

Church on Fire.03. Welcome the Fire

Today, we continue our study of the book *Church on Fire* looking at Week 3

Week Three: WELCOME THE FIRE

“What separates our church from the sports bar or the health club down the street is not the omnipresence of God. What distinguishes the church from any other institution on earth is the flaming reality of the manifest presence of Christ.”

- “A church without the manifest presence of Christ is not a church - it’s a knockoff. A car without an engine is not a car - it’s a chassis. A church without the manifest presence of Christ is not a church - it’s a club.”

- “The reason young adults are leaving the church in droves is because, if they want a club, they can find something more exciting. It is time for us not only to rediscover the distinction between the omnipresence of God and His manifest presence; it is time for us to lead our people to encounter the manifest presence of Christ.”

Day 11 - DON’T FEAR THE FIRE

“When John saw the exalted, enthroned Christ in the first chapter of the book of Revelation, the Lord was walking among the flame holders. Each flame holder represented a different church. These flame holders show us that the primary purpose of the church is to hold out the fire of the manifest presence of God.”

- “Flame holders define the essence of the church.”

- “The Greek word for flame holder is *luxnos*; what John saw were seven free-standing pieces of furniture that held oil that were ignited to provide light to those in their vicinity. The *luxnos* was not the flame, but it carried the flame.”

- “This flaming image provides a profound prophetic picture of the essential identity of the church as an entity that holds out the flame of God’s manifest presence to the world. As a *luxnos* exists for the sole purpose of extending light, so the church exists for the single purpose of holding out the flame of God’s manifest presence.”

- “There is no other human institution that can fulfill this unique role. *Church on fire* is a fitting description of the reason that the church exists on earth.”

“The church is here on earth to carry the fire - the fire of the manifest presence of Christ.”

- “Fire is not human passion or enthusiasm. Neither is it religious activity. Fire is not our activity but God’s. Fire is the manifest presence of Christ.”

“The Bible is full of God-encountering fire manifestations”

- “It is not surprising that Paul exhorted the believers in the church in the city of Thessalonica, ‘Do not put out the Spirit’s fire’ (1 Thes. 5:19).”

“It is important for us to keep in mind that often the manifest presence of God will not be accompanied by fire, at least not literal fire.”

- “The critical issue is not the perception of fire but the presence of God. It is important for us to keep our focus on Christ and not on the manifestation. At the same time, it is important for us to

recognize not only that there is such a thing as the manifest presence of Christ but that His manifest presence plays an irreplaceable role in the church.”

“The tragedy of the modern church is that we have settled for the omnipresence of God and virtually overlooked the manifest presence of God”

- “We must realize that we can’t get any more or less of His omnipresence - that His omnipresence benefits all people equally, whether it be Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, secular atheists or Christians.”
- “For this reason the omnipresence of God requires absolutely no prayer. There is no need for us to ever ask for God’s omnipresence”
- “The manifest presence of God, however, is categorically different”
- “While there is no need to ask for God’s omnipresence, encountering His manifest presence is at the very heart of prayer.”

Omnipresence

Biblical
Real
True to God’s nature
God is everywhere
Generally theoretical
Available to all
Universal
Generally impersonal
Abstract
Obedience rare
Absolutely no prayer required

Manifest Presence

Biblical
Real
True to God’s nature
God is tangibly perceived
Generally transformational
Normally for God’s people
Selective
Highly personal
Specific
Obedience required
Normally prayer required

DAY 12 - PRAY YOUR HUNGER

“Welcoming the fire of God’s manifest presence is not complicated. We don’t need a twelve-step program on how to set our church on fire. All we need to do is pray our hunger and gather hungry people to pray with us.”

“Praying our spiritual hunger is the key to every revival”

- “Christian leaders throughout the ages have cried out to God for fire.”

➔ **“What level of spiritual hunger is God creating in you and in your church family?”**

When Jesus wanted to set the first church on fire, He gave them a command and promise.”

- “The command was that they were to gather and the promise was that they would receive. Jesus repeated the promise on numerous occasions”

➔ **“Jesus gave us promises so that we might believe them, pray them and receive from Him their fulfillment”**

DAY 13 - GIVE AWAY CONTROL

“Welcoming the fire of God’s manifest presence sounds intimidating - even threatening”

- “It is not mere coincidence that the vast majority of ‘fear nots’ in the Bible were spoken to people who had just encountered the manifest presence of God.”

