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A Fresh Start

May not a single moment of my life be spent outside the light, love and joy of God's presence. And not a moment without the entire surrender of myself as a vessel for Him to fill full of His Spirit and His love.

ANDREW MURRAY

The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

GENESIS 1:2

“Stop and listen, and God will show you!”

Out of the mouths of babes can sometimes come divine wisdom, and my four-year-old son was God's mouthpiece to me in that moment.

I was searching the house for my purse at 4:10 on a Friday afternoon. All three kids were loaded into their car seats, and I was trying to make it to a 4:30 doctor's appointment for the one I suspected had an ear infection. I wanted to get him to the doctor before the weekend, just in case we would need to start him on an antibiotic.

I was more than a little frantic in that moment, however. My purse had our health insurance card in it, and I had been looking for no less than twenty minutes to find it, with no luck. My frenzied search was leading me straight into the freak-out zone when my son—normally mellow and collected—let God speak to me through him.

His voice caught my attention enough that I sat down in the car, paused and prayed. Then I listened to hear any direction the Helper might give me.

My kids were quiet. (They were likely nervous about the impending meltdown I was about to unleash into our afternoon.) Their stillness allowed me to hear the directive to call the ice-cream shop where we had stopped for a snack earlier that day.

I rang the shop, and sure enough, they had a purse. When I described my purse to them, they were certain it was mine. I zipped over there, collected my treasure and made it on time to the appointment. Whew!

I have just shared with you an example of what it is like to receive divine help in an earthly context. It is my experience that the Holy Spirit offers this help to us—and boatloads more. It is my lifelong experience that the heavenly Helper not only wants to connect with you, but also to participate in your daily living—to give you divine help in ways you have yet to experience.

Throughout my life, the Holy Spirit has been preparing me to write this book for you. The journey to help you know the Holy Spirit through this book began in September 2010, when I started an outrageous adventure of studying for a sermon series on John 14–16. In these chapters of John’s gospel, Jesus emphasizes the Holy Spirit during His last meal with His closest followers. They are riveting chapters to me because they provide an in-depth teaching on the Person of the Holy Spirit, who is often so mysterious to us. I am eager to share with you the results of my adventure of studying those chapters.

As I will share with you in a later chapter, I grew up in the charismatic tradition. My upbringing included voluminous amounts of teaching about the Holy Spirit, rooted in the book of Acts and Paul’s epistles. I learned numerous times about the gifts of the Holy Spirit found in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, and I heard countless sermons about walking in the Spirit, as taught in Galatians 5. But for whatever reason, I never seemed to hear any teaching about the Holy Spirit from John 14–16, where Jesus introduces the Helper to us with descriptive explanation. I am amped to share these teachings with you.

But I will also be honest with you. As I wrote this book, I was more than a little intimidated by the prospect of expressing truths about the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. It is one thing to write about topics like success, priorities, making our work sacred, raising healthy children or living in a constructive marriage. All of those things are important, for sure. But when I compare those subjects to writing about our heavenly Helper, it feels like a completely different level. I do not want to go astray in anything I say

about God or how we relate to and connect with the Helper. I am also intimidated by the diversity of people who will read this book, knowing each person will come to it with his or her own mindset, emotions, doctrinal biases, experiences and predispositions.

I must say, though, that I think a little bit of intimidation can facilitate a healthy level of respect for the Helper. We must live in the tension of healthy respect and integrated intimacy. My prayer is that as you read through this book, your awareness of and appreciation for the Helper will become sharper. I pray this for you because I believe the Triune God wants to connect with us in both deep intimacy and vibrant transformation.

I also want to acknowledge that this can be a tricky subject. When it comes to the Three Persons of the Trinity, God the Father is not an altogether foreign thought. Whether you had an awesome, absent or awful dad, the concept of *father* is a common paradigm in the human experience. Furthermore, it is not much of a stretch for us to conceptually connect with God the Son, whom we know as Jesus. Jesus came and lived among us, experiencing a familiar human life with family, hunger, friends, sleep, pain, joy and grief. These first two Persons of the Trinity are, for these reasons, usually easy to approach and appreciate.

