

SPIRIT-LED SMALL GROUP GUIDE



EVERYDAY
SUPERNATURAL

Living a Spirit-Led Life
without Being Weird

MIKE PILAVACHI
& ANDY CROFT

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Published by Soul Survivor,
Soul Survivor Charity No. 1080720 Company No. 03991111.
Unit 16 Paramount Ind. Estate Sandown Road, Watford, Herts, WD24 7XA, UK

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Everyday Supernatural, the book this guide relates to, was published by David C Cook
4050 Lee Vance View
Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted, scriptures are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

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WHAT IS A 'SPIRIT-LED' SMALL GROUP?

Andy:

It was a mild February evening; I drove to church feeling nervous. It was the first meeting of our new connect group and we were reading *Everyday Supernatural* together. I was nervous, not about how people would respond to the book (I already knew there would be complaints about Mike's jokes), but because I couldn't control the most important part of the evening. We were going to be talking about the presence of God. I had told everyone we wouldn't just be talking about it; we'd actually be making space for God to show up. The only problem with telling everyone that you are going to do that, is that you then have to do it...

People trickled in and introduced themselves to one another over tea and biscuits. We met in 'The Den,' a backroom of our church that should probably be called 'The Pit.' It has a mismatched collection of furniture, a large pile of children's toys shoved untidily into a corner and is always either boiling hot or freezing cold. An enormous six-foot teddy bear sits on a sofa at one end. Rooms with less atmosphere would be hard to find.

To begin, we each shared, a bit awkwardly, about why we'd committed to the group and some of our own story. We worshipped God for a while. Then I took a deep breath and invited the Holy Spirit. We stood there for quite some time in silence while not much happened. I quietly wondered whether this was going to be a disappointing evening. Then I noticed a lady standing opposite, she had her eyes closed and looked peaceful. I wandered over and prayed for her, asking God to meet with her. After a little while the Spirit began to rest on her gently. It was not dramatic, but it was real. I felt encouraged and excited; God was here! By the time I turned around several other people had begun to experience the Spirit's presence. Some of it was lovely and gentle, some of it less gentle, but that didn't matter, what mattered was that God had shown up!

We wandered around the room praying for each other and trying to 'join in' with what the Spirit seemed to be doing. At the time I had no idea what the Spirit was doing. Some people wept, others laughed, others just stood still with a settled calm on them, and others – like me – didn't experience anything. This went on for about thirty minutes, then, when people seemed to have received enough prayer we sat on our mismatched furniture, opened our Bibles and had a discussion about the presence of God. The six-foot teddy in the corner listened in. Afterwards I drove home not just relieved but elated. What had thrilled me was the combination of how *ordinary* it all seemed and yet how *divine* it was. I felt like we were on to something new - 'Spirit-led small groups'. Of course this was actually something very old! Since Pentecost, normal, broken believers have gathered in ordinary, pokey rooms and invited the Holy Living God to meet with them. He loves to meet with us. Wouldn't you love to meet with him?

RISK-TAKING

We (Mike and Andy) share a mutual love for the programme *The West Wing*. In one particular episode President Bartlett's Chief of Staff, Leo, is critically ill. During a discussion at the hospital bedside the two reminisce about the way in which Bartlett had invited Leo to take the job. Smiling they remember Bartlett's question to Leo; it wasn't 'Would you like this job?' it was, "Are you ready to jump off a cliff?"

Our question to you is not, 'Would you like to lead a small group?' It is, "Are *you* ready to jump off a cliff?"

Are you ready to attempt to lead a small group, youth group or a gathering with a few friends that looks very different from what we typically do in our churches? It will look different because however much you plan and prepare for it, you are going to be relying on God turning up and doing what only God can do. There will be nothing you can do to make that happen, you can only make space and trust that God will do the rest.

Let us say at the outset: it will feel like a big risk but it will be worth it.

PRACTICING

We hope this is a somewhat 'dangerous' small group guide because our expectation is that you, and everyone else in the group, will be taken out of your comfort zone. At times you may be fearful and there is a high chance of you looking foolish.

Our ambition is not that people would read books about the spiritual gifts, but that people would *exercise* the spiritual gifts. We've noticed that people tend to get enthusiastic about these things in large meetings and at conferences, but struggle to translate that enthusiasm into lived practice in everyday life. As such, it's our hope that any small group that decides to read *Everyday Supernatural* aims not to simply discuss the contents but also to make space to practice the contents of each chapter. This booklet is a guide to what that might look like.

