



holy spirit encounter
groups edition

Holy Spirit Encounter

Session Seven - Roadblocks of Religion

Begin this session by sharing the “freedom fallout” you experienced from last week’s exercises. Also express any hunger you’re experiencing for more freedom. This is the sweet spot of expectation without agenda—you have experienced the goodness of God and it is fueling your faith for the more He has in store!

Pray a prayer of invitation and declare the Lordship of Jesus Christ over your time together.

You can pray something like this, *“God, we thank you for what you have done and what you are going to do. We declare our faith in your goodness and invite you to continue your good work in us. We declare the Lordship of Jesus Christ over this space and this time, over our words, thoughts, and emotions. In the mighty name of Jesus, we silence any voices that would raise themselves up over the knowledge of God. Amen!”*

Review - This session is a continuation of a teaching that was originally recorded as one longer session. As you watch the next video, remember that we are talking about the stuff that clogs our souls and blocks the flow of the Spirit in our lives. These blockages are often the result of an ungodly response to an unmet need. Sometimes they are because of our broken responses to pain caused by others.

Note there is a lot of content and much to activate in this session. **Do not rush through it.** God wants to do a deep work of sanctification in His people, and it is important to make space for His Spirit to work in us. If you need to stop partway through this session due to time constraints, simply pause and pick it up again the next time you gather. Be sure to pray a fresh filling of the Spirit when you bring your time to a close and a fresh prayer of invitation when you pick it up again.

Watch the video, **Session Seven - Roadblocks of Religion.**

The spirit of religion is a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. It lends form and function to our worship without the power of the Holy Spirit. It brings bondage rather than freedom. It can feel safer, but it is deadly. Religion nailed Jesus to the cross and it will continue to destroy his life in us and our churches if we let it. Because religion is a counterfeit, it can be tricky to recognize. This session highlights some of the ways it can function.

Desire for Manifestations - In an earlier session we talked about how we can resist the work of the Spirit because we are afraid of what might happen. The flip side of this is attaching our expectations for the Spirit to manifest in a certain way. We may desire a particular feeling or experience rather than just Jesus himself. This can also manifest as reliance on a formula for “getting the Spirit to work” rather than the character and promises of God.

“So, I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”
- Luke 11:9-11 (NIV)

1. What are some of the ways, consciously or unconsciously, we measure the work of the Spirit? **Pray a fresh prayer of surrender and invitation.** You can pray something like this:

“God, I repent of the ways I have tried to control the flow of your Spirit. I acknowledge that I have wanted certain feelings and experiences of your presence and work more than I have wanted you. I also recognize that I have believed the gift of your Spirit relies in certain behaviours or procedures more than on your nature and character as a good Father. I ask you to forgive me for this. Thank you for being such a good Father. As I am asking and seeking for more of your Spirit to manifest in my life, I declare my faith in your goodness and promises. Amen.”

Ranking Spiritual Gifts - In our humanity, we have a tendency to rank some spiritual gifts as more significant or desirable than others. We might also resist or reject some gifts due to negative experiences.

Spiritual gifts do not come to us fully formed. However, like any other skill or ability, they must be cultivated, and we grow in our capacity to function in them. We can be afraid to step out in a gift because it is awkward and new to us. We may also have had negative experiences when others have tried to function in the gifts in ways that have been insensitive or unwise.

2. Be honest with yourself and each other about the ways you have ranked spiritual gifts. Get curious about why we do this. Consider how Jesus views the gifts. Ask Him to align your heart with His!
3. Have you held back from functioning in a gift because of pride or comparison? Bring that to Jesus now in the presence of your brothers and sisters. Repent and ask the Spirit to give you mentors and courage.
4. Invite God to show you any pain or offence that has come to you through others trying to function in a spiritual gift. Forgive them and bless them (you can use the tool in the last session).

The Religious Spirit is at odds with the Spirit of God. It prefers formulas over following God's lead. It relies on tradition over truth. Jesus described the religious spirit like this, “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.” (Matthew 15:7-9, NIV)

5. Consider the following signs of the religious spirit and ask God to search your heart and reveal where these might be showing up in your life.¹

- You are more inclined to see what is wrong with other people, churches, etc., than what is right with them.
- You are often subject to an overwhelming guilt that you can never measure up to the Lord's standards.
- You keep score on your own spiritual life.
- You have a leadership style that is bossy, overbearing, and intolerant of the weakness or failure of others.
- You take pride in your spiritual maturity and disciplines, particularly as compared to others.
- You are encouraged when your life or ministry looks better than others.
- You "glory" more in what God did in the past than in what He is doing in the present.
- You are suspicious of, or oppose outright, new movements, new churches, and other new things God brings to life.
- You tend to reject spiritual manifestations you do not understand.
- You are overly prone to view supernatural manifestations in your own life as evidence of God's approval.
- You find it difficult to join anything you do not deem perfect or nearly perfect.
- You have a tendency to "glory" in anything but the cross of Jesus, what He has accomplished, and who He is.

6. **Confess and repent of the signs you recognize in your life.** Do not let shame hold you back—we are all susceptible to the religious spirit. Be fierce in resisting pride. Embrace the work of the Spirit. This is the awkward and holy work of making more room for the Spirit to flow in your life. Pray something like this:

"Jesus, I confess that there is something of a religious spirit in me that is not of you and I repent of (name applicable signs from the list). In Jesus' name, I renounce the religious spirit in my life. Jesus, I lay this way of thinking and behaving at your feet. I receive your forgiveness and receive the truth, freedom, and joy that you have for me. Holy Spirit, I invite you to fill me afresh. Amen."

False Spiritual Agreements - All of the things covered in this session can lead us to make false spiritual agreements. Believing and accepting a lie creates barriers to what God wants to do. Examples of false spiritual agreements are statements like, "I don't hear God's voice... I'm not the kind of person who...I don't have the gift of.... I only... I will never..."

7. Pause in the presence of God and invite Him to reveal to you any false agreements you have made. **Break agreement with these things by declaring:**

"In the name of Jesus and by the power of the cross, I break any agreement I have made with (name what has been revealed to you). Jesus, I ask you to take this away from me and show me what you say is true."

Pause and wait to see what He reveals to you.

¹ List adapted from 'Overcoming the Religious Spirit' by Rick Joyner.

You have done a lot of hard work in this session! You have brought joy to your Father and you have taken back land from the enemy (3 John 1:4, NIV). Be sure to pray for each other as you wrap up this session. Ask for a fresh filling of the Spirit and thank God that He is always faithful to continue the good work He has begun!

Going Deeper

The next pages contain **two supplemental exercises to the Roadblocks sessions**. You can do these together—a powerful way to go deeper in community. If you choose to do them as homework, be sure to share what the Spirit does through them when you gather again. This is accountability and the power of the testimony which overcomes the work of the enemy! (Revelation 12:11, NIV)

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour.”

- Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV)