let's have some fun together with the Holy Spirit!

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank You for leading me to read this book. Please help me to listen to You as I read, and help me to hear You talking with me about how I can stay in step with You better. I want Your presence and power to infuse my life so that I reflect Jesus to the people around me and so that I walk in greater intimacy with You every day.

Go Further

1. Why were you drawn to read this book?
2. How are you keeping in step with the Holy Spirit in your life right now? How are you noticing yourself out of step with Him?
3. In the past, when you have been in sync with the Holy Spirit, what was the result? What has happened when you got out of sync?
4. In what areas of your life would you like more direction from the Holy Spirit right now?
5. Do you tend to jump ahead or lag behind the Holy Spirit's pace? Why do you think that is?

2

Help Yourself

I have always had a streak of wanderlust in my soul. Adventures I have taken have always been more fascinating than frightening to me. So when a friend and I concocted a harebrained idea in the early 1990s to take more than thirty teenagers and young adults to China on a mission trip, I was all in. We broke the group into four teams and spread out across four areas of the country. Over the course of ten days, each team made its way toward Hong Kong, doing missions work along the way.

In theory, the idea was phenomenal. I thought, *What could possibly go wrong?* In reality, I was in way over my head. At one point, because I was having a meltdown, I zipped into a hotel for foreigners in Beijing to find an international phone kiosk so I could call my fiancé, who was worlds away in Kansas City. I was smack-dab in the middle of a crisis and could not let the team of mostly high schoolers I was leading know I was freaking out. Thankfully, he answered the phone, heard my sobbing voice and was immediately supportive.

I explained through my jet-lagged hysteria that I could not get any train tickets out of Beijing for my team. Then I unraveled some more, expressing my fear of losing one of the students, of being thrown in jail, of somebody getting sick, of finding ourselves stuck in Beijing without enough money to get us back to Hong Kong. I had no clue how the other teams were faring, as this was pre-cell-phone era and there was no way to communicate with any of them.

My phone call had interrupted Reece's barbecue with his church friends, but he immediately circled up his buddies and prayed for me. He also gave me a few encouraging words and told me to pull myself together.

It was exactly the help I needed.

Long story short, the trip was a powerful experience for everyone, and we returned home safely and with our worldviews expanded for a broader perspective.

For me, though, it was a unique adventure into the world of help. While I had been confident about leading a team on an international trip—no problem there whatsoever—I came to realize my hyperindependence could be a liability, rather than an asset. The older I get, the more I accept the truth that I need help—not just professional help but divine help, also known as the Holy Spirit.

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

Before we dive into the plethora of adventures we can have with the Holy Spirit, which is the focus of the rest of this book, it is important that we give some of our attention to who the Holy Spirit is.

We have to start, first, with knowing that what the Holy Spirit *does* is an expression or outworking of who the Holy Spirit *is*. This will make more sense if you think about it this way: If you watch me with my children but do not know I am their mother, you might think that in my interactions with them, I am overprotective, hypernurturing, nosey and inappropriately corrective and honest. But when you understand who I am—the mother of Isabell, David and Benjamin—then it is easy to accept what I do and say to them. My actions are an outflow of who I am in their lives.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the Holy Spirit, many times we get this backward, focusing too much on what the Holy Spirit does and not enough on who the Holy Spirit is. For example, sometimes it is easy to look at what the Holy Spirit did on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2) and think the Holy Spirit is a rushing, mighty wind or a demonstration of speaking in tongues or even just supernatural phenomena. While I appreciate these expressions, let's be careful not to chase the expressions more than the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Because of this misaligned focus, we frequently find ourselves in "user" mode with the Holy Spirit, rather than relationship mode. We think of the Holy Spirit as God's power extension cord, rather than the third member of the Trinity. Or we think of the Holy Spirit as the backup deity, the one who jumps in when the Father and Jesus get tired or too busy. Any time we treat a living being as an object, you can bet dysfunction, misunderstanding, abuse and neglect will result.

So, let's go back to basics. Who is the Holy Spirit?

Jesus introduces us to the Holy Spirit in John 14–16. In these chapters, we are treated to the Last Supper sermon, where Jesus leaves His disciples with a significant download of essentials, including a primer on the Holy Spirit, before walking out the door and heading to Gethsemane. These are His most important teachings, in other words, for preparing them for what is around the corner,

which would come to include the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, described in Acts 2.

Let's pretend we are one of those guys sitting around the table with Jesus at that Last Supper, listening to what Jesus had to say about the Holy Spirit.

(And, by the way, as you read the brief overview below, you may find yourself wanting to learn more. My previous book, *Heavenly Help,* provides an engaging, practical and more thorough discussion of the question of who the Holy Spirit is. It may solidify your understanding of and connection with the Holy Spirit even more. One reader told me after reading it, "I never realized that I could have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit—He always seemed so distant and strange! After reading your book, I've come to recognize and appreciate the Holy Spirit in my daily living like I've never known Him before. Thank you so much for writing this and making the Holy Spirit so accessible!")

Helper

Jesus introduced the Holy Spirit in John 14:16 with these words: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever." So, the first thing the Holy Spirit is, is the Helper—or Comforter or Counselor or Advocate, depending on your translation of this verse.

It has always been interesting to me that Jesus refers to the Third Person of the Trinity not by a formal title, like God the Holy Spirit or Third Being of the Triune God, but with a more accessible description: *helper*. If we get honest here, you and I both would admit we need massive quantities of help throughout our lives. We need help in school and our jobs, in our relationships and families, with making decisions, with managing our emotions and thoughts, with our financial lives and loads more. I am grateful that when Jesus introduced the Holy Spirit, He made the Helper relevant to our daily life!

I have experienced the Holy Spirit as Helper in lots of different ways and on many unexpected occasions. One time it happened when I was invited by one of my friends to a party that was going to include hundreds of affluent businesspeople, brilliant educators and successful entrepreneurs. Needless to say, I was more than a little intimidated and seriously considered declining the invitation with some imaginary excuse that would camouflage my insecurity. But I decided to attend out of loyalty to our friendship.

The minute my husband and I walked into the venue, I felt this quiet confidence come over me, and I heard a whisper in my heart that said, *Sarah, I'm right here with you, and I'll help you through this whole evening. Just lean into Me*. And that is exactly what I did throughout the evening—an evening

where I ended up having many opportunities to encourage and be a blessing to various people. When we drove home from the party, Reece and I talked about the conversations we had enjoyed and the new acquaintances we had made.

In the past, my introverted self would have found some corner in which to hide at this kind of an event, but because of the Holy Spirit's help, I was able to navigate the entire evening with poise and confidence. I am thankful for heavenly help!

Spirit of Truth

We read in the next verse that Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth (see John 14:17). Later, in John 16:13, Jesus says the Spirit of truth will also lead us into all truth.

We might be tempted to ignore the importance of truth when we read this—until we begin to consider some of the potential consequences of allowing deception or distortion into our lives. From my own experience, I can say the most dangerous form of duplicity is self-deception. Even as I write this, I cringe to remember the many situations and seasons in my life when I had a gut sense of the truth but allowed myself to be allured or deceived by something that was only partially true.

One time, we had wonderful neighbors who were loved by our whole family. Then Reece told me he thought they were going to move because of a possible job change. I did not want to believe this, so I ignored his insights. As time continued, more indicators cropped up—home-improvement projects, school changes—that I continued to dismiss. Finally, the day came when I could not ignore the impending change anymore.

When the family moved, it was a traumatic transition for all of us. Had I been more attentive to the truth, I could have decreased some of the trauma our family experienced.

Self-deception is not helpful, whatsoever. Sometimes we let our desires tweak the truth or ever so slightly bend it, but all deception is inherently destructive. In contrast, the Holy Spirit holds up the platinum standard of truth to our lives. We would be wise to carry the highest respect for this Spirit of truth and to give Him room to work in our lives and eliminate deception.

Connection to the Father

Next, Jesus says He will not leave us as orphans (see John 14:18). Instead, He will come to us through the Holy Spirit, which means the Holy Spirit vaccinates

us from an orphan mentality. Consider Romans 8:16, where Paul says, “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”

We all have human parents. This means that despite their best efforts and intentions, our moms and dads are inherently flawed and likely made lots of mistakes when they were raising us. These mistakes and flaws can impact our lives as adults.

One friend of mine, for example, grew up surviving a rocky relationship with his dad. He struggled to connect with his dad and carried this challenge with him into all of his relationships. All of his relationships were filtered through the lens of the broken relationship with his dad, so it was difficult for him to feel confident, valuable and effective.

The Holy Spirit, though, connects us with the reality that we are also children of a heavenly Father, one who is perfect in love and wise above all things. As God’s children, we are highly valuable and deeply loved. This can bring us so much peace.

A friend of mine who grew up with an alcoholic mom has experienced this. Her childhood was quite tumultuous, but she began to earnestly follow Jesus in her early twenties, and she was introduced to the Holy Spirit in those pivotal years. When she learned the Holy Spirit could speak into her heart about her identity as God’s daughter, she was able to forgive her mom for the addiction behaviors that affected her childhood. I am always pleasantly surprised to hear her talk with deep love about her mom today.

When the Holy Spirit is not allowed to heal the wounds of our upbringing, we can experience subsequent fallout. I have seen this happen many times. Regardless of the challenges we have experienced, let’s be certain the Holy Spirit can breathe life into those broken areas of our souls, repairing and redeeming the parental pains and scars found there. Indeed, no human parent is perfect!

Teacher

Jesus says the Holy Spirit “will teach you all things” (John 14:26). When I think about the Holy Spirit being my teacher, I rest easy in my soul, confident that the Holy Spirit, who knows me better than anyone in the world, also knows how I learn the best. I get gentle nudges about things I can do for my husband, insights into struggles my children may be having or creative ideas for dilemmas at work that can seem overwhelming.

One time I was at a party where a young kid said something crude to me that took me by complete surprise. I did not know how to reply to him because I was

totally caught off guard by his words. Later that night, when I was sleeping, I had a dream about the kid and what he said. In the dream, I felt strongly that what was said was not nearly as important as why he said it. I felt urged by the Holy Spirit to look past the words and chat with his parents about what he might have been exposed to in his life that would cause him to say such crude things. The Holy Spirit taught me what to do in an awkward situation, which allowed the young child to receive some help and his parents to become aware of challenges they had not known about.

Reminder

Additionally, Jesus told His followers that the Holy Spirit would serve as a reminder: "He will . . . bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit reminds me of what Jesus says when I get distracted or forget (which happens often!). I also experience the Holy Spirit reminding me about important things. For example, it has happened to me several times that I have had a spiritual dream at night and will remember it in the morning. But the important part comes when the Holy Spirit reminds me of it later in the day or in the future, when I am to do something about that dream—perhaps to pray with the person in the dream, to be led into a decision based on the dream or to be warned about a situation in which I need to be careful.

I experienced the Holy Spirit being a reminder to me when I was recovering from a concussion I received from a snowboarding accident. Because a concussion is a brain injury, I came to realize my brain was not functioning at optimal performance and that my memory was significantly challenged. I will never forget in those first few weeks after the concussion how the Holy Spirit gave me a simple step-by-step plan for remembering things. He also reminded me of encouraging verses from the Bible that confirmed He was right by my side at every second to give me help, strength and grace. I deeply appreciate how the Holy Spirit both teaches and reminds us!

Witness

In John 15:26, Jesus says of the Holy Spirit, "He will testify about Me." The word *testify* is also the word *witness*, and our modern word *martyr* is also derived from this word in Greek. So, first of all, the Holy Spirit speaks to us about Jesus and then helps us be witnesses to Jesus in our daily lives, coaching us on how to communicate who Jesus is. Also, when it comes to the word *martyr*, we may find that in sharing the reality of who Jesus is with the people

around us, be it family, co-workers, classmates, acquaintances or friends, we need to lay down our lives and desires so we can effectively communicate who Jesus is with conviction and compassion.

I have certainly experienced the Holy Spirit in this witness capacity. As just one example, I was flying back from Africa a few years ago and sat next to a nice young man who I later learned was Jewish and was reading some Hebrew. We began to talk about what he was reading, and it turned out to be a Danish philosopher whom I admire. Our conversation grew into several hours of discussion about the Old Testament, the New Testament, different Jewish authors and philosophers, Jesus and the apostle Paul. It was a fascinating chat, and I was amazed at the natural question-and-answer conversation we had about religious and philosophical matters, which included a discussion of the Messiah reality of Jesus. Because of the young man's sincere questions, I was able to share with him about the Christian belief that Jesus is the promised Messiah and about the personal relationship based on love that God, our heavenly Father, wants to have with each of us. After leaving the plane, I thanked the Holy Spirit for giving me the opportunity to witness about Jesus, our loving and redeeming Messiah, and for making it such an easy conversation.

Upgrade

Jesus tells us in John 16:7, "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." Whenever I read this verse, it feels counterintuitive. How can the Holy Spirit, whom we cannot see, feel, hear, smell or touch, be an upgrade, or advantage, to Jesus' physical presence with us? Because Jesus says it, it must be true. So, how is it true?

To begin, let's consider that Jesus was limited during His earthly existence to a physical body, just like us. Consequently, He experienced the same kinds of physical limitations that we have with time and space. In contrast, the Holy Spirit is not confined by spatial or temporal limits. Indeed, He is with each one of us at all times and in all situations. He personifies God's omnipresence throughout the world and throughout time. When I consider the Holy Spirit with this perspective, I realize He truly is a great upgrade to the physical and temporal limits Jesus experienced in His human existence.

In addition, the Holy Spirit is an upgrade to Jesus because Jesus says the Holy Spirit will be with us forever (see John 14:16). Clearly, Jesus, in His human form, cannot be with us forever.

Given this reality, I think we need to change the way we think about the presence of the Holy Spirit with us. In worship songs and prayers, we frequently invite the Holy Spirit to be poured out or to descend upon us and fill the room. Based on what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit never leaving us, maybe our prayers and worship would be more effective if we instead asked that our awareness and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, who is already there, be increased. Indeed, if the Holy Spirit is always with us, then let's pray that we *recognize* the Holy Spirit better!

Recognizing the Holy Spirit can happen when we see a sick person and feel prompted to pray healing for them. Another way to recognize the Holy Spirit is when we have an indescribable love for someone who is not very lovable, as Paul says the love of God is poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (see Romans 5:5). We can recognize the Holy Spirit when we resist the urge to lambast someone for doing something hurtful or stupid. Resisting such urges is called self-control, and that is one of the fruits of the Spirit that Paul identifies in Galatians 5:22–23. There are lots of ways to recognize the Holy Spirit, but it all starts with a simple request that we be given an increase of sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, who is already there.

Convicting Presence

Toward the end of His primer on the Holy Spirit, Jesus gives us more to consider. He says:

> "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged."
>
> John 16:8–11

For the longest time, these verses baffled me. They felt mystical and elusive. But as I asked the Holy Spirit for wisdom—again, turning toward the reality of His being our teacher—a few things started to become clearer.

To begin, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will *convict*. In the Greek, this word means "to train or teach a person a better way to go or live, in the sense of reproving or correction." According to this passage, the Holy Spirit convicts us in relation to sin, righteousness and judgment. Notice, as well, that Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict *the world*—that is, people who are not followers of Jesus.

So, how does this relate to us as followers of Jesus? Here is something to consider: Each of us has areas in our life (our thoughts, emotions, priorities, paradigms and the like) that have worldly or fleshly roots. For example, there are conversations I have had with my husband that I know were influenced by worldly thinking rather than the Holy Spirit. This is where the Holy Spirit wants to convict our hearts.

I remember the time I became aware I was disrespecting my husband with my various comments, behaviors and attitudes. I was getting my hair cut when I became aware of how wrong this was, and I began crying. I had to explain to my hairstylist through tears that I felt horrible about how disrespectfully I had treated my husband over the years. At that moment, as I sat in that chair, the Holy Spirit was convicting me of my worldly thinking and behavior. From that time on, you can bet I was—and continue to be—more sensitive to any of my disrespectful remarks or behavior toward my husband. It has made an improvement in our marriage!

Foreteller

Last but not least, in John 16:13, Jesus says about the Holy Spirit, "He will disclose to you what is to come." This implies the Holy Spirit will tell us ahead of time about things that will happen in the future. This means He is a foreteller.

I have had more than one experience of this. These are times when I have known in my heart well in advance that something was going to happen and there was no rational reason for me to have that information. It has happened to me in relationships, in my travel experiences around the world and even in things that have happened with my family. Sometimes I have ignored or tried to deny these insights when they came, but as I mature in my walk with the Holy Spirit, I am learning how to deal more constructively with these spiritual foresights.

So, as we finish up this chapter, let's review what we have learned about the Holy Spirit so we can give the Holy Spirit permission to be who He is to us. Let's ask Him to

- help us, rather than leaning on our own independence;
- direct us in truth, rather than settling for distortion or deception;
- work into our identity that we are children in God's family, rather than living an orphan's isolation;
- teach and remind us, rather than staying ignorant and forgetful;

- share Jesus through our lives, rather than being exclusive or avoidant;
- convict us, rather than condemning ourselves;
- raise our awareness of things to come, rather than living in ignorance.

What Does This Mean for Us?

After Jesus gave His disciples a tutorial about who the Holy Spirit would be in their lives, He went to Gethsemane, where He was betrayed and then went on to be crucified and rose from the dead.

After His resurrection, Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Before His ascension, we see that Jesus told His followers to wait in Jerusalem until they received supernatural power (see Acts 1:4–5). After waiting several weeks, the disciples had a revolutionary experience with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:1–4) that empowered them to live the supernatural lives to which they were called.

Indeed, Jesus did not intend for His followers to settle for natural possibilities. Instead, He intended His followers to do what is naturally impossible in their daily lives because of the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we do the impossible? You are about to find out.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank You for being my heavenly help. Thank You for giving me counsel, comfort and strength and for making the supernatural a daily possibility in my life. Help me not to limit You based on my experiences, emotions or intellectual understanding. Teach me who You are, and unravel any deception about You that exists in my life. Thank You for making Jesus increasingly real to me and through me. I am eager to learn who You are more and more every day.

Go Further

1. Describe a time in your life where you acted independently, doing life with no help from anyone. How did it feel, and what were the outcomes?
2. Do you find it difficult to admit you need help? In what areas of your life do you find yourself needing more help? How open are you to receiving help from the Holy Spirit?
3. Describe a time in your life when you were unknowingly deceived and another time when you let yourself be deceived. What were the outcomes of both situations?
4. With which of your parents, your mom or your dad, do you have a more difficult relationship? How have those challenges bled into your relationship with God?
5. What are some ways the Holy Spirit has been your teacher? When has the Holy Spirit reminded you of something important?
6. How might the Holy Spirit want to share about Jesus through you right now?

Part I

Holy Spirit Navigation

3

Spirit-Led Direction

Have you ever been in a situation where you knew you needed to be led by the Spirit more than by your natural thoughts or feelings? I am willing to bet you have.

I have certainly been there. One time I found myself in a group conversation about someone who was not the easiest person to get along with. Each person in the group had some story of frustration to voice about the person, and I was tempted to join in. It would have been so easy. Everyone was doing it!

But I knew something more was wanted of us in that moment. So I waded into the fray and invited the group to voice the person's positive qualities instead—to notice their strengths, not just their weaknesses. I also suggested we pray for the individual and ask the Holy Spirit whether there was something we ought to know or do differently when it came to this person in our lives. After some prayer, we began to sense the Holy Spirit leading us in a more positive direction with this person, and the conversation became significantly more constructive.

You could say it was a close call! We could so easily have let our natural thoughts and feelings guide our attitudes and behaviors toward that person. Instead, we sought to be Spirit-led. I am so glad we did.

I have noticed that when I allow myself to be led by the Holy Spirit instead of my natural inclinations, I like the outcome better. I may follow the Holy Spirit's prompting to zip my lip when I want to lambast someone, or I may decide against following the Holy Spirit and wind up with disastrous consequences. The choice is usually mine.

In this chapter, we are going to explore what it looks like to let the Holy Spirit guide our steps, and we are going to let Jesus be our guide.

It Requires Being Filled

Prerequisite number one to being led by the Spirit is to be filled with the Spirit, and on a continual basis. I say this because sometimes we emphasize being led by the Holy Spirit without first being filled with the Holy Spirit. This deficiency is similar to trying to start a car that has no fuel in the gas tank. There is no flowing or going with the Holy Spirit if there is no filling from Him first.

With Jesus as our guide on the matter, we can see that He was first filled with the Holy Spirit before He set out into any new direction in His adult life. In Luke 3:21–22, we see that the Holy Spirit came on Jesus when He was baptized:

> When all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

Now, Luke, as the author of this passage, did not write his book with the chapter-and-verse divisions that we see in our modern readings of the Bible. We can skip those divisions and simply follow the flow of his writing to see the story unfold. Here, we find that the story of Jesus' baptism at the Jordan River, where the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove, is followed first by a section on Jesus' lineage and then by these words:

> Jesus, *full of the Holy Spirit*, returned from the Jordan and *was led around by the Spirit* in the wilderness.
>
> Luke 4:1, emphasis added

You see? Here is the model for us that being filled with the Holy Spirit must precede being led by the Spirit.

I would also suggest to you that being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a one-time experience. I have found that I need to be freshly filled with the Holy Spirit on a regular basis because I leak. I can tell I have leaked when I get snippy with my family. I can tell it has happened when my flesh appetites grow louder than the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit in my heart. I know I need to be filled again with the Holy Spirit when my intellect attempts to define and constrict my faith or when my emotions, rather than God's Word, begin to organize my priorities. Do any of these challenges sound familiar to you?

Consider what Paul says in Ephesians 5:18: "But be filled with the Spirit." The Greek verb tense Paul uses for being filled with the Holy Spirit here is the present tense. When the present tense is used in Koine Greek, it means an activity is to continue without stopping. So, Paul is saying we should be filled with the Holy Spirit in an ongoing way, not merely in the one-off manner of a supernatural experience or a spiritual high.

I should add that being filled with the Holy Spirit means more than receiving the gift of speaking in tongues, as the apostles experienced on the Day of Pentecost described in Acts 2. It is helpful to pray in tongues, but being filled with the Holy Spirit also means much more.

Let's be sure to stay filled with the Holy Spirit so that Jesus' words in John 7:38–39 will be true of us:

> "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive.

It Can Lead You into Wilderness

Sometimes being led by the Holy Spirit is not a glorious or blissful experience at all. For example, we read in Luke 4:1, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit *in the wilderness*" (emphasis added).

Now, when we think about the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness, it is important to understand what that wilderness was like for Him. This was the Judean wilderness in Israel. It is one of the most naturally desolate locations on the globe. In the Judean wilderness, almost nothing lives. No yearly plants survive the temperatures or absence of water. Only a handful of animals scrape out a meager existence in that dismal wasteland. It is a stark place, full of eerie silence and sinister stillness.

Into this place of maximum desolation, the Holy Spirit led Jesus—right after His glorious experience of being baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, no less. What a contrast!

When I think about being led by the Spirit, my mind does not imagine deserts or echoing voids. But that is exactly where the Holy Spirit led Jesus for forty days—and it was only the beginning of a difficult season. We read in Luke 4:2 that, in addition to having been led into a wilderness location, Jesus was "being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry." Clearly, this is not a description of spa-licious treatment! But let's remember the Holy Spirit cares about developing our character more than catering to our comfort. When we follow the Holy Spirit, sometimes we go through desolate seasons and face deplorable circumstances.

I went through a challenging season like this when I was newly married and had just moved to Kansas City. As I shared in a previous chapter, I had experienced a profound encounter with the Holy Spirit the week before our wedding. After that supernatural encounter, I was overflowing with passion for

the Holy Spirit. I remember telling the Holy Spirit, *I want You to use me, and I want You to speak through me. Do miracles through me, and demonstrate Your power and presence wherever I go*.

Because of those prayers, I looked for opportunities to serve and minister. I was working on my graduate degree at the University of Missouri, so I prayed and looked for chances to share about Jesus with students in my classes—to no avail. I volunteered for the Sunday school classes at my church and fell flat on my face.

Finally, I took a job as a crossing guard and park patrol representative with the local police department. I became discouraged with the absence of what I considered, at that time, to be Spirit-led results. I was frustrated in my own kind of wilderness experience. I was being led by the Holy Spirit, but it was not comfortable for my flesh or rational to my intellect.

I did not feel remotely spiritual when I put on my heavy, dark brown polyester crossing-guard pants with the giant three-inch-wide belt. I did not feel spiritual when I donned the bright orange safety vest, waving the stop sign at oncoming traffic for kids who were crossing the street. I did not feel spiritual while riding in the sweltering summer heat of Kansas City on the police patrol bike during my late-afternoon shift. And it seemed a fruitless waste of time to iron my new husband's shirts so he would look professional in his engineering career. None of these things felt spiritual to me in any way. Everything felt mundane and decidedly *unspiritual*.

But when I look back on that season, I see the Holy Spirit leading me and abiding with me throughout those two years, even though it was hard on my flesh and my pride. Sometimes a wilderness experience is nothing more than the Holy Spirit's way of taming our flesh and deflating our pride. This was not the case for Jesus, of course, since He was already perfect, but I know it is true for me. Maybe you will discover it is true for you, too.

If the Holy Spirit leads you into a wilderness time, know that such a season will come to an end. It is not a permanent state of being. While I am sure that Jesus' time of fasting and testing in the wilderness felt interminable to Him, it lasted forty days—less than six weeks.

There is a time and a season for all things, and we will be given what we need to endure what we encounter. It is as Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven." It is like 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, too:

> No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Since wilderness experiences can be part of what it means to follow the Holy Spirit, we need to be careful not to judge people by the things they are going through. Let's be careful not to think, *Well, they didn't follow the Holy Spirit and that's why they're going through that wilderness*. Job comes to mind in response to this. Let's not be like his friends, who judged him! Our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ may be walking through wilderness experiences while legitimately being led by the Spirit.

The wilderness experience for Jesus was a trough between two pinnacle experiences: His water baptism, where He received the affirming presence of the Holy Spirit and heard the affirming words of God the Father, and the beginning of His earthly ministry. Immediately after His wilderness experience, He started His public ministry and began talking about the Holy Spirit's anointing on Him to live a supernatural life (see Luke 4:18–19). But His baptism and the beginning of His ministry were interdependent on His being led by the Holy Spirit through desolation, deprivation and intense temptation first.

Following the Holy Spirit does not mean living in opulent abundance or experiencing tantalizing miracles, then. Sometimes when we follow the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves stretched and challenged far beyond our natural abilities.

It Can Defy Your Mind

Not only will the Holy Spirit lead us through wilderness experiences, but also the Holy Spirit's leading can defy our rational thoughts. This becomes clear when we think about how Jesus was led into a desolate wasteland and challenged with forty days of fasting and then, on top of all that, was tested by the devil.

To me, this seems illogical. Why would the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into such a stark place and bring Him to a place of such physical weakness, only to have Him face significant tests by the devil? Ultimately, it tells me that when we are led by the Spirit, the leading does not always make sense, particularly in the moment it is happening. Sometimes you can figure out what it means in hindsight, and sometimes you cannot. But expecting the leading of the Holy Spirit to follow a logical path is one sure route to disappointment.

