

9 Ways to Keep Missional Fire Burning

As Timothy oversaw the church in Ephesus, Paul exhorted him to “fan into flame the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6b, NIV). Despite this, within a generation, the church in Ephesus faced a stern rebuke from Jesus for abandoning its first love, with the only remedy being a return to its initial deeds (Rev. 2:2-5).

How did this once-thriving community lose its fervor? Perhaps it grew too comfortable, relying on its robust infrastructure, sound doctrine and well-organized systems.

Looking back at the church’s dynamic beginnings in Acts 19, we see that its “first works” were characterized by passionate discipleship, bold gospel proclamation, regional transformation and the planting of vibrant Jesus communities across Asia Minor.

1. We need consistent, united corporate prayer. In Luke 24:49b (MEV), Jesus instructed His followers, “But wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high.” This waiting was not merely for self-renewal but for empowerment as witnesses.

The early church exemplified this through its 10-day prayer vigil leading up to Pentecost. This vigil illustrates that significant time in united corporate prayer is crucial for leaders to bond and create the synergy necessary to unleash God’s power (Acts 1:14).

The outcome was extraordinary: They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God’s word with boldness (Acts 2:1-3, 4:31).

2. Believers need to maintain consistent spiritual habits. In Acts 3:1 (NKJV), we read, “Now Peter and John were going up to

the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*.” This highlights how the early church practiced spiritual disciplines, mainly set times for corporate prayer, which kept them anchored in their daily lives.

This discipline was inherited from their Jewish heritage. For instance, King David declared in Psalm 119:164a (ESV), “I praise You seven times each day for Your just rules.”

Sadly, many nondenominational churches have discarded historic practices, including the discipline of set prayer times, often called the daily office. Establishing regular individual and corporate prayer times is crucial for keeping believers grounded in their faith amid life’s challenges.

3. Churches must maintain a corporate missional focus. The early church was not just concerned with individual blessings but with the collective mission of the entire congregation.

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Acts 4:32 describes this beautifully: “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.”

This unity and shared purpose fueled their missional focus, ensuring the entire community worked together to spread the gospel and support one another. This corporate calling created a powerful, cohesive movement that transcended individual interests and pursued a common, divine mission.

4. Spiritual leaders stayed within their assignments. When the apostle Peter faced the challenge of needy widows, he continued his primary mission to address the issue directly. Instead, he affirmed his commitment to preaching the word of God, stating in Acts 6:2b, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”

The New Testament emphasizes that the body of Christ comprises diverse gifts and assignments among its members. Each person must “stay in their lane” to operate effectively within the grace given them.

As Paul writes in Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-12 and Ephesians 4:11, each member’s unique role is essential for the whole body to function harmoniously and fulfill God’s mission.

5. Churches must prioritize the mission above all else. Acts 8:4 states, “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” Despite being forced to leave everything behind, these early believers remained committed to spreading the gospel and planting churches.

Throughout Christian history, numerous followers of Christ have made the radical choice to leave behind their comforts to fully dedicate themselves to preaching the gospel and serving the poor. Consider the inspiring lives of:

- St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226): Renounced his wealth to embrace a life of poverty and service.
- St. Clare of Assisi (1194-1253): Followed Francis in living a life of simplicity and devotion.
- St. Anthony the Great (251-356): Known as the father of monasticism, he abandoned his possessions to live in the desert.
- St. Benedict of Nursia (480-547): Founded the Benedictine order, emphasizing prayer and labor.

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- St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556): Founded the Jesuits, committing to education, missionary work and aiding the needy.

6. The church must have faith for the conversion of gospel enemies. The early church was deeply devoted to prayer in the temple and homes (Acts 2:46, 12:12). A significant portion of the people's prayers likely focused on converting those hostile to the gospel, as evidenced in Acts 4:27-31.

Their faith and relentless prayers bore remarkable fruit: Saul, one of the church's fiercest adversaries, encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and was dramatically transformed and became their greatest apostle (Acts 9:3-6).

7. Christ's followers must maintain a spiritual focus during discretionary time. Acts 10:9-10 illustrates that Christ's followers often sought God outside formal gatherings. For instance, while waiting for a meal, Peter went up on the roof in solitude to pray and seek God. This moment of personal devotion opened the heavens, and he received a vision commanding him to preach to the Gentiles.

This example shows that the early believers prioritized their spiritual life during their discretionary time, remaining attuned to divine guidance.

8. Missional churches will send out their best leaders. In Acts 13:2b-3, the church of Antioch exemplifies the courage and faith required to advance God's mission by sending out its best leaders: "'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

Unfortunately, many pastors hesitate to release their top leaders today, even when God calls them to new fields. This reluctance stifles the missional flow that drives the kingdom forward.

9. The church must have a vertical focus in problem solving. The early church's ability to solve complex issues while maintaining its missional fire is seen in Acts 15:28: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." When faced with

the challenge of integrating Gentile believers, the church didn't rely solely on human wisdom. Christ-followers compared Scripture and created space in their deliberations to hear God's voice.

By prioritizing divine guidance alongside strategic planning, the church kept its focus and momentum in spreading the gospel.

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