You may want to put the image of a book-reading club out of your mind. Discussion is going to be important – it is essential that we understand the Biblical foundations for what we are doing - but *practice* and *having a go* are going to be equally important. If you went to a class on first aid, cooking or playing the guitar, you would expect to actually attempt CPR, bake a Victoria sponge or play some music. A huge amount of learning happens in the doing. To quote an old Chinese proverb, 'I hear I forget, I see I remember, I do I understand.' The aim of this group is not going to be getting through a list of pre-set questions; it is about following what the Spirit says in the moment and practicing obedience. If, at the end of each session, people aren't metaphorically covered in bandages, baking powder and broken guitar strings then it may not have been a memorable lesson! People aren't signing up for book club but for band practice – we're going to be *doing it*.

HOW CAN I LEAD A GROUP LIKE THIS?

WHO CAN LEAD IT?

You can.

People's main objection to leading a group where space is made for the Holy Spirit is 'I don't really know what I'm doing.' If you were going to a cooking class, you'd expect the person leading to know how to bake!

We want to assure you that in that very 'weakness' lies your great strength as a small group leader, youth leader, or person-who-is-really-keen-and-forces-their-mates-to-chat-about-the-book-weekly.

If you don't feel like you know what you're doing, do it anyway and tell people that's how you feel. The best approach is to say to whatever group you gather, 'I don't know what I'm doing but I want to grow in these things; can we learn together?' Lead from a place of vulnerability and honesty. It will give others permission to admit that they also don't know what they are doing and you can then enjoy figuring it out together. It takes the pressure off! The Spirit knows what he is doing and we're going to be looking to him to lead us. You don't need to know much, and you certainly shouldn't wait until you feel like a spiritual

giant. What you do need is the willingness to have a go, be real and take risks even though that means you may look and feel a bit foolish at times. If you think you can do that, you can do this!

It's a great idea to lead with a friend. The two of you can give each other encouragement, debrief after a group, pray for boldness together and laugh at each other's mistakes (that's what Mike does when Andy fails).

FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT

Planning is important - we don't want to presume on God or run the group as if it's an after-thought. At the same time, following the lead of the Spirit is of *primary* importance. He's the real group leader.

In practice this means we plan - there are group plans you can use as a basis in this booklet. However, it also means we are prepared to **be flexible with that plan**. This can be hard for those of us who are control freaks or completer-finishers (Andy is one of these in all walks of life. Mike is a food-based completer-finisher.) For those of us who like things structured and controlled, our attention can be on executing our plan; instead we need to see the main objective of the group as following the lead of the Spirit. This isn't to say that the Spirit isn't in our planning - he often is. However, a huge part of the purpose of the group is to invite the Spirit and attempt to follow his lead in the moment. We don't *need* to change the plan, but if it never changes it's possible we are missing something.

It's also likely that the group will look different week on week. The Spirit is endlessly creative. He usually does things differently. Andy's recent group had great fun following the Spirit's lead. As he prepared, Andy tried to ask the Lord each week 'What should it look like this time Lord?' At times things went as he had imagined beforehand, other times it seemed right that they should change direction. Sometimes they began with a time of worship and it seemed right to postpone the discussion and make space for the Spirit. Other times they worshipped, discussed and then prayed for people. Sometimes they chose a couple of people they particularly felt the Spirit highlight for the rest of the group to pray for. Other times it was as straightforward as asking who would like prayer to receive the Spirit, for healing or to receive the gift of tongues. The important thing isn't to be flexible for the sake of it, it's *to listen to the promptings of the Spirit* and see where you think he's taking you. Perhaps ask him throughout the day if there's anything particular he wants to do that evening. (For more on listening to God see chapters 7 and 8 on hearing God speak.) Bear in mind if you don't hear anything in particular it's a good idea to just use common sense!

The key point is: submit to the lead of the Holy Spirit and try to do what he is telling you.

BEING 'FAMILY'

An essential - but sometimes surprising - part of people growing in the things of the Spirit is the culture of the group. What do people feel like they are attending? Do people feel like they are coming together to

study a book, complete a course, or to be a family? These differences in approach may seem small but they are actually worlds apart.

It's an obvious thing to say but when people are genuinely friends (not just making small talk) the potential to share honestly, be vulnerable and journey together is far greater. People rarely open up either to receive or to risk if they feel unsafe. You may want to give consideration as to how you are going to intentionally nurture family in the group. Sometimes we expect 'family' just to develop by showing up in the same room together, but this often isn't the case. How are you going to celebrate each other? How might you laugh together? What excuses can you find to eat together? How are you going to make it safe to fail when attempting to share a word of knowledge? How are you going to give people permission to admit they have doubts? How are you going to encourage and draw in those who are naturally shy and on the edge? How are you going to do this recognising that people's time is limited? This is not a culture that develops accidentally.

