



“The Christian church cannot rise to its true stature in accomplishing the purposes of God when its members operate largely through the gifts of nature, neglecting the true gifts and graces of the Spirit of God. Much of the religious activity we see in the churches is not the eternal working of the Eternal Spirit, but the moral working of man’s mortal mind—and that is raw tragedy! From what I see and sense in some evangelical circles, I would have to say that about ninety percent of the religious work carried on in churches is being done by ungifted members. I am speaking in this context of men and women who know how to do many things but fail to display the spiritual gifts promised through the Holy Spirit.”

A.W. Tozer, *Tragedy in the Church: The Missing Gifts*

When Jesus walked the earth, He was laser focused on the role that He had been given. There were many different ways that He expressed that role: “to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10), “to do the will of my Father who sent me” (John 6:38), and “that they may have life abundantly” (John 10:10). But early in Mark’s gospel, Jesus expressed His purpose in very practical terms: “Let us go on to the next town, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” (Mark 1:38, underline added) Jesus came, in simple terms, to proclaim the gospel. That certainly included using words to declare truth, but as seen in the other statements of purpose that Jesus made, it also meant *embodying* the gospel as well.

Matthew’s gospel might give the best example of this tandem of proclamation/practice or preaching/demonstrating: Jesus taught His famous “Sermon on the Mount,” recorded in Matthew 5-7, and then Matthew follows that teaching with two chapters (8-9) full of miracles and demonstrations of those teachings. Steve and Alace Straw, missionaries in Gabon, Africa, call that balance “show and tell.” It’s never just one or the other. As we seek to be with Jesus, be like Him, and do the things that He would do, this means that we also need to both “show and tell!”

In the Fall of 2023, we spent some time in the practice of “Preaching the Gospel,” focusing on the nature of the Gospel message itself and how we can be effective in communicating that message primarily through our words. This practice series moves into the “show” portion of our

proclamation. “Demonstrating the Gospel” is focused on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and how God works through us to demonstrate His truth to the world around us.

Both the teachings in this series and the practices in this booklet will focus both on the why and the how of demonstrating the gospel. The specific exercises in this booklet will stretch over the next six weeks and will tie directly to the teachings from Sunday morning, following the two-week introductory series on understanding and discovering spiritual gifts. You can find the teachings at www.yorkalliance.org/sermons-embedded. We believe that it is impossible to gain the life of Jesus without practicing the lifestyle of Jesus, and Jesus intentionally chose to live in community. The way that we believe God changes us is through the intersection of Biblical teaching, community, and practice. As such, this practice series and others like it, have a high potential for transformation for Jesus followers. If you don’t currently have a connection to a Community Group or another committed group of believers with whom to engage this material, you are strongly encouraged to get connected to one. You can get more information and sign up at yorkalliance.org/groups.

As with many of our practices, I have relied heavily on the teachings and writings of Practicing the Way in the development of this practice. A few other resources that I have found especially helpful in preparing for this series and would recommend for further study: *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* by Michael Green, *More* by Simon Ponsoyby, and *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts* by Sam Storms. I’m also grateful to our friends Alex and Hannah Absalom who will be joining us near the end of this series for a “Demonstrating the Gospel” daylong conference. The weeks will be laid out as follows:

- Week One: Holy Spirit
- Week Two: Presence
- Week Three: Breath
- Week Four: Power
- Week Five: Doing, Loving, and Walking
- Week Six: Prophecy and Healing

Our prayer is that God powerfully works through us to demonstrate His love and grace to the world around us!

Week One: Holy Spirit

“Christlikeness in our inner being is not the result of the right application of spiritual disciplines, finding a ‘good church,’ or mastering the right technique of living—it is always a gift of sheer grace. You will never work harder for anything in your life that Christlike character, and nothing else will ever feel like such an unearned gift. This is a paradox you simply have to experience for yourself.”