When we begin to talk about God the Holy Spirit, though, everything can get misty super fast. In fact, even bringing up the word *spirit* sets us into a mode of thinking of things ethereal. *Sublimate* is a scientific term for the process where matter transitions directly from a solid phase into a gas, bypassing the liquid state, and that is often what happens when we think about the Holy Spirit. We move directly from

a solid concept to something more like dry ice—gas that wafts up and disappears in a few brief seconds.

I pray this book reverses the sublimation process for you when it comes to your experience of the Helper, making what may seem to be an ethereal vapor into a concrete reality.

Here is the road map for our journey. In the next chapter, we will explore Jesus' revolutionary introduction of this Helper to His disciples—what it means for the Holy Spirit to be our heavenly help and how such help is radical. After that, we will learn what it means to encounter the Spirit of truth, how to accept the invitation to live as children rather than orphans, how the Helper reminds us what we need to know, ways we can allow our lives to be witnesses of our God life and how our receiving of the Holy Spirit is actually an upgrade to the experience the disciples knew with Jesus. We will also learn about the gifts and fruits of the Spirit, what happens when we do not let the Helper into our lives in the various ways available to us and what it can look like to lean on this heavenly help every single day of our lives.

Additionally, each chapter ends with two special features. The first is what I call the IRA—and by that, I do not mean a kind of retirement savings account or the Irish Republican Army. Rather, it stands for “Inspect, Reflect, Apply” and is a grouping of questions and exercises that can be helpful for your own self-study or for use in group discussions to reflect and make application of each chapter's content to your daily life. It is my core conviction that the Helper wants to be thoroughly integrated into our daily living so that we live out a beautiful lifestyle of transformation with heavenly help. I pray each of these IRA sections provides practical tools and exercises to make this conviction relevant for you.

Second, each chapter closes with an allegory. I want to help you connect and engage with the Helper on a deeper level than your current status. While some people connect in a more cerebral way, where going into Jesus' words and the Greek and historical contexts behind biblical passages are rich and helpful exercises, other people connect in a more relational or emotional way, finding their deepest connections through spiritual conversations, experiences and interactions. For those of us wired up in this second way, I have included a brief allegory with each chapter that endeavors to link the topic of the chapter with a relational expression found through the interactions of two fictional women I have named Naomi and Ruth.

I chose these names, in part, because of the biblical content found in the book of Ruth, where we find the beautiful forging of a deep and intimate relationship between two women who suffered tremendous loss. Naomi's son Mahlon was the husband of Ruth. When the common link that bound these women together was removed through Mahlon's death, Ruth made the decision to stay attached to Naomi, her mother-in-law. In the book's most-famous passage, Ruth tells her mother-in-law:

"Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

Ruth 1:16–17

The book of Ruth is rich and rewarding, filled with real-life intimacy, hardships, disappointments and satisfaction. Ruth and Naomi cultivate a deep connection through their struggles, uncertainties and fears. They choose to become a mother and daughter to each other, not merely defaulting to their bloodline realities.

I would encourage you to read through the book of Ruth and to consider how the relationship between these two women grew into a permanent, fruitful and intimate connection that brought great life, joy, hope and future. The brief allegorical expressions included at the end of each chapter are meant to make a similar connection. They are intended to help you see how the Helper can become more real in your life, full stop.

So, let's jump into this fantastic adventure. I have lined up some initial questions for your first IRA experience below, and our first allegory story with Ruth and Naomi follows. Then we pick up the trail of our adventure in chapter 2 with an exploration of radical help. Onward!

Inspect, Reflect, Apply

1. What has been your experience of our heavenly Helper, the Holy Spirit?
2. Would you say you are more of a cerebral learner or someone who learns in a more relational and emotional

way? How have you seen evidence of this in your learning experiences?

3. Take some time over the next week or so to read John 14–16, paying special attention to all that Jesus says about the Helper.

Ruth and Naomi: An Introduction

“Ready, set, *go!*”

I jumped off the bridge and plunged toward the ground, wind blowing my hair back and my eyes wider than car tires. My stomach rushed into my throat.

