

SUPERNATURAL CHURCH

For more information on the material in this session,
read chapter 7 of the book *Forgotten God*.

Unfortunately, one of the most striking similarities that most churchgoers share with the non-Christian world is their ability to complain about the way the church operates. We all do it from time to time. But think positively for a minute:

1. If you could create the perfect church, what would it look like? (How would it be run? How would people act, reach out, worship, pray, and so on?)

Now consider this question: Could that perfect church be accomplished through human talent and strength? Or would it require the power of the Holy Spirit? Why?

Let's be honest: We could duplicate most of our successful churches by assembling the right group of talented, winsome people. If a church has the right worship leader, an exciting children's program, and an entertaining speaker, it will grow. But is that really the secret to life-changing ministry? Is that how God designed the church to operate? Where does the Holy Spirit fit in that model? As much as I believe in using our natural abilities for God's glory, I simply cannot reconcile that model with the Lord's statement: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

All of our natural talents come from God, and I'm not trying to downplay using your unique gifts and abilities. But if our lives and churches make perfect sense in light of human talent and strength, then something is missing: "I don't want my life to be explainable without the Holy Spirit. I want people to look at my life and know that I couldn't be doing this by my own power. I want to live in such a way that I am desperate for Him to come through" (*Forgotten God*, 142).

2. Consider your involvement with church life. In what ways do we tend to rely on natural talent as we strive to fulfill the church's mission?



If you have the *Forgotten God DVD Study Resource*, watch the video for session 7, particularly if you are meeting with a group. After the video, come back and work through the rest of this section.

The cartoon in the video gives a powerful illustration of the church today: We get excited about the tractor, then wear ourselves out pushing it inch by inch through the field. At the end of the harvest, we've barely managed to finish the job and end up with just enough food to go around. Tragically, this is how many churches operate—they are built on the sweat and effort of a few talented (but exhausted) leaders.

When we consult the owner's manual, however, we find that the tractor is actually designed to run and plow the field on its own. So we fix the tractor, plow the field in a single night, and then share the overabundance of food with everyone in need. When we discover that the church was designed to function through the power of the Holy Spirit, it changes everything.

3. Think about the tractor illustration. Do you see yourself and/or your church pushing and pulling the "tractor" an inch at a time? If so, in what ways?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26—2:5.

When Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth, he had to address factions that were dividing the church. Groups were forming around attractive personalities (Paul, Apollos, Cephas). In order to address their preoccupation with human personalities and wisdom, Paul brought their focus back to the power of God, rather than the brilliance of men.

4. How does Paul describe human effort as compared to the power of God?
5. According to this passage, why is it so important to rely on the power of the Spirit? (See especially 2:5.)
6. Think about the way you minister to the people around you. Can you say along with Paul, "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4-5)? Why, or why not?

What's true of the church in general is also true of our lives in particular. There ought to be a real difference between a Spirit-filled person and everyone else. I'm not necessarily talking about walking around raising the dead and speaking foreign languages all the time.

Remember the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5? The fruit mentioned there is not all that shocking. Many non-Christians are actually happy, peaceful people.

But as Christians, we have the Source of both joy and peace *living inside of us*. So while anyone can show love at times and to certain extents, we who have the Holy Spirit ought to love the people around us to a supernatural degree in any and every circumstance. Sometimes the difference isn't apparent until tragedy strikes. When we find ourselves in the midst of overwhelming circumstances, the Spirit has a chance to show His incredible power.

7. Have you ever witnessed a person manifesting the fruit of the Spirit to a supernatural degree? How did God show His power through that person?

The Spirit wants to do more than just help us out a bit. He wants to transform us, patiently but steadily, into people who transform our corners of the world. We sometimes get so caught up in everything God wants us to *do* that we lose sight of who God wants us to *be*. The difference is significant. God wants us to be the type of people who love Him wholeheartedly, who depend on the Holy Spirit, who by faith reach out to the people around us. As we spend time pursuing God and enjoying fellowship with the Spirit, we will begin to see our lives changing from the inside out.