John Mark Comer, Practicing the Way

Depending on the survey, more than half of American Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is a force, not a person. These are folks who generally hold orthodox viewpoints on the major points of Christian doctrine but fail to understand the most basic nature of the third person of the Trinity. Beyond that, most of us are honestly a bit underwhelmed with the experience of the promise and the Person that Jesus was so excited about. The final extended conversation that Jesus had with His disciples (John 14-16) was marked throughout with the excitement of Jesus about the “Comforter” who would come to be with us. However, most of us would trade the indwelling presence of the Spirit for 30 minutes in the presence of Jesus. We’re not as excited as Jesus was.

The invitation is to get to know the Holy Spirit. We can’t get to know a person just by learning about them. Instead, we need to experience them. To spend time with them. This is the invitation we’ve been given in our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Discuss in Community

Before you read the Scripture for this week, discuss the following questions:

- In one or two sentences, how would you describe what you were taught or understood about the Holy Spirit?
- What are some of the obstacles or fears you have when you think about getting to know the Holy Spirit?
- What hopes stir in you when you think about a life that is more filled with the Holy Spirit?

Have somebody read John 20:19-23. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- Are you ever fearful when it comes to your relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit? How does that work out in your life?
- How would you describe the peace that Jesus brings into someone’s life? Talk about a time that you’ve experienced that.
- Why should an encounter with Jesus through the person of the Holy Spirit almost always lead us to mission?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- What times during the day are you most aware of the presence of the Spirit? What times are you least aware?
- Have you ever had the Holy Spirit “interrupt” your day? What was that experience like?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider connecting with a consistent prayer partner/group throughout this series so that you can encourage one another in this practice.

Individual Practice

As we start out this six-week journey, take some time to consider your daily rhythms and schedule. Most of us fail to recognize how formational our habits and rhythms are in our daily lives. The invitation for this week is to evaluate times/ways that you might engage the presence of the Spirit and follow His promptings. Consider these rhythms, or consider developing similar rhythms that work better for your daily schedule:

- Each morning before you get out of bed or even look at your phone, take 2-3 minutes to breathe in deeply and say “Come Holy Spirit” pausing to receive anything He has for you.
- Set a phone/watch alarm for several times during the day where you can simply pause what you’re doing and reflect on the way that the Holy Spirit has been or is working around you.
- Conclude your day with a few minutes of looking back and celebrating the ways you saw the Spirit work in and around you.

Week Two: Presence

“What we should see (and this applies to all Christians) is that God pours His Spirit out upon us so completely that we are filled with joy, victorious over sin, and bold to witness. And the ways He brings us to that fullness are probably as varied as people are. It may come in a tumultuous experience of ecstasy and tongues. It may come through a tumultuous experience of ecstasy and no tongues. It may come through a crisis of suffering when you abandon yourself totally to God. Or it may come gradually through a steady diet of God’s word and prayer and fellowship and worship and service. However it comes, our first experience of the fullness of the Spirit is only the beginning of a lifelong battle to stay filled with the Spirit.”

John Piper, Sermon on Ephesians 5:18

Life in the Spirit is not a set of beliefs or a philosophy to live by; it’s more like a series of encounters by which we more deeply and fully experience the person of God. This means encountering Him in the midst of the world as it actually is with the realities of suffering and hardship that exist all around us. The beauty of encountering the Spirit within the reality of a broken world is that while a set of beliefs or a philosophy doesn’t have the power to heal us, the Spirit can.

One metaphor to describe the Spirit throughout the Scriptures is water. Author Tyler Staton teaches that this metaphor invites us to both *come* and *become*. We are invited to *come* to quench our thirsty souls with the water of the Spirit to be healed. However, this requires us to truly “wade in” to the water of the Spirit and not just stand on the riverbanks. We’re also invited to *become* part of the healing current that is flowing through our world. When we are healed ourselves, healing becomes our calling. Those who have been powerfully healed become powerful healers.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Ezekiel 47:1-12. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- As you look at Ezekiel’s measure, how deep do you feel like you are in the river of the Spirit?