An important starting place is for you, the leader, to be clear that the purpose of the group is twofold:

1. To deepen the relationships people have with each other.
2. To grow in the things of the Spirit.

If you have these aims at the forefront of your mind when planning, leading and shaping the group, you will begin to move in the right direction. Some of it may be instinctive to us but in the best groups it will always be intentional.

BE ON YOUR GUARD

Resist any temptation to stifle or shy away from making space for God to move. We were once talking to a respected Christian leader, someone who has led a church into the things of the Spirit. He mentioned to us that he has never once stood up to invite the Spirit without the devil whispering in his ear, ‘You don’t need to do it this time. It would be easier not too. It’s not that important.’ We tend to hear that whisper and we imagine you will as well. The devil will suggest things like, ‘If you invite the Spirit he probably won’t turn up.’ ‘It’s safer not to.’ ‘The Spirit came last week, he won’t turn up this week.’ ‘Let’s just have a really good discussion about this stuff, we don’t actually need to do it.’

You will be most susceptible to these whispers when you are tired and feeling like a bit of a failure anyway so particularly be on your guard when you turn up to lead after a bad day. We’d encourage you to recognise them for the lies they are. Remember, the point of this group is to practice stepping out. Hear instead the voice of the Good Shepherd, our true Master, “*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you... how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*” Luke 11:9, 13. We usually keep in mind that the worst that can happen if we make space is that God doesn’t do much and we go home early (and that’s OK, we don’t want to attempt to force things). The best that can happen is unbelievable breakthrough in someone’s life. Given those stakes, it’s worth taking the risk.

THE PRESSURE IS OFF

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

It can be easy to read a booklet like this and think that the key to the Spirit moving is what we do. If that’s what you think then you may find this quite a stressful few weeks!

We can’t make the Spirit move. He blows where he wants. We can make space. We can prioritise following the lead of the Spirit. We can encourage a hunger for more of what God has for us. But God does what he wants, when he wants. We say this not to discourage you, but to encourage you. The branches of fruit trees don’t stress or strain to produce fruit. They do so naturally because they are connected to the trunk. In the same way, we produce spiritual fruit by resting in Jesus, in his promises to send his Spirit and in his great desire to shower us with his mercy.

We don’t want to underplay the role we have: it will be hard, we’ll need to persevere through failure and we’ll be flying-by-the-seat-of-our-pants at times. However, the pressure for this group to ‘succeed’ does not rest on us. Our role is to seek Jesus and to make space.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

SUGGESTED READING PLAN

Everyday Supernatural has 12 chapters and we've included guides for every chapter except the Introduction and Chapter 5 which is a short introduction to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We've also combined the two chapters on hearing God's voice into one week. This means there are nine week's worth of questions. Your timeframe may be shorter or longer but hopefully you can adapt the below. Obviously the more you can do, the better; we think all the chapters are important. However, if you are pressed for time we'd suggest you have a minimum of six sessions and see the below as chapters to definitely include:

Chapter 1	The Power is in the Presence
Chapter 2	Being Filled with the Spirit
Chapter 6	Praying in Tongues
Chapters 7 & 8	Hearing God Speak
Chapter 9	Praying for Healing
Chapter 10	For the Sake of the World

Suggested Questions:

We can't plan the worship, or the time you are going to make to wait on the Spirit and see what happens. We can, however, plan a few questions and some exercises that can be done outside of the group during the week. These exercises might seem a little 'token' or simplistic but they can make a dramatic difference.

CHAPTER 1:

THE POWER IS IN THE PRESENCE

1. What particularly struck you when reading this chapter?
2. What do you understand by the phrase, 'the presence of God'?
3. Our relationship with God isn't based on feelings, but at the same time, many of us can speak of moments God has seemed especially close. Can you describe where/how you have experienced God's presence most keenly?
4. Moses, in a time of crisis, refused to leave God's presence (Exodus 33:15-16). David, though he could have sought many things, chased the 'one thing' of God's presence (Psalm 27:4-5). Why did they place such a priority on God's presence? What can we learn from them?
5. "Our goal should be relationship *with* Jesus, not power *from* Jesus." (Page 23) What might this look like in our lives?
6. "It's never been about what we can do – it's about *who we are with*." (Page 26) What difference might this make when we look to pray for others?

At home...

Set aside a brief period of time (maybe 10 minutes) each day to ‘practice the presence of God.’ Identify a time and place you can do this regularly. It may be while you’re doing the washing up or walking home, it might be sitting in your favourite chair. The important thing is deliberately and intentionally inviting God into the moment and choosing to become aware of his presence. Sometimes it can be helpful to do this first thing in the morning or last thing at night. You’ll be amazed at what a difference just 10 minutes a day makes to our sensitivity to God’s presence through the rest of the day.