I experience this contrast often in the work of my organization, Saving Moses, which takes me many places where I sense the inexplicable love of the Holy Spirit where I would least expect to find it. Recently, I was in Cambodia and wanted to find a new neighborhood to include in our NightCare work. This

program of ours provides safe and nurturing shelter at night for babies and toddlers of sex workers in some of the poorest countries of the world. It is similar to day care, but we provide an environment of safety, love and stability for these vulnerable little people at night, while their mothers are working. Sometimes I walk through the neighborhoods that are part of this program and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in an almost tangible way.

On this particular trip, a few friends and I entered an apartment complex that was dark and sinister. I had visited the complex before, but it was the first time my friends were walking through the cement and graffiti-filled hallways with me. Bodies, needles and noxious trash lay in the stairwells.

Needless to say, my friends were a little freaked out.

But I felt a peace in my heart, regardless of what we saw. After a while, I had no clue where we were inside the massive apartment complex and had no idea whether to go up or down any of the stairwells. I tried to stay calm for my friends, who were rattled. I could tell they were doing their level best to keep their imaginations from going rogue.

Eventually, I led us up a level of stairs and down another bleak hallway, noting the locked gates that protected each dark doorway. At the end of the hallway, I could see one of the apartment doors was open. I sauntered down that way, trying to act calm for my friends. When we arrived at the open door, I looked inside and saw a baby swinging in a hammock. Eureka!

The baby looked healthy and was accompanied by an elderly lady, whom I surmised to be the grandmother. I popped inside and greeted the woman in my broken Khmer language skills. After our short exchange, I thanked her for letting me intrude and recognized that she said “God bless you!” in Khmer as I was walking out the door. My friends noticed crosses had been painted around the doorway of the apartment. It seems we had stumbled into the home of perhaps the only believer in Jesus in that entire apartment complex. Furthermore, we had found another opportunity to explain our NightCare services in a desperately needy neighborhood.

Sometimes following the Holy Spirit can feel more accidental than intentional and more irrational than logical. Let’s be careful not to filter everything through logic, lest we magnify our minds rather than glorify Jesus. If there is any way the devil can get us to stop following the Holy Spirit, he will use all of his power and knowledge to get us sidetracked, just as he tried to do with Jesus. The devil used food, power and glory to tempt Jesus to stop following the Holy Spirit, and he will try the same with us, using comfort, convenience, logic, accolades and even fear to distract us from being led by the Spirit. But what feels good to our

flesh is not usually what the Holy Spirit is asking us to do, regardless of how tempting the devil can make it seem!

It May Not Look How You Expect

After His wilderness experience, we begin to see Jesus follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in a big way and with some cool results. Consider Luke 4:14, where it says, "And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district." Because Jesus was obedient to follow the Holy Spirit, not only was He Spirit-empowered, but His fame spread throughout the region. Additionally, in Luke 4:17–19, when Jesus began teaching in the Jewish synagogue in Galilee, which was the area of His upbringing, He said these words:

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

These verses show us that being led by the Holy Spirit can be tremendously powerful, in terms of results. It can lead to people getting set free from chains and recovering their sight!

Furthermore, after Jesus spoke in the synagogue, the people were impacted by what He said. Luke 4:22 tells us, "And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'" I find it interesting that although Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit and people recognized the special flavor of his words—even spoke highly of Him—they did not necessarily see things from a Spirit-led perspective. In the end, they questioned Jesus' identity and eventually drove Him to the edge of a cliff because of what He said (see verses 28–29).

This shows us that when we are led by the Holy Spirit, things do not always turn out as we think they should. I remember this realization first hitting me during my teen years, when I wanted to be led by the Holy Spirit more than anything else in the world. The summer before I started high school, I had experienced something powerful with the Holy Spirit and was on cloud nine. I wanted nothing more than for the Holy Spirit to lead me in my daily life going forward.

To be honest, I thought that meant the heavens would open for an amazing outpouring of supernatural events. I thought I would feel electricity every time I

prayed. I expected to hear an audible voice that guided me to pray for people in the grocery store and maybe even raise the dead.

That did not happen. Instead, I learned some valuable lessons on humility—like when I prayed for people and nothing happened. They did not feel anything, and there were no supernatural results, no matter how much I dialed up my intensity or volume. These experiences helped me learn that I am a vessel and not the source of healing or spiritual manifestation.

My roots in the Bible also deepened, as these experiences forced me to dig into my Bible loads more and not just read the stuff I liked or agreed with. During this time, I became more earnest in my daily reading discipline and began reading through the Bible—including all the challenging books, like Leviticus and Numbers—on a yearly basis.

When we are Spirit-led, that can sometimes mean we experience the supernatural in different ways than only what appeals to our flesh or rational thinking.

Even so, our obedience can have incredible results we do not anticipate. I remember one time this happened to me after I finished several intense days of ministry in Cambodia. I was praying for people at the end of a service, and a gentleman came up to me and asked if he could share his testimony with me. I was spent by this point and did not feel I had the energy to listen, but I said yes.

He proceeded to tell me that four years earlier, he had attended a church in Phnom Penh where I ministering. He was not a believer at the time, but during the service, I had called him out to give him a Bible verse and minister to him. At that moment, he began to shake inside, and the shaking continued for two weeks. At the end of those two weeks, he gave his life to Jesus and began to attend church. Now he was telling me that over the past year, the Holy Spirit had led him to plant a church in a remote city in Cambodia. And all of these events started the day I called him out in that church service to give him a Bible verse.

Needless to say, I turned into a puddle of tears after listening to his story. I felt gratitude to God not only for directing this man's steps and spreading the Kingdom of God through him, but also for giving me timely encouragement at the end of my ministry trip in a moment when I was exhausted. Following the Holy Spirit's leading can certainly be challenging, but let's remember there are tremendous rewards for being obedient, too.

It Can Still Be Amazing

We have seen that in being Spirit-led, Jesus was not led by His flesh, His logic or His environment. We have also seen that following the Holy Spirit does not always lead to supernatural outpourings or demonstrations. Indeed, walking through those horrific hallways of the freaky apartment complex in Cambodia was no gloriously spiritual encounter. I did not hear a divine voice wafting through the stairwells, providing me with supernatural illumination. There were no flashing neon signs to guide my steps. We did not feel a Holy Spirit brand of Kevlar protecting us. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit did direct our steps.

Even so, following the Holy Spirit *can* lead to some cool and amazing experiences sometimes. Looking again at our model of Jesus, we see that in His ministry, He was led by the Spirit into some astounding supernatural experiences. In Luke 4:14, after the devil had left Jesus in the wilderness, we see that "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district." Throughout the rest of that same chapter, we see that the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus and that He walked in supernatural protection and divine power to cast out demons. Throughout the rest of His ministry, Jesus demonstrated supernatural power and offered transforming teaching from the Old Testament. Through it all, He was committed to being led by the Holy Spirit, no matter where that took Him.

It Is a Special Kind of Walk

Lastly, we would be wise to look at what Paul says about being Spirit-led in Galatians 5. In writing to the church at Galatia, offering helpful spiritual foundations, he says:

> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.
>
> Galatians 5:16

> If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.
>
> Galatians 5:25

I bring these verses to our attention because of the Greek words used in them for the word *walk*. In verse 16, where Paul says that we will not carry out the desires of the flesh if we walk by the Spirit, the word for *walk* in the Greek is *peripateo*, and it carries the idea of walking alongside or walking together. In verse 25, Paul uses a different word—the Greek word *stoicheo*, which conveys more of a sense of cadence and walking in sync. These Greek words teach us two different ways we can walk in step with the Spirit.

The difference between these two words reminds me of two different ways I had of walking with my dad when I was a little girl. My dad was six feet tall and had long legs, so it was difficult for my short legs to keep up with his long strides. I remember him saying to me, “Sarah, you’ve gotta keep up with me!” And I would reply as I jogged to keep up with him, “I’m trying, Dad, but you walk too fast!” I think it helped him remember my legs were much shorter than his when we held hands as we walked alongside each other, usually when he would meet me at the bus stop after school to walk home with me. This kind of walking, when we walked beside each other, is the *peripateo* idea Paul conveys in verse 16.

There were also occasions when I would play a footstep game with my dad. In these times, he would invite me to step up on his feet, facing the same direction he was. Then he would hold my shoulders with his hands to keep me stable and then begin to walk. I would literally be walking in his steps. My right foot would follow his right foot, and my left foot would follow his left foot.

Playing this footstep game, we especially understood the difference in the size of our strides. My dad, with his super long legs, could stretch out his stride and cover a great length. My legs were very short, and it was impossible for my legs to stretch as far as his did. So, we adjusted accordingly. He would shorten his stride, and I would lengthen mine as far as it would go—all so we could walk in each other’s footsteps. This is similar to the idea Paul conveys in verse 25 with the word *stoicheo*.

Sometimes we can sense the Holy Spirit walking by our side, and maybe we are kind of holding hands. Other times, we might sense a more precise step-by-step walk with the Holy Spirit. In both instances, we are being led by the Holy Spirit in the direction and at the pace the Holy Spirit chooses.

How do we apply all this to our daily lives? To begin, we remember that being led by the Holy Spirit implies we will follow and not lead. The Holy Spirit is not a supporting actor in our life but rather the lead character around whom all of our life revolves. Rather than expecting the Holy Spirit to take His cues from us, as though He is simply tagging along and offering suggestions, let’s be surrendered and determined to follow the Holy Spirit as the leader in our lives.

It is like the game “Simon Says.” Do you remember it? We used to play it in elementary school, and I always wanted to be the one telling everybody else what to do. Following the Holy Spirit is like a role reversal of this game, where we get to do and go as the Holy Spirit directs.

Additionally, let’s commit to follow the Holy Spirit regardless of what the environment, the conditions or our logical thoughts tell us. It is not important for our flesh to feel cozy or powerful when we follow the Holy Spirit’s lead, nor do

we have to understand everything the Holy Spirit leads us to do. Instead, we make the decision to be a committed follower, and that decision is not up for reconsideration.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank You for talking with me about following You. Help me not to resist when You lead me into a wilderness experience. Teach me to walk in step with You in both speed and direction. Forgive me for trying to lead You more than being led by You, and thank You for being patient with me as I grow deeper in You. Fill me up again with You, and help me to pay attention to my continuing need to be filled with You. Give me power to remain steady in my commitment to follow You. Thank You for making all things possible, for helping me and for leading me. Amen.

Go Further

1. What signals in your life indicate you might be in need of a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit?
2. In what areas of your life do you need to be more Spirit-led?
3. Think back on the wilderness seasons of your life. How were you led by the Holy Spirit through them? What outcomes do you treasure from those experiences, despite their difficulty?
4. What causes you to resist following the Holy Spirit? Take a moment to pray about the reasons for your resistance, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you.
5. What helps you stay in step with the Holy Spirit? What does staying in step with the Holy Spirit look like for you?

4

How to Handle a Closed Door

Thanks for your call, Mrs. Bowling. I don't have any new information for you this week. Please call back next week," said the monotone voice through the phone.

I was applying for a graduate history program at a state university. Every week, I would call and say, "Hi, my name is Sarah Bowling, and I've applied to your graduate program. I'm calling to check on the status of my application." And every week, the same lady answered and gave me the same reply.

I was hoping my persistence would reflect well on my application, but the more time passed, the more anxious I became. I was newly married and had not applied to any other programs, confident my undergraduate grades and educational experiences would make my acceptance automatic at my first-choice school—or so I thought. After unending weeks of the same phone calls, I was more than a little frustrated, and my new husband jumped into the mix.

"What's the admin's name and number?" he asked. "I'll call her and get to the bottom of this."

Long story short, Reece learned from his phone call that the university to which I was applying prioritized their limited graduate spaces for their own undergraduates who might apply. I was third on the waiting list, and it was a virtual certainty I would not be accepted.

Why the receptionist told my husband this information and not me still baffles me to this day. Nevertheless, I was disappointed and at a loss as to what I should do next, since it was the middle of December. Because I had refused to apply to other universities as a possible backup plan, I did not seem to have any options available to me. Everything seemed like a closed door.

Have you ever encountered closed doors that disappointed you? Maybe it was a romantic interest that was not reciprocated. Maybe it was a declined job application or position. Sometimes a closed door can be a medical diagnosis that says you are unable to get pregnant.

I do not believe there is a human on the planet who has not experienced a closed door in some degree or fashion. So, what do we do in these situations?

Some wisdom says we should keep knocking on the door, hopeful it will open, and sometimes this works. It is the thought that we are on the cusp of a breakthrough that keeps us going—the thought that if we endure one more day, that closed door will miraculously open. That was my thinking all those years ago, when I called every week to check on the status of my application.

But I was never accepted into that graduate program. Instead, I scurried around at the last minute to apply for another local program, to which I was provisionally accepted and from which I eventually earned my master's degree. That experience was a valuable lesson to me, not only about persistence but also about the wisdom of knocking on lots of different doors instead of just one. Such stubborn knocking on just one door made my knuckles bleed.

Three Kinds of Closed Doors

If we look in the Bible for help with closed doors, we do not have to look far to find help and encouragement. Paul, with the many missionary journeys he took that are detailed in the book of Acts, is a great starting point for our consideration.

The first thing we learn from Paul's missionary journeys is the importance of being led by the Holy Spirit. For his first mission trip, he was sent out with Barnabas after a prayer meeting in which the Holy Spirit had directed the group to commission the two men to spread the Gospel:

> While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.
>
> Acts 13:2–3

I bring up this point because it is important, first of all, for us not to confuse a good idea with a God idea. For example, it was a God idea for me to go to graduate school, but my "good idea" of applying to only one university was absurd.

Have you tried knocking on doors that were good ideas but not necessarily God ideas? That is the first question to ask yourself when facing a closed door.

Now let's look at a few other ways a closed door might confront us.

Relationships

After Paul and Barnabas completed their first mission trip, Paul suggested they do it again. In Acts 15:36, we read, “After some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.’” This sounded agreeable to Barnabas.

But shortly after they made this agreement, they faced a sharp disagreement about who should go on the trip with them. They were unable to resolve the conflict, so Barnabas took John Mark and sailed off to minister in Cyprus, while Paul took Silas and began his second journey into modern-day Turkey (see verses 37–41).

On the surface, this conflict between Paul and Barnabas seems like a failure in brotherly love, and for a long time it bothered me to see what had happened between them. But looking more closely at the outcomes, we can be encouraged to find that God multiplied their ministry when they went their separate ways. Instead of one team with three guys going to the places they had previously visited, now there were two teams with four guys going to different places. We learn from this that when we keep a Kingdom perspective about our relationships, just as they did by staying focused on the spreading of the Gospel, we will keep our hearts more flexible, and this can make closed doors of relationships easier to navigate.

I will say, though, that because I am a loyal person, it is difficult for me to navigate closed doors in the context of relationships. Still, I have found God is faithful, in the end, to bring good out of these hard situations.

In one case, several years ago, I had a great friend with whom I had robust biblical discussions. After a few years, it became obvious the friendship was not going to continue, and I was hurt by the break in our relationship. Looking back now, with some years having elapsed to provide me with perspective, I can see how the Holy Spirit opened the door for that friendship for that season and then opened other friendships to me when the season for that first friendship had concluded.

I have also burned bridges with people that the Holy Spirit later repaired and restored. I will never forget the time in my late twenties when a successful pastor recalled to my memory a conversation I had with him when I was a teenager. Much to my chagrin, he reminded me that in my teens, I gave him an earful about his passion to establish life-giving churches in America. My cheeky teenager self railed at him with arrogant disdain, saying he was wasting his time doing anything for America when there were so many opportunities for Americans to experience Christianity through TV, radio and churches that could

be found almost everywhere. I let him know the real work of Christianity was to be found in international missions work.

I am grateful he dismissed my arrogance at the time and stayed true to his calling, as he has since established hundreds of life-giving churches all over America. And when he reminded me of this conversation I had with him when I was a teenager, he laughed and commended my passion for international missions work. My saucy attitude had burned a bridge when I was a teenager, but the Holy Spirit repaired the bridge years later.

When it comes to closed doors in relationships, let's keep our hearts free of bitterness so we do not corrode future opportunities with unforgiveness. We see, in Acts 15:40, that this is what Paul did: "But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord." He was able to overcome the obstacle of offense and get on with the work he was called to do.

Destination

After Paul navigated that first obstacle with Barnabas, he began his second mission trip with a new traveling companion, Silas, and soon faced additional closed doors. The two men set out on their trip with the intent to visit the churches that Paul and Barnabas had established during the first mission trip. They likely planned to encourage those fledgling churches, troubleshoot any negative behaviors, address any leadership challenges and rectify any influences of heresy.

The repeat places they intended to visit included Derbe and Lystra, as well as the regions of Galatia, Phrygia, Mysia and Bithynia. Of course, the names of these places have virtually no meaning to us today, but in the context of looking at Paul's closed doors, they become important. Consider what we learn in Acts 16:6–7 about the closed doors Paul experienced in these cities and regions that had been open to him during his first mission trip:

> They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.

I have read these verses many times, and they have always intrigued and challenged me. It seems counterintuitive that the Holy Spirit would close doors for Paul to minister the Gospel. I have wondered why Paul and Silas were even allowed to start the trip in the first place, if they were just going to face closed door after closed door.

I ask these kinds of questions about my own life and ministry, as well, in discouraging seasons. Sometimes I feel the Holy Spirit gives me answers, strength and encouragement, and sometimes it seems like I am just going from locked door to locked door. I can get discouraged by this. And while there is no indication Paul became discouraged from all of the closed doors he faced, it would not be difficult to understand if he was disheartened.

I had a conversation recently with a friend that eventually shed some light on what could be happening when we face these kinds of closed doors. We were talking about his life, what he had achieved thus far and where it seemed like he was going with his future. In the course of our conversation, he expressed some frustration, saying, "I'd just like for God to make a sidewalk for me to walk on rather than a jumbled maze."

How many of us can relate to that same sentiment? I know I can.

When I brought this frustration to the Holy Spirit, I felt this answer pop into my heart: *Sarah, the problem is you'd prefer to trust the path rather than Me. When the path gets circuitous, you're forced to trust in Me. When the path is clean and straight, you don't trust in Me as much.*

So, the purpose of the winding path can be to develop our trust in God. It is less about getting to some external destination or achieving some fleshly goal we might have. I am reminded of Proverbs 22:19, which says, "So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you today, even you." We would be wise to reframe our goals and destination to trust God more and have greater synchronicity with the Holy Spirit.

Please understand that I do not think Paul's original intention to return and visit the churches from his first trip was a fleshly goal. Rather, I would say the Holy Spirit used his interest and initiative to direct his steps for greater multiplication, rather than redundancy.

Time

Not only did Paul face divine adjustments to his plans and destination, but he also experienced seeming delays in time.

Time is a challenging thing to manage because we cannot earn or make more time, as we can with money. Furthermore, there is a great emphasis on speed and efficiency in our modern life. Baked into our modern culture is an almost universal acceptance that things should happen quickly. Even with the flight delays and security complications we face today when traveling, we can still hop on a plane and be in a different hemisphere in a few short hours. It is pretty amazing.

In Paul's world, however, travel was not nearly as quick, nor was time measured in quite the same way as it is for us today. All of this becomes clear when we consider the distances between the regions of Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia and Bithynia he attempted to visit. None of those regions could be reached with a quick little plane trip. When Paul and Silas traveled, it was nothing more sophisticated than walking, one step at a time, day after day. If we consider that an experienced and healthy person can walk twenty to thirty miles a day, the distances Paul and Silas walked could easily have taken at least two weeks or longer.[1] And yet, after all that time they took to walk from one place to another, they still faced closed door after closed door. It must have started to feel like they were living in a closed-door state of being, rather than just an experience.

Such times can tempt us to quit. I know that, for a season, I wanted to quit on my dream of getting my master's degree. It seemed like every door was not only closed but also locked. Thankfully, Reece encouraged me not to give up.

"Why don't you apply at some other universities around the area?" he said. "There are probably a half-dozen universities in the metro area of Kansas City that have master's programs."

Initially, I balked and found lame excuses to wallow in my feelings of rejection and insecurity. But he encouraged me not to give up. Long story short, I was accepted into a master's program not far from our house and ended up earning my degree there.

Now, we do not see any evidence of Paul and Silas getting discouraged by all those closed doors they faced over that long period of time. We do not see them wanting to give up and quit. I find that super reassuring—especially in light of what happened next. In Acts 16:9–10, we read:

> A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

In these verses, we see that Paul had a supernatural experience that planted a seed in his heart that he may not have considered before that time: to go to Macedonia. Macedonia was a new place for Paul to visit, and no one had brought the news of Jesus to that region up to that point.

Macedonia, in Paul's day, is what we know today as Greece. This becomes a powerful thing to consider when we see that Paul's ministry, having been established in Asia, was now being expanded to Europe. He crossed the Aegean Sea to Samothrace and Neapolis (see verse 11), and after making the journey by ship, he began to minister and invest time and energy into this new place. It was

on this missionary journey that Paul began to minister in Athens, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth and several other towns and cities.

We can look at this event to see where Christianity began in Europe. If you have European ancestry, you can trace your Christian heritage back to Paul's accepting this invitation to minister in Macedonia. And just think—these open doors in modern-day Greece came on the heels of the boatload of closed doors they had faced in modern-day Turkey. Let's consider that God can direct us every bit as much through closed doors as open doors!

Three Lessons Learned

I have had many experiences with closed doors and open doors in my life. Even as I write this, there are some closed doors that I am facing and waiting to see what God will do. But there are also loads of lessons I am learning from the closed-door situations. Let's take a look at a few of them.

Discernment

For starters, it is important to ask for discernment. Sometimes a closed door just needs our endurance and tenacity to turn it into an open door. At other times, I have learned that no matter how hard I try, how much I fast and pray or what kind of pressure I apply, the door is steadfastly closed. There are times God closes doors no man or woman can open, no matter who that man or woman is or how much they might want it to open, and there are times God opens doors for us that no man or woman can close. Consider what Jesus says in Revelation 3:8: "Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut."

We would be wise to pause and seek the Holy Spirit's input on a door that may seem closed. Would the Holy Spirit have us dig in and develop more endurance? Has He closed a door because of a different direction He wants us to go or a different door He wants to open?

Another lesson I have learned from closed doors is that if I keep my heart tender and responsive to the Holy Spirit, a door will open for me that is often far superior to the door that has been closed. For example, there was a season in my life when I felt fulfilled by my family life, my work achievements and my availability to the Holy Spirit. It was an enjoyable season. But after a few years, I began to feel unsettled in my heart. I had a sense God had more for me. I began talking with Reece about some ideas that were floating around in my heart and mind. It seemed like I was discerning a shift in my heart.

After several months of prayer and discussion, we decided to move forward with implementing some of the ideas. Shortly after we made those changes, I had an unexpected medical emergency that sidelined me for several months. The ideas we had implemented were perfectly aligned with the adjustments I needed to make until I could fully recover. They not only allowed me space to recuperate but also helped our ministry grow and improve.

Flexible

It is also critical that we learn to be flexible. Just because you start out with a particular destination in mind does not mean God has the same goal. Paul and Barnabas started out with the premise of doing a repeat trip to strengthen the churches they had launched during their first trip, and they made plans and took actions to agree with those goals. Clearly, God had a different objective in mind.

If Paul had been inflexible, he would have been more likely to quit at different places along the way. He might have quit when he had the fight with Barnabas about who would go with them. He might have quit when the Holy Spirit forbade them to go through Asia. And he might have stopped when he was not permitted to go through Bithynia. Instead of quitting, Paul adapted.

When you start experiencing closed and locked doors, keep trying different door handles. Oftentimes God has a different door for you than the ones you know, and your flexibility will make the whole experience—and getting to where God really wants you to go—that much easier.

Adversity

Now, it is also important to know that just because a door is open to you, that does not mean that once you walk through it, you will not face adversity. Consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:9: “For a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” Open doors can lead to difficulties, but we cannot let them put us off. If God has opened a door for you, then be sure to go through that door, regardless of what the enemy may throw at you.

We would be wise to think of obstacles as opportunities rather than hindrances. Closed doors mean other doors are open. We just need to keep trying the doorknobs to see which doors are unlocked and available for us.

This is what I had to learn when starting the NightCare program for Saving Moses. At present, we have five NightCare shelters running in Cambodia, and we are aggressively working to expand into other nations. I am passionate about

this ministry because, in my heart, it feels like we are serving Jesus by ministering to the very least of the least in the modern world (see Matthew 25:40)—the baby of a sex worker.

But my initial attempts to open NightCare in a poor Asian country were unsuccessful and frustrating. I was so disheartened by the opposition I encountered with my initial attempts that I gave up trying to make this unique ministry a reality. However, the Holy Spirit kept stirring my heart, and I could not let go of the idea. Although I was frustrated, I felt I should try again in a different nation.

Then I remembered I had some good ministry friendships in Cambodia. I thought, *What about trying out this idea there?* I figured I had nothing to lose by trying, so I flew to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, to meet up with one of my friends. When I told him about the idea, he thought it was great and told me about some other people I could connect with further about it. Through a series of divine coincidences, I met with several people who felt a deep alignment with the idea. After about six months, we had our first NightCare center up and running!

Then I tried to open the program yet again in the initial country. My visa applications to even enter the country were repeatedly declined, and I was again discouraged—but this time, instead of sitting down at the closed door of that country and wallowing in frustration and rejection, I decided to try a third country instead. I have decided I will not quit trying to open NightCare in the first country but will, in the meantime, keep bringing the program to additional countries where we are allowed to go and let it multiply there.

One closed door often means God has other doors ready to open, if we will just knock!

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank You for guiding my steps, even when I face closed doors. Please keep my heart free from the corrosive influences the enemy would try to inject from rejection, hardship and discouragement. Give me strength in my heart to keep trying and not quit. I trust You to guide my steps, the people on the journey with me and the timing for various seasons of this

journey. Thank You for helping me to trust You more and to walk with You closer and closer every day. Amen.

Go Further

1. What closed doors do you see in your life that God may want to talk about with you?
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment about whether you should be persistent with a closed door in your life or try a different option. If you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to try something else, what could that something else be?
3. Have you tried any different doors as alternatives to the closed doors you are facing in your life?
4. When you think back on your life, describe a time when God opened a door for you that was different from the one you were trying to open.
5. Think of someone in your life who is facing a closed door. Pray for them to be directed by the Holy Spirit.

5

Keep On Keeping On

From time to time, I get to work out with my friend Cato, who, besides being a body builder, an emergency medical technician and a personal trainer, also happens to be one of the coolest people on the planet. One of the things I love about Cato is that, as my trainer, he never gives up on me. I can get into seasons where I am doing really well with exercising and staying fit, and I can get into seasons where . . . well, not so much.

I remember after my dad died, I could not find the motivation to train with Cato for many months. When I finally texted him to let him know I would like to start up again, he never once shamed me or questioned why I had gone MIA for so long. He knew my dad had died, and when I showed up to train, he made it feel like we were picking up where we last left off. He did that again when I had to take a pause after I injured my shoulder and had to go through surgery and physical therapy rehab. Cato never seems to give up on me. In this way, he reminds me of Jesus, who never gives up on us, either, no matter what opposition we may face or what storm we may find ourselves in.

Now, it is one thing to go through a storm, but it is a different thing altogether to let a storm go through you, wreaking havoc, despondency and destruction on your life. I have another friend who is the definition of this kind of persistence. Her husband died after their third child was born, leaving her to care for their three small children. Then she met a kind man in church, and they were soon married. She became pregnant and delivered a healthy baby boy, whom they named Joshua. But when Joshua was about eight years old, his father was in an accident at work and died, leaving my friend to now raise the four children by herself. My friend was already no stranger to grief, having also lost both her parents in a car accident when she was a teenager.

