

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

For more information on the material in this session,
read chapter 2 of the book *Forgotten God*.

Fear is an excellent motivator. Every American is taught from an early age to denounce fear. Our heroes are tough and fearless. We actually believe that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. But let's face it: We're all far more affected by fear than we'd like to let on.

1. Think about a time in your life when you were afraid (whether the fear was irrational or legitimate). How did you feel? How did you respond?

If I asked you whether your theology was formed by truth or fear, I doubt anyone would answer “fear.” But the Holy Spirit has become a controversial topic of discussion. Whole camps have formed around particular understandings of the Spirit. Most evangelical churches could be categorized as either charismatic or non-charismatic. And deviating from your camp’s position could cause you to be questioned or even rejected. Changing your views about the Spirit could mean finding another church or group of friends.

2. Why do you think it is so easy to become defensive and fearful of change when it comes to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit?

It’s natural to develop specific views about the Holy Spirit. But unfortunately, we typically develop stereotypes about the other camp. While some aspects of these stereotypes are based on fact, most of the time they’re exaggerated at best and unfounded at worst.

When all we know about the other position is based on stereotypes, it breeds fear. It is this kind of fear that keeps us stationary. We’re afraid to move from our position because we don’t want to become “like them.”

3. Try to figure out where you’re at with this. Which camp (if any) do you most identify with regarding your established views of the Holy Spirit, and what fears and stereotypes do you have of the other camp?

4. Being as honest as possible, do you think those fears would keep you from changing your views and practices, even if you found that the Scriptures teach that your views are misguided? Why, or why not?

If you're not afraid of becoming like the other camp, there are other kinds of fears that keep us from what God has for us.

Most of us have experienced a time when we asked God to do something, but He did not come through in the way we expected. Maybe you're afraid that if you ask God for the Holy Spirit, nothing will happen. I'm sure that more of us are guilty of this than are willing to admit it. You read the Bible and don't see any reason why God couldn't do today what He did then. But you don't see the miraculous in your everyday life, so you're afraid that if you ask God for His Spirit, you'll be disappointed.

5. If you are motivated by a fear that God won't act when you ask Him to, what does that say about your view of God?

If you are afraid that the Holy Spirit won't show up when you ask Him to, start by assessing your requests in light of James 4:2-3: "You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." Sometimes God doesn't show up because we don't ask Him to. Sometimes God doesn't answer our requests because our motives are all wrong. Rather than praying for the things that God has promised

to give us (like the Holy Spirit—see Luke 11:13) we pray that God will give us what we want.

Many of us need to earnestly check our hearts at this point. If you find yourself doubting that God can and will do the impossible, you need to reexamine your view of God. Try reading through the book of Acts. As you read, ask yourself whether or not you believe that the God you worship is the same God who worked in all of these incredible ways.

There is one other fear that we ought to address. Perhaps the only thing scarier than the Spirit not showing up is the thought that He will! What if the Holy Spirit started to act powerfully in your life? I'm concerned that most of us are not prepared for what that might mean.



If you have the *Forgotten God DVD Study Resource*, watch the video for session 2, particularly if you are meeting with a group. After the video, work through the rest of this section.

Ignorance can be bliss. If we don't know exactly what God wants us to do, we can maintain our current lifestyle and still manage a perception of godliness.

6. Imagine that the Holy Spirit took complete control of your life and showed you exactly what He wanted you to do. Why might the thought of actually following the Holy Spirit be scary?

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Have you ever found yourself fearful of this? If so, describe what you thought and did.

Read Luke 18:18–30. The ruler in this story had been going about his life in peace. Apparently, he was really striving to keep God's commandments. He seems to have been sincere in asking Jesus about the path to eternal life. He was confident in his efforts. But (as we often find) Jesus' answer required more than he was prepared to give.

7. Why do you think the ruler was so surprised when Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor? What do you think he was expecting Jesus to say?

8. What did Jesus mean when He said "follow me" (v. 22)?

Do you think the ruler understood what Jesus meant by this? Why, or why not?

Just like the blackjack game mentioned in the video, Jesus acknowledges that it's more difficult to follow when a lot is at stake: "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:24). It's easier to go "all in" when we don't have much. In America, not many of us fall into that category.

9. Try to put yourself in the ruler's position. He was a wealthy man, yet he came to Jesus to learn what he should do. Picture yourself coming to Jesus and asking His Spirit to lead you in the right direction. Do you have any thoughts about what He might ask you to do?

10. Would you be willing to follow, no matter what that might mean? Why do you say that?

Most people are control freaks. It can be difficult to let someone else call the shots, especially when it comes to the way you live your life. “The truth is that the Spirit of the living God is guaranteed to ask you to go somewhere or do something you wouldn’t normally want or choose to do” (*Forgotten God*, 50). Does that statement surprise you? No matter what plans we may have for our lives, none of us is perfectly in tune with God’s will:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa. 55:8–9).

At this point, question yourself: Do you really believe that where the Holy Spirit would lead you is better than where you would lead yourself? That’s a difficult question to answer, a question that the rest of this study will help you to answer. In fact, we will spend the rest of our lives becoming more and more convinced that God’s way is the best way. For now, it’s all about laying aside our fears and trusting the Spirit to lead us.

Fear paralyzes us for a variety of reasons. But there is one thing in particular that we actually should be afraid of when it comes to the Holy Spirit: “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:19–21). We shouldn’t fear other people, the possibility that God won’t show up, or the possibility that He will show up. But we should be afraid of quenching the Spirit. What hope does the church have if we actively suppress the power of God?

11. Read Ephesians 4:30. Write down a few aspects of your life that you think may grieve the Holy Spirit and hinder His work in and through you. Once you've written them down, stop and pray. Repent of those things and ask the Spirit to give you the strength to put those things to death.

In Luke 11, Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray. He tells them to ask, and it will be given to them; to seek, and they will find; to knock, and the door will be opened (v. 9). He says that every human father knows how to give good gifts to his children. And then He draws a powerful conclusion: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (v. 13).

12. Spend some time in prayer. Ask God to remove your fears about following the Holy Spirit. Ask God to give you the Holy Spirit. Pray that the Spirit would show you what He wants you to do and pray that God would give you the strength and the heart to follow wherever He might lead.