CHAPTER 2:

BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

1. What is the main thing you learned about the Holy Spirit from this chapter?
2. “To be a Christian isn’t to tick a box next to a set of beliefs, it’s to enter into a relationship with the living God. As we do this the living God pours his Spirit into us.” (Page 38) Do you believe that you have received the Holy Spirit? Why/why not?
3. *“Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”* (1 Corinthians 12:3)
Why is confessing ‘Jesus is Lord’ a sign of the Spirit living within us?
4. What did ‘receiving the Holy Spirit’ look like for the first believers? See Acts 2:1-13; 4:31; 10:44-48 and 19:6.
5. Paul writes to the Ephesians, *“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”* (Ephesians 5:18) The sense of this is that we are continuously filled with the Spirit. What might receiving more of the Spirit look like for you?

6. Mike and Andy suggest that three steps in our receiving more of the Spirit are:
- a. Accepting he is a gift given on the basis of Jesus' merit, not our own
 - b. Persistently asking for more
 - c. Trusting the giver (expressed as surrender and expectation)

Which of these steps is the biggest hurdle for you and why? How could you overcome this?

At home...

We're told by Paul to go on being filled with the Spirit. We're also told by Jesus to persistently seek things from God. Continue with your 10 minutes a day practising God's presence; as part of this time intentionally invite God to fill you again with his Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 3:

GOD'S POWER, OUR WEAKNESS

1. Was there anything that especially encouraged you in this chapter?
2. Many of us agree with the theory that 'God can use anyone,' but deep down we remain convinced that he only uses those who are strong and capable. Where do you think that subconscious belief has come from and why is it so deeply rooted?
3. The Bible is full of people who God used despite their brokenness. Why do you think God so consistently chose the seemingly weaker people to build his kingdom?
4. Lots of us seem to think that there is something about us that stops God using us. We don't pray enough, we are addicted to something, we are too fearful or shy, or we are caught up in destructive behaviour patterns. What would you say is one of your weaknesses, a barrier that you can't overcome and that you feel stops God using you?
5. Can you recall a time when you have stepped out, in weakness and vulnerability, because you thought God had spoken? What happened?
6. If we wait until we are 'sorted' we will be waiting forever. In what simple practical way would you like to begin to step out this week?

At home...

However you answered the last question, that's your challenge for the week! Identify where you feel weak and what growth would look like for you in this area, whether it's sharing the gospel, praying for a friend to be healed or asking God to fill someone with his Holy Spirit. Don't forget to keep up with your 10 minutes a day practising God's presence too.

CHAPTER 4:

DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU

1. Jesus said, *"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love... You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* (John 14: 10, 14-15) Why is obedience the key to friendship with Jesus?
2. Have you ever had a time when you felt like God was asking you to 'step out of the boat'? How did you respond and what happened?
3. Jesus responded to Peter's doubt with kindness and help. What difference would it make to your ability to step out if you knew that no matter what happened, Jesus would respond to you with kindness?
4. Are there Christians you know where you can see the link between their obedience and their effectiveness in a certain area? What do you learn from how they live?
5. God 'doesn't wait until it's convenient, comfortable or safe' (page 84) before asking us to do things. How might this change the ways in which we listen to him?

6. Is there anything you think God is specifically asking you to do in the immediate future? What is it and are you going to do it?

At home...

As part of your daily 10 minutes with the Lord, ask him if there is a particular way he wants you to obey him that day. Listen for his answer... and then do it! You will be amazed after a little while – God really will speak to you.

CHAPTER 6:

PRAYING IN TONGUES

1. What particularly struck you when reading this chapter?
2. Speaking in tongues is no more a status symbol than having blue eyes. It can, however, be very encouraging to hear other people's stories. Has anyone in the group received the gift of tongues? How did it happen?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 14 verses 1-5 and 13-19. Paul is addressing a misuse of the gift of tongues here. What you can learn about Paul's own use of tongues? Does anything stand out to you?
4. Whilst the gift of tongues is not the most important of the gifts, it can be a phenomenally helpful way of praying. Paul writes, *"If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding."* (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). What is meant by 'praying' or 'singing' with the Spirit?
5. Praying in tongues is one way that we pray in the Spirit. Mike and Andy talk about how the gift of tongues:
 - Gives 'words for the soul'
 - Helps us draw near to God
 - Helps us see kingdom break-throughs

Which of these three things excites you? Why?

6. We can frequently doubt that God wants to give us good things – like the gift of tongues. What might give us confidence and expectation as we seek this gift?

Ministry time note:

In this session you may want to make space to pray for people to receive the gift. Not everyone will want to; for some this will be very new and they may want time to process the teaching first. It's important to be sensitive to that. However, for those who would like to receive the gift of tongues, it can be helpful to remember the three steps mentioned on pages 105-6: believe, ask, step out. In addition it's important to stress how *normal* praying in tongues feels; it is not divine ventriloquism, but an act of collaboration.