When I step back to consider how this friend of mine has endured the immensity of hardship and grief in her life, I can only attribute her endurance to her relationship with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, when I first met her many years

ago, I was awestruck at how closely she walked with the Holy Spirit in her daily life. Her intimacy with the Holy Spirit provoked me because of the contrasting deficiency of the Holy Spirit in my life. To this day, I am motivated by her ongoing persistence to stay the course with Jesus, never getting bitter or turning herself into a victim of the hardship and grief she has endured. She would attribute her staying power to the Holy Spirit.

The same can be said of the apostle Paul. Here is another man who endured grueling hardships again and again in his life but remained constant with God and surrendered to the Holy Spirit's directing of his steps.

Yet in contrast to my friend, the apostle Paul could have chosen an easier life for himself. I say this because of the astounding success he had in Ephesus during his third missionary trip. Consider all of the events detailed in Acts 19:

- He led a Spirit-filled team of twelve men who transformed the city of Ephesus for Jesus over the course of two years (see verses 1–10).
- Extraordinary miracles were performed through his hands (see verse 11).
- His authority was acknowledged by the demons who faced the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest (see verses 13–17).
- Masses turned away from idolatry and witchcraft (see verses 18–20).

Even so, in the middle of this outrageous success and the tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit that happened, we read in verse 21, "Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.'" Rather than resting in the comforts of success, Paul let the Holy Spirit create a divine dissatisfaction in his heart, such that he was ultimately determined to go to Rome. Paul had never yet been to Rome, but being led by the Holy Spirit, he was committed to going.

When Paul received divine direction to go to Rome, he was in the middle of tremendous success, but this did not deter him from following the Holy Spirit. In fact, when I watch Paul after the Holy Spirit directed him to go to Rome, I see that he did not make choices that would be most comfortable to his flesh. Rather, it was more often just the contrary.

Indeed, when he was saying farewell to his spiritual brothers and sisters in Ephesus, he told them, "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions

await me" (Acts 20:22–23). Bonds and afflictions awaited him! And yet he went forward anyway.

Let's be abundantly clear, then, that following the Holy Spirit does not guarantee our flesh a life of comfort and convenience. Indeed, it seems to me that more often than not, following the Holy Spirit means our flesh will get uncomfortable, challenged and cranky. But I know that if I follow my flesh, I will not live out a fulfilling or impactful life. Let's agree to choose fulfilling and impactful over comfortable and convenient when we are confronted with these options.

So, how did Paul persist through his hardships, and how might we do the same? Let's learn a few things from his example.

Stay the Goal

To begin, I would suggest that Paul kept in mind the end goal: that he would get to Rome.

After he received his instructions to go to Rome, Paul went up to Jerusalem, where he was put in prison and kept for two years without any hope of being absolved of the false accusations against him or the hope of being released (see Acts 24:27). After these years, Paul still did not give up on getting himself to Rome. This was obvious when he appealed to Caesar as he was being heard by Festus (see Acts 25:11). Because Paul made the appeal to have his case heard by Caesar, Festus was required by law to send Paul to Caesar, since Paul was a Roman citizen. In this way, the journey to Rome took a twist Paul likely did not anticipate. I doubt Paul thought, when he set out for Rome, that he would get there by being a political or religious prisoner! But I am inspired by his persistence to get there, regardless of how it was accomplished.

Keeping a goal in mind can help us to keep going when we would rather quit. I have been in some pretty rough situations I was able to endure because I kept my focus fixed on a future goal. For example, I will never forget the season in my life when I was studying in Germany and struggling with depression. It was inching closer and closer every day to being not only debilitating but also destructive. For a little while, it helped me enough to remember that my time in Germany was limited. I was only there for a few months in the summer. But the depression continued to grow. Soon, I was not able to keep my attention on the end of the summer. Instead, I began to focus on a visit to Germany my parents were making toward the end of my studies there. When even my parents' visit became too far in the future to keep my focus, I found comfort in thinking about

the next time my friend and I would meet up to make a fruit salad and take a hike in the Black Forest nearby.

Now, it is important to notice that getting to Rome was not Paul's only goal. He also kept in front of him the goal of sharing the Gospel everywhere he went. No matter what city he was in, whether he was in jail or was brought in front of an authority, he promoted the name of Jesus.

We see this was true when Paul first appeared before the Jewish council after his arrest in Jerusalem. On one of the nights of his imprisonment, we learn, "The Lord stood at his side and said, 'Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also'" (Acts 23:11). Paul received this encouragement at the beginning of his long and unpredictable trek to Rome, and it was an encouragement that told him he would eventually get to the end point but that he would witness to the cause of Jesus along the way.

Paul kept sharing about Jesus during each step of the journey. He shared about Jesus with Felix, the first Roman official to hear the charges against him (see Acts 24). He also talked about Jesus to Felix's successor, Festus (see 25:1–12), as well as King Agrippa and his wife, Bernice (see Acts 25:23–26:32).

In my thinking, Paul did not just survive his trek to Rome. Rather, he thrived. And he did this by letting everyone along the way know about Jesus and the possibility that existed for them to come to know Him in a personal way. Sometimes we need to think about persistence not merely in terms of goals and survival, but also in terms of flourishing. We need to ask ourselves, What would it look like to flourish, no matter our difficult circumstances?

When I think about flourishing in the context of hardship, I am reminded of a man named Nick Vujicic. Nick was born without limbs and allows his disability to be the platform from which he shares about Jesus to anyone who will listen. In more than ten years, Nick has shared his testimony about overcoming adversity with Jesus' help to more than four hundred million people, and to this day, he continues to spread his message of hope and redemption. His book *Life Without Limits* is a super-encouraging read.

Keep Company

Being persistent requires a goal, but sometimes having a goal is not enough, particularly when seemingly insurmountable obstacles crop up along the way. During those times, we need to keep good company.

Consider the life-threatening storm Paul faced in his travels to Rome, detailed in Acts 27. Paul and his friends were put on a ship with other prisoners and with Roman soldiers as their keepers, and they made a voyage in which everyone aboard the ship came within a hair's breadth of dying. In the middle of one of the darkest times on the ship, Paul stood up among all of the passengers and said:

> "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'"
>
> Acts 27:22–24

From these verses, you can see that Paul encouraged his fellow travelers by telling them they would all survive the deadly storm. We need that kind of encouragement when we have been shipwrecked in our lives, too, and God is faithful to provide that encouragement to us.

On a recent trip, I was traveling to Cambodia and I had some friends who were coming after me the next day, bringing more than twenty people with them. As I was waiting to catch my first plane for this trip, one of my friends texted me to let me know there was an epic typhoon developing in Taiwan and that it was forecast to land around the same time I was supposed to be passing through Taiwan on my way to Cambodia. I replied, "They eat typhoons for breakfast in Taiwan!" But I was concerned. When I landed in Los Angeles, I did some quick finagling and rerouted through Korea to avoid the typhoon.

In the meantime, my friends were scheduled to fly through Taiwan the next day, and I was concerned about their safety and schedule. When I landed in Cambodia, I learned that, indeed, the typhoon had landed in Taiwan and wreaked destruction, but it had landed before my friends flew through Taipei. Additionally, all of the air traffic had either been averted or delayed so that no one was hurt. Despite being tired from all of the travel, my friends were ready for the wonderful adventure we had in Cambodia, and the typhoon was more of a footnote than an insurmountable obstacle in our journey.

Through this experience, I grew to appreciate my friend who was concerned for my safety. I was encouraged when my friends landed safely, too, confirming that God is bigger than typhoons and takes care of us in unique ways. My friends missed the typhoon by a day, and I avoided it by flying around it. It is encouraging to watch the ways God not only leads us but also provides for and protects us.

Not only do we get to enjoy various people along the steps of our journey, but we also get to be present with others as they walk their journey, too. I am

reminded of a friend whose elderly father was in a serious health crisis. I learned about it just a few months after my own father passed away, and I felt compelled to walk with her at the time of her dad's crisis. I went to the hospital almost every night and walked the halls with her, listening, praying and endeavoring to be present to her in the midst of her struggle. At one point, she asked me why I would choose to be with her in the situation, having just lost my dad. I replied that I felt uniquely positioned to stand by her side in that season and appreciated the honor of getting to join her journey through it. Her dad died a few months later, and I was more than happy to get to walk with her through some of those days.

Walking in the company of the Holy Spirit is also, of course, essential for keeping us going through hard circumstances. I say this based on what we have already learned that Paul teaches about walking in the Spirit. To refresh your memory, Paul uses the Greek word *peripateo* in Galatians 5:16, when he talks about walking in the Spirit to avoid carrying out the desires of the flesh. This word carries the idea of walking alongside someone. Friends can do this with us, like the friends who travel with me on my different trips for Saving Moses. (Truth be told, I think my husband contacts them before our trips, soliciting their help to keep me from getting too adventurous or taking too many risks!) But the Holy Spirit does it, too—and He walks with us through the *entirety* of our lives. His presence keeps us from walking out our fleshly desires and from doing thoughtless things. I find it helpful to think of this kind of walking like we are holding hands with the Holy Spirit as we walk through the peaks and valleys of life.

Furthermore, remember that in Galatians 5:25, Paul uses the word *stoicheo* to describe another way of walking in the Spirit. This word is derived from a military context and implies marching in step or cadence. When you see soldiers marching in formation, it is because they have drilled and trained for many hours to perfect that unity and precision of moving together as a whole body. We can learn to move that same way with the Holy Spirit.

In fact, I would suggest that Paul's ability to stand up in the middle of that harrowing storm recorded in Acts 27 was due to his having trained for many years to stay in step with the Holy Spirit in this *stoicheo* way. And there have been times I have found myself moving with the Holy Spirit in that way, too.

One time it happened on a Sunday morning when my family was getting ready for church. My husband, Reece, motioned me away from the kids and let me know, with great difficulty, that he was struggling to speak and thought he needed to go to the emergency room. I raced him to the nearby emergency clinic, telling the kids to wait at home for me to call with further directions, and then I

called a friend from church to ask if she could collect the kids and get them to church. She was happy to help.

When we arrived at the clinic, the attending physician put Reece on a stroke protocol. Shortly thereafter, he had a more serious episode, which confirmed the doctor's diagnosis of a stroke. Everything from that moment on shifted into hyperspeed and intensity mode because the stroke mantra is "Time is brain." This means that the longer a stroke continues, the more impact it has on the patient's brain function.

Reece was transported to a nearby hospital that has an intensive care unit that specializes in stroke care. I called a few friends and then drove myself home to change clothes and get a few essentials, since I did not know how long his stay at the hospital would be.

I felt myself going through the mechanics of what I needed to do in those moments, and yet, concurrently, I sensed the Holy Spirit telling me what I needed to do each step of the way. I could sense Him giving me strength and wisdom as I prayed for Reece. When a friend stopped by our house to pick me up, we drove to the hospital, praying all the way. When I was walked down the hallway of the intensive care unit and felt myself getting panicky, I heard the Holy Spirit say, *I'm here with you*.

In the end, Reece came through those episodes with no permanent damage, and we thank God every day for His healing power. I am grateful the Holy Spirit gave me what I needed to walk in step with Him so I did not dissolve into a puddle of panic.

Choose Your Response

When Reece went through that stroke experience, I had a choice about my behavior. I could choose to let the Holy Spirit be my internal anchor, or I could allow the circumstances to override His activity in the situation. I think the same could be said of Paul, and hopefully it can be said of you, as well.

To better explain what I mean, let's look at the conclusion of Paul's shipwreck experience, described in Acts 28:3–5. In these verses, we see the group has survived the awful storm and has safely landed on the shore. Now they are warming themselves with a fire.

As Paul gathers sticks for the fire, a snake rises up from the sticks and bites him on the hand. The natives of the island see this happen and expect him to die from the venom, but Paul shakes off the snake and stays very much alive—to their total surprise!

How could that have happened? Let's think through some possibilities. Maybe the snake did not inject its venom into Paul. Maybe it was low on venom. Maybe Paul had some kind of antivenom inside him. My point in raising these questions is to challenge your thinking about what is on the inside of you. More importantly, *who* is inside you?

It should be no surprise to you to hear that the enemy of your soul is looking for ways to poison you multiple times in any given day. Like Paul, you may have just come through a horrific storm in life. Maybe you have survived a doctor's diagnosis of a terminal disease or have survived a financial bankruptcy. Maybe you have acquired a job after a long-term season of unemployment. Or perhaps you are starting school again, looking for a fresh start. No matter what stage in life you find yourself, Satan is looking to camouflage himself in the mundane details of your life and attack you when you least expect it.

Having survived the storm and the shipwreck, did Paul succumb to the unexpected snake attack? No. If you have survived your own set of harrowing circumstances, will you fall victim to the enemy's plans to destroy you? I hope not. He may try to do this through offense, isolation, arrogance, deception or any of the other things that can creep into your thoughts and emotions. Let's remember we have a choice about our actions and attitudes because of who is inside of us—namely, the Holy Spirit.

Here are some verses for you to remember when the enemy seeks to sink his poison into you:

> You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.
>
> 1 John 4:4

> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:57

> But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.
>
> Romans 8:37

Furthermore, not only did Paul survive the snake attack, but he took it one step further. He carried the healing power of Jesus to the inhabitants of the island, beginning with the father of Publius, a leader on the island (see Acts 28:7–10). Clearly, the healing power of Jesus kept Paul from being affected by the snake attack, but staying consistent with Jesus' earthly ministry, this healing power was multiplied through Paul and was not kept for his personal benefit.

I have seen something similar happen in the life of another one of my friends. I watched her go through a season in life that was a nightmare in the fullest sense

of the word. Over the course of a year, her husband fell off a roof and broke his back, one of their kids ran away from home, she learned one of her daughters had been traumatized, and their family finances took a massive dive. As I watched my friend walk through this storm, of course I prayed for her and tried to encourage her from time to time, but I also saw her keep her faith in Jesus and her feet in step with the Holy Spirit. Having survived this stormy season, she would tell you today that her confidence in God is stronger now than it ever was before that time. Even though she went through a horrible storm, she did not let the storm get into her soul. Nor did she allow the enemy's venom to taint her thoughts or poison her emotions. In fact, her example became an encouragement and blessing to others, including me. Consider that God can turn any plans the enemy has to curse and destroy you into blessings and life (see Nehemiah 13:2).

Know When to Quit

Let's also be clear that there are situations where you *should* quit. In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon makes a list of things related to time, and there is indeed a time to quit.

If you struggle with addictive behaviors, I advise you to avoid the hooks that cause the addictive pattern to cycle in your life. If you are an alcoholic, do not go to bars. If you have a history of drug addiction, do not apply for a medical prescription for marijuana. If some of your relationships are destructive, toxic or violent, get some help, quit those relationships and walk away. Sometimes we need to stop being overly responsible for others or blaming them for our deficiencies. I encourage you to seek discernment from the Holy Spirit about when to endure and when to quit.

Paul made his way to Rome possibly ten years after he voiced his initial plan to do so. To get there, he persisted through religious hostilities, political persecutions, more than a few delays in jail and numerous interpersonal conflicts, to say nothing of the dangerous storm and shipwreck he survived. While in Rome, Paul was kept in prison. Tradition says he presented his case to Nero, telling the most deviant and powerful leader of his day about the saving and redemptive power of the resurrected Jesus. History also says Paul was beheaded in Rome, ultimately becoming a martyr for Jesus.

The Holy Spirit led Paul to Rome, despite a circuitous route and more than a few setbacks and delays in time. And here is some final irony for your consideration: The first time we learn about Paul, he was looking after the cloaks of the Jewish leaders and giving his approval while they stoned Stephen, the first

martyr for the cause of Christ. This man Saul, who became Paul, was transformed because of the power of the Holy Spirit. He endured tremendous hardships for Christ, and his words tell of his tremendous persistence through strenuous struggles:

> Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.
>
> 2 Corinthians 11:24–27

This is the same man who wrote two-thirds of the New Testament with the help of the Holy Spirit!

Paul did not quit, and we do not have to quit, either. We can keep on keeping on. Following Jesus means laying down our lives so Jesus can live through us. This is the ultimate display of persistence.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, sometimes we get tired and we want to quit. Sometimes the journey seems longer than our endurance and the hardships bigger than our strength. We pray that You would make us strong on the inside—stronger than the hardships and sturdier than the journey. Holy Spirit, breathe Your life into our hearts, and dispel any storm that may have seeped in through the cracks of life. Help us to be strong for other people who are going through storms, and give us grace to let other people help us when we are going through storms of our own. I pray You would help us to live out the truth from Galatians 6:9, that we will reap a harvest because we do not grow weary in doing well. Thank You for Your help, life and strength. I love You. Amen.

Go Further

1. What are some areas in your life where you are tempted to quit? Take a moment to ask the Holy Spirit for discernment and wisdom about whether you should quit in these areas or persist.
2. What goals could you set to help you keep going in a difficult situation?
3. Who in your life is struggling to endure through a season or hardship? In what ways could you encourage them?
4. What are some areas in your life where you have quit and need to start again? What could be some first steps to get started?
5. List a few of your Bible heroes who inspire you for their persistence. What are some things they did that you can emulate to help you stay faithful through your struggle?

6

Ingredients for Revolution

I heard a true story about a guy who was being mugged at knifepoint in New York City and offered his mugger not only his wallet but also his coat. He even invited the guy to join him for dinner at a nearby diner!

The mugger agreed to the meal, and when they walked into the restaurant, he was surprised by the warm welcome everyone gave to the guy he was trying to mug. Not only did the hostess greet the man warmly, but also the manager came out to say hello, as did the dishwasher, and the waitresses jostled to get them to sit in their section.

The mugger said, "What gives? Why is everyone so friendly with you? Do you own the place?"

The victim replied, "No. I just come here every night after work to eat dinner. These are all my friends."

At the end of the meal, the mugger returned everything he had taken from the man, but the man told him to keep the coat and gave him twenty dollars.[1]

This is an unlikely but true story—unlikely because it goes against the grain of our fears and survival instincts. The assailant did not expect his victim to be generous or welcoming. Usually, when we are scared, we either fight or flee, but this man "friended."

It seems to me this is exactly the revolutionary life to which the Holy Spirit invites us—to turn our worlds upside down. It is like the people said of Paul and Silas when they got to Thessalonica on their missionary journey: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:6 ESV).

Walking in step with the Holy Spirit challenges us to be nothing less than revolutionary. So, how does that happen?

It Begins on the Inside

The first time we are introduced to the apostle Paul, he is called Saul and is entrenched in the pursuit of apprehending Jesus' followers. He is traveling to Damascus to hunt them down for persecution, imprisonment and possibly death.

Then, on the Damascus Road, he has a divine epiphany and conversation with Jesus, which turns him blind for three days. At the end of those three days, another believer in Jesus, named Ananias, is instructed to lay hands on Paul and pray for him to receive his sight and to understand his divine calling. Initially, Ananias argues with these instructions, but he finally obeys and finds Paul to pray for him (see Acts 9:10–17).

Paul's Damascus Road experience was powerful, but I would argue that he did not begin the journey to be God's revolutionary until Ananias showed up to pray for him. Consider what Ananias said to Paul when he arrived at the house: "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight *and be filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 9:17, emphasis added). Did you see that? Paul was to regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to move into his calling.

I believe being filled with the Holy Spirit is ground zero for getting revolution into the marrow of our bones and the motive of our heart. Consider a few examples of individuals who were filled with the Holy Spirit and then ignited revolutions:

- **John the Baptist.** In Luke 1:15, Gabriel tells Zacharias that his son, John, will be filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb. John the Baptist was the forerunner to Jesus. He prepared the way for the Messiah and let the Holy Spirit use his life to spark a revolution that opened the door for Jesus' earthly ministry to begin.
- **The disciples in the Upper Room.** In Acts 2:4, we read about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. On that day, the 120 individuals who were gathered together were filled with the Holy Spirit. From that moment, the birth of the Christian Church was set into motion—a revolution, to be sure!
- **The martyr Stephen.** In Acts 7:55, we read that Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and saw the glory of God before he died. His subsequent death began the earnest spread of the Gospel that has reached almost every tribe and tongue in today's world.

So, you see, the revolution we so desperately want to see in the world needs to start *inside* us, in addition to being born *through* us. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is an essential ingredient to instigate that internal revolution.

Indeed, Paul makes this clear in Romans 8:6, when he says, "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace." Our mindset begins to change when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. It helps us see things from a spiritual, rather than fleshly, perspective. It gives us strength to make godly decisions, instead of the appealing natural choices. It gives us supernatural power to see supernatural results in our lives.

I once saw evidence of what such supernatural living can look like in a practical situation. I have a friend who went through an international adoption many years ago. I watched their family go through tremendous struggles to adopt their little girl. In a conversation I had with the father a few months after they had brought her home, the Holy Spirit began to speak through me in an astounding way.

I found myself telling him things I had no way of knowing. It was like I had this real-time download of what was going on in his thoughts and emotions. I sensed how overwhelmed he was with the responsibility of being a new father and how inadequate he felt. At the same time, I felt the Holy Spirit speak words of life and truth to him through me as he was starting this life as a new dad. Through my words, the Holy Spirit affirmed him, telling him that God was giving him supernatural power and strength to be the exact dad his daughter needed. The words I spoke were Spirit-filled and in no way "Sarah-filled."

Our conversation was brief, but as I walked to my car afterward, I was stunned at what the Holy Spirit had done, all to supernaturally encourage this new dad!

It Is Aided by People

Going back to the example of Ananias, when I think about him, he inspires me because of his honesty and obedience. He was honest with God about being afraid of Paul, and yet, despite his fears, he was obedient.

Like the man who gave his coat to the mugger, Ananias went beyond his fear and did not allow fear to impair his obedience to God. That is when we run the risk of being a counterrevolutionary—when we let our fears rule what we do or do not do. Thankfully, Ananias prioritized his obedience at the expense of his fears and followed through to pray for Saul. While we only read about Ananias

in a few verses in Acts 9, he was nonetheless an essential part of helping Paul become the radical revolutionary we know about today!

Do you have people in your life who have been an Ananias to you? For me, it was a friend who spoke a word I needed at just the right moment.

In my early twenties, I went through a crisis with my faith and was not certain I wanted to follow Jesus. Having been raised as a pastor's kid, I did not want my faith to be something assumed or automatic, so I began exploring various world religions for several months. After reading *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, I was attracted again to the Christian faith but had some reservations because of some discrepancies I observed between Jesus' teachings and the behavior of some Christians.

I will never forget the discussion I had with a friend during that time. She said something to me like, "Sarah, you can follow Jesus and not eviscerate your intellect."

With those words, my friend became like Ananias to me. And I told God as I drove home from her house, "Look, I don't have much faith, but what little I have, I give to You to do with as You please." Those words were my way of surrendering my life to Jesus. To this day, I am eternally thankful to that friend for being like Ananias to me.

We also need the Holy Spirit working through our relationships to make revolutions contagious. Take, for example, Barnabas. Shortly after Ananias laid hands on Paul and he was converted, Paul began to speak boldly on behalf of Jesus in Damascus. This was the same Paul who had previously demoralized Jesus' followers. He was now defending them and preaching Jesus!

When Paul got to Jerusalem, he tried to connect with the followers of Jesus there, but they did not believe he had converted. They were afraid he was trying to trick them in order to persecute and possibly kill them. Consequently, they refused to grant Paul access to their community.

Enter Barnabas.

We do not know much about Barnabas up to that point, but he soon became a significant instrument the Holy Spirit used to integrate Paul with the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem during a precarious time. Consider what happened because of Barnabas's intervention:

> When [Paul] came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.
>
> Acts 9:26–27

Barnabas brought Paul to the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, and this became the foundation upon which Paul's ministry was launched. Paul would never have had the platform to promote Jesus as he did or to ignite the revolutions he did without Barnabas having helped him to be accepted by Jesus' followers in Jerusalem.

It is my sincere conviction that spiritual revolution requires our allowing the Holy Spirit to integrate us with other believers, rather than staying isolated from our family in Christ. This integration is so important.

For example, one time I was visiting Angola and happened to meet a young woman who was struggling to find her purpose in life. She was broken and searching. I met her at the local market, and her appearance made an impression on me. My friend shared with me that this young woman was staying alive by earning a living as a prostitute.

The next day, I was ministering at a church and this same young woman responded to the call to receive Jesus at the end of my message. When she came forward, I was floored to see her there—and to see her responding to Jesus—and we both had tears in our eyes.

The day after that, I was looking for babies we could help through Saving Moses and was walking through a shady neighborhood of the town. Through a doorway, I saw a newborn baby and popped my head inside to greet the mom. In the corner of the shack lay a disheveled mattress.

Suddenly, the same young woman I had seen the preceding two days sat up on the mattress and looked at me. There was nothing but shock in both of our eyes. Her eyes said, *What is she doing here in my home?* And my eyes said, *How is it possible for me to have run into the same girl three times in three days in a city of almost two million people?*

It could only have been the Holy Spirit.

Over the several years that have passed since then, I have come to know this young woman more and more. She is now a mother and a wife. Every time I visit Angola, I make it a point to check in on her and see how she is doing. Sometimes she is doing better than at other times, but she is consistently following Jesus and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, being a good mother, wife and woman, all while making a steady and concerted effort to regularly be in church.

In this situation, I became a kind of Barnabas in this young woman's life, reaching out to her and encouraging her in her walk with Jesus and helping her become a part of the body of Christ. It is my steady prayer that my friend will continue to grow in Jesus and be a witness to her family and neighborhood of the power of Jesus.

Not only did Paul make significant progress toward becoming a Spirit-led revolutionary through the influence of Ananias and Barnabas, but also he was able to continue as God's revolutionary with the support of other friendships. One such friend was a man we have already come to know who played a significant role in Paul's life: Silas.

We first meet Silas after the intense conflict that arose between Paul and Barnabas about who would accompany them on their second missionary journey. If you will remember, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, but Paul thought John Mark was a substandard traveling partner because of the immature behavior he displayed on their first missionary trip. So Barnabas and Paul parted ways. Barnabas took John Mark, and Paul took Silas, and each team spread the news of Jesus in different regions.

This leads us to notice that neither Paul nor Barnabas tried to work revolution without the company of friends. Barnabas had John Mark, and Paul had Silas. It seems evident the Holy Spirit will bring people along at various points in the journey to help us perpetuate the revolutionary truth of Jesus as Lord and Savior.

I have seen this to be true in my own life, despite my proclivity toward independence. I have had friends who have kept me from doing really stupid things, and I have had friends who have encouraged me to be radical in my pursuit of Christ. I know the Holy Spirit has brought these friends to me.

One of those revolutionary friends is my buddy Steve. I appreciate Steve because he has traveled with my team in my work with Saving Moses and is every bit as eager for adventure and revolution as I am. I will never forget the time we drove up to a remote malnutrition clinic in Angola, only to have the volunteer physician greet us by asking, "Did you bring any medicines, and are any of you O-positive blood type?"

Her tone was impatient and abrupt, even borderline rude. Then I learned she had endured a horrendous weekend, as more than four babies and toddlers had died within that short period of time. She was more than a little edgy, too, because a remaining toddler, Angelina, was hanging on to life by a thread, dependent on an essential donation of O-positive blood. Steve's blood was a match, and he quickly volunteered to donate his blood, hoping to save Angelina's life. In the end, despite the donation, Angelina died because her health had deteriorated too far.

