

It's Time to Start Scaring Visitors Away From the Church

Many are working hard to attract the wrong crowd on Sunday—and the result is an Ichabod church.

We soon won't be able to define going to church the way we do now. God is coming to reform, to crush structures of old for what is to be introduced very soon. Our call isn't to stand strong until the shift comes, it's to prophetically sound the alarm and awaken those at risk! God is coming! The force from Heaven, the celestial asteroid, is going to impact the Church, and most pastors and people will resist with everything that's within them. Man-made support systems will be removed. People's financial and relational structures will be threatened by this strange new spiritual invasion. The human wisdom and natural common sense that have been involved in the development of the current church structure will not be usable in the new. Those who walk by sight are in danger.
~The Coming Church, John Burton

I've met countless pastors and others who say they are focused on revival, but who are misguided on exactly what it is. Their focus is on attracting people to the church, on people getting "saved" and on other church growth strategies.

The problem? The foundational pursuit of revival has nothing to do with church growth or the lost. It has everything to do with the church awakening, contending in intercession and attracting the fire of the Holy Spirit.

The lost didn't show up in the upper room. Marginal followers of Jesus were repelled by the upper room.

Revival isn't marked by a full house. Revival starts in a room that reveals the remnant. The revival that erupted in that

roomful of remnants resulted in explosive church growth and kingdom advance.

Premature church growth will result in a multiplication of lukewarm, dead and dying people who have no idea what it feels like to have tongues of fire igniting over top of them.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like a mighty rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared to them tongues as of fire, being distributed and resting on each of them (Acts 2:1-3).

Visitors Should Be Shaken by What They See in the Church.

*The pure Christian message of surrender, repentance, holiness, intercession and rescuing souls from hell has been replaced by a self-centered gospel that boldly affirms a focus on benefits without cost, on personal gain without sacrifice, on freedom without consecration. The Church has been unapologetically and boldly focused on how to have faith to receive while forsaking the call to have faith to give. The spirit of the age infiltrated churches long ago—and now, all too often, that demonic spirit is the primary counselor.
~The Coming Church, John Burton*

It's time self-focused, semi-interested people are no longer given the opportunity to demand what they are looking for in a church. It's time to close up the welcome centers and put away the welcome gifts. When presented with the unmistakable burning only a supernatural church can offer, their decision to stay or leave will be immediate. I've often said that one indicator of the Holy Spirit moving in power is that bystanders will do one of two things. They will either marvel or they will mock.

They were all amazed and perplexed, saying to each other,

“What does this mean?”

Others mocking said, “These men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:12-13).

When naturally minded people walk into a furnace of intercession, a place that is electric with supernatural activity, they should be radically unsettled, yet so many church assimilation teams today attempt to make the environment as familiar and comfortable as possible.

I’ve often heard pastors admit they hide the pre-service prayer (for those who have pre-service prayer at all) in a side room instead of filling the sanctuary with groans of intercession because they don’t want to freak out the soon-arriving visitors. I’ve heard that many, many times, and I was grieved every time. There are a few legitimate reasons why prayer might not work in the sanctuary prior to the service in some churches, but that’s not one of them. If we are attempting to introduce people into the wonder of a supernatural encounter with Jesus, why would we, at the same time, work so hard at shielding their eyes? I propose bringing the fire and the groan right into the heart of the Sunday service. Those who remain will be the laborers you need to fulfill your mission.

Many years ago, when I first started Revolution Church in Manitou Springs, Colorado, I worked hard at assimilating visitors. I would excitedly connect with them and share just how much they would enjoy making our church their new home. It didn’t take long for me to start feeling like a used-car salesman: dirty, compromised. My strategy grieved my spirit. The truth was that our atmosphere and our vision were called by God to be driven by intercession and marked by a strong prophetic emphasis. The messages were intense. Revolution Church was not designed for those who would be marginally committed (as no church is}. The “Sunday go to meeting”

Christians would, by choice, not remain for long.

The reality was, that by attempting to attract those types of people, I was compromising the vision. The church needed the remnant who would lock in and pray, who would contend for revival and who would endure with great strength. A large group of non-remnant people would be a distraction. Years would be lost. Lives would be at risk. Eternities would be in danger.

So, I shifted. I started literally trying to scare people away from our church.

To the dismay of those who simply want to hear a little worship and listen to good (and short) teaching, services will become more like prayer meetings. This is one of the most critical and most upsetting shifts that will come—and it must come now. Today, most of the energy church leadership teams expend is usually on attracting and keeping visitors instead of training and engaging intercessors. ~The Coming Church, John Burton

A Church on Fire

America doesn't need another bed-and-breakfast church that comforts our flesh (our natural desires). Our nation needs a church with a volatile atmosphere that explodes, burns human flesh and shocks our culture. —The Coming Church, John Burton

I knew we were called to lead a church on fire, and that just wasn't possible with tepid, resistant, lukewarm people.

I know your works, that you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain but are ready to die (Rev. 3:1-2).