We won't be transformed by simply trying harder. "Grunting and saying through clenched teeth, 'I *will* be patient!' hasn't worked yet, and that isn't likely to change. But what does effect change is when we begin to ask God to make these fruit manifest in our lives, by the power of His Spirit, and when we spend time in communion with our God" (*Forgotten God*, 148–149). Remember, it's never been about you doing it on your own. It's about the power of the Spirit in your life.

8. What would it look like for you to cultivate a relationship with the Spirit, allowing Him to transform you, rather than simply trying harder on your own?

It's been brought up in previous chapters, but perhaps we don't recognize the Spirit's power in our lives because we're not stepping out and doing anything where we desperately need God to show up. Anyone can show up to a Sunday meeting, sing a few songs, sit still for forty-five minutes, shake a few hands, and then drive home.

But when you start talking to the hurting people around you, digging deeper to learn how you can love and serve them, that's when you need the Holy Spirit, and that's precisely when He shows up! God works in the most desperate situations so that no one can mistake it for anything other than His power. Maybe He will grant you boldness to speak in a frightening situation. Maybe He will give you a divine compassion for the lost and destitute. Maybe He will give you the wisdom to say exactly what a person needs to hear at a crucial moment in his or her life. You won't know what God will do until you get out there and follow His leading. The question is, do you trust Him enough to follow Him into the unknown, confident that He will work powerfully in that situation?

We absolutely need to step beyond our own abilities. It's much safer to stay where we're comfortable, but our lack of confidence in God's power does not bring Him any glory. You get praised for using your natural talents well. God gets praised when His power accomplishes the humanly impossible.

9. Have you ever walked away from a ministry opportunity because it would take you beyond your natural talents? In what areas would you need the Spirit to empower you in a situation like that?

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10. Do you believe that the Spirit would “come through” for you in that type of situation? Why, or why not?

Throughout these seven sessions you’ve thought through the importance of the Holy Spirit from a number of different angles. We could always study more, but it’s time to act (if you haven’t already). This is by far the most difficult part. It’s time to follow the Spirit’s leading, even if you’re not sure where He’s taking you or how you’ll get through it. The world desperately needs to see a united church that is absolutely submitted to and filled with the Holy Spirit.

11. Allow yourself to dream for a minute. What would it look like if every Christian in your community fully submitted themselves to the Spirit’s leading?

12. What practical steps can you take right now to pursue the Spirit and live in dependence on Him?

It all comes down to one important question: Will you rely on your natural abilities, or will you allow the Holy Spirit to use you in incredible ways? The way you proceed will determine if you as an individual and your church as a group of individuals will be stoppable or unstoppable.

If you rely on our own talents, you can be stopped so easily. You could get tired, distracted, overwhelmed, attacked. But if the Holy Spirit moves through His church, nothing can stand in the way. Rather than the weak, this-worldly churches we're so familiar with, the church would actually look like Jesus said it would: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). I believe that God will empower His church in this way, but the question is, do we want Him to start with us?

13. As we end this study, spend more time than usual in prayer. Pray that the Spirit of God would radically transform your life from the inside out. Pray that your life will never be the same.

REFLECTIONS ON ...

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NOTES FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS

The purpose of this book is to provide a framework for discussion and reflection on the book's content. The book is designed to be used in a group setting, and the notes are intended to guide the discussion and reflection process. The notes are organized into sections that correspond to the chapters of the book. The notes are intended to be used as a guide, but they are not meant to be read verbatim. The notes are intended to be used as a starting point for discussion and reflection, and they are intended to be adapted to the needs of the group. The notes are intended to be used as a guide, but they are not meant to be read verbatim. The notes are intended to be used as a starting point for discussion and reflection, and they are intended to be adapted to the needs of the group.

Discussion Leader's Job Description

The discussion leader's job is to facilitate the discussion and reflection process. The discussion leader should create a safe and supportive environment for the group. The discussion leader should encourage all members of the group to participate in the discussion and reflection process. The discussion leader should guide the discussion and reflection process, but they should not dominate the discussion. The discussion leader should be prepared to facilitate the discussion and reflection process, but they should not be afraid to let the group take the lead. The discussion leader should be prepared to facilitate the discussion and reflection process, but they should not be afraid to let the group take the lead.