Despite this grim result, Steve continues to be a revolutionary friend to me. He encourages me to do what seems impossible until it is accomplished. I am grateful God provides us with friends who bolster our faith and spur us on to good—and even revolutionary—works!

It Spreads Outward

We often think revolutions happen in political contexts, and they do. But revolutions happen in other places, too. Let's take a look at a few ways God can bring revolution into the various spheres of life.

Politics

In Acts, we see that Paul took lots of opportunities to influence political leaders, despite being unjustly accused by Jewish leaders. For example, during his times under arrest and in prison, Paul witnessed about Jesus to all kinds of political leaders. One of those leaders was the Roman governor Felix. In Acts 24, we see Paul defending himself to the governor against his Jewish accusers. Indeed, for two years, Paul continued to witness to Felix about Jesus, and then he went on to witness to Felix's successor, Festus (see Acts 25:1–12, 18). After sharing Jesus with Festus, Paul continued his witnessing efforts with King Agrippa and his wife, Bernice. In defending himself, Paul conversed with the king to such a point that the king even said to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Paul replied, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains" (verse 29).

Ultimately, Paul was taken to Rome, as he had appealed to Caesar to hear the case against him. Along the way to Rome and while waiting for his appeal, Paul kept sharing about Jesus (see Acts 27:21–26, 35; 28:7–9, 17–28, 31). After living in Rome under house arrest, Paul likely appeared before Nero and again shared his faith in Jesus. Many historians believe Paul was decapitated by Nero for being a leader of the Christian sect.

Even though Paul did not ignite a global political revolution for Jesus from his widespread witnessing, he nonetheless used all of his life to give voice to the lordship of Jesus, even when he stood in front of political leaders, up to and in all probability including Nero, the emperor of Rome.

When I think about our modern political world and what a Jesus revolution could look like, I am not as keen to see a political party gain ascendancy over a rival party as I am to see a Jesus revolution in which Jesus' leadership upends what is all too common in our political arena: immorality, the absence of integrity and indifference to genuine suffering. A return to authentic humility, service, community and responsibility would all be in Jesus' wheelhouse of priorities and values. And I believe with everything inside of me that, again, the

revolution we want to see around us starts with a transformation within ourselves.

Education

Jesus can also do some revolutionary work in the educational and intellectual world. Think about the way Paul shared his faith in Athens, a leading intellectual center of his day, in Acts 17. As Paul wandered around that historic city, his spirit was "provoked" (verse 16) as he observed all of the idols on display there. He began to dialogue with the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in the city, which led to an opportunity to talk about the resurrected Jesus on Mars Hill. There, he voiced what have since become his famous words: "Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you" (verse 23). Paul continued sharing about Jesus being raised from the dead, and several people became followers of Jesus after hearing his presentation to this intellectual crowd.

Whenever I read Acts 17, my heart speaks my desire to see Jesus bring a spiritual awakening to college campuses around the world. Indeed, when I was working on my master's degree in Kansas City, I prayed with passion that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on my campus. I would go to the cafeteria for lunch day after day and pray for a supernatural outpouring of God's presence on the campus. I have done similar prayer work on other college campuses around the United States, including prayer and outreach work for the big university in my hometown, Denver University.

Our university campuses desperately need a genuine experience of Jesus, maybe more than any other place in our nation. I would also suggest our public education system needs to have a revolutionary encounter with Jesus. Would you be willing to contend in prayer and possibly service to reach students, teachers and administrators in our schools? Would you let Jesus put into your heart a passionate prayer, joined with compassionate service to see your school communities reached for Jesus? The intellectual bastion desperately needs a Jesus revolution!

Economics

A final area with revolution potential, based on Paul's missions work, is the economic context. The best place to look to see what this kind of revolution could look like is Acts 19, where we see it happen in the city of Ephesus. After Priscilla and Aquila had laid a foundation, Paul and others returned to work in

Ephesus for more than two years, building upon that foundation and igniting a Jesus revolution throughout the city—and turning its economy upside down.

Historically, Ephesus was the center for the worship of a god named Artemis. As such, the production and sale of Artemis's idols were a huge industry in the city. But after Paul and his team ministered there for several years, the idol industry was severely impacted. The economy of Ephesus shifted from its idolatrous foundations.

Because of this dramatic shift, a silversmith named Demetrius collected his fellow workers to unite them in opposition to Paul's revolutionary message. He told his fellow workers:

> "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence."
>
> verses 25–27

Demetrius's plea stirred up a riot in Ephesus. For several hours, thousands of the citizens gathered in the city's amphitheater and chanted, "Great is Artemis!"

At one point, Paul wanted to address the mob to try to calm everyone down, but his friends convinced him such an action was too risky. Finally, the clamor became so dangerous that the mayor intervened, addressed the crowd and explained that the city was in danger of breaking the Roman law against riots. He dismissed everyone to return to their homes. The riot that almost turned violent was due to the city's economy, largely grounded in the temple of Artemis, being upended by the message and demonstration of Jesus!

What could an economic revolution look like for modern-day followers of Jesus? Let me tell you about a conversation I recently had with an Uber driver who took me to the airport. He was originally from Cali, Colombia, and we shared a conversation about his city and its history of drug lords, violence, corruption and widespread danger. He shared with me that Cali is now a peaceful city, full of order and economic prosperity.

As I talked with him, I was reminded of a video by George Otis Jr. that I watched a few years earlier about the spiritual transformation that had happened in Cali after intense prayer among the churches and pastors there.[2] Because of their united and fervent commitment to intercede for their city, these pastors watched Cali become an entirely different city, turned upside down because of the power of Jesus.

At one time, Cali was considered to be the drug and corruption capital of the world. Now the political and business leaders of the city have tremendous integrity and respect. Furthermore, the drug lords that once ruled Cali have been imprisoned. The citizens have experienced an economic renewal that started with a spiritual revolution. That is the kind of economic and spiritual revolution God can do!

It is happening in other places, too. I recently had the honor of sharing breakfast with some Christian leaders in Cambodia. This is a country with a history of genocide in its not-so-distant past. Historians estimate that more than 10 percent of the nation was slaughtered in the genocide led by the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot.[3]

As I listened to my friends over breakfast, they shared that Christianity has significantly grown in Cambodia in the recent decade and that they have a vision, passion and plan to see Cambodia transformed for Jesus and for more than 10 percent of the country to become devoted followers of Jesus. I see this unfolding before my eyes, as I frequently travel to Cambodia because of my work with Saving Moses, and it inspires me to see such a revolution ignite in my own nation and city. What about you?

It is my conviction that each of us who follows Jesus is meant to be a revolutionary and upend our world for the cause of Christ. Our neighborhoods and cities have enough violence, indifference, greed and corruption. It is not enough to curse the darkness around us. Instead, let's be the candle that extinguishes such darkness!

Each of us can be an agent for change when we let the Holy Spirit work in us and through us. The question is, Are we willing to yield to that work?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank You for being the original revolutionary. Thank You for loving each of us with genuine love. Help me to let Your revolutionary love flow through me. Let my life be Your springboard to effect change in political, education and economic contexts—and even more. Help me when I feel intimidated or afraid. Make me bold with Your love, and let my life be used to bring others to know You. Help me not to be repelled by the brokenness I see around me but instead to see broken people as You see

them, through Your eyes and with Your love. Thank You for working revolution in and through me. Amen.

Go Further

1. When you hear the word *revolution*, what are your initial thoughts and reactions?
2. Have you ever considered yourself a revolutionary? If so, when and how? If not, why not?
3. Who has been an Ananias in your life, and how? Have you been an Ananias to someone else?
4. Are there countries, conditions, communities or social pockets of society where you feel compelled to pray for revolution to take place? Take a few moments to make a list of the areas that rest heavy on your heart.
5. Take the list you just made and bring it to Jesus in prayer. Do you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to do something? If so, what would it be?

Part II

Holy Spirit Relationships

7

Having a Supernatural Family

One of my all-time favorite movies is *The Incredibles*. I like that each family member has his or her own special superpower. Violet, the daughter, can do the disappearing thing and makes an awesome protective force field. Dash, the son, is quicker than a blink, and the mom, Elastigirl, is fabulous because of her amazing flexibility that allows her to stretch beyond the normal bounds of life—a mother's dream come true! Mr. Incredible, the husband and father, has unbelievable strength, and Jack Jack, the baby, is still growing into his superpowers. It is a cute movie about a family that is, in a word, incredible.

But, alas, it is just a cartoon movie. We must leave it in the fantasy category.

Or must we? In this chapter, I will show you that living in step with the Holy Spirit can transport your experience of family life from the mundane to the supernatural. We will do this by considering a handful of individuals who stayed in step with the Holy Spirit and saw this bear fruit in their families and saw what God was able to do through them.

We will consider Zacharias and Elizabeth, an elderly couple deeply devoted to following God but also infertile, even after decades of marriage. The next two people, Joseph and Mary, are young and unmarried when we first meet them in their story. And then there is Philip the Evangelist, whom we read about in the book of Acts. We never read about Philip's wife, but we do know from the book of Acts that he had four daughters, all of whom were prophetesses (see Acts 21:9). I do not doubt Philip was married, but as we look at the work the Holy Spirit did through Philip when he was ministering on his own, I hope any single parents reading this chapter will see how powerfully the Holy Spirit can move through people, regardless of their marital status.

And if you are single or without children, I hope you will find much in this chapter to be relevant to your life, too, especially when you consider that we are all part of the family of God.

Now let's look at five characteristics these individuals had in common that had an impact on the supernatural destiny of their lives and families.

They Chose Faith

To begin, members of a supernatural family choose faith over doubt.

Growing up in a pastor's home, with strong Bible-believing parents, I saw my parents choose faith over doubt as a normal instinct. But I did not appreciate this until I spent time with other families whose everyday conversations gravitated toward unbelief, fear and negativity.

I remember visiting a friend when I was a teenager and listening to a conversation her parents shared in the kitchen about how a certain ailment one of them had was likely going to lead to cancer and a premature death. They started to talk through how the remaining parent would take care of the kids, the level of financial impact the impending death would have on the family and the subsequent downsizing that would be necessary to accommodate the income shortfall.

I was disturbed by this conversation. When I was alone with my friend later, I asked if she was bothered by it, too, but she was not. She said it was not unusual for her family to have these kinds of conversations and that, in fact, they expected a traumatic event to sabotage their *Leave It to Beaver* life. As time went on, my friend's mother was diagnosed with cancer, underwent years of treatment and struggle, and died as a victim to the cancer she had expected would come many years prior to her diagnosis.

In contrast to this family's story, the three stories from the Bible we are studying in this chapter demonstrate what it looks like to make steady choices of faith rather than doubt. Zacharias and Elizabeth, the faithful older couple who became the parents of John the Baptist, are the first example. While Zacharias initially expressed doubt when the angel Gabriel appeared to foretell the pregnancy (see Luke 1:11–20), Elizabeth received Gabriel's announcement with gratitude and faith:

> After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."
>
> Luke 1:24–25

Mary, too, demonstrated faith in response to Gabriel's announcement to her that she would give birth to Jesus, despite being a virgin and unmarried. This has

always impressed me. She says, “Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Mary’s words express a quiet and sincere faith that God was able to do what Gabriel had declared to her. She did not express panic, fear or unbelief.

Finally, we see that Philip, too, was a man of faith. He demonstrated tremendous faith after the outbreak of persecution that came upon the early Church. Instead of hiding under a rock and keeping his mouth shut to save his life, we read that Philip went down to Samaria and preached about Jesus to the Samaritans (see Acts 8:5). Fear and doubt would have constricted Philip’s actions and silenced his words, but faith was the action and voice he expressed by going to Samaria and preaching the Gospel there.

As we look at these individuals, we likely see some contrasts between their faith and our upbringing. Sometimes our upbringing can hardwire doubt into our mindset. But doubt is every bit as much a choice as faith is, and we must never surrender the power to choose faith over doubt.

I saw the reality of this choice in the life of one of my friends who is a single mom with three children. She did not have the benefit of growing up in a stable home, and she did not have access to a good education, so her choices for employment were limited. Even so, she is a hard worker. I have known her for more than twenty years, and I have seen her choose faith again and again, even in dire circumstances.

I remember a season when one of her kids was in high school and making some poor and even dangerous decisions. My friend was concerned about her child and would, from time to time, melt into a puddle of tears, due to her grave concern. Yet every time she swam in those tears, she would maintain that God was bigger than the choices her child made. She would speak Bible promises to hold herself together in those dark days.

Over time, her child began to see the traps the enemy was setting and how getting into those traps, rather than nestling in God’s truths, was a choice. It took a few years, but my friend’s child got out of those traps and is today a healthy adult, a college graduate and happily married. My friend made daily decisions to choose faith over doubt, and her child did, too, eventually. This led to strength and success.

They Elevated the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is kept as a high priority in supernatural families. First, we see the Holy Spirit all over the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Consider the

following verses:

> "And he [John the Baptist] will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb."
>
> Luke 1:15

> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
>
> Luke 1:41

> And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied.
>
> Luke 1:67

In these verses, we see that all three immediate members of John the Baptist's family were filled with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit in Elizabeth's womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit when Mary greeted her. And Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit after his son was born and Zacharias confirmed his name.

We see this reality at work with Mary, too. She asked Gabriel how she would get pregnant, since she was a virgin, and Gabriel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Mary's pregnancy was a supernatural event, due to the fact that the Holy Spirit came upon her to make it happen.

We also see that when Philip preached about Jesus in Samaria, he paved the way for the apostles to later come and lay hands on the Samaritans so they could receive the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:14–17). When Peter and John came to Samaria, a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit was launched in that region. This was one of the first steps to fulfilling Jesus' instructions about preaching the Gospel in Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth (see Acts 1:8).

I think this is something for us to consider and pray for our families. I have the honor of having grown up in the church that my husband and I now pastor. This means I have seen many families keep a deep commitment to the Holy Spirit from generation to generation. This generational mindset is often applied to ministers and pastors, but several families in our church who have no background in the ministry received a deep reverence for the Holy Spirit from their parents. These families now have kids and grandkids who are all passionate to stay in step with the Holy Spirit, and some of them work for airline companies or in other secular industries. Let's avoid the misconception that says only Christian leaders can have a continuous flow of the Holy Spirit throughout the generations!

At the same time, I am inspired when that happens, too. Consider the example of Bill Johnson and his family. Bill Johnson pastors Bethel Church in Redding, California, where his dad pastored before him. Bethel Church has been a leading influence for the move of the Holy Spirit for decades and is a deep well for connecting people around the world to the Holy Spirit. Bill comes from a rich heritage of parents, grandparents and forefathers who made the Holy Spirit a priority, and this value is continuing to be expressed through his adult children today.

They Took Risks

Supernatural families also tend to be risk-takers. Take, for example, Elizabeth and Zacharias, who adopted a simple acceptance of Elizabeth's pregnancy well after her years of childbearing had concluded. It is unlikely they knew the statistical risks and complications associated with being pregnant well into one's older years like we do today. I do not think they were entirely clueless that her late pregnancy would be dicey—being pregnant is hard enough on the body of a young woman, to say nothing of how the body of an older woman will accommodate such significant changes!—but following God is risky, and that was certainly the case here, with Elizabeth and Zacharias.

Mary and Joseph made risky decisions, too. Mary began taking risks when she agreed with Gabriel that she would become pregnant out of wedlock in a supercharged religious culture that would likely stone her for such immoral behavior, no matter whether she claimed an "angelic visitation" or not. She also took a chance that her family would not understand the supernatural nature of her pregnancy, which may be why she went to spend a few months with Elizabeth.

Joseph also took several risks in leading his family. Possibly one of the major risks he took is the one mentioned in Matthew 2:13–15. In these verses, we see Joseph had a dream about the danger baby Jesus was in because Herod was looking to kill Him. After being warned and instructed in the dream, Joseph got up that night and moved his family to Egypt to protect Jesus from the murderous intentions of Herod. Joseph made risky decisions to protect his family.

Philip was also a risk-taker. This seems obvious, given his choice to keep preaching no matter where he went and despite the murderous threats of Saul, who was intent on stomping out any news about Jesus that might spread (see Acts 8:3). He also took a chance when he shared Jesus with the Ethiopian eunuch (see Acts 8:26–39). Rather than being silenced by these various risks,

Philip seemed emboldened to speak about Jesus, no matter where he found himself going.

During my upbringing, I never gave much thought to risk. My parents did not express any reservations when I was in my early teens and went with our youth pastor to street-witness on Friday nights along Colfax Avenue in central Denver, which ran in front of strip clubs and sex shops. They also were not overly concerned when I was fourteen and planned to spend a summer in Nigeria doing missions work.

Probably the time I saw my mom the most oblivious to risk was when she was preaching about Jesus to a crowd of more than one hundred thousand people in Karachi, Pakistan. On the last night of our public meetings, the crowd was so keen to connect with Jesus that they had pressed their way almost to the edge of the stage by the end of my mom's sermon. When I came up to her while she was preaching to let her know it was time to move on to the next portion of the schedule, she looked at me in surprise, unaware that this large crowd was almost touching the stage and that we were close to being in a dangerous situation.

As I said, during my upbringing, I did not have much awareness of or respect for risk. Consequently, my family has had an abundance of supernatural experiences. One of these experiences happened when I was ministering in North Carolina at a church. As I was speaking, I felt the Holy Spirit lead me to minister a verse from Acts 17 to a couple concerning their son giving his life to Jesus. I had never seen this couple before, and I had no idea if they even had a son.

I began to argue with the Holy Spirit about giving this couple such a specific word from God. It is one thing to step out with direction from the Holy Spirit to give general encouragement. It is a different level of risk when the Holy Spirit compels you to be more specific!

I began to minister to the couple by agreeing with the general encouragement that their family would come to Jesus. But I continued to feel the Holy Spirit urging me to be specific about their son. Back and forth I went, arguing with the Holy Spirit about it, until I finally surrendered and jumped into the deep end.

"I feel the Holy Spirit saying that you have a son who doesn't follow Jesus and that you've been praying for this son," I said. "The Holy Spirit is working in his heart to lead him to Jesus, regardless of what you see or hear from him."

I kept my eyes closed as I shared this specific word because I did not want to be affected by their facial expressions. I wanted to stay in step with the Holy Spirit.

After the service, I went to lunch with the pastor and his wife and asked about the couple and the word I had given them about their son. The pastor said the

encouragement could not have been more accurate. The couple had two sons, neither of whom were serving God, and the couple was desperate to see their young men surrender their lives to Jesus. I had taken the risk of giving them the word I heard, and I am grateful God met my risk with abundant confirmation. Now I am eager to hear when those young men become followers of Jesus!

They Spread the Faith

A fourth characteristic of supernatural families is that they are contagious—and I do not mean that in the sense of viruses or bacteria. I mean that their faith is generative, not contained within themselves.

Consider the examples of Jesus and John the Baptist. Their parents were aware that their sons' lives were rooted in divine mandates for multiplied expression and impact. Indeed, John the Baptist was the forerunner for Jesus and blazed the trail for people to connect with Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ and Son of the living God. Consider the impact John the Baptist had in Israel at his time. Priests and Levites came to him, inquiring about his identity (see John 1:19). Crowds came to him to be baptized (see Matthew 3:5–6; Luke 3:7, 15–17, 21–22). And he confronted religious and political leaders of his day (see Matthew 3:7–10; Luke 3:19–20).

Jesus was altogether magnetic, too. People could not stay away from Him—not religious leaders, like Nicodemus (see John 3:1–21); not wayfaring, ostracized women, like the woman at the well (see John 4:7–30); not tax collectors, like Zaccheus (see Luke 19:1–10). And there were heaps more. Indeed, Jesus said of Himself, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32). Jesus was irresistible!

Philip, too, was a man who spread the news about Jesus wherever he went, as we have already seen. But we also see that he had four daughters, all of whom were prophetesses (see Acts 21:8–9). Clearly, his spiritual lineage carried on to his daughters, who exercised their gifts for others.

For supernatural families, you could say that Psalm 145:4 is the golden standard: "One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts."

When I think about my own family and heritage in this way, I am moved by how many of my preceding generations, as well as my husband's ancestors, God has touched. I see the Gospel spreading through my mom's ministry and my ministry and now through my kids. It is my conviction, from both biblical

foundations and personal experience, that God intends our faith to be contagious and continuous through generations.

We do not need to look far to find modern-day examples of families of faith who are contagious. One such example is the Osteen family. I grew up knowing about Joel Osteen's dad, John Osteen. To me, Pastor John was larger than life. I remember watching him as a little girl, when my mom ministered at his church in Houston. At that time, Pastor John's wife, Dodie, was in the hospital, on the verge of death because of the cancer that had overtaken her body. I watched Pastor John and listened to his words. While I knew he was concerned, I also saw him choose faith over fear.

I remember wondering at that time about his kids, who were about my age, and how they were handling this crisis with their mom. I have heard them say that while those were dark days, their family decided to keep their faith in Jesus' healing power strong and to dismiss the fear and panic that could have overtaken their minds and emotions. More than thirty years later, each adult child of John and Dodie Osteen is loving and serving Jesus with contagious faith and maximizing the talents God has given them by spreading the love of Jesus wherever they go and however they can.

They Defied Convention

The last characteristic of supernatural families is that they are unconventional. This is probably my favorite characteristic, not because I am a rebel, but because it seems God has infinite expressions for the unique creativity He implanted in us rather than the stereotypical paradigms that our world endeavors to press upon each of us.

Consider what Gabriel told Zacharias when he doubted Gabriel's announcement about the supernatural birth that was to come. Zacharias expressed conventionality and doubt when he replied, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years" (Luke 1:18). Gabriel affirmed Elizabeth's supernatural pregnancy, despite the conventional norms of her age that would have rendered a pregnancy unlikely.

Over the course of the succeeding nine months, Zacharias had a change of heart and became supportive of his wife's unconventional pregnancy. Additionally, they chose to defy the convention of their time when they named their son John. In their day, a son would normally be named after his father (see Luke 1:59). Zacharias surprised everyone when he confirmed John's name. Immediately after that, he received back his ability to speak.

It is also easy to see that Mary and Joseph were anything but conventional. Joseph agreed to take Mary as his wife, even though she was pregnant as a virgin. Furthermore, we read that despite their getting married, they did not have sex until after Jesus' birth (see Matthew 1:24–25).

It was also more than a little abnormal that Joseph and Mary received angelic visitations, in addition to the shepherds and magi who popped by for visits after Jesus was born. And it was entirely unconventional for Joseph to move his new family to Egypt for a few years until Herod died. There was nothing average or conventional about Joseph or Mary.

Philip was anything but conventional, too. Rather than preaching to Jews, he preached to Samaritans and an Ethiopian, defying the Jewish traditions of his day. Remember that Jews viewed Gentiles with disdain and inferiority. Furthermore, Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses, the only such mention of daughters like this in the whole New Testament.

The most unconventional decisions I make pertain to my work with Saving Moses, and specifically our NightCare outreach, which I have mentioned in previous chapters. The outreach itself is unconventional—taking care of the babies and toddlers of sex workers in highly impoverished countries while their moms work. But it also invites me to do unconventional things.

I will never forget the night in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, when I took my youngest son to a shady part of the city. I was looking for more babies and toddlers to serve with this ministry. We made our way through a dark alleyway, only to find babies at the end of the trek who had no one to look after them. On that same night, my son and I stumbled upon a miniature brothel, discreet with curtains but brimming with toddlers and babies who meandered through this brothel as if it was their normal environment.

While it may seem unconventional for me to have taken my son with me into that shady neighborhood, let's remember that the unconventional can lead to the supernatural. Because of our experiences that night, we were able to open a NightCare shelter in that exact neighborhood. We have been taking care of those babies and toddlers now for more than three years.

I have taken the charge to carry the genuine love of Jesus to the least of the least on our planet today: the babies of prostitutes. Clearly, this is nothing less than unconventional. Yet in this wonderful ministry, I have experienced God's supernatural power and provision in unique and moving ways. Furthermore, my daughter is now keen to do short-term work in one of our NightCare centers, and I can see that becoming a reality in the near future.

Conforming to convention is often the death call for supernatural living. But having a supernatural family is not *carte blanche* to be wacky or dysfunctional.

Having a supernatural family is about walking with the Holy Spirit. It is about maintaining a daily balance between godly wisdom and unconventional obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

If you want to have a supernatural family, commit yourself to the same characteristics to which our biblical examples were committed. Cultivate faith. Be willing to take risks. Maintain a close walk with the Holy Spirit. Let your faith become contagious. And say yes to an unconventional life.

Remember, too, that each member of your family has a unique journey to take with Jesus. Their individuality is every bit as important as your own. We make grave errors when we try to force our family members to walk the same path we walk. I say this because I see a wide array of abilities in my family. Some of my family members have astounding creativity; they love to write music and lead worship. Some are nothing less than brilliant; I can see them letting God direct their brilliance toward medical research, political leadership or business deals. Other members of my family have astounding social skills that God can use in amazing ways.

While the message of Jesus' redeeming love never changes, the methods of how His love is communicated can change and adapt with each new generation. Let's allow that to happen.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank You for setting up the human experience with our heavenly Father around a family paradigm. I pray You would help me live as a supernatural member of Your family. When I struggle with doubt, interrupt my thoughts and emotions to strengthen my faith. Where I have neglected to make You important in my life, forgive me and help me to change these deficiencies. Let my faith in Jesus and love for people be appealing and contagious to the individuals in my life. Help me take risks when I would rather run and hide. And thank You for helping me not to conform to the world around me but rather to make consistent decisions to live in step with You.

I pray for my family, that You would help them to know You and to live in a deep relationship with You, fulfilled, vibrant and effective. I pray for each member of my family who is estranged from You. Please massage Your love

into their hearts and dispel any demonic distortion that keeps them from responding to Your love. Thank You for choosing me to be Your child. Amen.

Go Further

1. In what ways would you like to see the Holy Spirit move in your family?
2. Given your history and your personality, are you more likely to choose faith or doubt as a default?
3. Are you more inclined to be risky or play it safe? How does this affect your family?
4. In what ways could your faith be more contagious?
5. In your perspective, what are the differences between being unconventional and being kooky?

8

Who's Your Friend?

I used to have a relative who was a hermit, and this is the honest truth. When he tried to live in urban settings, things could get both crazy and dangerous fast. He used to carry a gun before concealed-weapon permits were legalized. After several years of urban endurance, he moved to a remote part of the country and lived in isolation until his death.

I bring up this relative as an extreme example of the opposite way God has wired us to live. We are designed for social interaction, whether we are introverts or extroverts. With that said, relationships can be difficult. No one seems to get an exemption when it comes to this.

Truthfully, I struggle with relationships almost daily. Some days I feel good about how my relationships are going. My marriage feels healthy, my kids are doing well, my friendships and family relationships feel close, and my work colleagues and I are smoothy-groovy. But it is a rare day when all of my relationships are steady and tranquil at the same time. And that is exactly why I need to write this chapter.

