

Should the Church Get 'Scary'?

Many congregations are working hard to attract the wrong crowd on Sunday—and the result is an Ichabod church. 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 (Acts 2:1-3).

Stop Seeking Seekers

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 hospitality 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 marvel or they will mock.

Acts 2:12-13 says, "They were all amazed and perplexed, saying to each other, 'What does this mean?' Others mocking said, 'These men are full of new wine.'"

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. 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 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.

Stoke the Flames

“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. 3:1b-2a).

I knew we were called to lead a church on fire, and that just wasn’t possible with tepid, resistant, lukewarm people. I was confident that, if I clearly shared the wild, costly, other-worldly vision God had given us, and how people at our church were called to invest into that vision, 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 my salesman suit and shared my raw, passionate dream of God to advance with a team of zealots for Jesus. Extending 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 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 central 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.

In John 6:63-67, Jesus says, "'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?'"

In the same way Jesus ministered in John 6, 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.

What About 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 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.

Like the rich young ruler in Luke 18:23-30, 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, on fire and something to which true seekers will give themselves. 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 for 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 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 like-minded 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}

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