

How One Man's Experience With Holy Spirit Is Transforming the Russian Church

For countless decades, those referred to as Spirit-empowered believers were deemed crazy. But in our times, the Holy Spirit is moving in fresh, unmistakable ways. We are witnessing a revolution, and for those who are watching, the true source is undeniable.

Ivan's incredible story of redemption and Holy Spirit rescue has the unique distinction of changing not only my life but the lives of thousands of people. Ivan (not his real name) grew up in a small village in Russia. Life was simple enough until his father died when Ivan was barely 18, leaving him with the responsibility of helping to provide for his mother and seven younger siblings. Overwhelmed by their circumstances, his family moved from their village to a larger town to find work. With his new responsibilities weighing on his shoulders, Ivan set out to find work.

Instead, he ran into trouble. Two of the families in his apartment building made a hearty living as thieves, and they taught him how to steal. The money and all that he was accomplishing seemed to come easy. Until one day, it didn't. Before he turned 25, Ivan found himself in a Russian courthouse, the judge's guilty verdict echoing in his ears.

The prison to which he was condemned was so harsh that neither family members nor preachers dared visit. However, amidst the darkness and loneliness that seemed to have consumed his life, an unusual miracle took place. During lunchtime one day, the head of the prison brought in a box of Gideon New Testament Bibles. Somehow it had come by mail, the officer explained, and any prisoner was welcome to take one back to his cell.

Ivan picked up the New Testament and began to read.

He couldn't put it down. By the time he finished, warm tears were flowing down his cheeks. In that moment, he surrendered his heart and life to Christ and prayed the sinner's prayer. Almost as soon as Ivan said amen, something came over him, and he began to speak in a language he had never learned. It frightened him to the point that he thought he was losing his mind.

Determined to understand what just happened, Ivan began to read through his little book one more time. He decided that if there was nothing in it that explained what had happened to him, he would know he had lost his mind, and he would commit suicide. His heart soared and then fell as he read through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John again but found no evidence of the experience he had in his cell the night before. His hope waning fast, Ivan reached Acts 1. He devoured it and quickly turned to Acts 2. There, he found his answer: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to speak" (Acts 2:4).

He wasn't crazy after all. That was what had happened to him—and if the Holy Spirit could change his life in such a way, why wouldn't He do it for others? Filled with fresh faith, hope and Holy Spirit power, Ivan began to tell everyone what God had done in his life.

For many years now, he has extraordinarily preached the gospel, planted churches and fed the hungry families of Russia. His life has left an indelible mark on the Russian church and the worldwide community of believers. Even more, Ivan's story is a poignant reminder that the world needs Jesus, but the church still needs the mighty infilling power of the Holy Spirit.

You're beautiful. I see Jesus in you!

Have an awesome week. {eoa}

Mikel French has challenged spiritual awakening all across America, where many celebrations extended into multiple weeks, and has conducted celebrations in France, Sweden, Russia, Romania, Poland, Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, Germany, South Africa, Malawi, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Haiti, Japan, Singapore, India and Thailand. He conducted an outreach celebration in Manila, Philippines, reaching 200,000 teenagers with the Book of Hope. Through the generous support of partners, he has presented the message of Jesus Christ to millions of people in the nation of Russia through televised citywide soul-winning celebrations. Mikel considers it an honor to assist in conducting the annual pastor's conference, where thousands of pastors from Russia's 11 time zones come for training, teaching and equipping. Mikel and his wife, Marsha, reside in Tulsa, Oklahoma.