When praying for people to receive the gift of tongues we often do the following:

- Identify who would like to receive the gift
- Invite the Holy Spirit
- All begin to praise God in English
- Invite all those who already pray in tongues to begin to pray in their prayer language
- Invite and encourage those who want to begin to step out and start to pray. They will feel foolish and it's important they are reassured that it is a safe place and reminded that if it's gobbledygook, let it be gobbledygook for the Lord.
- Encourage and affirm what the Spirit is doing

At home...

If you already speak in tongues or have received the gift during this session, practice using this gift daily. It may be helpful to identify a time or place (a car journey, a walk to school, the shower) where you know you'll be able to practice regularly.

If you haven't yet received the gift of tongues but would like to, continue to ask God and attempt to step out again.

CHAPTERS 7 & 8:

HEARING GOD SPEAK

1. Can you describe a time that when you remember God clearly speaking to you? (It could have been through something very normal, e.g. scripture, a sermon, a friend, or through a prophetic word etc)
2. God often seems to speak to us in riddles; why might this be?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-6. In what ways does prophecy build up the church? Have you seen or experienced this?
4. Prophecy involves revelation, interpretation and application. What do these three elements mean? How would you describe them?
5. Mike and Andy list a number of the gentle ways that we receive revelation:
 - SEE - visions, screen of mind
 - FEEL - physical or emotional
 - SPEAK - automatic mouth
 - HEAR - a thought that's not your thought
 - KNOW - a sudden conviction of something

Which of these can you most connect with?
6. How might you practice prophecy this week?

Ministry time note:

This session is a great opportunity to practice prophecy. One simple way to do this might be for you to choose one or two people to pray for. Invite the Holy Spirit and encourage the rest of the group to listen to anything they feel the Lord is saying for that person. Then encourage them to step out by sharing it. It's always helpful to:

- Make sure people feel safe to get it wrong
- Remind people that God usually speaks very gently; we're often not sure until after we've shared it
- Lower the bar. This isn't about knowing someone's passport number – what might seem like a simple word to you might mean a great deal to the person you are praying for.
- Don't overthink it! It doesn't matter how simple or strange it seems, just go for it.
- Remember that prophecy is for strengthening, encouraging and comforting people and we should be mindful of this when sharing

At home...

Take every opportunity to listen to God for other people this week. If you regularly pray for certain people you may want to ask God for a Bible verse or word of encouragement to give to them. If you are praying for a particular situation, ask God for a word of wisdom. Challenge yourself to give a word of knowledge to someone.

CHAPTER 9:

PRAYING FOR HEALING

1. Have you, or someone you've prayed for, ever experienced physical or emotional healing? What happened?
2. *Why* we pray matters. Jesus' prayers were clearly motivated by compassion (Matthew 14:14). How might our willingness to pray and our manner of praying differ if compassion were our primary motivation?
3. A lack of sensitivity when praying for healing can damage people. It can also be easy for us to pick up all sorts of distracting or unhelpful practices. What basic principles can help us avoid this?
4. "No one "earns" healing anymore than anyone can "earn" salvation. Jesus paid the price so we wouldn't have to." (Page 162) How does this affect the way we pray for healing?
5. Mike and Andy suggest a model of:
 - *Remembering* who is responsible
 - *Asking* what hurts
 - *Following* the lead of the Spirit in how to pray
 - *Checking in*
 - *Following up* by making sure the person knows they are loved

What is the most helpful piece of advice you have received when learning to pray for healing?

6. "When it comes to healing, the best way to learn is by doing." (Page 179) If you have never done this before, how will you begin to practice praying for healing? If you are more experienced, what is a 'next step' you can challenge yourself to take?

At home...

Commit to praying every day for someone who is sick. If it is appropriate, offer to pray for them in person. Be sure to ask towards the end of the week if they have noticed any improvement.

CHAPTER 10:

FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

1. Have you had any experience of praying for healing or sharing a prophetic word with someone who is not a Christian? How did it go?
2. The Bible tells us we are sent with the authority of Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20), and the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8), *in order to witness*.

In what ways have you experienced the Spirit partnering with you as you look to reach someone? What does this look like in everyday life?

3. Praying for strangers is clearly part of the everyday supernatural, but how might it become a part of our *existing relationships* with family, friends and colleagues? What might this look like for you?
4. Mike and Andy write of their friend who says his success comes down to expectation, not gifting (pages 198-199). How would you approach your days/conversations differently if you shared this confident expectation that God was going to use you?
5. The early church prayed not just for supernatural signs but for supernatural boldness. Have you ever persistently sought God for boldness? What happened?