In contrast to my hermit relative, I believe the Holy Spirit would have us live in constructive communion with others. Furthermore, I am convinced, based on the Bible and personal experience, that the Holy Spirit is keen to help us overcome relationship hurdles. Consider what Paul says in Philippians 2:1–2:

> Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

From these verses, we can see God wants us to live with appropriate levels of interaction and fellowship with the people around us. But I am guessing, like me, you have struggled with relationships from time to time and have encountered a few hiccups along the way. I would also bet dollars to donuts that you want to

see the Holy Spirit work supernaturally in your relationships as much as I want that for myself.

Let's look at some common relational hurdles, then, and how the Holy Spirit can help us overcome these challenges.

Our Relationship Hurdles

I would name our most common relationship hurdles to be rejection, poor communication and the absence of forgiveness. Let's take a look at each one.

Rejection

We have all experienced the pain that comes with rejection. I experienced it one time in elementary school, during recess. I was running, tripped on the pavement and scraped my face through some gravel. I went to the nurse's office, and she cleaned me up and advised me to leave the scrape open to get some air.

When I got back to my classroom, I was anathema. No one wanted to get near me, and I could hear the whispers:

"Man, she's super ugly!"

"I don't want to play with her at recess anymore—she might rub off on me."

"Keep away from her. You might catch it!"

This is still an unpleasant memory for me, even forty years later. It is the kind of thing that can lead us to want to reject others before they can reject us.

I wonder if this is what Thomas, Jesus' disciple, felt when he discovered the other disciples had encountered the risen Jesus before he had. Maybe he felt like pushing them all—even Jesus—away. I am sure you recall his words to the group of disciples when he heard they had seen Jesus without him:

> The other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."
>
> John 20:25

Maybe Thomas felt the strong pain of rejection in this moment. Maybe he felt like an outsider for the first time with his friends. Before, when they had followed Jesus through His years of ministry, he had been a part of the group. This time, he was left out.

We then learn Jesus visited the group again eight days later, and Thomas was there:

> After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”
>
> John 20:26–28

Not only did Thomas doubt the news about Jesus’ resurrection before he saw it for himself, but I would surmise he also felt like an outsider with his disciple buddies for those eight long days before Jesus showed up on the scene again. I am certain the other disciples did not isolate Thomas with their words or deeds, but I cannot help but feel sympathetic toward Thomas for not having experienced Jesus’ appearance for himself. He likely felt left out.

Rejection is a difficult obstacle to overcome. If we ruminate on an event where we might have been rejected, the experience can turn into a mindset and a permanent chip on our shoulder. I have met more than my fair share of people who play the perpetual victim. Regardless of my efforts to connect with them or affirm who they are, they frame our relationship in rejection terms.

Sometimes people use the rejection mindset as a defense mechanism to keep themselves from getting hurt. Unfortunately, such protection does more than just keep them from getting hurt. It also keeps them from the experience of close friendships.

When I have encountered this defense mechanism in other people and find it difficult to be close with them, I have ended up praying for them to experience the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth who can lead them out of their deception and into the glorious love that comes from walking in close fellowship with the Holy Spirit and in close relationship with other people.

Maybe you know this experience. In fact, maybe you are someone who rejects other people in order to protect yourself from getting hurt first. This would be a good place to pause and ask the Holy Spirit to help you repent and lead you into truth. It might also be helpful to think about the people you might need to forgive, since this defense mechanism can sometimes be an indication of unforgiveness. (We will talk a bit more about forgiveness later in the chapter.)

Rejection can become a splinter in our souls. And sometimes, as followers of Jesus, we reject other believers based on their experience with the Holy Spirit. I will never forget my first day at my Lutheran middle school, when someone whispered in my ear, “I know you speak in tongues!” Her secret message immediately made me aware I was *different*. I was also in a charismatic Bible study once where one attendee shamed another group member because she was not Spirit-filled.

Rejection is hurtful for everyone, including the person who is doing the rejecting. But I think this is where, once again, we can learn from Thomas. We see, in looking at his story, that even though he likely felt like an outsider with the other disciples, he did not isolate himself from them. He voiced his disappointment, listing some conditions for restoring his belief in Jesus, and then he *stayed connected*. The next time Jesus appeared, Thomas was not found sulking and detached, nursing his wounds and keeping himself separate from the group. Instead, he was still there with his buddies, keeping close so he would not miss out on Jesus' appearance next time. And when Jesus did appear, He was able to speak directly to Thomas to address his doubts. He could only do that because Thomas stuck around.

Jesus went the extra mile to reconcile Thomas to Himself, and I believe the Holy Spirit does the same thing with us today. Indeed, I believe the Holy Spirit works in and through us to bring reconciliation where there has been rejection. Sometimes this reconciliation happens through a conversation, like Jesus had with Thomas. Sometimes it happens through faithful actions that express reconciliation. For example, I have a friend with an abundantly busy life who, despite her busyness, checks in on me with text messages, voicemails and sweet notes in the mail. When I hear from her, I am reminded how much actions speak louder than words. Her faithful actions toward our friendship mean so much to me.

Evidence of the Holy Spirit doing such supernatural reconciliation abounds in the book of Acts. We can see it in Acts 10, when Peter helped the Gentiles become accepted into the newly formed Church. We also see the Holy Spirit reconciling believers in Acts 6, when there was a conflict over food distribution for Greek widows; in this case, the conflict was reconciled after the believers prayed and received direction from the Holy Spirit to select men who could help with the logistics. Philip was part of the Holy Spirit's reconciliation plan when he preached the Gospel to the Samaritans in Acts 8. And we see the Holy Spirit reconciling Saul to His divine plans when Ananias was sent to lay hands on Saul in Acts 9, despite Ananias's massive reservations about praying for this murderous persecutor of the Christian faith. Where humans specialize in rejection, the Holy Spirit organizes reconciliation!

I have seen the Holy Spirit do this work of reconciliation in my own life. For example, a few years ago I received an unexpected note from a friend, asking if I would like to meet up for coffee. The reason I knew this experience was orchestrated supernaturally was because a break in this friendship had occurred and lasted almost fifteen years. We had zero interaction or communication in those years. It was all the more supernatural because I had recently finished

reading R. T. Kendall's book *Total Forgiveness* and felt the Holy Spirit dealing with my heart to forgive various offenses, including what happened with this friend.

I agreed to meet my friend for coffee. We had a lovely chat, catching up about our kids, husbands and other events in life. At the end of the conversation, we talked about how our relationship had been hurtful to each other. We asked each other's forgiveness and talked about reconciling our relationship. To this day, while we still experience ups and downs, we are nevertheless friends. In my thinking, this is because of the reconciling work of the Holy Spirit.

Poor Communication

I am the mom of three teenagers, and there is not a day that goes by when there is not some kind of misunderstanding that happens in our home. I would like my children to continue improving their conflict-resolution skills, but there are a plethora of occasions when Reece and I find it wise to intervene as parents. (This is the politically correct way of saying that both of us step into these conflicts between our kids with tedious regularity!)

Relationships rise and fall based on communication, so when the communication is lousy, the relationship suffers.

We find this to be the case with the early Church. On the Day of Pentecost, for example, there were some significant communication gaps. To begin, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room, there were no less than eight different languages being spoken in the group, and that is a massive challenge in its own right.

Furthermore, there was a communication chasm between the followers of Jesus and the Jewish population. One group believed Jesus was the Messiah, and the other group believed He was a dead heretic. Let's also remember that Jesus' followers were largely uneducated, compared to the pious religious adherents who were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festival.

All of these communication challenges could have sparked a massive conflict and even a bloodletting among them, but something supernatural happened instead. The Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus' followers as they were gathered together in the Upper Room. There were noteworthy demonstrations of the Holy Spirit that took the form of the sound of a rushing mighty wind, tongues of fire dancing over each believer's head and everyone speaking in languages they did not know.

From this supernatural demonstration, the followers of Jesus spilled into the streets of Jerusalem and spoke in the languages they did not know. The Jewish

people in attendance were nothing less than shocked by these followers of Jesus who were declaring the mighty deeds of God in a variety of foreign languages. We see in Acts 2:12, “And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’”

It seems to me the Holy Spirit gave Jesus’ followers this prime opportunity to unravel all of the misunderstandings and speculations that had come about after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension. Indeed, Peter stood up and took advantage of the moment and began reconciling the events of that day, beginning with Joel’s prophecy (see Acts 2:14–36). He explained that Jesus, whom they crucified, was risen from the dead and sitting at the right hand of God. Peter was endeavoring, with the Holy Spirit’s help, to resolve the mystery and misunderstanding that had been circulating about Jesus’ identity.

We may not have had experiences quite this profound ourselves, but we have all had misunderstandings with other people, whether they came about through conversations or situations. I have had more than my share of times when someone let me know I said or did something hurtful and I was clueless about it. There have also been times when I have been hurt by someone else’s words or actions. Being hurt is not the issue, but communicating to repair and resolve it is very much a work the Holy Spirit does. And sometimes the work that the Holy Spirit does is not what we would expect.

A few years ago, I had an occasion where someone expressed an interest in being friends. I find these sentiments kind when they happen, so I carved out some time when my kids were in school to cultivate a friendship. But after a while, I began to feel uncomfortable around this person. I began to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help me understand what was happening. Then I began to see that the person’s motives were not honest. Instead of being friends, they wanted to use me to help them get some things they wanted in their life.

While the person’s communication with me was murky, the Holy Spirit’s communication was clear, and the Spirit started to guide me to walk away from that friendship. At the time, I did not feel I should confront the person on their questionable motives, so I left them in God’s hands, mourned the loss of the perceived friendship, forgave them and moved on. From time to time, I still pray for that person and ask that God would continue to bless them and direct their steps.

Absence of Forgiveness

“I could never forgive them for how much they hurt me.” I have heard these words on more than one occasion, and they grieve my soul to no end. I have

heard them spoken by couples who have gone through acrimonious divorces, by boyfriends or girlfriends who are going through breakups, by people whose friendships have unraveled and by people in different job or school scenarios.

Usually when a person shares these words with me, they have a justification in their mind that makes it right for them to decline forgiveness. But the truth is that when we refuse to forgive, no one is more hurt by this decision than we are. It is like that famous saying that tells us when we refuse to forgive, it is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

Even in the best of circumstances, forgiveness can be extremely difficult. But let's consider how the Holy Spirit can help us become forgiving people.

I think one of the most powerful examples of forgiveness in the Bible is recorded in Acts 8, when Stephen is being stoned by the Jewish leaders who were enraged with him. The last thing Stephen says before he dies is, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60).

Prior to speaking these last words, Stephen witnessed to the Jewish leaders about God's redemptive plan throughout Jewish history that led to the culmination of Jesus dying on the cross for their sins. The leaders did not respond well to Stephen's sermon, but that is the place where we see Stephen lean into the Holy Spirit for help. We read:

> But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
>
> Acts 7:55–56

Instead of trying to forgive the leaders in his own strength, Stephen leaned into the Holy Spirit for the focus and power he needed to forgive. Stephen models for us how to forgive even in the most horrendous and intense conditions. Rather than focusing on his accusers, how they had wronged him and all of their sins and shortcomings, Stephen turned his attention to Jesus.

This is an essential action we must choose if we are going to actively and effectively forgive. Indeed, when I nurse and rehearse the pain and injuries I have sustained in hurtful relationships, that makes it all the more difficult to choose forgiveness. But when I nestle into the Holy Spirit and ask for help to direct my focus on Jesus, then I find the strength I need to continue with the decision to forgive.

Stephen let his focus be consumed with Jesus so that regardless of what was happening around him, he had the power to forgive, all the way to the end of his life. When we invite the Holy Spirit to help us with our focus, we can experience

the presence of Jesus like never before and receive the divine help we so desperately need to live forgiveness as a lifestyle, not just an occasional feeling.

God's Relationship Plan

God has put many important components in place for relationships to be healthy and functional. Let's look at those now.

The MEC Framework

The first is what I call the MEC framework, which stands for *mutuality*, *equality* and *commitment*. The best place I see these three components play out with the help of the Holy Spirit is in Acts 10, where we find the interchange between Peter and the Roman centurion Cornelius, who was a God-fearing man.

At the beginning of this story, the Holy Spirit worked mutuality into the hearts of Peter and Cornelius by giving each man a distinct vision that motivated them to reach out to someone they would not normally pursue. In a vision, Cornelius was told to send for Peter (see verses 1–6). The next day, Peter was told by the Holy Spirit to go with the men who appeared at his door (see verses 9–20). A relationship where one person does all the work lacks mutuality and is not sustainable, but the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of both men to make their relationship mutually agreeable.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit worked in each man's heart the ingredient of equality. It would have been normal for Cornelius, the centurion, to look down on Peter, an uneducated Jewish fisherman with no military experience whatsoever. It would also have been easy for Peter to feel superior to Cornelius, a Roman centurion who was not Jewish and did not follow Jewish laws concerning food and cleanliness (see verses 11–16). Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit worked in each man's heart a respect for the other, and this was essential for what the Holy Spirit wanted to accomplish between them.

Finally, both men allowed the Holy Spirit to work commitment into their hearts for the relationship and what the Holy Spirit wanted to do in and through them. The commitment on Cornelius's part was evidenced when he first encountered Peter: "Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him" (verses 24–25). Peter evidenced his commitment by making the journey to be with Cornelius and by saying, "That is

why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me" (verse 29).

In Acts 10, there is a massive demonstration of the Holy Spirit that comes as a result of these essential ingredients of mutuality, equality and commitment. Thankfully, both men let the Holy Spirit speak to them, and they were willing to be humble and change. Cornelius opened his house and heart for Peter to share the Gospel, and Peter surrendered his legalistic thinking to the Holy Spirit's adjustments. As a result, Peter began to share Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection with Cornelius. The Holy Spirit then added an exclamation point to the message:

> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.
>
> verses 44–45

The mutuality, equality and commitment that Cornelius and Peter allowed the Holy Spirit to work into their hearts and thoughts became the launching pad for the Holy Spirit to be poured out not only on Jewish believers, but also on Gentile believers. A further supernatural demonstration came on the heels of the experience: "For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God" (verse 46). When there is mutuality, equality and commitment in the fellowship of Jesus' followers, supernatural things can begin to happen.

I will never forget the time when I was entering high school and my friend and I prayed together at church after a sermon. My friend was going to be a senior in high school that year, but despite the difference in our ages, we were both serious about wanting God's presence in our lives. There was a mutuality, an equality and a commitment between us that exceeded our age difference.

We sat in the balcony at church while everyone shuffled down the stairs after being dismissed. We intended to stay an extra few minutes and pray together. I cannot remember what we were praying about, but I remember what happened after we began.

As we prayed, I felt something strong come around us. Although my eyes were closed, it seemed like giant headlights were shining through my eyelids. I freaked out and jumped away from my friend, who had the same reaction at the same moment.

We asked each other, "Did you feel that? What was that?"

The experience spooked both of us, and we ran down the stairs and into the church lobby, and we tried to dismiss the supernatural experience.

Like I said, when mutuality, equality and commitment exist, the Holy Spirit can begin to do supernatural things. Unfortunately, my friend and I were not quite ready for it. To this day, I regret getting spooked and running away. I still think back to that experience and tell the Holy Spirit that I will not run away the next time He wants to move like that.

Unity

When I read through the book of Acts, I am often captivated by the supernatural outpourings of the Holy Spirit that are described throughout the early chapters of the book. The events of Pentecost enrapture me, with the rushing mighty wind, the tongues of fire and everyone speaking in tongues (see Acts 2:1–4). Then in Acts 4:31, we find an astounding description of a prayer meeting that says, "And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness." We find more supernatural stuff in Acts 5, where people are getting healed by Peter's shadow and mass healings are happening throughout Jerusalem and the surrounding cities (see verses 14–16). Finally, in Samaria, an entire region is revolutionized by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:5–8). May these things happen in our day!

But let's take a deeper look at these events to see what they all have in common, as we ought not dismiss them as coincidental. When we look closer at each story, we find that one word precedes all of the supernatural demonstrations. It describes the condition of the people at each of the events, before any of the supernatural demonstrations occur.

Before the Day of Pentecost, it says in Acts 1:14, "These all with *one mind* were continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14, emphasis added). At the supernatural prayer meeting in Acts 4, we read, "And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with *one accord*" (Acts 4:24, emphasis added). Acts 5:12 says, "And they were all with *one accord* in Solomon's portico" (emphasis added). Finally, in Acts 8:6, we read, "The crowds with *one accord* were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing" (emphasis added).

Each of the supernatural events that happened was preceded by the group being in *one accord*. This is the Greek word *homothumadon*, and it means "to have one mind or to be in unity of purpose and thought." In other words, before each outpouring or expression of the Holy Spirit, there was unity among those who were gathered together. In Acts 1, they were waiting for Jesus' promise of power to be released. In Acts 4, they were praying because of the wicked

intimidation the Jewish leaders had exercised against Peter and John for healing the paralytic man in Acts 3. The same holds true for the events in Acts 8, where the Samaritans were unified in attention as they heard and saw demonstration of the Gospel from Philip.

Lest we get too dismissive of this demonstration in Acts, let's finish by considering Jesus' final words in the presence of His followers at the Last Supper in John 17. Here, Jesus was not speaking directly to His followers but was praying to His heavenly Father. He prayed no less than four times in this chapter that the Father would unify His followers (see verses 11, 21, 22, 23). I think it is powerful that the last prayer Jesus' disciples heard Him pray was filled with intercession to the Father on their behalf to keep them unified.

Is it possible that where we find unity in the Church today, we will see a free flow of the Holy Spirit? Is it possible that where there is an absence of unity in the Church today, there will also be a restriction of the moving of the Holy Spirit? I think these questions are important for us to think about in light of our American tendency toward personal rights and individuality.

It is, of course, indisputable that God has made each of us unique. But in our individuality, I believe we are to live in complementary relationships with our fellow believers, rather than exercising a competitive or combative spirit. I also believe we can disagree without being disagreeable if we look for the ground we share in common rather than isolate ourselves from each other in judgmental exclusivity.

I found such unity in the African country of Eritrea, where I had the privilege of attending a prayer meeting more than twenty years ago. My friend told me the prayer meetings were a powerful time in God, but I was hesitant to attend because they happened super early in the morning and did not take place in English. My friend convinced me not to be dissuaded by these obstacles, and I am so glad I went. I am still amazed at how strongly I felt God's presence in that prayer meeting, even though I did not understand a word that was spoken. Despite the language barrier, there was a unity among everyone in attendance. We were there for a common purpose: to exalt Jesus and to absorb the presence of the Holy Spirit.

This experience was a defining moment for me. For the first time, I could appreciate that language differences are not an impediment to God's presence—similar to the Day of Pentecost, when the followers of Jesus spoke in many languages!

The Secret Sauce

As we finish this chapter, let's consider a few essential ingredients the Holy Spirit wants to stir into our relationships on a continual basis:

- genuine love
- conflict resolution
- the acceptance of seasons

Romans 5:5 says, "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Every relationship goes through peaks and valleys, but genuine love remains steady, regardless of the terrain. We would be wise to let the Holy Spirit love people through us, rather than trying to love others from our weak and fickle stash of human love.

Also, when Paul stresses the importance of resolving conflicts in Ephesians 4:29–32, he does it in the context of not grieving the Holy Spirit. Consider his words:

> Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

To resolve conflict, we need to remember a few essential truths. First, forgiveness is not optional. Also, we need to seek to understand before being understood—to listen to resolve, rather than reply. Instead of attacking the person, discuss their actions. And lastly, ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and insight. Conflicts are fertile ground for distortion and deception.

Not everyone is meant to be our closest friend, and there are seasons for relationships. Here is a helpful guideline for relationships: "Some are for a season, some are for a reason, but only a few are for a lifetime." Let's celebrate the friendships God provides for us, whether they are for a specific purpose, a defined time or the golden few who stay with us for long swaths of time.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, help me in my relationships. I give You freedom to work Your love into my heart so that it can be expressed through my words and actions. Lead me in Your truth about myself so I can let You help me grow into who You have made me to be. Shed abroad Your love in my heart so that my love for others will be untainted and pure. Thank You for loving me through the relationships You have placed in my life and for helping me to let Your love shine through me. Amen.

Go Further

1. In what ways have you experienced rejection in relationships? Do you tend to be someone who receives rejection from others or who rejects others first?
2. How would you like the Holy Spirit to help you communicate better in your relationships?
3. Where do you experience mutuality, equality and commitment in your relationships?
4. What is your experience of forgiveness? Are there people in your life you need to forgive? Are there people from whom you need to seek forgiveness?
5. What places in your life need some unity work?

9

The Supernatural in Daily Life

Mr. Lopez, you will live and not die!"

These are the words I heard one of our pastors speak repeatedly over my friend's dad. Mr. Lopez had an accident at work, and during his recovery at the hospital, he suffered two traumatic medical emergencies within minutes of each other. The doctors said he would most likely die but that if he survived, he would have virtually no brain function.

During the dark and discouraging weeks that followed, we prayed for Mr. Lopez. And one of our pastors visited him frequently, praying Psalm 118:17 over him: "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD" (NKJV).

Slowly, Mr. Lopez began to recover. He opened his eyes, then responded to instructions. He began to move, then speak. He defied every prognosis the medical professionals declared. To this day, a few decades later, he lives with some lingering effects of that traumatic event but is walking, speaking and carrying on a normal life.

There are several things I love about this testimony. First, I love that Mr. Lopez was an average guy who worked in a print shop to earn a living for his family. He was not a spiritual giant, nor was he a deacon or elder in the church. His family enjoyed lacrosse, the Denver Broncos and delicious tamales.

I also love that the miracles he experienced came in all sizes and shapes. Some miracles seemed small, like when he first moved his eyelids. Some miracles were big, like when he began to walk. And, of course, there were the financial miracles, too, that concerned paying for the medical expenses and his day-to-day essentials.

Mr. Lopez personifies what the supernatural can look like in our daily lives. But let's be honest. Sometimes our daily lives get monotonous. A blur of repeated activities stretches into the future with no finish line. Washing the same socks, rinsing the same dishes, driving the same route, greeting the same people —on and on it goes.

In the monotony of these days, the danger of defaulting to autopilot is insipid, and we run the risk of becoming trapped in mindless oblivion. But thinking about the presence and work of the supernatural in daily life can be the antidote for this lifeless drone existence.

How can this become real in our lives?

Parallels with Scripture

Let's visit a couple of stories in Scripture—specifically, the events surrounding Jesus' resurrection—to see how this happened in the lives of the disciples.

The Resurrection

For starters, we have to consider Jesus' resurrection because it is the pivot point between Jesus' earthly ministry and His disciples' transformation into the supernatural lifestyle.

We understand from the various gospel accounts that Jesus died a painful, gory death through the crucifixion. Joseph of Arimathea petitioned Pilate for Jesus' body, which was granted, and he prepared Jesus for burial in a tomb. After Jesus' body was laid there, the tomb was closed, sealed and guarded by Roman guards.

On the third day, Jesus was raised from the dead. Here is where we learn something important. Paul wrote in Romans 8:11, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you . . ." From this verse, we learn Jesus was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, resurrection is one of the Holy Spirit's specialties.

We also read that on the night of Jesus' resurrection, the doors to the Upper Room were shut because Jesus' disciples were afraid of the Jews (see John 20:19–22). They were afraid because the Jewish leaders had crucified Jesus and there was a good chance these same leaders would next come after Jesus' followers.

In the middle of all this, Jesus supernaturally appeared in the room and said to them, "Peace be with you." In my thinking, His appearance must have added to their fright at first, since the last time they had seen Him was when He was hanging on a cross, bleeding to death. They knew He had been interred in a tomb, and strange rumors had started to circulate about His body having gone missing. Now He was standing in the midst of them, apparently risen from the dead. It is no wonder He said, "Peace be with you"!

In an effort to settle them with more than mere words, Jesus also showed them His hands, feet and side. Why would He do that? I think He did it so they would know it was Him and not some poser. He was giving them permission to inspect the crucifixion evidence on His body so they would know it was legitimately Him.

We learn from this that the miracles the Holy Spirit does can stand up to inspection.

This reminds me of the time my husband, Reece, and I were driving to Santa Fe for a weekend vacation. I fell asleep in the car as he was driving. The next thing I knew, I was jarred awake by a semitruck pinning itself against my car door. Reece had fallen asleep, too, and had woken up just in time to make a hard swerve right to avoid an embankment, which slammed us into the fuel tank of the semitruck in the lane next to us.

We pulled off the road, and I remember sitting in the tow truck, praying with Reece that God would bring more good out of this accident than what we had started with. I remember looking at our wrecked car—specifically, my side of the car—and being astounded we had survived and did not have a single scratch. The car was mangled, and my door was smashed. But other than being shook up, we were unscathed.

We submitted the damage to our insurance company, who proceeded to total the car. After several weeks, I was sitting in Reece's office when he received a call from the insurance company. I could tell he was surprised by what they were saying. When he got off the phone, he told me they had totaled the car and would be giving us a check for the settlement.

When he told me the amount of the settlement, I was astounded. We had bought the car two years earlier for a certain amount, and now the insurance company was offering to give us more money than we had paid for it—a total miracle and answer to my prayer. I repeated what I thought I heard him telling me, just to verify I understood. I was "inspecting and verifying" the miracle. He agreed I had heard correctly.

God certainly answered our prayer. More good was brought out of the car accident than what we started with!

The Spirit's Breath

After Jesus proved His resurrection to His disciples, John 20:22 says, "He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" From this verse, we learn that Jesus' disciples received the Holy Spirit well before the Day of Pentecost that is recorded in Acts 2. In fact, I would suggest the Day of

Pentecost demonstrated whom they had already received on this earlier day in the Upper Room with Jesus.

This is important for a few reasons. Number one, let's consider the timing on this. Before Jesus breathed on His disciples, He was raised from the dead. Before He was raised from the dead, He was crucified. Before He was crucified, He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. And before going to the Garden of Gethsemane, He was at the Last Supper with His disciples, where He had given His followers an extensive introduction to the Holy Spirit.

So, when the Holy Spirit showed up on the Day of Pentecost with demonstrative power, Jesus' disciples did not freak out. They had already learned about the Holy Spirit from Jesus' teaching at the Last Supper, and Jesus had already given the Holy Spirit to them when He breathed on them in the Upper Room.

There is something we can learn here. When something new or foreign happens, many people grow distant or self-protective. They resist what is new and can react against it. Other people, like me, love when something fresh or new happens, but we are usually the exception. A majority of people need to understand what is going on before they accept new stuff.

Thankfully, Jesus had already given His followers a tutoring course on the Helper. We explored all of this back in chapter 2, where we imagined ourselves at the table of the Last Supper, as taught in John 14–16. So when He breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit, this was not alarming or unfamiliar. And now that they had been coached on the Holy Spirit and had also received Him, they were making progress. This was a significant step forward in seeing the supernatural become more integrated into their daily lives.

Going back to Romans 8:11, Paul said, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." We have already seen from this verse that the Holy Spirit was responsible for Jesus' resurrection. But we now can see from this verse that when Jesus breathed on His disciples, He breathed that same resurrection breath on them.

Let's look at the Greek to see what this could mean. In John 20:22, where it says that Jesus breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit, the Greek word for *breath* is the word *emphusao*. This is the only time in the entire New Testament that this word is used. The other times the word *breath* is used in the New Testament, it is the Greek word *pneuma*. *Pneuma* carries more of the idea of spirit and wind, but *emphusao* is connected to the idea of breathing in. Our English word *infuse* is similar in meaning to this Greek word.