- What are some things that might hold someone back from going deeper in the life of the Spirit? What about you? Are there specific things that hold you back?
- Are there areas where you think you are finding life *outside* of the river? Why?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- Where do you need Jesus to speak to the internal chaos of your life? Where are you thirsty, and what are you thirsty for?
- Where do you sense an invitation from Jesus to become a healer out of your own healing?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider connecting with a consistent prayer partner/group throughout this series so that you can encourage one another in this practice.

Individual Practice

We’re all in different places on our journey with the Holy Spirit. For some, the “Becoming” practice fits well. For others who aren’t ready for that practice yet, the “Coming” practice is better suited.

Becoming. Ask the Spirit where He’s calling you to be an instrument of healing, reflecting on the spaces in your life where He has healed you. If you’ve been healed from addiction, maybe it’s getting connected with AA or Redemption Group. If you’ve experienced loneliness or a broken family, maybe it’s connecting with someone who seems to be alone. Step into the way that God is asking you to be an agent of healing.

Coming. Get together with a friend and talk through the places in your life that need healing and then pray together asking God to do it. Use your “holy imagination” to ask the Holy Spirit to show you what it looks like for you to be healed and to become a healer of others in the same situation that you find yourself in right now. What dreams/visions do you have as you consider your own healing?

Week Three: Breath

“The word used for the Spirit of God in both Hebrew and Greek are highly significant. Ruach in Hebrew and pneuma in Greek have three main meanings of wind, breath, and spirit. The Spirit of God is his life-giving breath without which man remains spiritually inert. It is his mysterious wind, which man cannot get under his own tidy control. Those twin notions of power and mystery mark much of the teaching of Old and New Testaments alike when they [teach about] the Spirit of God.”

Michael Green, I Believe in the Holy Spirit

At creation we see God breathing His *ruach* (breath) into all humankind, setting us apart from all other created beings. Another metaphor used throughout the Bible for the Spirit is the divine breath—the breath of the Spirit not only creates life where there is not life, but He refills that which is technically alive, but lifeless.

Jesus came to the world because of the love God has for each of us (John 3:16), and the Holy Spirit is meant to be the vehicle through which we each experience that love. The Spirit moves the teachings and work of Jesus from our mind to our hearts so that we don't just *know* the gospel—we are able to *live* it. The *ruach* of God is still filling our lungs so that the words we speak and the way that we live can be a carrier of the healing power of God to the world.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read John 3:1-8. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “born again?” When you read that phrase in the context of Jesus’ teaching, does it change your impression of it?
- What are some things in our lives that are “born of the flesh,” in Jesus’ terms? What things that are “born of the Spirit?”
- Is verse 8 disconcerting to you? Why or why not?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- What is helpful to you when you think about the Spirit as God’s breath?
- Where do you need the Spirit to breathe life into you?
- When God prompts us to speak to someone or pray with someone, what makes it difficult to do that?

Pause your discussion and ask the Spirit to reveal to each of you if there is someone in your lives that he would like to have you speak to, pray over, or bless in a specific way.

- Do you sense an invitation from the Spirit to partner with Him in someone’s life? Who is it, and what would that look like?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider pairing up family units (singles and couples) if you haven’t already to encourage one another as you go into this week’s practice.

Individual Practice

Depending on the way you worked it out, this practice might be a continuation or a deepening of a practice that you began in Week One. The goal is to give God the first word in your day, and by doing so, to rewrite your habits so that our first move when we get up is to turn our attention to the Spirit. In doing this we invite the Spirit to shape our day and we begin to learn what His voice sounds like.

The actual practice is simple: give God the first 2-3 minutes of your day. *The first 2-3 minutes as soon as you wake up.* This means developing enough awareness, likely while still in bed, to turn your heart to the Spirit rather than instinctually to your phone, as many of us do.

If you’re willing to commit to this practice, take a few minutes to share with at least one other person, either during your Community Group meeting or by phone/text/conversation, how you are planning to tangibly make this happen.

