

GOD'S SUPERHEROES

As humans have grappled with the struggles of life throughout history, a common thread keeps emerging into popular culture to help us face the problem. Feeling powerless in the face of wars and global strife, we've invented cultural superheroes. People like Superman, Batman, and others create an escape into a world where an ordinary person is suddenly endowed with superpowers that enable him to defeat evil and safely "control" the world around them.

The church is full of superheroes. Empowered by God's Holy Spirit, these superheroes steward a higher power to accomplish great things for a cause commissioned by God Himself. As we celebrate the Day of Pentecost, when God first sent the Holy Spirit to live inside His people, we discover the original source of authentic superpowers designed to strengthen God's people and propel the church into God's greater work.

► Read Acts 2.1–13.

On the Day of Pentecost, the church is turning a corner in its life. It's transitioning from a season of confusion,

disappointment and doubt after their Messiah's death into a new era in which their reliance upon God takes a new twist. Christ is gone, they're being persecuted, their numbers are

dropping, and they feel alone. Before Christ's ascension into heaven, Jesus tells the disciples to wait for His power to come to them (Acts 1.4–8). During this tumultuous waiting period after Christ's death and resurrection, we see the pattern of all superheroes' development. It's through the hard times that God is shaping and humbling His people to prepare them for the power to come. Just as Superman lost his entire planet and Batman watched his parents die, these traumatic experiences marked the beginning of their transition into "super-status." As Christians, we know that God uses these times of difficulty and hardship for a greater purpose—to prepare us for His good plan for our lives.

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QUESTION: *In hindsight, can you look back at moments of trial in your life and see how God used them to prepare you for what was ahead? Can you think of other Biblical and historical figures who walked through a similar pattern of development?*

Acts 2.2–3 tells us of “a sound like the blowing of a violent wind” and “tongues of fire” that accompanied the arrival of the Holy Spirit amongst the disciples. It’s in this violent encounter that God’s power begins to rest upon them. Every superhero comes to a moment of violent encounter that changes their entire life’s course. They face a force greater than themselves which transforms them into something super. The Incredible Hulk encounters gamma radiation that endows him with superhuman strength. A radioactive spider bites Spider-Man and turns him into a web-swinging rescuer. The Fantastic Four were exposed to an explosion in space. It’s the same with the Holy Spirit. The violent rushing wind comes into our lives to dislodge the weaker things to make room for the greater power. The Holy Spirit will always come in to remove that which isn’t equal to the weight of Christ. We can’t have average and super occupying the same place. When we say, “God, use me,” then God says, “More of me, less of you.” When we’re in transition, God is moving stuff out to put more of Himself in us. The Holy Spirit comes to disrupt all in our lives that is not anchored in Christ.

1. UNITY

► Read John 17.20–23.

The first superpower that we see present within the church during this encounter is unity. Acts 2:1 says “they were all in one accord in one place” (KJV). In the church, God intended that we should all use our superpowers together as one body (Rom. 12:4–5). An arm can’t function as something super on its own. It is connected to the head, shoulders, neck and beyond to work in its own distinct ways as it contributes to the function of the whole. The right arm can’t leave the body to do something else because it’s jealous of what the left arm gets to do. Where would it go? How would it accomplish anything without the rest of the body to support it? Unity in itself is a demonstration to the world. Most ideas fail because someone wants their name to be bigger than someone else’s. If thousands of believers came together just to worship and pray, the world would be amazed. The common denominator that unites every Christian, regardless of background or denomination, is that we are all broken and need a savior.

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2. SUPER-HEARING

► Read Acts 2.5–8.

The next superpower that we see emerge from this encounter is super-hearing. The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to speak in multiple languages so that every visitor to Jerusalem could understand God’s message in their own language. Usually, in the church, we don’t hear each other very well. If we could, the church would be different. We usually only hear what we want to hear. We tune out if we don’t like what is being said. We do this not only to each other, but also with God.

The Holy Spirit opens our ears in two ways. First, He allows us to hear each other. Diversity in the Church doesn’t happen unless the Holy Spirit interprets between two different ways of life. He enables us to understand others’ love for Jesus, no matter what it looks like. When we hear their hearts, then we can know their history. Secondly, the Holy Spirit translates God’s message to us. The Bible is full of examples of how God’s Word brings help in our time of need. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10.17). God’s Word is a lamp to our feet (Psalms 119.105). He makes the crooked places straight (Isaiah 40.4). The Holy Spirit uses the Word of life to give us strength wherever we are. When Peter gets out of the boat to walk to Jesus on the water (Matthew 14.22–33), the miracle of the story is that Peter can hear Jesus’ voice over the storm.

QUESTION: *Think of times in your life when God gave you super-hearing to understand something new or bring strength in difficulty. How did you hear His voice? How did His Word affect your heart?*

3. SUPER-VISION

► Read 2 Corinthians 4.7.

God will give us the ability to see and know what we otherwise would not know. When Superman sees the vision of his father at the ice castle as a child, his encounter with his father changes him. He flies away from the ice castle with new superpowers. When we encounter Jesus, He shows us

the power we already have. We have His power residing inside of us through His Holy Spirit, but we need Him to help us realize it. Prayer is our phone booth for “super-vision.”

► Read 1 Peter 2.9.

When the church walks in their God-given superpowers, we can expect the response of others today to be the same as it was on the Day of Pentecost. At the end of our passage (verses 12–13), the onlookers are “amazed and perplexed. They asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’ Some, however, made fun of them and said, ‘They have had too much wine.’” People outside the church will never truly understand us. Anyone called by God will always confuse people. “Are you drunk? Who does that? That doesn’t make sense.” But if we are going to be used by God, our choices will not make sense to others. Regular humans can’t understand a superhero.

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It is because of this misunderstanding that many of us deny who we are in Christ. God says to be the superhero He has called you to be.

QUESTION: *Have you experienced this misunderstanding from non-Christians? How did you respond? How does that experience still affect you today? How can you walk more fully in your God-given superpowers?*

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