As I plummeted to the ground, I reminded myself the bungee cord was sturdy—hopefully. I’d always wanted to try bungee jumping, and my new friend, Naomi, was waiting on the bridge, next in line for her turn, cheering me on in the plunge.

The earth kept getting closer and closer, and I knew I was reaching the limit of the cord. I kept praying it wouldn’t snap on me at the bottom. I could see the headlines now: “Woman Plunges to Her Death.”

I brushed aside the pessimism and decided to enjoy the last nanoseconds before the elastic bounced me up and rescued me from a deadly face-plant.

I had hopped into this bungee-jumping adventure after meeting Naomi by the brussels sprouts in the grocery store.

She was mumbling to herself about how a person was supposed to eat those little alien green balls.

To this day, I have no idea why I piped up to tell her, a total stranger in the grocery store, how to cook a freaky vegetable for a tasty outcome. Normally, I don't talk to strangers. More often than not, I think they're strange, and I don't need to add my strange to their strange, thereby making the world altogether more strange. But there I went with my usual "leap then look" strategy, offering up an easy and delicious recipe for brussels sprouts to a total stranger.

And she didn't freak out! In fact, she seemed really happy to have my input, and we started up a friendly conversation, sharing a few cooking ideas as we worked our way through our weekly grocery lists. I learned my new friend's name was Naomi, and I found her interesting and engaging.

The next week, we happened to catch up again in the grocery store and struck up another fun conversation, exchanging more recipes while getting our weekly ration of eggs, milk, lunchmeat and bread. At the end of our shopping foray, Naomi mentioned bungee jumping as something she'd been wanting to try for years. She had finally worked up the courage to take the dive with a friend.

"I thought I'd ask you," she explained, "because you seem kind of unconventional. Maybe you're just crazy enough to enjoy new adventures!"

Little did Naomi know that *unconventional* is my middle name—almost.

We exchanged phone numbers in the parking lot, and that's how I found myself in this precarious and playful plunge, plummeting through the air and diving into a new friendship.

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After I finished my jump, I climbed up on the bridge and described the adrenaline rush.

“Oh my gosh,” I exclaimed. “That was totally awesome! I was so scared and exhilarated, all at the same time. I haven’t experienced that kind of a rush in years. Let’s do it again!”

The more I talked, the more Naomi’s face became focused. In a strange way, describing my experience to her seemed to draw us closer, making us feel more connected.

“Do you have any suggestions for me with this adventure?” she asked. “I’ve never done anything like this, and it seems you had an incredible experience. Tell me what I should know.”

It didn’t seem Naomi was getting cold feet by asking me this. Instead, she seemed to want me to share as much of my experience with her as I could. She had paid a sizable amount of money and put a lot of effort into checking this adventure off her bucket list, so learning from my experience was going to help ensure her success with it.

Still, since we were new friends, I wasn’t sure whether to tell her how scared I had been. Was it better to stay solely on the encouragement track with this?

I looked at the clear sky and then replied, “Naomi, this is the perfect day and perfect situation for you to do this. I’ll be honest—I was definitely scared as I put on the safety harness and stepped up to the platform. How could I not be? But once I jumped, the rush was worth the fear. You’re going to *love* this experience! I suggest you think only of what you need to do next. Put on the safety harness one leg at a time, and then let the instructor help you get ready. This will be a blast!”

I’m at my best when I get to encourage people, and Naomi was giving me the opportunity to be my best self. While I’m a fiercely independent person and enjoy adventures like bungee

jumping, I'm also intensely loyal. Getting to affirm and coach Naomi in this challenging moment allowed me to build a deeper friendship with her.

She looked at me with eager eyes as she slipped on the safety harness. The instructor clipped the cord to her harness and gave her a few more instruction points. Then she stepped to the edge of the bridge.

“Don't look—just leap!” I yelled.

Naomi looked at me and offered a knowing little smirk before taking the plunge.

And that is how my rich, deep and amazing friendship with Naomi moved from the produce section of the grocery store to a trust that can hold the thoughts, feelings and fullness of my heart.