Week Four: Power

"Paul declared that the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power (1 Corinthians 4:20). Sadly, however, we often seem all talk and no power. Impotent, academic, and anemic, we have placed God in a box; we have domesticated God and rarely want Him to disturb us. But the Scriptures reveal a God who is all power, who breaks our boxes, shatters our bonds, shakes up whole rooms, and turns the world upside down and right-side up. John Stott has written, 'What we need is not more learning, not more eloquence, not more persuasion, not more organization, but more power from the Holy Spirit.'"

Simon Ponsonby, [More](#)

In the Targum, the Aramaic translation of the Torah that Jesus would have read, it says that at creation God was hovering over the waters *like a dove*. Many, many years later when Jesus was baptized by his cousin John, it was recorded that Jesus came up out of the waters and the Holy Spirit descended on Him *like a dove*. The gospel writers were seeking to make a profound point: that the creative and miracle-working power of Jesus came to Him when the Spirit rested on Him at baptism. This is a "re-creation" story.

The life of Jesus displays for us what a human life looks like that is anointed with the Spirit of God and fully lives into that anointing. The call of Jesus to be His apprentices is also an invitation to become that kind of human. But this filling must necessarily be preceded by an emptying because it's in the act of emptying that we're ready to be filled.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Luke 4:16-19 and John 15:26-27. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in these two passages?
- How does the empowerment of the Spirit to be a witness tie to the teaching of Jesus from Luke 4?
- What does it practically look like to proclaim the gospel with our lives?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- What are some ways that you see people resisting the experience of the Spirit's power in their lives? What are some situations in which you resist His working?
- Are there situations where you are sensing the invitation to make more space in your heart to receive more of the Holy Spirit's power?
- If you need to be empty in order to be filled, what might God need to remove from your life?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider pairing up family units (singles and couples) if you haven't already to encourage one another as you go into this week's practice.

Individual Practice

The practice this week is related to being emptied so that we might be filled. Historically, fasting (as well as other abstinence practices) have been ways followers of Jesus have cultivated a greater hunger for the Holy Spirit. Fasting from food has been the historic way of understanding the idea of fasting, but there's no one specific way to fast. The goal is to deny yourself something (food, entertainment, sugar, alcohol, media, etc.) in order to remember that the "something" doesn't truly satisfy us. Our desire is to cultivate a heart for the Spirit who truly satisfies.

The goal of fasting isn't endurance, it's about identifying appetite. It's less about how long you can do it and more about what happens to you when you do. Our goal is to recognize the space of hunger in our soul that can only be met by the presence of God's Spirit.

Choose a method of fasting and predetermine a duration. It might be a 24 hour fast from food once a week for the next 3 months. It might be abstaining from social media, news websites/podcasts, or a specific form of entertainment for a month. It might be giving up sugar or alcohol for a predetermined period of time. The power is to create a hunger for the Holy Spirit as we abstain from something that doesn't truly satisfy.

Week Five: Doing, Loving, Walking

“Jesus stands in a long line of Hebrew prophets who stand for justice in the world. Making wrong things right, crooked things straight. Dr. Gerry Breshears said, ‘Practicing justice is an act of joining God in seeing that the created order (people and everything else) receives what is due.’ And doing this no matter the pain to yourself. It means disadvantaging yourself for the advantage of the ‘other,’ the one in need of care. To follow Jesus is to stand with him for justice. If all of this sounds next to impossible, remember that the only way we can do any of this stuff is ‘in the power of the Holy Spirit.’”

John Mark Comer, Practicing the Way

One of the consistent works of the Holy Spirit throughout the Scriptures is regularly empowering people to do the work of justice and mercy. This has continued throughout the history of the church. Atheist writer and historian Tom Holland makes the case in his book Dominion that much if not all of the “good” that is found in our world today has its seeds in the Christian movement.

Unfortunately, a word like “justice” has become a buzzword for both the political right and the left rather than embodying the biblical ideal of wrong things being made right and broken things being made whole. However, the work of justice is deeply embedded in the Scriptural narrative and seems to be a “favorite work” of the Holy Spirit.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Micah 6:6-8. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- What are some of the forms of injustice that you see in the world around you?
- How do the work of justice, the love of kindness, and the practice of humility work together in unity?
- Have you been involved in any kind of justice work? What was that experience like?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the community practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- What are some ways that our group is specifically “shaped” to serve in the world around us?
- As you consider the list of ways to serve, does something really stick out to you?
- Is there a way of serving that’s not on the list that you’d like for the group to consider?