This becomes all the more interesting when we consider that *emphusao* is also the word used in the Greek Old Testament in Genesis 2:7, where it says, "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." When God breathed into the dirt that He had formed, man became a living being. When Jesus breathed on His disciples in John 20:22, He told them to receive the Holy Spirit. In both places, the same Greek word is used.

When the Holy Spirit is infused into our lives—literally breathed into us—resurrection begins to spread into our daily living. Similar to what Adam and Jesus' disciples experienced, when the Holy Spirit is poured into our lives, we receive divine destiny and fresh life that is abundant, vibrant and overflowing.

I would suggest that Jesus' followers needed this divine infusion more than they could understand at that moment. If you think about the lives of these men, they formed the foundation for our faith and what became the Church. All but one of them died a brutal martyr's death. Considering everything they endured, including their atrocious and violent deaths, I do not think they could have done what they did without the presence and supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus' closest followers needed the Holy Spirit, then I would suggest we need the Holy Spirit all the more now in our modern world. I say this because the world in which we live has more pressures, more competing voices, more distractions and more demands. While the disciples faced the pressures of martyrdom—no small obstacle!—our lives carry a longer span and higher levels of complexity than theirs did. It is my resolute conviction that we cannot live out who God has made us to be without that breath of the Almighty and without having the Holy Spirit fully engaged in our daily lives.

It does not have to be spectacular. It just requires our obedience. It is like the story I heard of a little girl who was taking a walk with her dad. They passed an emergency room, and she said, "Daddy, let's go in and pray for the people who are sick." The dad was not sure how this would go over, but he wanted to encourage his young daughter not to be afraid about being obedient to God's promptings. So they went in and visited each room, asking if they could pray for anyone there. They also offered prayer to each person in the waiting room. They had a spectacular time praying for various people. Upon finishing, the little girl was overflowing with gratitude, sensing God's love and pleasure toward her.

Now, there is a difference between being infused by the Holy Spirit and what could be called "sucking wind." This idea of sucking wind reminds me of the day in high school when I tried out for the cross-country team. My only purpose for joining the team was to get in shape for the basketball season later in the

school year. Needless to say, it did not take me long to start "sucking wind," and I quit before the first day ended.

Sometimes our spiritual life starts running on fumes, and we find we are sucking wind. We need a fresh infusion of the Holy Spirit. The same happens in a host of other areas in our life, like our marriages, work, school, emotions and more.

Given this reality, now would be a good time to pause and take an inventory of the various areas of your life that need a fresh infusion of the Holy Spirit. I encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to infuse your life with the breath of the Almighty and to ask what areas in your life might, in fact, be "sucking wind." As you do this, here is a prayer that might be helpful:

> *Holy Spirit, breathe into me. Breathe into my life the breath of the Almighty. I need to sense You, and I want to be more connected with You. Increase my awareness of You, and be wholly free to breathe into every area of my life. Please help me to become increasingly sensitive to You. Thank You for being with me all the time. Amen.*

One last thing I will say about this resurrection breath is that it is challenging. It is challenging because it is experiential, not just cerebral. We can study the Holy Spirit, but Jesus never intended the Holy Spirit to be analyzed and dissected like a frog in a high school biology lab. On the other hand, if we do not study the Holy Spirit, how can we begin to recognize, let alone flow with, the Holy Spirit in our daily lives? Some people can get lost in the study of the Holy Spirit and never actually be filled, which makes them easy victims of a Spirit-less life. Others place such an emphasis on being filled with the Spirit, rather than studying Him, that they are oblivious to who the Holy Spirit is. This makes them easy prey for deception. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to grow us in our understanding of who He is and to teach us how to flow with Him in our daily living.

The Real Doubts

One of the next things to happen in this resurrection story is that we encounter Thomas. Now, we already looked at Thomas's story in chapter 8, where we considered how his not being in the Upper Room when Jesus first appeared may have made him feel left out or even rejected. But we also know Thomas's story to be one of someone who faced great doubt.

Have you ever struggled with doubt? That is a somewhat silly question, I know, because I do not know one thinking human who has not had some doubt challenges. I know I have struggled with doubt in my life. There was a season earlier in my life when I was deeply skeptical. Even though I adhered to the pillars of Christian faith, I doubted the Holy Spirit and anything I deemed irrational or supernatural. I went with my mom to a revival service during that time, and I suited up in my mental-doubt armor, ready for a likely assault.

But it never happened. Instead, I sensed the authentic presence of the Holy Spirit—and that was the end of my doubts.

Growing up in church, I had experienced the genuine presence of the Holy Spirit on several occasions and found the Holy Spirit irresistible. Consequently, anything that was authentic to the Holy Spirit was an automatic yes for me.

The same was true for Thomas. He had been around Jesus for almost three continuous years and was on board with following Him. But he did not want to follow someone else's idea of Jesus, nor was he going to take anyone else's word as truth for himself when it came to the crazy resurrection story. I appreciate Thomas's position when he said, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

And this is exactly what happened:

> After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"
>
> John 20:26–28

When I was younger, I used to read these verses about Thomas and feel provoked that he seemed to get the easy button for his doubts. When I tried to leverage the same verbiage with God from time to time, telling Him, "I won't believe unless You do these things," it never seemed to work for me. Indeed, I could easily see how a person might become more doubtful with such a mindset.

So, where does the Holy Spirit come into this picture? And how does the Holy Spirit help us to overcome our doubts? For starters, we have to be honest about our doubts because they are often rooted in something different from the construct for doubt we have built in our minds.

For example, I have a friend who used to be a strong believer in Jesus but turned away. He talks with me from time to time and uses big words and robust logic to rationalize the absence of faith in his thinking. But if you dig into a deeper conversation with him, it becomes clear he was hurt by a church leader

many years ago and never overcame his pain. Instead, he packed his pain into a little corner of his heart and constructed a sophisticated castle of rational thinking to explain away any perceived need for faith. Doubt is the armor that protects him from dealing with the pain from his past.

Doubt can also be rooted in being disappointed with God. Who has not asked God to do something that God has not done and been subsequently disappointed? How do we deal with this disappointment and doubt?

Again, the first step we have to take is to be honest with the Holy Spirit about our disappointment. Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, it seems pointless to masquerade our disappointment in anything but honesty, and I am grateful the Holy Spirit can handle our disappointment.

I experienced this truth when I traveled with a large group on an international mission trip years ago. I shared part of this story in my previous book, *Heavenly Help*, but not the full scope of how I wrestled with my disappointment with God afterward.

Before we left on the trip, I had prayed with fervency that no one would lose their passports or airline tickets. But a few nights before we flew back home, one of the travelers, Sheila, had her passport and airline ticket stolen from her purse.

I did my level best to help her get a new passport from the American embassy, but it was the weekend. They were not going to be able to help her until Monday, and we were scheduled to fly home before then. It appeared Sheila was going to have to stay by herself in that foreign city and do all the passport and ticket work on her own.

I felt awful and more than a little mad at God. I did not hesitate to remind Him about all my fervent prayers.

When I returned to Denver, I checked in with the leader of Sheila's flight to see if he knew how she was doing back where we had left her. He said he did not end up leaving her there—that she had made it back to the United States because she happened to have a photocopy of her passport with her.

Now, these were pre-9/11 days, so the security measures were not as strict as they are today. Even so, I was flabbergasted. I had never heard of anything like this happening in all my years of traveling.

I gave God an earful all the same. "You didn't answer my prayer!" I told Him.

"Sarah, what was the goal of that prayer?" I heard Him reply.

"I wanted everyone to return home safely."

"Did Sheila make it home safely?"

"Well, yes. But You still didn't answer my prayer for the passports and tickets to be safe. I'm disappointed in You!"

“Come on, Sarah,” I heard Him say. “I more than answered your prayers, and I did so in a most miraculous way. You’re upset I didn’t answer your prayers with your methods. Instead, I chose to answer with a sweeping display of supernatural power that overcame impossible obstacles.”

I felt an invitation to be a little more grateful and a little less gripey in that moment, and this conversation helped reframe my disappointment. When I brought the truth of my feelings to the Holy Spirit, He could walk me through it and strengthen my faith. I am grateful we have this kind of freedom.

Now, it is one thing for the Holy Spirit to walk me through something like this passport adventure, but it is another thing to let the Holy Spirit walk with us through more traumatic events, like a fatal diagnosis, a painful divorce or a dysfunctional childhood that continues to bleed into our decisions and paradigms as an adult. Doubt can creep into our thoughts and emotions from these kinds of struggles. But I would maintain that the Holy Spirit can still walk with us through these kinds of doubts we face.

Can the Holy Spirit help us overcome our doubts? If we give the Holy Spirit some wiggle room in our lives, I believe He will help us overcome the doubts with which we struggle. Let’s keep walking and not get quagmired in the quicksand of discouragement and doubt. Sometimes, just like the psalmist says in Psalm 42:5, we have to say to our souls, “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.” Let’s make the active decision to trust God with the continuous help of the Holy Spirit.

Living the Mundane

Sometimes our consistent routines can provide a counterbalance to catastrophic events. Take, for example, Peter’s return to fishing in John 21. I have often looked with disdain on Peter when reading this story of how he went back to fishing. It seemed to me his actions were an indication he was leaving his decision to follow Jesus as a fisher of men.

But there is also a strong possibility he went back to fishing—something he knew very well—to get some ground under his feet, so to speak. Maybe after all of the freaky things that had happened, from his betrayal of Jesus to Jesus’ crucifixion to the supernatural appearances afterward, he needed something familiar and stabilizing. And so he went back to the comforting routine of fishing through the night.

Peter’s actions remind me of how I feel when my kids go back to school after their summer break. Our summers often overflow with activities, with travel and with unstructured days, despite my best efforts. Undoubtedly, we need a break from the demands and stresses of the school year, but I find there is great comfort in keeping to our daily routines and structure.

Peter’s return to fishing, viewed through this lens, is not much of a surprise after all, though it was probably discouraging for them not to have caught anything during their all-night fishing effort. The real surprise came when Jesus called directions to them from the shore so they would throw their nets on the right side of the boat. After they did this, their catch of fish was so great that they could not haul it in. This is Jesus doing the supernatural yet again in what would be considered someone’s regular, everyday life.

Sometimes I think there is a mentality that says the supernatural is only for rock-star Christians or the extremists who eat grasshoppers and visit graveyards in Africa to raise the dead. I think sometimes we are afraid of the supernatural, so we hide in the safety of our daily routines. We do not take risks because we are afraid. We can be afraid of failing, afraid of kooky stuff, afraid of looking stupid, afraid of being rejected and afraid of heaps more than that. Maybe we are comfortable living on the sidelines and poking fun at the people who step out and try to live in supernatural cadence with the Holy Spirit.

I am convinced that when we live in step with the Holy Spirit, though, supernatural events become more common. And the supernatural can look a variety of ways. For some people, the supernatural happens when they offer to pray with a stranger for healing, regardless of the outcome. The supernatural can happen when we decide to stop relying on our rational thoughts and yield to a decision we know in our hearts to be right. The supernatural happens when we choose to forgive rather than nurse a grudge. The supernatural happens when we decide to trust God with our finances, relationships, careers or other stressful areas of life. The supernatural happens in our daily lives as we continue to receive the Holy Spirit.

I will never forget the day I broke down crying in my car as I waited to collect my kids at the end of the school day. A few months earlier, I had visited Angola for the first time with Saving Moses and was wrecked by it. With Saving Moses, we endeavor to meet the most urgent survival needs of babies and toddlers where care is least available, and Angola meets this criteria because it frequently has the world’s highest infant-mortality rate. It is one thing to see pictures of babies who are starving to death, but it is an entirely different experience to hold that baby in your arms and later learn that she died. This is exactly what happened to me, and I was a basket case for many months.

While I was in Angola, I had made a rash promise to pay for an entire year's supply of malnutrition formula, only to later learn this would cost me more than $100,000. I had no clue where I was going to come up with that kind of money, and Saving Moses was barely an entity anyone knew at that time.

My mind started to go crazy thinking about the potential for hosting bake sales, sponsoring jog-a-thons and holding cardboard signs on street corners to raise all that money. I had all kinds of wild ideas. Both my husband and my mom said they would pray God would bring me the money—a polite way of saying they were not going to help me raise this money.

A few months went by, and I still had no idea how I was going to come up with $100,000 over the course of a year. So on that day when I was waiting to pick up my kids after school, I was blown away to receive a phone call telling me a nice lady had given Saving Moses $100,000.

I called her and broke down sobbing as I tried to explain the commitment I had made, based on the horrific things I saw and experienced during my trip to Angola. This nice lady listened to me and then explained God had put it in her heart to make the donation. She was thrilled to learn it would be used to save babies and toddlers from starving to death.

Yes, the Holy Spirit can do the miraculous in our daily mundane lives!

But deciding to trust God to do the supernatural in our daily lives is often a decision to give up control. When we ask the Holy Spirit to make us more sensitive to His presence, such sensitivity comes with an expectation of obedience. If we think about it, why would the Holy Spirit make us increasingly aware of His presence and directive in our lives, just for us to ignore and dismiss such guidance? There is a sacrifice that comes with asking to be made more aware of the Holy Spirit, but it is well worth the cost and surrender.

Saying yes to the Holy Spirit means choosing obedience rather than arguing. When we say, "Please increase my awareness, and help me to be more sensitive to You," we are saying yes to walking in the Spirit and not gratifying the works of the flesh (see Galatians 5:16).

Saying yes to the Holy Spirit also means saying yes to the identity God has for you and not to the deceptions that may currently be gripping you. This may mean experiencing tweaks in your identity because you previously believed a lie and some smoke screens. Many times we believe the devil's lies more than God's Word. When the enemy tells us we are failures, that the supernatural will never happen through us and that God does not love us, we must choose to reject those lies and replace them with God's truth.

The Holy Spirit wants to be more active in our daily lives and waits for us to give the green light for His activity. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to work in and

through each of our days—whether those days are mundane or thrilling, puzzling or fulfilling, gory or glorious.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, in my daily life, let me hear You clearly. When I speak, fill my mouth. When I serve, minister through me. Flow through my life with Your gifts. I pray I would have greater evidence in my life of our fellowship together by displaying more of the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. Help me to be more sensitive and dialed in to what You want to do and who You are in my daily life. I want to walk in step with You. Thank You for helping me to grow more and more Christlike every day. Amen.

Go Further

1. When you look back over your life, can you identify some experiences where the Holy Spirit acted supernaturally?
2. Do you struggle to see the supernatural in your life? Is it possible the Holy Spirit is doing supernatural things but you do not perceive them to be supernatural? What might some of those things be?
3. In what areas in your life could you be "sucking wind," due to not being filled with the Holy Spirit?
4. What doubts do you face in your life? What are the roots of those doubts?
5. In what ways do you sense the Holy Spirit asking you to be more obedient to His promptings?
6. What are some of the enemy's lies that have taken up space in your life? What Bible verses could you memorize to replace those lies?

Part III

Holy Spirit Power

10

Sidestep the Land Mines

The first time I visited Angola on the continent of Africa for Saving Moses, I received a startling word of welcome from my hosts.

"Avoid the fields that have red bands painted on their tree branches," they said. "White bands mean the field is safe, but red bands let you know there are land mines present."

I had to ask them to repeat those instructions because I was not expecting to learn how to navigate active land mines in my efforts to help babies. This was not a familiar context for me.

After they confirmed I correctly understood the difference between the red and white paint on tree branches, I was quiet with my thoughts, trying to process what I had gotten myself into. After giving some thought to what my hosts had told me, I decided there was no need for me to wander through any fields in Angola, full stop.

Land mines are ugly weapons. More than twenty million land mines were planted during the civil war in Angola, and several million of them remain active today, maiming and killing innocent victims. You can see the results of these land mines throughout Angola, where more than eighty thousand individuals are missing feet and legs.[1] The individuals who have been affected by these land mines hobble around to the best of their abilities, but they have been permanently disabled. Humanitarian organizations are making an effort to at least identify the fields with active land mines.

This is such a different context from my American existence. The context of my daily life, probably similar to yours, is about navigating traffic, dealing with email, making healthy eating choices and making other small decisions like these. But different contexts create different perceptions and shape our choices and behavior.

The same is true when it comes to walking in step with the Spirit. When we have the right context in mind, we can keep in cadence with what the Holy Spirit

is doing. But when our context does not match up, we get off course. We need to avoid the spiritual land mines that could cripple our walk with the Holy Spirit—and the first place to begin is with understanding context.

Three Modes of Context

In its simplest definition, context is composed of time, place and conditions. These three factors usually make up our understanding of a situation, or its context.

To see how our understanding of a situation's context can affect our cadence with the Holy Spirit, let's look at how these three factors played into Jesus' birth and how the individuals involved either stayed in step with the Spirit or did not.

Time

When we think about the timing of Jesus' birth, we can consider two perspectives. First, there is God's perspective. Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman."

From God's perspective, the timing of Jesus' birth culminated through centuries and even millennia to a defining moment that was ripe for Jesus' physical entrance into human history. Theologians say there were four hundred years of silence between the last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi, and the birth of John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner. To further magnify the precision of the timing, let's remember the first prophecy about Jesus was given many millennia earlier in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:15). From God's point of view, the timing for Jesus' birth had culminated into this one moment that was considered "the fullness of time."

In contrast, the human perspective on the timing of Jesus' birth lent a different view, particularly for Joseph, Mary's fiancé. After he learned Mary was pregnant, we read, "And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly" (Matthew 1:19). This pregnancy was likely the last thing Joseph wanted to hear from his soon-to-be wife. I cannot begin to imagine what was going through Joseph's mind when Mary told him, "Joseph, I know that we're engaged to be married, but you need to know that I'm pregnant and you're not the dad." I suspect such news was unexpected and unappreciated—a timing land mine!

If we are going to avoid the timing land mine, it is essential that we align our perspective with the Holy Spirit's point of view for the timing of events and

experiences in our lives. There have been so many times the Holy Spirit has "interrupted" my schedule for a divine encounter so I could pray with someone or experience something I had not planned. Quite often, I have not appreciated these "interruptions" and have even thought they were nuisances, stepping on the land mine of misperceived timing.

Let's not disregard an opportunity because it seems inconvenient or ill timed. It could be the Holy Spirit's work.

Place

We must also consider place, or location, when it comes to staying in step with the Holy Spirit rather than stepping on land mines.

When we think about where Jesus was born from the divine perspective, one thing we can say is that it was noteworthy. The angel told the shepherds, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12). It would have been unusual to find a newborn baby using the feeding trough for an animal as a crib—a noteworthy location, to be sure!

From the human perspective, though, the location of Jesus' birth was a land mine of inconvenience. We are told there was no room in the inn (Luke 2:7). And, really, how ideal could it have been for Mary to give birth in a structure that belonged to animals and to put her newborn son in a feeding trough? Not very!

I relate to this inconvenience of location all too readily. Recently, my daughter and I needed to make a run to the grocery store to buy ingredients for a dinner we were making. At the time, my foot was injured, and it was painful to walk on it. The last thing I wanted to do was run to the grocery store and walk through the aisles to collect ingredients, but we needed to do it.

As we were heading to the back of the store to get milk, a guy turned down our aisle and began talking with me with great excitement. He told me he was from Nigeria. As we talked, my daughter and I were able to encourage him to grow deeper in his relationship with Jesus.

It was a wonderful time of ministry, back by the cheese, butter and milk section of the grocery store. From a human perspective, it seemed inconvenient, but from the Holy Spirit's point of view, the refrigerated section of the grocery store is as good a place as any for such a divine appointment.

Conditions

The conditions surrounding events are important, too, when it comes to staying in step with the Holy Spirit. Going back to Jesus' birth, I am always excited to read the angel's announcement to the shepherds (see Luke 2:8–14). It warms my heart when I think about those shepherd guys lying in a field in the middle of a cold night and being arrested by an angelic host that was declaring the birth of Jesus. Those angels were celebrating Jesus' birth. It was almost like heaven could not keep the good news away from even those shepherds in the middle of the night.

I cannot help but smile when I read these verses and think about how I would react if I had been hanging out with those shepherds during that experience. Indeed, it was a momentous celebration. Heaven spilled into our human existence through the birth of Jesus!

While the shepherds received this shocking news, they went into Bethlehem to find the baby that was announced to them. But when it comes to the conditions Mary faced, it was no doubt an awkward land mine. I say this because of her words in Luke 1:34, when she told the angel Gabriel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

I have a teenage daughter, and the last topic she wants to talk about with a strange man is the subject of sex. This would be more than a little bit awkward for her, and I cannot imagine how uncomfortable Mary might have been, having this conversation with the angel Gabriel.

From heaven's perspective, Jesus' birth happened in the culmination of time and at a noteworthy location, and its conditions were cause for celebration. From a human perspective, it was full of land mines—unexpected timing, an inconvenient location and a more than awkward situation. This just goes to show that staying in step with the Spirit requires a sensitivity to context—a heavenly one!

I will share one last example of the importance of having a heavenly point of view. One night when Reece and I went on a date, we rode the light rail into downtown Denver on a Friday night, sans children. We were happy to have some time together and looked forward to an evening of adult dialogue without the interruption of our kids' comments or the need to actively parent their teenage behaviors.

We had a lovely evening downtown and enjoyed a delightful meal, along with some relaxing conversation. Then we began making our way home on the light rail late into the evening.

Since it was a Friday night in the summertime, plenty of people were riding the train with us. But instead of seeing the people around me from God's perspective, I saw them from my point of view—as creepy, weird and annoying.

I did not appreciate that one group had brought a quart of vodka onto the train, nor did I like their drunken comments. As far as I was concerned, the timing and place were wrong, and so were the conditions.

Instead of praying and asking for input from the Holy Spirit, I began to sulk and withdraw. I even got angry with Reece for not moving us away from the disorderly passengers. I stepped onto the land mine of selfish perception because I did not appreciate that the Holy Spirit could interrupt a challenging situation and turn it into something more redemptive. It was not until the next morning in my prayer time that I was open to the Holy Spirit challenging my perspective of that train ride.

If we are going to stay in step with the Holy Spirit on a consistent basis, then we need to allow the Holy Spirit to change the filters of the contexts in which we see and experience life. Without divine direction, our human existence will be not only limited but also dysfunctional and unfulfilling. Let's actively choose to stay on God's page!

Internal Land Mines

I suggest there are two kinds of land mines of which we need to be aware: internal and external ones. Let's first take a look at the internal land mines that lie below our surface observations and can be deadly. These land mines deal with the ways in which we think about the Holy Spirit, and they even relate to some of the fundamental paradigms that shape how we walk with the Holy Spirit in daily life.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

During that first visit to Angola, I was aware of the instructions I had been given about the painted tree branches everywhere I went. I have been to Angola multiple times since then, and every time I have to be careful that those instructions do not become an afterthought. It is easy for me to forget the guideline because I do not think about land mines in my day-to-day life in Denver.

In the same way, we can get comfortable and overconfident in our daily routines, such that we forget or neglect to pay attention to the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the routines can become so mindless that we do not allow the Holy Spirit to participate in our daily decisions, directing our lives with truth and

adding divine help to our work and thoughts. This can be an internal land mine for us.

I am reminded of a healing testimony one of my daughter's friends experienced. She had struggled with abdominal pain for many years and was diagnosed with both a gluten and dairy intolerance. Upon receiving that diagnosis, she removed all gluten and dairy from her diet. This seemed to resolve the problem. She and her family organized their eating routines to support these dietary changes and carried on with their regular, day-to-day lives.

However, her mother had a bit of a spiritual wake-up call. She became aware of what these food allergies could mean for her daughter on a permanent basis, and she did not want her daughter's life to revolve around them. She began to pray with her family and friends for healing in her daughter's body. A few years went by, but she did not give up believing for the gift of healing to remove these allergies.

One day, at a weekly youth service in her church, the young girl received prayer yet again for these struggles. On that day, she felt something shift in her digestive system. She believed she was healed during that prayer but waited to test the healing until she went home. There, she tried some cookies—and had no pain! From that day on, she has been able to eat all kinds of wheat and dairy products with no pain.

Here are some ways we can commit to keeping the Holy Spirit front and center in our day-to-day routines to see divine, supernatural results:

- Let the Holy Spirit direct you to pray with someone who needs prayer.
- Choose to use your lunch break once a week for a personal prayer time or to fast.
- Take a 48-hour break from social media and replace the time you would spend on social media with extra Bible time, maybe choosing to read John 14–16.
- Memorize verses about the Holy Spirit.
- Ask a friend who loves Jesus to ask you about the Holy Spirit from time to time.

A Lack of Longing

If you were to strip back the surface of my life, you would see the things I deeply desire. For many years, I desired to be successful in my career by achieving fame and popularity. I also have wanted to be a good mom and a godly

wife. These are common and relatively normal desires. But about a decade ago, I began to feel an intense longing in my heart for more of God. In my journey to respond to that longing, I began to deepen my interest in and widen my exposure to the Holy Spirit. From these investments I have made in my relationship with the Holy Spirit, I have never been so richly satisfied or exhilarated in my whole life.

Sometimes it is easy to think we understand the Holy Spirit because we have a rigorous intellectual framework or theology to explain the Bible verses that discuss the Holy Spirit. While this information is vital to ensure we remain orthodox in our theology, we must not assume that intellectual information is the same thing as an intimate relationship.

For example, I can tell you some important information about the birth date, physical address and phone number of various friends, but such information does not mean I know those friends intimately. Information is not equivalent to intimacy. Let's avoid the land mine that says knowing *about* the Holy Spirit is the same as *knowing* the Holy Spirit.

Calling It Kooky or Weird

Our modern education has conditioned us to believe that what is unexplainable or weird should be avoided. Unfortunately, we often allow this conditioning to influence our filters for engagement. If something seems strange or kooky, we reject it. Sometimes this strategy is healthy and can keep us from some shady experiences. But other times it can prevent us from exploring the reality of the Holy Spirit and walking in His presence and power.

In my early twenties, I had this mindset and rejected everything I deemed to be spooky or weird. Unfortunately, this included the Holy Spirit, and therefore I made many poor decisions and had to manage the negative consequences of those decisions. I believe that if I had not avoided the Holy Spirit during those years, I would have avoided a lot of unnecessary pain and hardship.

Besides, something that seems kooky or weird could be the legitimate work of the Holy Spirit. One of my friends, Robby Dawkins, shared in his book *Identity Thief* about a time when he was ministering in England and a gentleman in the back of the audience began to have some medical challenges. He began to contort and twitch in the service. The symptoms grew worse, and Robby rushed over and began praying for him.

The man's condition deteriorated quickly. After a short time, the man sitting next to him, who happened to be a doctor, checked for his pulse and found none. He also observed that the man's pupils were dilated and his lips had turned blue.

Robby and others continued to pray for the man, rebuking the spirit of death. After what seemed like endless minutes, he began to breathe again, and the color returned to his lips and face. Clearly, this was a supernatural experience, and while it may seem spooky and weird, nevertheless the man who received this healing—even being raised from the dead—is grateful to this day that Robby was not put off by things that are seemingly inexplainable and that defy rational thought.[2]

The Baby and the Bathwater

This internal land mine is adjacent to the one we just covered. Rather than thinking the Holy Spirit is kooky or weird and therefore avoiding Him, we look at other people who are kooky or weird about spiritual matters and decide the whole scene is not for us.

