

Genuine and Lasting Revival Requires These 4 Elements

Today's charismatic churches seek revival fire, but are they equipped to steward it when it comes? I have found it helpful to think of cultivating Holy Spirit ministry with the analogy of building fireplaces within our local churches. It's easy, at times, for charismatics to pray and ask for God to send more power. Often, we believe that if we just had more anointing flowing, that would take care of whatever problems we're facing. But what I've found is that's not usually the case. If we ask for the fire of God and receive it, we quickly will be faced with our need to figure out how to steward the fire in a safe way.

Fire may have the potential to be very productive, but in and of itself, it is far from safe. Under most circumstances, a fire burning in our home will result in one of two outcomes: Either the home will be damaged or the fire will be extinguished. It is only with the structure of a fireplace that the fire can be harnessed to warm the home or be used to cook food. Believe it or not, the fire of God can rip a church apart just as much as it can build it up. It's all about building an environment that can steward and protect the fire God provides.

This subject is essentially the point of 1 Corinthians 14, wherein Paul gives a number of very direct instructions for how to build a healthy fireplace environment. For example, here is a fire without a fireplace: "Therefore if the whole church assembles in one place and all speak with tongues, and those who are unlearned or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" (1 Cor. 14:23).

And here is what Paul says will happen when that fire is in a fireplace: "But if all prophesy and there comes in one who

does not believe or one unlearned, he is convinced by all and judged by all. Thus the secrets of his heart are revealed. And so falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you” (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

In one situation, the power of God results in chaos and the disrepute of the church; in the other, it builds the church up. The environment matters.

Over the last few years, I’ve had the opportunity to work with more than 200 different churches with the School of Kingdom Ministry, and along the way, I’ve seen churches that have built excellent fireplaces, and churches that have suffered for not having enough in place there.

In the spirit of keeping with the visual metaphor, I find it helpful to think about the elements of a fireplace and how they translate to our application in a local church. We will take it one component at a time: flames, fuel, air and bricks.

Flames

Without fire in it, a fireplace is just an empty corner. Similarly, we need to be thinking about the sources of flames God has put around us. Fire comes from God; it is not something that can be controlled, but it is something we can anticipate and create the space for. One way to get fire is to carry it from another fireplace—an important thing for each of us to keep in mind. What sources of fire are we interacting with regularly? If we’re not hanging around fire, it’s much harder to find it and know when we have it.

There are also people whom God uses as “fire-starters” in the body of Christ. These are people who just seem to have things happen around them. They generate flames and catch things on fire around them (sometimes, maybe even often, without meaning to). It’s important that we know which people around us God is giving as fire-starters, and that we make room for them to make some sparks.

The difficult part with this is that fire-starters are usually messy people. They often aren't your ideal small group leader. They may be weird or socially awkward; they may have maturity gaps or a little bit too much personal drama. They are not often neat, clean people, and they're not always the people to whom we want to give discipleship influence. We need to be purposeful to engage with the often-challenging road of working with these people, refining their character and creating spaces for them to make some sparks. Who are the fire-starters God has put around you? How are you investing in them?

Consider these fire-starters in action: "Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they came down, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for still He had come on none of them. They were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14-17).

Philip works tremendous miracles and masses get saved, but it's Peter and John who start lighting some fires with the Samaritans themselves. In fact, it's the very same Peter who denied Jesus. It's the very same John who, with his brother James, tried to call down fire from heaven when people didn't accept their preaching (see Luke 9:54). Jesus patiently spends more than three years pouring into them and helping them grow up, in part because He knows, in time, they will be the fire-starters the early church needs to get off the ground.

If you want to have fire in your fireplace, have a plan to get it there. It may be hard work, but it's worth it.

Fuel

Real fires also need more fuel to keep burning. If you don't continually give a fire new gas or wood, it will burn out, and I find the same is true for our local-church fireplaces. We

need to continually be thinking about feeding people into a place where they can get caught by the fire in the fireplace. Often I find that churches have a great plan in place to get people saved, but much less of one to introduce people to the Holy Spirit; that seems a shame to me. The Holy Spirit is very eager to draw new people into an active partnership with Him.