Take some time to pray together as a group this week, both about what you are planning to do, when you are planning to do it, and asking the Holy Spirit to give you His power for your service so that you aren’t simply doing it in your own strength.

Community Practice

The practice this week is for your whole community to take at least one night over the next few weeks to serve those around you in an intentional way. There are many different forms that this service could take—the goal is for you to determine one or more ways you’d like to serve together as a community, and then plan it and make it happen!

The Global Action Team has developed a list, in conjunction with our home mission partners, of specific needs that you could possibly meet as a group. In addition to meeting these needs, it would be a great opportunity to start to develop an ongoing relationship with one of these mission partners so that you might serve sporadically or even regularly throughout the year. Contact the church office for the list or follow the link that is posted with this week’s sermon online.

You could also creatively engage your community by meeting needs that you are able to observe. Your group might do some yard work or minor house repairs for an elderly neighbor, provide childcare for a few young families in your community, or serve someone who is experiencing homelessness that you have encountered in a public space of some kind. The sky’s the limit, but the goal is to serve together sometime in the next few weeks.

Week Six: Prophecy and Healing

"We may as well face it: the whole level of spirituality among us is low. We have measured ourselves by ourselves until the incentive to seek higher plateaus in the things of the Spirit is all but gone... (We) have imitated the world, sought popular favor, manufactured delights to substitute for the joy of the Lord and produced a cheap and synthetic power to substitute for the power of the Holy Ghost."

A.W. Tozer, *Of God and Men*

Prophecy and healing can be challenging gifts for us because we cross over from what we might be able to produce on our own (good teaching, evangelism, being hospitable, etc.) into that which requires a step of faith. When someone hears a true word from God or experiences His healing power, they know that they have experienced the divine. Yet many of us struggle to step out in faith with these miraculous gifts of the Spirit because we're afraid of looking foolish.

However, it's important for us to remember when we are engaging things like prophecy and healing that we aren't "playing with God's power" but rather we are *stewarding God's presence*. He is the one who desires to work in our community as well as among the people that we engage in the world around us, and being faithful stewards of His presence means practicing the gifts of prophecy and healing so that we can become more proficient at ministering to others in these powerful ways.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read 1 Corinthians 14:1-5 and James 5:13-18. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in these passages?
- Does the way that Paul describes prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14 line up with the way that you tend to think about it? Why or why not?
- When you think about God's work of healing, do you also think about confession of sin at the same time? Why or why not?
- What might it look like for us to practice prophecy and/or healing in this group?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- How has this entire practice series been for you?
- Have you ever experienced God working either in you or through you in a miraculous way? Describe your perception of that experience.
- Does the prophetic part of this practice or the healing part of the practice (or neither) make you more uncomfortable?

Take some time to pray over one another, and if you've had pairs or groups that have remained consistent throughout this practice, take some time to debrief your experience of this practice series.

Individual Practice

This last week contains two practices: a prophetic practice and a healing practice. It may work best for some to spread these out over a few weeks, particularly with the holiday coming. You are encouraged to do them in a way that will allow you to engage them most completely.

Prophetic Practice

Spend some time this week listening intentionally to the Spirit on behalf of someone. You could start with a specific person in mind, or you can ask God to bring someone to mind. You might do this each day, or you might prefer to take a more extended time to do this on your Sabbath. After listening, approach the person with humility if there is a message that you sense you may have received for them.

Healing Practice

First, spend some time each day asking the Lord for healing in some area of your life. It might be physical, emotional, spiritual, or something else—bring this area before God and ask Him to heal it.

Second, take time each day to pray healing for someone else in your life. It could be someone in your Community Group, a co-worker, a friend, a family member, or even a total stranger. Bring them regularly before the Father, and then look for opportunities to pray over them in person as well if appropriate.