6. Mike and Andy talk about their own journeys of growing into this. What could be a first step for you?

At home...

Share your faith in some form this week. This can be as simple as offering to pray for someone who is not a Christian. Don't just pick someone at random, be attentive to anyone who God is highlighting to you.

CHAPTER 11:

GROWING IN FAITH

1. What particularly stood out to you when reading this chapter?
2. Very few of us ever feel like we have ‘enough’ faith. Why is this? In what ways does this restrict us?
3. “Faith is really about two things: trusting God’s character, and stepping out because of this trust.”(Page 210) In what ways (either in the Bible or in your life) has God shown he is trustworthy?
4. In Mark 9:14-29 a father brings his demonised son to Jesus. He tells Jesus, *“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”* How might Jesus answer that prayer? How might he grow your faith?
5. “A life of faith isn’t one free from all doubt, it’s one where we keep expecting God to be faithful in the midst of our questions.” (Page 209) Describe a time when you’ve had to trust God in the midst of difficult circumstances. What was the result of that time on your relationship with God?
6. Just as a muscle grows when it is exercised, so faith grows as we step out. In what way would you like to begin to step out more? What might be a possible ‘faith exercise’ that you could do?

At home...

Find a way to step out in an area that you want to grow your faith in. That could be anything from praying for healing, to sharing a prophecy, or reaching out to someone even though it feels like a risk. Faith grows as it is exercised – do some exercise and report back to the group!

CHAPTER 12:

SUSTAINING THE SUPERNATURAL

1. What is the key lesson God has taught you during the weeks we've been looking at *'Everyday Supernatural'*?
2. "Success in the everyday supernatural isn't about getting everything right; it's about keeping going." (Page 225) What are the main things that could stop you from keeping going? How might you address them?
3. James 1:2-4 says, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*" Perseverance can only develop in a time of testing. What difference might this make to the way you approach challenges?
4. "If we make the decision to plod today, in fifty years time we'll be rejoicing that we did!" (Page 229) When you are in your old age what do you want to be able to look back and say about how you followed God?
5. Andy and Mike talk about 'sowing seeds'. What seeds have you sown recently? How do you do this best?

6. Intimacy with the Lord is key to growing in the everyday supernatural. What habits do you want to continue to develop that might help you draw close to God?

At home...

What one manageable and achievable practice could help you stay close to Jesus in the long haul? Do this!

We'd love to hear about your journey as you've followed this guide! You can email testimonies@soulsurvivor.com to tell us your story.

LEADING A MINISTRY TIME

Believing that the ministry and gifts of the Holy Spirit are for today and making space for the Holy Spirit to actually move don't automatically follow on from each other. There can be a number of reasons for this but often it's because we lack the confidence to step out and give it a go. Here we want to demystify what it means to lead a ministry time and talk through some simple steps in the hope of demonstrating that anyone can do it. This is something we do in relationship with God and in dependence on *him*, not on techniques. However, we can offer principles that we hope will guide you as you look to grow in this area. It should be noted that these principles apply at a small group level, but they are just as important when leading a larger gathering as well.

1. GIVING UP CONTROL

Let's be honest, many of us are control freaks. This isn't necessarily a bad thing when leading a small group. It is good and important to be prepared. We want to have fun, we want to have a meaningful time of worship and Bible study, and we want to eat restaurant quality food. (Mike, on principle, only attends groups *in* restaurants). However, if we're not careful, all of this can cause us to shut down any contribution that hasn't had prior approval. Of course the Holy Spirit is present and can inspire and guide us in our preparation but, we suggest, there is something utterly biblical and excellently powerful in inviting him to

move upon us and then giving him the space and time to do so. This involves an element of giving up control. In practice it means we arrive prepared but that throughout the meeting we should be constantly seeking to discern what God might be doing. We will need to be willing to put our prepared contributions on hold if it seems that he wants to intervene. When God takes over, people often become deeply aware of his loving presence, not as an intellectual theory but as a living reality. People will often experience healing in their bodies, minds or emotions. In our experience, whilst we can't manufacture these moments, they are wonderful and not to be missed when they do happen. It can be helpful to recognise that leading a ministry time does not mean, 'leading a slot at the end of a service.' It can mean this, but it is much broader. It's more a case of, when the Spirit starts to move, how do we follow? Giving up control is the starting place for this.

2. CONSTANTLY ASKING

How does this happen in practice? Throughout the meeting we are asking the Lord if there is anything he wants to say or do which is not part of our agenda. Asking God what he wants to do isn't something that starts in a specific ministry time, it is an attitude that we want to maintain as much as possible, and it's the attitude that allows for ministry times to happen at any moment.

