

Don't Put a Lid on the Holy Spirit

Last month a pastor named Antione Ashley invited me to speak in his church in Deland, Florida, near Orlando. Ashley is only 33, but he has seen the Holy Spirit move powerfully in the past few years. When he began leading Arise Church two years ago, he made it clear that he wouldn't apologize for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So on that Sunday night we had a special service designed to introduce new people in his church to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I preached from John 7:37-39 about how the Spirit wants to flow out of all believers, like "rivers of living water" (see v. 38). And guess what happened? Many people were filled with the Spirit for the first time.

If your church allows this kind of freedom, you are blessed—because many pastors today are afraid to allow the Spirit to move. We've put Him in a box. We have a long list of seeker-friendly rules these days, telling us No.1, American churchgoers only want a 60-minute church experience; No. 2, the only "cool" way to do church is to offer three songs, a short TED Talk and video announcements; and No. 3, altar calls scare people away.

I don't follow those rules. People need the reality of God's power. I wish we would stop being so worried about how the Holy Spirit might show up in church. Here are seven practical things we can do to encourage the freedom of the Spirit:

1. **Teach about the Holy Spirit often.** The Holy Spirit was rarely mentioned in the church I grew up in, so we never expected Him to do anything. Yet He is described in the second verse of the Bible as "moving" upon the surface of creation (Gen. 1:2), and He has one of the last

messages in the Bible (see Rev. 22:17). He moves and He speaks throughout the Scriptures. But we must invite the Spirit to move and speak in our churches by giving Him the place He deserves. Don't minimize His role.

2. **Leave time for altar ministry.** A church without altar ministry is like a hospital without a maternity ward. New life often begins at the altar—whether it is salvation, healing or prayer for a fresh anointing. Today many churches that offer multiple services often skimp on ministry time because they need to rush the 10 a.m. group out of the sanctuary to get ready for the next crowd. Multiple services are fine, but we are crowding the Spirit out of the church if we don't schedule time for people to respond to the message.
3. **Host small groups where people can use the Holy Spirit's gifts.** It's not practical for everyone to prophesy or exercise other spiritual gifts in a large congregation. But if people are plugged into small groups, there will be opportunities to encourage one another in supernatural ways. And people are more comfortable stepping out in faith in front of 10 people than they are in front of 3,000.
4. **Train people in spiritual gifts.** Many pastors clamp down on spiritual gifts because a few fanatics have tried to pull the church into weirdness. But in our efforts to protect the sheep from "charismania," let's not swing the pendulum to the other extreme by forbidding the gifts. The power of God will flow if we teach people the difference between authentic anointing and strange fire.
5. **Offer "teaching moments" to explain spiritual gifts.** I've been in churches where Brother Herschel or Sister Agnes prophesied in such a harsh, condemning tone that everyone in the church let out a collective groan. Their "words from God" had the same effect on the congregation

as fingernails on a chalkboard. We can't ignore these awkward moments. When the Corinthians mishandled speaking in tongues and prophecy, the apostle Paul used their mistakes to teach about how to use gifts properly.

6. **Expose your church to ministries that flow in the anointing.** God not only gave the church pastors—He also gave evangelists, teachers, prophets and apostles (see Eph. 4:11). Yet many churches today know only pastors. We need life-giving traveling ministries because God sends them to win new converts, heal the sick, unleash prophetic power, train leaders and impart new vision in congregations. We should not be afraid to open our pulpits to the other people God uses to bless the church.
7. **Give time for testimonies.** Nothing raises the faith level of a congregation like someone's raw experience with God. If a man was healed this week in your church, let him tell about it. If an infertile couple got pregnant, let them shout it from the housetops. Stories of supernatural intervention trigger a holy expectation in everyone.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 says it plainly: "Do not quench the [Holy] Spirit." Let's fling open the doors and allow the Spirit to have His way. Instead of being afraid of what He might disrupt, or whom He might offend, let's care more about what the church would be like without Him. {eoa}