I am guilty of this land mine. I have often chosen to deal with freaky or kooky people by "throwing the baby out with the bathwater." Even worse, I have often dismissed as fake the work of the Holy Spirit because of people I have met who I thought were sketchy. I have had my fair share of experiences where a person pretended to prophesy or use a gift of the Spirit for personal gain, and this is repulsive to me.

But just because there are fake or freaky people, that does not mean the Holy Spirit is fake. The works of the Holy Spirit are often supernatural and defy rational explanation. Sometimes, as we saw in the story with Robby above, it can even seem freaky when held up against reason. But let's avoid the land mine that tempts us to avoid the Holy Spirit because of some kooky people who abuse or misuse the supernatural.

Devaluing the Spirit

It is easy to think of the Holy Spirit as kind of a junior-varsity member of the Trinity. We readily identify with Jesus, the Son of God, since He came in the flesh and lived among us and we read about His life in the gospels. Jesus is accessible and easy to relate to. Similarly, God the Father is not too far of a stretch for us to consider because all of us have some context for fatherhood. Regardless of whether you had a good, bad or nonexistent father in your childhood, the concept of father is part of the human paradigm, so it is not unfamiliar or hard to grasp.

The Holy Spirit, however, does not have a corresponding human counterpart or experience. Consequently, the Holy Spirit can seem elusive and misty. Even

the word *spirit* feels floaty. It is not difficult to understand why we might relegate the Holy Spirit to junior-varsity status when compared to the other members of the Trinity.

But treating the Holy Spirit in this way only serves to keep us from walking in the presence and power of God throughout our lives.

As I look back on my life, I see a plethora of times the Holy Spirit has worked in my life. Let me give you a recent example. Right now, all of our kids are teenagers, and we have a house rule that we do not allow computers or cell phones in our bedrooms. One evening, after all of the kids had gone to bed, I felt a little nudge to check on one of them. I obeyed that nudge, and, sure enough, one of them had snuck their computer into bed and was watching a movie under the covers. Imagine their surprise when I pulled back the covers and found them on the computer.

"Mom!" they cried. "It's not what you think!"

But I took the computer away and said we would discuss the consequences of their disobedience in the morning. I am grateful for those Holy Spirit nudges!

External Land Mines

If we are going to stay in step with the Holy Spirit, then we need to avoid the internal land mines we just covered. But there are external land mines we need to be aware of, too, so we can sidestep the additional injuries they cause. Let's look at some of the external land mines we should avoid.

Lying to the Holy Spirit

An example of a couple who walked into this land mine is found in Acts 5. Their names are Ananias and Sapphira. Although they were part of the early community of Jesus' followers, they did not allow the Holy Spirit to continue to shape their decisions and behaviors.

Similar to others in the community, these two had sold some property and brought the proceeds to the apostles to share with the rest of the community—but they withheld some of the money. When Peter confronted them about this deception, he asked why they had agreed to lie to the Holy Spirit (see Acts 5:4, 9). Each of them dropped dead on the floor, and their bodies were carried out by the believers of the community.

I find that I do not purposefully lie to the Holy Spirit, but there are times when I allow distortion or subtle nuances to influence my thinking and how I interact

with the Holy Spirit. Remember that Jesus identifies the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth (see John 14:17). When we allow distortion or deception into our relationship with the Holy Spirit, it is never a good thing, and we can be assured we will walk into external land mines as a result.

Let's additionally think about the motive Ananias and Sapphira had for lying. They were trying to keep money back for their personal gain. Using the Holy Spirit for personal gain is a land mine that we should avoid at all costs. While this may seem to be so obvious that it need not be discussed, it is nonetheless a land mine that is far too common because of humanity's sinful nature. I have heard horror stories of shady characters who used false prophecies to manipulate naive believers for personal gain. I have read of people who had the supernatural gift of healing but used it in manipulative ways to acquire money and power. Let's not think for a split second that lying and manipulating others in the name of the Holy Spirit is trivial. Ananias and Sapphira paid with their lives for stepping on this land mine, and we would be wise to learn from their mistake.

Resisting the Holy Spirit

As the Jewish leaders were about to martyr Stephen, one of the early followers of Jesus, he said to them, "You . . . are always resisting the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51). This phrase haunts me because Stephen spoke it to the religious leaders of his day. I do not think those leaders started out with the intent to go against God, but Stephen's declaration was a bold wake-up call to those religious leaders who thought they were being fervent in their religious obedience.

Could the same be true of leaders in the Church today? Have we become so religious that our eyes are blind to the many ways we resist the Holy Spirit?

Resistance to the Holy Spirit is evident when there is a continual refusal to discuss or acknowledge anything about the Holy Spirit. Other indicators are a lack of transformation, the absence of the gifts or fruits of the Holy Spirit and a deficiency of the power of the Holy Spirit.

I can appreciate that what I am about to say next is controversial, but I feel strongly this needs your consideration. There is a doctrinal position that says the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased to operate when the last apostle from Jesus' earthly ministry died. Sometimes this position is extrapolated to minimize the modern-day work and effect of the Holy Spirit. If this idea is a struggle for you, please consider reading *Holy Fire: A Balanced, Biblical Look at the Holy Spirit's Work in Our Lives* by R. T. Kendall. We would be wise to reflect on these external observations.

Grieving the Holy Spirit

In Ephesians 4:30, Paul tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. I do not think either you or I set out to hurt the Holy Spirit. However, based on the surrounding verses in this passage, it happens when we allow anger, slander or hostile words to come between us and other followers of Jesus. The backbiting, gossip and derision that happen in churches and in Christian communities around the world grieve the Holy Spirit.

This external land mine must be avoided if we are going to walk in step with the Holy Spirit. No matter what another person may say or do, we must be responsible not to step into the trap of responding to them with slander or in wrath. While I can appreciate the anger or hurt that can arise in various experiences, let's determine not to grieve the Holy Spirit with the words and actions we choose in response to such challenges.

Quenching the Holy Spirit

Paul also tells us not to quench the Holy Spirit (see 1 Thessalonians 5:19). This instruction relates to prophecy and is extended to the gifts of the Holy Spirit discussed in 1 Corinthians 12.

Sometimes we allow the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be quenched or squashed because they do not fit into our logic or they seem too supernatural for our modern sophistication. But I contend that our world has never needed the supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit as it does today. We are steeped in demonic deception and intellectual arrogance, and we are in desperate need of the Holy Spirit to arrest such deception and unravel this arrogance. May we never be the person who clings to the deception or arrogance that quenches the flow of the Holy Spirit!

I have seen evidence of this external land mine when people say they do not want to turn off someone who might be unfamiliar with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Rather than explain to a possible newcomer what the Holy Spirit could be doing, instead they squelch any supernatural expressions. I see too much evidence of this land mine in our modern church. By stepping on this land mine, we risk the danger of going against Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:4–5: "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

Let's pay attention to both the internal and external land mines that could sabotage our walk with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, if we are going to infuse our

lives with God's presence and power, then we must be committed to staying in step with the Holy Spirit. As we keep in step with the Holy Spirit, we will avoid these land mines, along with many others.

Let's also keep in mind that these steps happen in our day-to-day lives and not just in the broad and ethereal context of our lives. The steps we take every day in our decisions, focus and attitude play a direct role in helping us avoid the land mines we meet in our daily lives.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, I want to walk in step with You. Help me to pay attention to You and avoid both the external and internal land mines that would deter my steps with You. Raise my awareness of the land mines I have stepped on, and let Your healing and redeeming power effect a cure for the injuries and pains they have caused. I repent for making bad decisions that have put me at risk of stepping on these land mines, and I receive Your forgiveness. Please help me to walk with You in power, love and redemption. Amen.

Go Further

1. How have you seen the Holy Spirit work through the timing, place or conditions of your life or the lives of others? Have there been times when you interpreted the timing, place or condition on a human level, when it was actually the work of God in a situation?
2. Do you find yourself uncomfortable talking about the Holy Spirit with other followers of Jesus? Why might this be?
3. When do you most frequently ignore the Holy Spirit?
4. What internal and external land mines do you struggle to avoid the most?
5. Consider memorizing one or all of the following passages: John 14:16–18, 26; 15:26–27; 16:7–15; Romans 8:1–27; 1 Corinthians 2; 12:1–13;

Galatians 5:16–26.

11

Defy the Impossible

When I was in my early twenties and teaching high school, I was adamant with my students that I would never get married. For me, marriage was something I maintained as a concrete impossibility for more than three years. On occasion, I might bring a boyfriend to a school event, but I was clear that any boyfriend held temporary status in my life because I was entrenched in my position and relished being single.

Then I met this guy, of course, who was nice—but it was convenient that he lived more than seven hundred miles from Denver. That meant I did not have to confront any long-term possibilities between us or change my mindset.

Long story short, I fell in love with that guy in the middle of the school year. By the end of the school year, I had to explain to my students that the ring I was wearing was an engagement ring. Everyone dropped their teeth—most of all me, since I had been convinced that getting married was an impossibility for me. I just did not ever see it happening.

What are some impossibilities in your life? Maybe it seems impossible for you to want anything other than to get married, but God would like to help you become content with being single. Maybe you would like to get pregnant, but God has in mind for you to adopt a child instead so that your desire is fulfilled and a lost child also finds a stable family. Maybe you would like to be wealthy, but God wants to help you see the abundance you already have.

Is it possible God has other plans for you than you imagine?

Sometimes the impossibilities we perceive exist because of how we have framed or translated our circumstances. With this idea in mind, let's consider three biblical examples—each of which we have seen before—people who faced impossible circumstances that became possible because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

A Logical Absurdity

First, let's consider Zacharias. In Luke 1:8–23, we read about this elderly priest who was taking his turn to serve in the Temple by taking care of the altar of incense in the holy place. Zacharias had access to this area of the Temple because he was a priest. On the day it was his turn to care for it, the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Luke tells us Zacharias was "troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him" (verse 12).

Then Gabriel let Zacharias know his elderly wife was going to have a baby and that this baby would be filled with the Holy Spirit in his mom's womb. When Zacharias expressed his doubts about this impossibility, Gabriel let him know he would be mute until the child was born.

Zacharias was doubtful about all of this for lots of reasons:

- His wife, Elizabeth, had been barren her entire life, and they had never had any children.
- Zacharias and Elizabeth were elderly, and there was a sense that they had aged past the childbearing years.
- A baby being filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb sounded insane.
- Zacharias becoming mute for nine months seemed impossible.

Despite all of these seeming impossibilities, they are exactly what happened. When Zacharias finished up his incense work, he was not able to speak; he had to use rustic sign language to explain his delay and the angelic visit in the holy place. Because that impossibility had happened, could this also mean Elizabeth would, indeed, get pregnant? And if so, would the baby in her womb really be filled with the Holy Spirit? Clearly, what had seemed impossible was moving closer toward improbable.

We all have circumstances in our lives where we say, "Wow! How can that be? It's impossible." Maybe we want to believe. Maybe we want to see God do the supernatural to eradicate an impossibility. But perhaps in order for this to happen, we have to change our thinking first, trusting God to do the impossible stuff.

Maybe you have believed something to do with your finances is impossible or that your chance of getting into a particular school seems ridiculous. Perhaps you have received a diagnosis from a doctor that is discouraging or even

terminal. Maybe you feel it is impossible to see one of your kids make better decisions.

I faced what I thought was an impossibility a few years ago, when I was visiting a country God had put on my heart to explore for opening our NightCare service for Saving Moses. I mentioned this in a previous chapter, but here I am going to tell you more of the story of what happened. I had done some research before visiting the country, and I had even corresponded with some folks before I arrived. Because of this, I was astounded, once I got there, to hear our hosts say it would be impossible to do NightCare in their city.

They said the neighborhood where I wanted to start the service was dangerous beyond comprehension and that it was impossible to even visit that neighborhood in the daytime because of the perilous conditions. They said if I was to walk around that area, those involved with organized crime would recognize me as a foreigner and be suspicious of my interest in being there. Such suspicion could provoke a violent reaction, even if only to send a message to others that foreigners without “legitimate business” in the neighborhood risked physical harm.

I would have preferred to learn all this by email instead of having spent loads of time and money to hear it as we sat around the table, eating breakfast. Needless to say, I lost my appetite and grew discouraged over the next several days.

When I flew home, I talked with my friends and family about what had transpired, and they encouraged me by saying that if this was a dream given to me by God, then I should not give up. But I did give up for a few months, despite the nagging tug in my heart.

Over time, I began to look into other countries where we could launch this new but essential ministry. Through a series of “coincidences,” we launched NightCare in a different country more than a year after that disastrous first attempt.

As I write this story, it sounds like a short and ultimately encouraging one, but the journey through the impossibility I faced was anything but short and encouraging. The same is likely true for you and the impossibilities you face in your life. Sometimes we can see no path around or through the impossibility. Getting to the other side can seem to take forever.

But if God has spoken to you about what seems to be an impossibility, let me encourage you to be faithful to God for the next step and not to be overwhelmed by the immensity or longevity of the impossibility in front of you. God is able and God knows the perfect time to resolve what you are unable to accomplish.

Additionally, let's be careful not to allow the poison of the impossible to corrupt our thoughts or unravel our faith. Remember that what seemed impossible for Zacharias was exactly what happened: He became mute for nine months, his wife got pregnant and, as we will see in the next scenario, she was filled with the Holy Spirit. But he did not believe, so he faced some consequences.

A Dreamy Delusion

For Elizabeth, the impossible in her life did not seem like a logical absurdity but rather a fantasy. At this time in history and in the Jewish culture, all of the "normal" women got married and bore children. But Elizabeth did not get to experience "normal." The longer she was married, the more abnormal she became. Ultimately, she learned she was infertile—a difficult pill for any woman to swallow. Barrenness was anathema for a married woman, as a woman's value was found in having babies and perpetuating the family lineage. But it seemed this was not to be in Elizabeth's life. Year after year, she waited. The door finally closed to this possibility when she passed beyond menopause.

It seems to me God sometimes waits for impossibilities in our lives to become fully mature and totally ripe. When something looks improbable or impossible, it may be the exact time for which God is waiting to act. Maybe we have given up all hope for any natural intervention, and there is nothing in our ordinary thinking or abilities that can change the impossibility in front of us. That is when we must hold on to even more hope.

I am learning that the impossible is nothing more than a human point of view. There are innumerable occasions in my life when I have told God that something was impossible. I have used the words *never* and *always* to imply my assumption of an unchanging permanence, only to see those impossible dreams blossom into supernatural realities. Let's keep our faith agile and robust, rather than positioning ourselves in a place of unbelief or doubt.

Ultimately, Elizabeth does become pregnant—and with the person who was to become John the Baptist, no less. I find Elizabeth's response to this reality deeply encouraging. She says, "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men" (Luke 1:25).

I have a warm spot in my heart for Elizabeth because of the story of my own birth. Like Elizabeth, my mom was unable to have children. After my parents had been married a few years and were living in Denver, they attended a miracle

service in Dallas in the late 1950s that had thousands of people in attendance. At the service, the evangelist called several people up to the platform, one of whom was my mom.

At that time, my parents were new to the ministry and unknown to everyone, including the evangelist who was leading the service. My mom says she could feel God's presence as she stood before him.

He said to her, "You're not from here. You're from Denver, Colorado, and you want a baby. Go home and receive your baby."

Of course, my parents were elated to hear these words and expected to receive their miracle baby shortly thereafter. But years went by, and my mom never became pregnant.

Unlike Zacharias, my dad continued to trust in God's word to do what was impossible, contrary to any natural circumstances or thinking.

After ten years had passed, my mom began to feel strange things happening in her body. She thought she might be pregnant, so she went to the doctor, who examined her and said it was delusional for her to think she could be pregnant—that it was a medical impossibility.

Nevertheless, the things my mom felt in her body continued and even increased. She decided to go for a second opinion. After being examined by a different doctor, she learned she was twenty weeks pregnant with me!

Like Elizabeth, my mom was considered "too old" to be pregnant, but I was born despite the medical impossibilities facing them. I am grateful to have been raised in a family where the impossible was never a guaranteed certainty. My parents taught me that nothing is impossible with God.

An Innocent Impossibility

Mary is our final example of the impossible becoming a reality through divine intervention. She is the culminating example of what it looks like for us to live from a place of trust in God rather than doubt or cynicism.

Consider that at the time of Gabriel's announcement to her, Mary was an unwed teenage girl and engaged to Joseph. The greeting she received from this angel was highly unusual, and she was mystified by it. We read, "And coming in, he said to her, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was" (Luke 1:28–29). Then Gabriel continued with his divine announcement, letting her know she was going to get pregnant with the Son of God.

What would be our reaction if we were to receive such an angelic visit and proclamation? We likely want to say we would respond as Mary did, but it is more probable we would be suspicious or pessimistic.

Mary's reply was more innocent inquiry than doubtful skepticism. She said to Gabriel, "How can this be, since I'm a virgin?" (verse 34). Gabriel's reply is the essential answer to all of our questions and hang-ups about the impossibilities in our lives. He says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (verse 35). These words can encourage us when we have questions, doubts, uncertainties and flat-out unbelief.

When you wonder how you are going to navigate a doctor's prognosis, for example, remember: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." When you find yourself in a difficult conversation with your spouse or child and you need some supernatural help, Gabriel's words can anchor your thoughts so you remember to ask for the Holy Spirit's help.

I like the way Mary responded next. She did not say to Gabriel, "You know, you're a freak and a lunatic. Get away from me. I don't do that Holy Spirit stuff. In fact, I'm Jewish, and we don't do the Holy Spirit. Indeed, who is this Holy Spirit?" She did not respond with any of this rationalizing, nor did she seem fearful about what might happen to her, given the religiously charged culture in which she lived. We do not even see her ask any questions about what to say to her parents or Joseph, her fiancé. All of these would have been natural and normal reactions.

Instead, she affirmed the message. She said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word" (verse 38). It is like she said, "I don't get it, but I don't have to understand it to ultimately agree with it."

In the same way, we do not have to understand God to agree with Him. The truth is, we will never wholly understand God, our Creator. If we base our faith in God doing the impossible on the prerequisite of our understanding how, when or where it will happen or on the host of other questions we can ask, then we miss the point of believing without seeing. Remember what Hebrews 11:1 says: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

While we will never fully understand our infinite God or how God does the impossible, we can nevertheless decide to agree with God. This is the simple decision that says, "I don't understand, but that doesn't mean I disagree. I've decided to agree with You, no matter what I understand or don't understand. I trust that You're good, and I trust Your word is true, and I trust You're going to

bring good stuff out of this impossible situation." With this mindset, let's agree with Mary: "Let it be done to me, Your servant."

An Important Comparison

The impossibilities Zacharias saw in his scenario were rooted in doubt and logic. The impossibilities Elizabeth faced were long-standing and seemingly permanent, having to do with her physical body. The impossibilities in Mary's situation combined the two—it seemed a logical impossibility for someone who was a virgin to have a baby.

Let's take a few moments to contrast Mary's response with that of Zacharias. While Mary was an unwed teenage Jewish girl of no particular importance who was likely uneducated, Zacharias was the opposite. He was an elderly Jewish priest who had been married for many years and was a shining example of piety, faith and religious leadership in his community. But when it comes to their mindsets about what God can do with the seeming impossible, Mary is the better example to follow, rather than Zacharias.

Mary had far more to lose than Zacharias by being pregnant out of wedlock in her highly religious community. Indeed, she could have been stoned for violating the Jewish law, to say nothing of losing her fiancé, her social position and any respectable future. Nonetheless, she models for us a life of faith and acceptance of the Holy Spirit, regardless of age, gender, educational background or family.

Just because we have a religious background, that does not mean we will be open to the Holy Spirit doing the impossible through us. Zacharias had the religious pedigree, education and position as a man of faith. But his reply to Gabriel displayed anything but faith. Indeed, sometimes new believers have a simpler and purer faith than those of us who have been around in the faith a long time. Mary's simple faith and pure behavior challenge us to model faith, regardless of our age or background.

An Overshadowing Miracle

The Holy Spirit was an integral part of all the impossible situations posed in Luke 1. Consider the way the Holy Spirit worked in the life of each individual:

Zacharias: "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit" (verse 67). Zacharias became filled with the Holy Spirit after John was born and

he could speak again.

Elizabeth: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (verse 41). Not only was John the Baptist filled with the Holy Spirit in Elizabeth’s womb, just as Gabriel announced he would be, but Elizabeth was also filled with the Holy Spirit.

Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (verse 35). We see it was the Holy Spirit’s overshadowing of Mary that caused her to get pregnant.

Let’s talk more about this overshadowing stuff. When Gabriel told Mary the Holy Spirit would overshadow her, what did that mean?

In the Greek, the word *overshadow* is the word *episkiazo*, which carries the literal sense of a shadow coming on something or someone. It is the same idea as the shadow of a tree moving across the lawn in the summertime and extending its reach onto a picnic or sidewalk.

A shadow is quiet and gentle. If you are outside having a picnic and the shadow of a tree creeps over your blanket, you might observe a difference in the quantity of light or a small decrease in the temperature. The shadow on the blanket does not cause a massive change, but it can be observed and even enjoyed when the sun is hot and bright.

In a similar way, we can welcome the Holy Spirit to overshadow the impossibilities in our lives. We can welcome the Holy Spirit to bring gradual changes and make a way when there seems to be no way—to do the impossible that we cannot do in our own strength or wisdom.

I think about the way that incremental overshadowing has looked in the life of one of my friends. This is a friend I have known for a few decades and who I was surprised to learn was a former sex addict. I was even more surprised to learn he had been struggling with this addiction years ago, when I first knew him and began to spend time with his family. During a time when he had been helping me with car repairs, was in Bible studies with me and had invited me to enjoy steaks with his family, he was also struggling with sex addiction and had been, at that time, for close to thirty years. Unbeknownst to me, his marriage was about to blow apart, and his kids were beginning to experience significant difficulties in school. Everything started to unravel when he was arrested for soliciting a prostitute.

That is when the healing process began.

If you are an addict reading this, you more than likely want to hear me say my friend was delivered from his addiction in an instant, that his marriage became a

blissful haven and that his kids had a miraculous turnaround. While I have heard of that happening to many people, that is not the path the Holy Spirit chose for my friend. Instead, my friend began to walk out his salvation with fear and trembling every day and, most often, one decision at a time.

He will tell you the Holy Spirit was with him through the entire journey and gave him supernatural strength, comfort, wisdom and support as he made progress every step of the way. He says to this day that before his journey to recovery began, he felt trapped and hopeless in this vicious addiction. He thought it was impossible for him to get rescued from the bondage, but that is exactly what happened, albeit incrementally and one day at a time. He was gradually overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, slowly but surely.

Let me encourage you with another story that seemed impossible at the outset. I have a friend who was diagnosed with cancer in her uterus when she was in her midtwenties. At the time, she had two small children under the age of ten, and her husband had a job that required him to travel. To say she was afraid is an understatement.

The doctors were firm that she should not get pregnant because the cancer could spread to a baby if she were pregnant. Unfortunately, she did get pregnant with a third child, which caused her to fear for the life of the baby in addition to her own, to say nothing of the future for her two small children.

When she delivered her third baby, no cancer was found in his body. It seemed like a miracle! And the cancer went dormant for a year.

But then it came back with a vengeance. My friend underwent all of the medical treatments recommended by her doctors, but they could still detect some lingering cancer. During those years, she became a strong follower of Jesus and stayed vigilant with her regular checkups. After more than five years of careful monitoring, the doctors declared they were unable to find any trace of cancer in her body. She has been cancer free for more than 35 years now. What seemed to be a terminal diagnosis, impossible to overcome by human estimation, was a divine opportunity for God to do the impossible!

Sometimes God does the impossible in instantaneous, dramatic fashion, and sometimes God does the impossible in incremental, subtle steps. Both of my friends know the truth of the slower way. But in whatever way God chooses to do the impossible in our lives, let’s be sure to land on the side of believing and not doubting.

Simply put, let’s agree with the Holy Spirit more than we believe in any impossibility. Let’s decide we will abide under the shadow of the Almighty, as it says in Psalm 91:1. Let’s make the presence of the Holy Spirit important in our lives, regardless of what we do or do not understand.

Let’s not try to force the Holy Spirit to fit into an explainable theological box or to fit within our constrictive intellectual limits. I doubt Zacharias could have explained to his fellow priests what Gabriel said the Holy Spirit would do—and do not forget Zacharias came out of the Temple unable to speak for the next nine months. Maybe, in the end, it is better to be mute than speak unbelief.

Trusting the Holy Spirit to do the impossible in our lives is a transformational experience. Indeed, it seems the Holy Spirit uses every impossibility to help us change and behave increasingly like Jesus.

The real question comes down to this: Will we allow the Holy Spirit to overshadow the impossibilities in our lives? Our reply needs to align with Mary’s more than Zacharias’s. It needs to be one of innocent acceptance rather than doubtful dismissal.

So, again, let’s allow the Holy Spirit to overshadow and change us. Let’s be available vessels to the Holy Spirit so Jesus can be expressed through us to the world around us. Let’s say yes to the Holy Spirit working in our lives and overshadowing our day-to-day living. Let’s not base our acceptance of the Holy Spirit working in us on our intellectual understanding, our religious background or our theological scaffolding.

The beginning of the impossible becoming possible is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Let’s welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives and provide a conducive platform for the impossible to happen in us as well as through us.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank You for bringing me to the places of impossibility in my life. I am lifting up these impossible situations to You. How can they change? I do not know, but I trust You and have confidence that Your promises are yes and amen. Please nestle into my heart divine destiny—what You want to do in the long run, Your goal with these situations. And thank You for helping me to intercede and pray about these situations rather than being apathetic or ambivalent or giving up hope. Thank You, Holy Spirit, for overshadowing me and these situations. Thank You for bringing the supernatural out of what seems impossible and natural. Thank You for changing me and the way I think so Jesus can be promoted

throughout my daily life. I trust You, Father, and I thank You, Holy Spirit, for doing what is impossible through me with Your abiding presence. Amen.

Go Further

1. What are some impossibilities in your life that you would like to see God change?
2. How would your thinking need to change about these impossibilities in order for them to be made possible?
3. In the stories of Zacharias, Elizabeth and Mary, with whom would you most readily identify, and why?
4. How would your faith grow if you changed your mindset about the Holy Spirit?
5. Name some areas in your life where you would like the Holy Spirit to do some “overshadowing” work.

12

Life in the Spirit

My friend looked at the deflated, oblong tire around my car's rim that was supposed to be circular. "You should probably put the spare tire on there before you drive it anywhere," he said.

My friend was smart, and I was not.

I drove the car as it was to the tire shop. Once I arrived, the mechanics promptly told me I would need to buy four new tires. If I would have listened to my friend, the lesson I learned that day could have been much cheaper.

I could have saved thousands of dollars over the years if I knew then what I know now about cars. Because I did not have anyone mechanical involved in my upbringing, my first car received zero maintenance, and I was forced to quickly replace it. What I know now about cars is largely due to expensive lessons I have learned, and I am hoping I can save my kids from paying those same prices to learn lessons that need not be so expensive.

What do I know today about cars? I know it is cheaper to get tires aligned rather than buy a new set of tires. I know it is cheaper to change the filters and oil than replace the engine. I know it is cheaper to replace the brake pads than put on new rotors. These are lessons that were expensive for me to learn, and I could have learned them with less anxiety and stress and expense had I been less proud and more forthright about my ignorance.