During the meeting and especially during times of worship it can be very helpful to look around the room to see what the Father is doing. We are looking for indications that the Holy Spirit is touching people's hearts, healing them, or meeting with them in some other way. These

indications may be minor, for example, someone looking very peaceful or someone beginning to cry. There may be something more dramatic that begins to happen. If someone particularly catches our attention we find it helpful to ask God, 'What are you doing in that person?' 'Is that just for them or is that for others?' At other times, we may not see anything obvious in a person but there might be 'heaviness' in the room, or a silence that seems 'pregnant' with God's presence. This could be because of all that restaurant quality food and the fact that it's 9.30pm. It might be something more, however, and the important thing is not to rush past these moments. It's to make space and engage with God to see if he is up to something. It's important to recognise that with this constant attitude of asking, we are not trying to manufacture anything; it is perfectly fine to just move on to the next item if nothing much is going on. What we are doing is paying attention.

3. MAKING SPACE

At our church, Soul Survivor Watford, we always make space for ministry at the end of the service after the teaching. We believe the preaching of the Word should invite a response from those listening. Of course the response should be outworked in an ongoing way in our daily lives. However, there should also be a place for people to respond in an appropriate way there and then and seek the empowering, help or comfort of the Holy Spirit so that as a result they can live differently. The response may be in the form of a greater commitment to follow Jesus in a particular area, it may be to receive and know in greater measure the grace and love of God, it may be that the teaching has unearthed a realisation of sinful actions or attitudes that need repenting

of. We always want to make space for people to receive prayer for these things. We also want to make time as part of our service for people who come burdened, or sick in body or mind, or anxious over a life decision they have to make, to receive prayer.

We value the worship of God, so we will never have a service when we don't give time to worship. We value the preaching of the Word so we will always have a talk. We value the ministry and leading of the Holy Spirit, so we also always make time for that. We always begin the ministry before we close the service as this is an important part of our meeting. We don't send those who want prayer over to the side or to another room, they come to the front. Again, this is because we want everyone to know that we believe this is important and valuable and want openness to the Holy Spirit to be part of our church culture and not something reserved for the keen or the needy. We also invite people to come forward for a very practical reason. It is much easier to see who needs prayer and to direct people to them when they're at the front. For some it is also important that they make a conscious step to say they want prayer and are seeking to meet with God; coming forward can say this in a symbolic way. This principle very much applies in your small group. Ministry times are often squeezed out by all the other important things we want to fit into our allotted time. Make the ministry time a main event, a significant feature of what you are going to do as a group not an optional extra.

4. WAIT

Every time we invite the Holy Spirit to move among us, we will wait. And wait. And wait a little more. We cannot over emphasise the

importance of waiting. So many of us find this very hard to do but we have discovered it is the key to seeing God move in power. The longer we wait, often, the more he does!

The temptation for many of us (especially those of us who are evangelicals!) is to kill a ministry time with words. Often we need to simply shut up and let God be God. We don't need to pray long-winded prayers. Simply invite the Spirit to come and then give him space to do so. We must also resist the temptation to hype up the atmosphere. (Those of us who are charismatic Pentecostals can feel particularly tempted to do this!) We don't need a particular type of music to be playing for God to move or to goad people into making an emotional response. We kill the religion and wait. The Holy Spirit will sometimes move in great power and sometimes more gently. When less happens, we just go home earlier! When we manipulate an atmosphere or hype a response, we simply lose credibility.

Sometimes, after waiting for a while, there may be an obvious response. On other occasions, the response may be very gentle but we become aware that God is meeting with people. We may invite those who are aware that the Holy Spirit is resting on them to stand up, and encourage those around to lay hands on them and join in with what God has already begun to do. On other occasions, it will be appropriate to invite those who are sensing God meeting with them to take a step forward or respond in some other way. On occasion the Lord may give you some words of knowledge, prophetic insight into the state of individual lives and what he wants to do. If that happens, speak the words out, humbly and gently and invite a response.

The idea isn't that we become the centre of attention, we simply focus on Jesus. Avoid theatrics at all costs. Often we're not sure what God is doing and it is rare that we are completely clear what he is saying. It is better to go for it anyway and if we get it wrong, it really doesn't matter. If we wait for certainty, we will probably wait forever. Don't feel you have to become overly spiritual; aim to be 'naturally supernatural'. Remember, it is surprising how 'unspiritual' spiritual gifts feel.

5. PASTOR

Ministry may be new to many people and so it is wise to think about everyone in the group and what their expectations are and their previous experience has been. As the leader, it is your job to pastor the group. A large part of this will involve explaining (as much as possible) what is happening. It can be helpful to state what you are going to be doing as this gives people context and it helps them relax and feel safe. For example, if you are about to make space and invite the Holy Spirit, tell people. Stress that there's no need for anyone to do anything religious, explain you are all going to wait and give it some time. Make the point that no one needs to force this, either God will do it or he won't.

