

DML921 Following in Step with the Spiritual Mentors

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LE 2A Forgotten God by Francis Chan

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Summary:

In the beginning of his book, *Forgotten God*, Francis Chan describes the dilemma facing many modern churches of intellectually assenting to the Holy Spirit, but not relying on Him. He asks a poignant question, "When was the last time I undeniably saw the Spirit at work in or around me?" (35) Chan concludes the first chapter by addressing the need for "experiential knowledge of His presence." (36) The example of Joni Eareckson Tada is a powerful picture of someone who is Spirit filled and Spirit led, especially in the face of tragedy and the brokenness of this world.

In the next chapter, Chan lays out the obstacles which many Christians face in not relying on the Holy Spirit, struggling with fears of God not coming through for them or fears of the Lord not giving them what they think they need. He exhorts readers to not "hide your fears. Admit them first to yourself, and then to God...Allow the Spirit to continue His work of freeing you from unnecessary fear and inhibition or from unrestricted license. Surrender yourself and invite Him truly to dwell within you, whatever that may mean and wherever it may take you." (57)

In the following chapters he highlights the powerful truth that teachings of the Holy Spirit cannot just be informational, but have to be transformational. The multiple references to both the Old and New Testaments in chapter three were comforting and challenging passages to apply in believers lives back then as well as now. He reveals the heart of the Father in why He sent the Spirit to the Church. "The Spirit is intentional as He apportions these spiritual gifts to each person, according to His will and purposes. The most obvious and stated purpose of these manifestations is for the good and edification of the church. The Spirit desires to use us when our hearts are aligned with this vision, when we are filled with genuine love for the church, and when we desire to see the church grow in love for God and others." (85)

Chan's description of some of the faulty motivations of people reveal the cornucopia of distractions that plague the church from knowing the peace and healing of His presence. The temptation to draw attention to people and to seek miracles for personal gain are powerful motivations to keep using the Spirit for self-glory instead of God's glory. One of the most heart revealing questions in the book was, "Do I want to lead or be led by the Spirit?" (90) This is the crux of most Christians' struggles; the question is "Who sits on the throne of the heart?" Forgotten God continues in chapter four with the transition from the supernatural gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 to the motivation and goal of love in 1 Corinthians 13. "The Holy Spirit is the one who fills believers with God's love and the one who enables us to love each another, Ephesians 3:16-19." (95)

The last couple of chapters emphasize the importance of letting go of self so that we can hold onto His Spirit. Modern Christians are far too comfortable and concerned about security and personal pleasure than God's Kingdom and His Spirit. The example of the background noise of the world being the reason why many people cannot hear the whispers of the Spirit, was convicting. As believers take the time and commitment to develop a real relationship with God through listening to the Holy Spirit, the church can become who the Lord has called it to be in Christ. Without the Spirit of Christ growing in believers, they can do nothing. However, when Christians are intimate with the Spirit and are keeping in step with Him, where He is leading, believers will see and experience the power of God to transform lives.

Reflection and Questions:

As I read Forgotten God, I kept thinking about my Presbyterian upbringing. Through most of my youth, I was told that there was a Holy Spirit, but not much explanation or descriptions were given of who He is and how He works. Sadly, the Holy Spirit truly is forgotten in many churches. However, I also

saw that there is hope when people read the Scriptures and seek God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, Three in One. As we take one step closer to God, He will take many more steps to draw us nearer, and we will experience His presence.

I also felt that as I read *Forgotten God*, my excitement grew in discovering more of the Lord. I knew that I missed out for most of my life in how the Spirit works, but I am beginning to know and sense His healing presence in me and through me. The Lord is showing me how to develop a real and deep relationship with Him through the Spirit of Christ, especially in the light of the Holy Spirit weekend. I am still processing what the Lord did and is doing in my life from that weekend. There is a significant shift in me and what He is calling me to do in the next ten years of ministry, which I will elaborate in the Action Steps.

Three questions came immediately to mind as I was reflecting on the book. The first was, "What background noise do I need to silence so I can more clearly hear the Spirit's leading?" I realize that one of my greatest strengths has become my greatest weakness. I am a good multi-tasker. At a recent pastors fellowship where we introduced ourselves, I shared that I was the full-time lead pastor of River Church, but I also had four part-time jobs: Director of FDU Campus Ministry, adjunct professor, table tennis instructor, and coordinator of outdoor programs at the Harriman Outdoor Center. The realization that I am doing too much struck me hard for the first time. I realized that I have to let go of somethings, even though they are good and beneficial to others, in order to hear His voice more clearly. I need to increase my quantity and quality time with the Lord, just listening and being with Him.