There's a common saying, "What you don't know can't hurt you." But that kind of thinking can create disastrous outcomes, just like the flat-tire lesson my friend was trying to help me avoid. In that case, and in many others, I have learned that what you do not know *can* hurt you. The same is true for our spiritual lives.

When it comes to life in the Spirit, I have learned that, like with my auto education, ongoing maintenance is better than getting to the point where you need to take emergency measures. One of the worst things that can happen in this life is to discover we are running on empty and on the verge of a breakdown.

We need to keep our fluid levels topped off and our engines running smoothly, spiritually speaking.

So, how do we do that? I have found that when it comes to the daily maintenance of our life in the Spirit, Romans 8 is our best how-to manual. One clear indicator is that Paul uses the word *spirit* 21 times in the chapter, and 19 of those times, he is referring to the Holy Spirit.[1] This chapter in Paul's letter to the Romans overflows with step-by-step instructions for keeping our life in the Spirit on a healthy, flourishing journey.

Start with Outcomes

It is a common practice, when looking for a desired outcome, to reverse engineer that outcome in order to identify what is needed to reach it.

I only started to appreciate this strategy after marrying Reece, who was an engineer at the time and more mechanical than I. He brought, and continues to bring, a lot of logic and systems thinking to our family, and he helps me stay practical and less ethereal in my thinking. It is because of his influence that I can now teach how to reverse engineer the outcomes we desire in our spiritual lives to learn how to live each day.

Paul identifies our desired spiritual outcomes in Romans 8:28–39. While the whole of Romans 8 overflows with opulent outcomes that I think every living human desires, Paul identifies a few potent outcomes toward the end of the chapter, particularly in verses 28–39.

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." I feel such security when I remember God can bring good results from *everything* in my life—from kids who can get under my skin faster than almost anyone to unexpected health struggles to hurtful relationships to financial setbacks and heaps more. This verse reminds us that God is causing everything to work together for our good as we stay in love with God and true to God's purposes in our lives.

Additionally, Romans 8:31 says, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" This verse is super encouraging, too, because a lot of things can come against us on any given day. Not only can we experience human opposition, but we also face plenty of our own accusatory and condemning thoughts. Of course, the enemy of our souls is the fundamental opposition we face that continually works to steal from us and to kill and destroy us (see John 10:10). But Romans 8:31 is the verse that reminds us God is for us.

Romans 8:32 helps us appreciate that we do not lack anything we need. It says, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” I think it is vitally important that we appreciate not only that God gives us material provisions but, more significantly, that He remains steady and faithful to us throughout every second of our lives because of His limitless and daily love for us.

When we believe ourselves to have failed, we can consider Romans 8:37, which says, “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” When I studied this verse in the Greek, I learned that the words *overwhelmingly conquer* are in Greek the single word *hupernikeo.* This compound word is interesting for many reasons. To begin, it is the combination of the words *hyper,* meaning “over” or “extreme,” and *nike,* the Greek goddess of victory. So these words together mean “extreme victory or success.” It is also important to note that Paul uses this word in the present tense, which means the action never stops—that God causes us to supremely win without pause or hiccup. In those times when it seems like we have failed or missed the mark, God is causing us to win and be victorious.

Finally, and maybe most important of all, the last two verses of this chapter sink our roots into God’s love for us. These verses say:

> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
>
> Romans 8:38–39

These outcomes are outrageous! And what gets me revved up is that God, the Creator of the universe, is helping to make these outcomes a daily reality in your life and mine. I never grow tired of reading Romans 8 because after I have read it, I feel like I can take on anything and win.

Then Add Inputs

As I said earlier in the chapter, once we look at outcomes, we can reverse engineer them to discover the inputs that are needed for those outcomes. When it comes to Paul’s teachings in Romans 8, then, what inputs are needed for a life rooted in the victory, provision and love that verses 28–39 teach us can be ours?

We are in luck here, too. It turns out that of the nineteen times Paul refers to the Holy Spirit in this chapter, they all occur in verses 2–27, before the outcomes we listed above. We would be wise to think about what Paul is teaching us about

the Holy Spirit here, since he writes about the Spirit so many times in such a short number of verses. To be even clearer, there is nowhere else in Paul's writings where he speaks with such frequency about the Holy Spirit in so few verses.

In many respects, Paul's instructions to his readers in this first part of the chapter distill down to a singular focus of how to live in the Spirit. I would suggest that these verses provide us with significant guiding principles about this life. Basing our lives around these principles will foster the abundant life Paul describes in verses 28–39.

So, what does it look like to live in the Spirit? What does Paul identify as the inputs for Spirit-led living? Let's break it down.

Walk by the Spirit

To begin, Paul tells us we should walk by the Spirit (see Romans 8:4). In this verse, Paul uses the present tense of the Greek word *peripateo*, which we explored earlier in the book and which speaks of continuously walking or living alongside the Holy Spirit. I like to think of this in terms of the Holy Spirit keeping company with me throughout any given day. When I am driving to collect my kids from school, for example, or taking one of them to an event, I enjoy a chat with the Holy Spirit. I talk about the things that are on my mind, the struggles with which I am wrestling, the conversations that have happened with other people and the things I want to do. I talk with the Holy Spirit about schedules, about stuff I need to get done and about loads of other things.

Many times I sense the Holy Spirit speaking back to me. This happened recently when I was working on a sermon and struggling to think of ways to present the content so it would not only appeal to the listeners but also be easy to remember and apply. I was stressing out about it and then felt the Holy Spirit whisper to me, "I know what I want to say, so just relax and trust that I can communicate through you."

The same has happened to me while writing this book. There have been occasions when I was frustrated with some aspect of the writing process and then took a step back and heard a sweet echo assuring me that I am a pen for the Holy Spirit.

Examine Your Thoughts

Paul talks with us in verses 5–8 about our thoughts and what we allow our minds to cogitate on. Have you ever thought about your thoughts? While that

idea may seem strange at first, there is massive value in stepping back from your thoughts and evaluating things like what is going through your mind, what is tweaking your emotions and what forces are motivating your behaviors and attitudes. Paul writes in these verses:

> For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

In these verses, Paul explains there are two trains of thought: a spiritual way of thinking and a fleshly way of thinking. When I looked into these verses for their Greek derivation, it was interesting to realize that the word *set* is not found in the Greek text. Rather, Paul uses the word *phroneo*, which is the activity the mind does. In the simplest definition, it means "to think." From a broader perspective, according to the *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, *phroneo* is a verb that deals with holding an attitude, pondering, honoring or holding a certain perspective or position.

In other words, Paul confronts the content and activities of our mind. In these verses, he is forcing us to evaluate if our mind is buried in the soil of the flesh or breathing in the life of the Spirit. If we are going to live in the Spirit, achieving the spiritual outcomes we desire, then part of our journey must consist of assessing our mind. We need to assess what we think about, what emotions control us and the paradigms or filters through which we make decisions and set priorities.

The contrast between the spiritual mind and the mind of the flesh became clear to me as I was studying for and praying about writing this chapter. In the midst of working on it, America went through a volatile election season. As I stood back to watch people's words and attitudes and how they were behaving, the difference between spiritual and fleshly thinking became crystal clear.

Fleshly thinking gives people permission to be acrimonious and disrespectful, not only with their acquaintances but also with their close relationships and among family members. I watched people allow themselves to become unhinged from previously held values and priorities because they yielded to fleshly thinking.

In contrast, I saw other people wrestle against fleshly thinking because it ran contrary to their spiritual convictions. I saw them decide to think of the election in spiritual ways, and this decision worked out better for them.

In all, I saw the reality of what Paul taught about the deadly results of fleshly thinking versus the life and peace that emerge from spiritual thinking. The individuals who chose to think in fleshly terms became cranky and difficult to interact with. The people who chose to think in more spiritual terms were able to step aside from the hostilities and cultivate healthy dialogue, even in the middle of conflicting opinions, resulting in respectful disagreement and peaceful outcomes.

It is well worth our time and effort to take an inventory of the life and peace flowing in our daily lives versus the death and destruction we harbor or generate. Such an inventory can give us a clear indicator of whether our thinking is more flesh oriented or Spirit oriented. We would be wise to think about our minds from time to time and not allow them to run free or unexamined.

Dwell with the Spirit

Once we evaluate our thought life, we position ourselves to more effectively accommodate the Holy Spirit to live in us, based on Romans 8:9–13. In these verses, Paul continues to deepen our life in the Spirit by moving past our thoughts and into the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our lives.

Romans 8:9 says, "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." When we become intentional about cultivating our lives with more than just a smattering of the Holy Spirit, we go to a deeper place of letting the Holy Spirit live or dwell in us.

Paul uses the word *oikeo* when he speaks about the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. In fact, *oikeo* is used nine times in the New Testament and all by Paul. When Paul uses *oikeo* here in Romans 8:9, he uses the present tense, which means the Holy Spirit's living in us is not a one-time phenomenon but rather a continual state of being. Rather than inviting the Holy Spirit to join what we are doing, we would be wise to ask for a greater sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, who is already residing in us.

When I have prayed to be given more sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, I have had lots of different results. Sometimes when I am driving, I will become aware of a gentle and sweet presence with me in the car, whether my kids are riding with me or not. I have also sensed the Holy Spirit with me in meetings both secular and Christian. In some of those meetings, I have felt directed to say something poignant or defining. Other times I knew the Holy Spirit was guiding me to listen more than talk.

Sometimes I have been moved by the Holy Spirit to pray for someone, even though I could not see any obvious needs they had. There are also loads of occasions where the Holy Spirit has spoken to me through dreams or conversations. It seems to me that having the Holy Spirit living inside of us gives us an explicit advantage for managing life, rather than being managed by life.

We can also apply the idea of the Holy Spirit dwelling with us through the lens of different living arrangements we have had. In college, my first roommate and I were different from each other, but we learned to navigate our differences through communication. I have had lots of other roommates over the years, and each experience taught me many helpful things.

Being married for more than twenty years has been an even deeper and richer experience than living with roommates. Marriage has taught me about peacefully and successfully living with someone who is wonderfully different from me. Doing life together is an amazing adventure!

These are both good springboards for the deepest relationship we can possibly experience, which is the Holy Spirit living inside of us. With a roommate or a husband, I can enjoy their company but still choose to keep some space when I need to sort through my feelings and thoughts. But with the Holy Spirit living in me, I choose to let the Holy Spirit interact with my emotions and thoughts. I choose to let the Holy Spirit challenge my priorities. I choose to stay in continual communion with the Holy Spirit at levels far deeper than I ever did with roommates and with even more intimacy than I have in my marriage. This is the most intimate relationship we can have.

Additionally, when the Holy Spirit lives in us, we can experience the same resurrection life Jesus did. Paul says, “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11). On a practical level, I have experienced this at times when I have been more tired than normal. I remember Romans 8:11 and pray for the quickening power of the Holy Spirit to energize my weary body. This often happens when I travel overseas and have to navigate jet lag. It also happens during the normal demands of raising teenagers and juggling multiple responsibilities in daily life. I used to be a coffee addict, but I have found that the power with which the Holy Spirit can energize my body is better than caffeine!

Paul helps us appreciate that the Holy Spirit living in us removes any obligation we may have to live in the shackles of fleshly thinking. Indeed, in Romans 8:13, Paul says that when we live by the Spirit, we put to death the practices of the flesh. A Holy Spirit lifestyle overflows with resurrection life and with victory over the flesh.

Belong to the Family

Another significant input that helps us achieve the outcomes described earlier relates to seeing ourselves as a daughter or son of our heavenly Father. This is an essential ingredient, and Paul ensures it receives abundant attention in Romans 8 by referring to our family status twice, in verses 14 and 16. In between these two verses, he removes any sense of formality or religious posturing by telling us we have "received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" (verse 15). The word *Abba* is the Hebrew word used by small children to address their daddies. Our modern English equivalent could be *Dad*, *Daddy* or *Dada*.

This brings back fond memories of my dad. He was an eclectic man and had an affinity for anything artistic. When I would chum around with him before I started kindergarten, we would visit art galleries and antique dealers. Sometimes we would hit an art museum or look for art treasures at steep discounts at garage sales. This could get tiring for any five-year-old person, but my dad kept it interesting by promising me a jamocha shake at Arby's and telling stories he made up about talking skunks and friendly Indians. He waited for me with open arms and a bear hug if he picked me up from school or met me at the bus stop.

My dad was great, but he was also human and therefore flawed. In contrast, our heavenly Dad has no flaws. That is a good thing for all of us, because no matter how good or bad your human father is or was, your heavenly Dad fills the role of the perfect parent. Because our heavenly Dad is perfect, He loves us perfectly in our unique needs and personalities.

The bridge to knowing our heavenly Dad is the Holy Spirit. We experience the Holy Spirit as this bridge when we sense an increasing desire and closeness to our heavenly Father and as we grow in our confidence of being God's child. The better we know the Holy Spirit, the more we see ourselves as God's son or daughter. Indeed, this is a work the Holy Spirit does in our hearts, and we need this continual activity because of our fallen human nature.

This idea of the Holy Spirit helping me know that I am the daughter of my heavenly Dad has been more and more helpful the longer I am an adult, and particularly since my dad died some years back. We can get kind of messed up in our thinking when it comes to stuff with our earthly parents. If we are not careful, that messed-up thinking can affect the way we do life, making for some bad results.

Maybe you had a parent who was abusive or neglectful. Maybe you are adopted and you struggle with feeling rejected or abandoned. Maybe you had the best parents ever but have still observed some of their weak spots and failures.

I have thought about this for a while and have come to the conclusion that we all have broken parents because humanity is inherently broken. The point of all this brokenness is so that we carry a desire for the unbroken. Maybe that desire is evidence of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts so that we reach out to the perfect and unbroken Father, our heavenly Dad.

This input is essential because it frames not only how we see ourselves but also who we are. When we allow the Holy Spirit to work into our hearts the truth that we are God's son or daughter, then it does not seem to be an illusion when the psalmist says, "I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well" (Psalm 139:14).

Give Yourself to Prayer

Until I was in my thirties, my prayer life was largely relegated to emergencies and shopping lists of things I needed and wanted. On any given day, I would do a quick shout-out: "Help me in this situation!" My most common prayers were "Give me" or "Do this for me."

Such prayers can certainly be the backbone of a steady prayer life. But for me, I always had this longing in my heart for more. I did not want my prayer life to be a shopping list, but I did not know how to cultivate a deeper relationship with God through prayer. I tried various forms and patterns for prayer, but I could never seem to last more than a few minutes with them before falling back into my old habits, which were becoming increasingly bland and unfulfilling.

Finally, the Holy Spirit answered my prayer to cultivate a deeper intimacy with God through prayer. This happened in the most delightful and unexpected way. When my kids were all under five years old, I took them on a monthlong mission trip through Europe. As I write this, it sounds wonderful and appealing, but then I snap back to the reality that they were sick for much of the time, I lost all of our diaper supplies in the first three days of the trip, and we had to haul all of our luggage around planes, trains and buses and use rickety luggage carts. I was never so glad to get home as I was after that trip, and there was a wonderful gift waiting for me the next morning when I woke up at home in my own bed.

Because of jet lag, I woke up around three a.m., when everyone else was sound asleep. After tossing and turning, I decided to slip downstairs and get some Bible time. After some rich Bible fellowship, I found a notebook nearby and began to write out some thoughts to God. As I wrote, I sensed God speaking back to me, and we began a deeply fulfilling conversation through pen and paper that started a robust prayer routine that has lasted more than ten years. I attribute

this maturation in my prayer life to the deepening work of the Holy Spirit in my daily routines. He has helped me cultivate this daily discipline since my return from that trip, and it has worked into a habit. Now I wake early and get in my personal Bible and prayer time, and I am grateful for it.

You have probably guessed by now that the last section of inputs Paul outlines in Romans 8 has to do with prayer. Specifically, Romans 8:26–27 says:

> In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

In addition to the Holy Spirit establishing a vibrant prayer life for me several years ago, I appreciate that the Holy Spirit puts us in places and experiences where we sense a deep spiritual intercession to pray God's will to change a circumstance, in just the same way this passage above describes.

For example, one time I was visiting Cambodia to look for places to expand our NightCare work. As I was exploring a seedy neighborhood early one evening, I stumbled upon a toddler girl who was sitting on the steps of what I thought was a house. She led me into this "house," which I quickly realized was a mini brothel. This little toddler was giving me a "tour" of sorts.

To this day, the memory of that experience—what I saw and felt—continues to unravel me, and I feel the Holy Spirit groaning in my soul with pain and with an urgent beckoning to interrupt this deplorable cycle. While I cannot find the words to describe what this feels like in my soul, I am deeply moved to not only pray but also actively work to provide more NightCare shelters in Cambodia and in other desperate nations around the world.

I appreciate that not everyone sees the world like I do and that each of us has a unique journey to which the Holy Spirit calls us. But I also believe there are things each of us finds disturbing that might be the Holy Spirit's nudge inside us so we can allow the Holy Spirit to intercede through us. Maybe you are troubled by the homeless people in your city who hold signs asking for help at the corners of intersections. Maybe you have tasted the horrors of addiction and are moved with compassion to pray for addicts. Perhaps a physical illness or terminal disease causes a strong emotional reaction from you. It is my belief the Holy Spirit wants to pray and work through each of us to change the world around us because of God's redeeming and reconciling love.

As we finish this chapter, let's recall the essential inputs for living in the Spirit: We walk with the Holy Spirit and let our thoughts and feelings focus on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that we can accept we are sons or daughters of God and so that from these actions, we cultivate a vibrant prayer life with the

Holy Spirit. These inputs work together to culminate in a life integrated with the Holy Spirit and alive with the outcomes we listed at the beginning of this chapter.

Speaking of those outcomes, God wants you and me to be His poster children for them so the Holy Spirit can invite people around us to experience the irresistible love Jesus has for them. Remember that as we stay in love with God and true to His purposes in our lives, He causes everything to work together for good. Remember that God is for us, no matter what happens around us. Remember that God is generous toward us. Remember that we are more than conquerers in all things. Finally, remember the best news we could ever absorb into our daily life: that God's love for us cannot be interrupted, decreased or sabotaged by anything.

A life lived in step with the Holy Spirit is truly abundant living!

Prayer

Father, thank You for giving me the Holy Spirit. Thank You for teaching me what it looks like to live in step with the Holy Spirit. Please do not merely inform me about this wonderful life. I want the Holy Spirit to mentor me in this vibrant way so my life reflects Your presence and attracts people around me to You. Holy Spirit, continue to massage into my soul Your presence and truth. Thank You for helping me to walk with You, think about You and let You live in me, and thank You for confirming I belong in Jesus' family. Help me never to step away from Your love. Thank You for helping me to live both abundantly and successfully! Amen.

Go Further

1. Take an inventory of the ways life and peace and death and destruction show up in your daily life. What are their outcomes in the different areas of your life (family, job, school, friendships, physical health, etc.)?

2. What areas in your life are Spirit oriented? What areas are flesh oriented?
3. How can you make changes in the flesh-oriented areas of your life to cultivate more spiritual thinking? What flesh stuff needs to be eliminated and replaced with spiritual content?
4. In what ways is your heavenly Dad different from your earthly dad? Take a moment to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to work in your heart the truth that you are God’s daughter or son.

Epilogue

Writing this book has been an adventure of keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. To be honest with you, I have learned heaps of ways I do not walk in step with the Holy Spirit, simply through writing this book. Indeed, the more I wrote, the more obvious my missteps with the Spirit became. But I also came to see some of the ways I stay tethered to the Holy Spirit.

I am good at staying in step with the Holy Spirit when it comes to the platforms of my ministry, like studying and teaching the Bible. I tend to stay in the flow when it comes to exercising some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and I let the Holy Spirit direct me with Saving Moses.

As much as I would like to tell you I am an expert on this subject, I am afraid you will learn more from my failures than from my victories. I also suspect you could give me pointers on how to walk more in step with the Holy Spirit, and I welcome your gentle and gracious input. Feel free to contact me on any of the normal social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

Like I said, writing this book has been a sobering wake-up call to the plethora of ways I do not walk in step with the Holy Spirit. I do not often trust the Spirit for supernatural results. I carry within me a hyperindependence that is more than a little unhealthy. I am learning to become more mature in some areas with my emotions.

And then there are all the things that happened while I was writing this book. For starters, my kids began their teen driving years. That has caused more than a few anxious moments! My husband suffered a stroke, as I shared early on in the book. That was disturbing, but thankfully there was no permanent damage and he is 100 percent back to his normal self. I also spent time recovering from a concussion sustained in a snowboarding accident, and writing in recovery mode was challenging. It was easy to forget stuff, my emotions were more high strung than normal, and I struggled to keep my mind focused and disciplined in large chunks of time. I had to learn new ways to write, and I had to adapt to what was available at the time.

As I finished writing the book, I had an interesting experience from which I learned massive spiritual lessons. I went to a dermatologist to have some plantar warts frozen off the bottom of my foot. After I endured the liquid-nitrogen

torture, the doctor explained that I needed to wait a few days and then apply a covering of salicylic acid and duct tape on the area every night for six weeks.

The first week of this routine went fine, but soon the skin became raw. Then the nightly acid regime was anything but pleasant. To make matters worse, I decided to get more aggressive with my treatment by cutting away some of the dead flesh. This probably made the whole experience more painful than it needed to be. Not only was I in pain, but I hobbled around for a few weeks, unable to walk or exercise normally.

The spiritual lessons I learned from this were many, and I will share them with you because I believe they can help you as you endeavor to walk with the Holy Spirit for more of God's presence and power in your life. To begin, remember to trust the Holy Spirit and not go off on your own when it comes to ideas and remedies you might have. Remember that the Holy Spirit is the expert in both remedies and redemption! Our own efforts to heal ourselves often leave us more debilitated than we would be if we kept leaning into the Holy Spirit. Walking in step with the Holy Spirit makes us supernaturally mobile and effective.

Furthermore, total healing is often a process that combines daily decisions and discipline to protect the healing process. Just like my nightly regime of applying acid and duct tape was essential for the permanent removal of those warts, so also is it essential for us to have a daily discipline of following the Holy Spirit, rather than reaching out only for the occasional crisis intervention.

Being anxious and impatient with the Holy Spirit is pointless, too. Trust Him, and let your intimacy with the Spirit deepen with this trust.

Finally, allow the Holy Spirit to wholly be Himself with you. I tend to pick and choose the parts of the Holy Spirit I like or want and reject the parts that I do not like or feel I do not need. This strategy has limited my walk with the Holy Spirit and has restricted the supernatural from flowing in my daily life. Rather than shield ourselves from the Holy Spirit, let's yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit in readiness every day!

Notes

Chapter 4: How to Handle a Closed Door

1. For more information on the distances traveled, see Barnes' Bible Charts, "Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey," http://www.biblecharts.org/newtestaament/paulssecondmissionaryjourney.pdf.

Chapter 6: Ingredients for Revolution

1. NPR, "A Victim Treats His Mugger Right," *StoryCorps Morning Edition*, March 28, 2008, http://www.npr.org/2008/03/28/89164759/a-victim-treats-his-mugger-right.
2. You can view the trailer for the documentary on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBvxWl7jXr0.
3. History.com, "Pol Pot," http://www.history.com/topics/pol-pot.

Chapter 10: Sidestep the Land Mines

1. Adam Mynott, "Angola's Landmine Legacy," BBC News, November 29, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4049351.stm.
2. Robby Dawkins, *Identity Thief: Exposing Satan's Plan to Steal Your Purpose, Passion and Power* (Minneapolis: Chosen, 2015), 201–5.

Chapter 12: Life in the Spirit

1. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 469.

As the humanitarian founder of Saving Moses, **Sarah Bowling** endeavors to be a nimble demonstration of God's love in action to the least of these, as Jesus speaks about in Matthew 25:40. Her work with Saving Moses is based on the life of Moses, who at three months of age was almost eaten by crocodiles along the Nile River. Saving Moses works with babies and toddlers around the world where the need is most urgent and the care is least available. To that end, Saving Moses currently works to save malnourished babies in Angola, to administer infant immunizations and birthing care in Afghanistan and to provide night care for the babies of prostitutes in Cambodia and Bangladesh.

As a Bible teacher, Sarah loves to dig into the original languages of the Bible to inform her studies and bring relevance to her teaching. She desires to offer engaging and practical help for each person in their daily living. When Sarah teaches the Bible, it becomes alive to her audiences, infusing their experience with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

When she is not enjoying a robust cup of coffee or traveling and teaching, Sarah is busy raising three children with her husband, Reece, who is the pastor of a generational church in Denver, Colorado. Sarah is an active person who enjoys snowboarding, swimming, playing basketball and writing. If you would like to keep up with Sarah's daily blog, visit www.sarahbowling.me.

More from Sarah Bowling!

Visit sarahbowling.me for a full list of her books.



With candor and gentleness, Sarah Bowling draws back the curtain on her long and varied journey from hearing about the Holy Spirit to understanding what a relationship with Him might mean for her daily life. Driven by one essential question—*What does Jesus actually say about the Holy Spirit?*—Bowling offers powerful insights that will draw you into a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit and show you how He can transform your life every single day.

Heavenly Help

"Filled with biblical insights and personal stories as well as challenging questions. The honesty and integrity of this book will have great impact on all who read it."
—Bill Johnson, Bethel Church, Redding, California

"You will be challenged, provoked and awakened."
—Margaret Feinberg, author, Wonderstruck

"Read it and be transformed."
—Christine Caine, founder, The A21 Campaign; bestselling author, Undaunted

Chosen

Stay up to date on your favorite books and authors with our free e-newsletters. Sign up today at chosenbooks.com.

Find us on Facebook. facebook.com/chosenbooks

Follow us on Twitter. @Chosen_Books

Website: chosenbooks.com

Facebook: Chosen Books

Twitter: @Chosen_Books

Can you see the Holy Spirit's unique, supernatural expressions in your daily life?

With warmth and encouragement, Sarah Bowling shows how the Holy Spirit can be a vital part of every relationship and situation you face in life, from the mountaintop experiences to daily hardships. When you learn how to lean on the Spirit, He will direct your steps, open closed doors, carry your burdens, fill you with His gifts and release His supernatural power and presence into your life, family and community—because a Spirit-led life means Spirit-filled help, no matter what you're facing.

"Not only a great read, but a tool to inspire the ingredients to live a life of fullness in the presence of God!"
—**SHAWN BOLZ,** television personality; bestselling author, *Translating God*

"Learning to follow the Holy Spirit is the only way to fully experience God's amazing plans for our lives. Sarah's message gives eye-opening insight and practical steps to help people discover how to live by faith in Him."
—**JOYCE MEYER,** Bible teacher; bestselling author

"This book is full of inspiration and the practical how-tos of being led by the Holy Spirit in every aspect of your life."
—**HOLLY WAGNER,** pastor, Oasis Church; founder, GodChicks

"Finally, a practical book on how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. A must-read for you to be normal—normal as defined by the Bible."
—**SID ROTH,** host, *It's Supernatural!*

"This is a must-read for everyone!"
—**ROBERT MORRIS,** founding senior pastor, Gateway Church; bestselling author, *The Blessed Life, The God I Never Knew*



Sarah Bowling is a Bible teacher, international speaker, author and pastor. She co-hosts a daily television program with her mom, the esteemed Marilyn Hickey, and founded the international nonprofit Saving Moses to provide resources for children in need. Sarah and her husband, Reece, co-pastor Encounter Church in Denver, where they live with their three children.



Chosen
a division of Baker Publishing Group