As and when God begins to move you will need to play-it-by-ear but you will need to explain, explain, explain! The great Corinthian heresy when it came to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the use of the gifts of the Spirit was that it involved a super-spiritual exclusive club. 'Outsiders' or visitors were left out. We sometimes see this today in so-called charismatic churches. We can fall into a 'secret' language or a way of responding that only the spiritual 'in-crowd' can understand. This is incredibly destructive

to community and must be actively avoided. Our role as leaders is to keep everyone together, to explain and reassure. This means that we should always be asking ourselves, “What might those on the fringe be thinking now?” Then as pastors we gently address those questions.

Sometimes there may be a strong human response to the activity of the Holy Spirit. Some folk may weep, others laugh, others shake or even fall down and rest in God’s presence. The temptation at that point is to think, “Everyone else is meeting with God, what is wrong with me? Why have I been left out?” So we will say something like; “If you are not feeling anything, it’s OK, neither are we (as usually we don’t feel anything!). There is nothing wrong with you.”

Some might be wondering, “What on earth is going on? Are people making it up and getting hysterical?” We may say something like; “Is what you’re seeing and hearing all God? No. It is our response to God. Some of us are more naturally emotional so we are more likely to respond in that way. Some of us are more aware of our bodies and so we are more likely to respond to the Holy Spirit’s activity in a physical way. Some of us are more cerebral and so we will probably respond in a more intellectual way. Let’s give ourselves space to be different. No one has to do what anyone else is doing. The crying you hear is probably only pain being released in the Father’s presence. The laughing you hear is probably simply a response to a deeper realisation of the Father’s love.” And so on. People feel safe and included when they realise that we understand their questions and concerns and are attempting to answer them. If something especially dramatic begins to happen with an individual then things can be quite messy. There’s no need to be afraid of mess but you will want to make

sure you protect the dignity of the individual and that they are loved and cared for. When someone is being prayed for, if they leave knowing nothing else, they should at least leave knowing they’ve been loved.

6. EVERYONE CAN PLAY

A final but absolutely vital thing to be aware of is that anyone can do this. The goal is not that the leaders do ministry at the rest of the group, it’s that we make space to meet the Lord together. Some will be more experienced at praying than others and if that is the case then encourage these people to coach and support those for whom this is new. The purpose of the group is that people are equipped to do these things, not that they come simply to be ministered to. Keep looking to encourage people to step out and pray for each other. If you aren’t sure what the Lord is doing then listen to him together and see what others are sensing. Resist the temptation to make it about you; it’s about Jesus’ people being released to do the work of ministry. At best we are facilitators for that. The difficulty with writing this is that while we can give certain principles for leading ministry times that we have learned, we must emphasise that there is no blueprint. It really is about learning to listen to the Holy Spirit and seeing what he is doing, both with our natural eyes and our spiritual eyes. As is often the case when we step out, we feel vulnerable and we are dependent on God showing up.

To sum up: be bold, be kind, be humble and you won’t go far wrong. Give it a go and then persevere. Our churches need to have their minds renewed by the teaching of God’s truth and their hearts warmed and healed as the Holy Spirit fills them with the revelation of the love of the Father for them. Step out, wait on God and see what he wants to do.

FURTHER INFO

Find out more about our Naturally Supernatural summer and winter conferences at www.naturallysupernatural.co.uk which are all about equipping us to live the Spirit-led life. You'll also find related blogs on our website as well as teaching from previous events that you can watch for free.

Connect on social media and stay up to date with the latest Naturally Supernatural news – we're NSNconf on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Naturally Supernatural is part of Soul Survivor. Find out more at www.soulsurvivor.com.

EVERYDAY SUPERNATURAL SPIRIT-LED SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Most Christians believe in God's power, yet few of us see evidence of the supernatural in our everyday lives. Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft believe that God wants to break into our ordinary lives with his extraordinary power. Their book *Everyday Supernatural* explores how we can live Spirit-led lives and this small group guide is designed to work alongside the book to help you engage with the teaching and encourage one another to take steps of faith and put the teaching into practice. The idea is to journey as a committed community, sharing and growing together, and making space for God to meet with you as you spend time with each other.

There is a flexible reading plan covering between six and nine sessions, each with questions for discussion and ideas for how to put things into practice during the week. Plus there's additional material on how to lead a Spirit-led small group and how to lead a ministry time. So all you need is a group of friends who are up for taking some risks and you're ready to go!

Mike and Andy are both Reverends in the Church of England and are part of the leadership teams that head up the charity Soul Survivor and its associated church, Soul Survivor Watford. They have co-authored two books, *Storylines* and *Everyday Supernatural*.