The second question that came to mind from processing *Forgotten God* was "How do I continue to die to self?" At Rob Reimer's encouragement, I read *Let Go* by Fenelon multiple times in the past month. It has been an eye-opening and challenging book. There are so many ways that I didn't realize of how to die to myself. Self, whether it is self-interest or self-preservation, is one of the greatest

obstacles in my life. Jesus instructs us to follow Him, but we must first deny ourself and then take up the cross in order to follow Him. I need His Spirit to continue to show me and strengthen me on how to die to self, so that He can raise me up in Christ.

The third question that came to mind was, "How can I rely on His Spirit to see His healing presence in my life and ministry?" Being a self-reliant person, I usually try to figure out the problem with intellect or hard work. However, the Lord is showing me that I shouldn't lean on my own resources first, but to rely on His divine resources first. I need to go to Him in prayer immediately and ask for His wisdom and leading in every situation, not just in cases of "emergencies." As I have been spending more time in prayer, I sense the Lord is calling me to set aside more time and better quality time to spend with Him. He has led me to block out multiple days in the second week of May for a personal retreat to be with Him and "seek His face." I know He will guide me into a deeper relationship with Himself and will lead me in some major changes in ministry this coming year and years to come.

Action Steps:

The Spirit pressed on my heart last summer to ask the five elders from Riverside Community Church in Elmwood Park, who had just asked their lead pastor to resign, to study Soul Care with me. I didn't want to do it because they have had four lead pastors in ten years and three were close friends, but because the Lord showed me that I needed to ask, I did, thinking they would say no. They emphatically said yes. It was a good beginning to find some healing for their soul wounds. They asked me if I could become their pastor or if I would consider merging River Church with them. I told them I didn't feel led to do that, and I needed to finish my D Min in 2023 before I made any significant ministry decisions. I encouraged them to find a good pastor and move forward in His Spirit. However, in April the Riverside members voted down the pastoral candidate that the elders had put forth to be their new

lead pastor. They approached me again to consider becoming their pastor or merging River Church with them.

In March my good friend, Joe Chu, pastor of Fellowship Church in New Milford, informed me that he would be resigning this summer; his congregation is less than forty people. Joe asked if I would consider merging with their church, especially since they had a nice building and he knew that we were outgrowing our space. The leaders at River Church seemed to be open to this idea, and we were planning on spending the second half of the summer worshipping together with them. Then at the end of the summer River Church would have a town hall meeting to discuss whether we felt led to move in this direction of partnership/merger with Joe's church and possibly Riverside Community Church also. Since Fellowship Church's service is at 10 AM and Riverside's service is at 11 AM, both sets of their leaders and our leaders are now in discussion to attempt a two-congregation model for the second half of the summer to see if the Lord affirms this process of some kind of partnership.

Fortunately, River Church has multiple worship teams, where one team can lead worship at Fellowship Church and the other at Riverside. I would preach at the first service and then drive to the second service, less than 15 minutes away, and then preach again. Thankfully, this is something we did with Redeemer NYC in the 1990's, and when we planted Redeemer NJ. From 1999 to 2003 I spent over three years traveling between the Teaneck and Hoboken congregations and pastored both churches.

However, I realize that there is a part of me, which wants to derive worth from doing something that is daunting. I need to have the Spirit show me how to continue to die to selfish ambition and deny self-worth from my achievements. I also understand that the Holy Spirit is leading me to reduce my time in other areas like teaching table tennis and volunteering in the Appalachian Mountain Club, even though I enjoy them and often have meaningful conversations with people in those contexts. I will

continue to pray for His Spirit's leading in using my time well and seeking to be His instrument to bring living water to thirsty people and congregations.

We are planning to have a River Church congregation meeting on May 21 to discuss the possibility of combined services with Riverside and Fellowship Church from July 9 to the middle of August. These possible ministry opportunities will mean that our church will go through a metamorphosis. I truly feel that this could only happen if the Lord wants it to happen. There are many moving parts and people involved, and we need the Holy Spirit to lead us through this possible process.

I plan to increase my quantity and quality time with the Lord, seeking His face and direction over the next few months which will impact all of our ministries in the years to come. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit is speaking to me through His Word, through my wife, through my leaders, and through other Spirit-filled brothers and sisters. I know He is just beginning to grow in me a greater discernment and deeper intimacy with Him. He will carry us through by His Spirit.