I was confident that, if I clearly shared the wild, costly,

other-worldly vision that God had given us, and how people at our church were called to invest into that vision, that those who would not be interested in such a lifestyle would not return. Understand, my invitation for them to run with us was genuine. Our door was wide open. When I say "I tried to scare them away" I mean I was simply authentic. I stripped off the suit of a salesman and shared my raw, passionate dream of God to advance with a team of zealots for Jesus. Such an invitation was all I needed to see who was deeply hungry for revival and who was not. I would do my best to help those people connect in another local church. I'd give them the names of some churches they might enjoy. While I truly wanted the very best for them, it always broke my heart when they decided against adopting a lifestyle of intercession and revival. That lifestyle is not for a specialized few. It's for all.

This resulted in a confidence that those who remained were, in most cases, part of our remnant, firebrands who would dig in and assimilate with our tribe of revivalists.

When you spend energy attracting the mildly committed, you compromise your entire vision. Simply, you need soldiers to become equipped and ready to lay down their lives and fight for the freedom of souls in the region.

I believe it's core to the mission of the church to give opportunity for people to clearly evaluate their commitment and to give room for them to leave. The intensity of the truth demands it. We must call people out of a natural life and into the supernatural, out of a casual place and into radical surrender.

It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray Him. Then He said, "For this reason I

have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it were given him by My Father."

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him.

So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

Understand, similar to the way Jesus ministered in the above passage along with other key examples in Scripture, the Upper Room served as a filter. It filtered out those who weren't radically devoted. Most were repelled by the call to pray. The agenda did not change in the hopes of assimilating more people. The disciples loved them as they went their way, and then they turned the world upside down with the few who remained as a result. What filters do you have in your church, pastor, to call people to a transparent, genuine place of soul searching and decision? You must start and continue with an Upper Room atmosphere and an offensive, flesh-crushing Gospel message.

It's important to remember that the *ekklesia*, the church gathering, was not designed for the lost. So many pastors get derailed on this point alone. The church is a house of prayer for all nations. The predominant church activity should be white hot intercession with tongues of fire atop everyone, with groans filling the atmosphere. It's a remnant ministry. This call is for all who call themselves Christian.

If you build a church with people who won't devote themselves to the prayer room, you build your church with those who are disinterested at best and lukewarm at worst. Your church will be a low-water-level church. It will be a place where the fire can't rage. It will be naturally familiar with distant, elusive, marginally supernatural dreams. Pipe dreams.

Christians who aren't invested in fervent, supernatural prayer will be enticed by the natural familiarity of Ichabod

*churches (where the glory has departed). –The Coming Church,
John Burton*

What About the Seekers?

A question I hear from very good-hearted people is this: What do we do with people who are seeking? Do we just turn them away?

We absolutely don't turn them away! We invite them into the furnace. We do not turn down the fire. We turn it up! Those who are hungry for God must not be introduced to a tepid, natural environment with an image of God that looks just like themselves. Reveal the glory of our mysterious, fiery, living God and watch them collapse to their knees in desperation.

However, as I have stated already, many will choose to leave at the sight of something so alien and costly. That's a choice they themselves have a right to make.

Again, we must faithfully reveal the cost of following Jesus. We don't come on our terms. We come on God's. Too many are interested in warming their flesh by the fire instead of their flesh being consumed by the fire.

When he heard this he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. When Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Those who heard this said, "Who then can be saved?"

He said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

Peter said, "Look, we have left everything and followed You."

He said to them, "Truly, I tell you, there is no man who has

left his home or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

Many will turn away sad. Even the most devoted will feel the severity of a life devoted to Jesus. They will cry out, "Then who can be saved?" That tension will result in a church that is sober and on fire and something that true seekers will give themselves to. Pretenders will certainly go away sad as the remnant church is revealed.

My lifelong commitment in ministry is this: I refuse to tone down the activity of the Holy Spirit out of respect of those less hungry.

That commitment requires everything I do to have the smell of smoke. In fact, pastors, one reason even the most devoted people aren't coming to your prayer meetings is simple—they are dead, humanistic and boring. They are logically driven. They are simply a rehashing of what the natural mind can discern. As someone who comes alive in prophetic, prayer-fueled environments, I aggressively avoid powerless prayer meetings that are driven by lists of needs and human understanding. I don't want my soul activated. I want my spirit to burn! I think tired, powerless petition-driven prayer meetings can do more damage than good much of the time. Do your prayer meetings have the smell of smoke? Are tongues of fire resting on everybody? If not, don't be surprised when the even the most devoted disciples are no-shows.

We need a church on fire today more than ever. The lost are being introduced into lukewarm, natural, Ichabod religion instead of a supernatural shaking that can only come from the Great I Am. They are convinced they are saved as they are assimilated into a community of likeminded quasi-spiritual people who would love to see God manifest in their natural

realm—yet have no interest in manifesting in the spiritual realm where the Holy Spirit broods.

My challenge to pastors is simple: Risk everything. Allow your church to dwindle, if necessary, to a few remnant people who will live, pray, walk and advance in the Spirit. The world is waiting for them. {eoa}

You can download a free chapter and order *The Coming Church* by John Burton as at .

This article originally appeared at .

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