Consider this example when Peter goes to Cornelius' house: "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word. All the believers of the circumcision who had come with Peter were astonished, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in other tongues and magnifying God. Then Peter continued, 'Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these, who have received the Holy Spirit as we have?'" (Acts 10:44-47).

The Holy Spirit doesn't even wait for them to follow the right order! They don't get a chance to respond in faith in Jesus before the Spirit falls on them and lights them up as new fuel on the fire.

What is your plan for adding more fuel to the fire? How are you working with people who are not dynamically partnering with the Spirit of God to move them toward more activity there?

Air

Another thing fires need is air flow. If you don't have enough air circulation, a fire will burn through all the oxygen available and then reduce to a smolder. Similarly, in our local churches, our fire needs some space designated for it to burn.

Not every context is helpful for letting the flames rage full-tilt. I don't think we need to try to replicate a conference environment for our weekend services; a local church service is a good thing and doesn't need to be converted to a

conference experience. But if you don't have intentional spaces to allow the fire room to breathe, you'll find it starts to die down. This is part of why Paul says, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Examine all things. Firmly hold onto what is good" (1 Thess. 5:19-21).

Paul tells us we need the right balance. A fire needs some boundaries ("Examine all things"), but it also needs some room ("Do not quench the Spirit). We need to think about healthy boundaries and structures, and we also need to think about opening up spaces to let the flames burn a little more unhindered. What might that look like? Here are a few ideas:

Practice at weekend services. At times, open up ministry times a little more than whatever is usual. Take a few more risks. That may include letting members of the congregation prophesy to one another.

Do some worship and ministry nights. This is a great way to open up some room to pursue God in a very free way.

Consider specific ministries. These ministries might be prophetic teams, healing rooms or collaborations with training and equipping schools like the School of Kingdom Ministry. These are ministries that regularly hold a space open for people to go for it and see God do some amazing things.

Put people on the spot. Ask them to pray, prophesy or minister to someone without any preparation. This is a way of holding some space open for a specific person.

How do you plan to create room for your fire to burn? Where will you take more risks and push the envelope for your environment?

Bricks

Finally, without bricks, we don't have any fireplace at all! Bricks represent the boundaries; they are the places where we

curb the flames to protect the rest of the environment. In my opinion, this is a critical component of your fireplace, and one that can be undervalued. If we do not have a plan for how we are going to keep Holy Spirit ministry within healthy boundaries, in time that will lessen how much we see the Spirit on the move.

Where is the healthy boundary for our fireplace? Once again, Paul has words of wisdom for us: "So, seeing that you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church" (1 Cor. 14:12).

It seems to me that the gifts of the Spirit are on the path to going wrong when we forget this simple principle: The gifts are given to us, but they are for others. The benefit is not intended for us as the minister; the benefit is for the person we are ministering to. We are meant to spend them for others' benefit, not our own. Whenever we miss this and begin to spend them on ourselves in some way, we've taken the fire outside healthy boundaries.

If we want to have effective Holy Spirit fireplaces, we need to have a plan for how we are going to have "brick" conversations. These are never fun, and I don't like correcting people in this way! But if we aren't purposeful to create room for these conversations, we will reap the results of overlooking the need for them. Better yet, strive to be a leader who has these conversations proactively, not reactively.

A fire needs boundaries to keep it constructive, and it is part of our job as pastors and leaders to be intentional to help people know where those boundaries are. What is your plan for addressing places where fire would spill out of the fireplace?

Each of these layers represents something we can do to help create a healthy, Spirit-active environment. We cannot cause

God's activity, but we can foster the kind of environment that values and honors what He does do, and what I've found is that when we take those steps, God often blesses our preparations with His presence.

If you're hungering to see God move more in your local congregation, I join you in those prayers! May we see the Spirit fall in power and Jesus lifted high in glorious ways. As we pray, let us also prepare, for when the fire does come, we can immediately set to work in partnership with our King.

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