“All kinds of scary thoughts race through our mind when we consider welcoming the fire to our church.”

- *“What if things get out of hand? If people get carried away? If things get messy? What if people get turned off and leave my church?”*

- “Some of us are afraid of false fire, misfire, backfire that when things start to heat up, we panic and instinctively reach for the fire extinguishers.”

- “One of my admired pastor friends Erwin McManus exposes the controlling instinct when he writes, ‘Sometimes we forget that God is fire. We confuse Him with fireplaces and fireworks. When we try to contain God’s fire in a fireplace, we clearly have a control issue.’”

“The question in your church is, does the Holy Spirit control you, or do you control the Holy Spirit?”

➔ **“You cannot wholeheartedly welcome the fire without relinquishing control. If you sincerely want the Holy Spirit to take control, you need to give Him control.”**

“Many of you are asking yourselves, *Can I trust God enough to give Him freedom to manifest Himself in my church regardless of what it looks like? Am I willing to relinquish control to Christ? Or because of my fear of fire, will I retain control?*”

- “If you hold onto your church, it will never get any bigger than you are. You will always limit its potential. If on the other hand you relinquish control to the Holy Spirit, there is no limit to the size and potential of your church.”

“The spirit of control and the fruit of the Holy Spirit, self-control, are actually exact opposites.”

- “We are not confronting the fruit of the Holy Spirit; we are confronting the sin of unbroken self-will that is behind the spirit of control.”

- “A controlling spirit in a church can destroy a church and dangerously limit Holy Spirit activity. Not until we relinquish control can we truly be filled with the Holy Spirit and come under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit.”

➔ **“To be Holy Spirit filled is to be Holy Spirit controlled.”**

“The spirit of control prevents more churches from experiencing the manifest presence of Christ than all the debate over pneumatology, that is, the theology of the Holy Spirit. Most church leaders build pneumatology to suit their control issues.”

The spirit of control is witchcraft pure and simple.

➔ **“Witchcraft is intimidation and manipulation for the sake of domination and control”**

“Control is what we do in the absence of the manifest presence of Christ.”

- “As leaders, when we intuitively feel the void of God’s control, we try to fill it with something that we manufacture. At times our church members will even look to us to control the church when they feel the void of Holy Spirit control.”

- “We as leaders must resist the temptation to control, or we will never be able to welcome the manifest presence of Christ.
- “When we welcome the manifest presence of Christ, we will be empowered to evict the spirit of control.”

DAY 14 - RECEIVE CORPORATELY

“Church on fire is a church encountering the manifest presence of Christ, because it is a church filled with the Holy Spirit”

“Just as God wants every believer not only to be saved but to know that he or she is saved, so He wants every believer to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to know that he or she is filled with the Holy Spirit.”

➔ **“In the same way God wants every local church not only to be filled with the Holy Spirit but to know that it is filled.”**

“My generation made the tragic mistake of privatizing prayer to the neglect of the biblical model of corporate prayer, and we privatized the infilling of the Holy Spirit to the neglect of the Bible’s model of the corporate infilling of the Holy Spirit.”

➔ **“We know that God fills individuals, but we need to rediscover the glorious reality of the corporate infilling of the Holy Spirit”**

“The biblical pattern of being filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled corporately”

- “When the early church was filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, there was no doubt about what had happened - everyone was filled and each one knew it (see Acts 2:3-4)
- “Months later, after the release of Peter and John from prison, when the believers gathered for prayer again, “they were filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:31), and they all knew it for certain”
- “Paul introduced the Ephesian believers to the Holy Spirit. He ‘placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied’ (19:6). There was no doubt in their minds that they had received the Holy Spirit.”

“Every time God pours out His Holy Spirit on a local church, it will look different.”

- “It is not our responsibility to determine how God will manifest Himself - it is our responsibility simply to welcome Him and to give Him freedom.”

“At least once a year I lead our church to corporately receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit during a Sunday worship celebration. Here is what it looks like:

➔ **“Heavenly Father, we stand before you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We relinquish the control of our lives and over our congregation to You. We declare our absolute allegiance to Christ, and we present ourselves - spirit, soul, and body - under the authority of Christ. Right now we receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We welcome You and all Your manifestation gifts. Take control of us. We give You freedom to manifest Your presence in any way You choose so that we might receive Your power to be Your witnesses here in our city and around the world. We receive now the fullness of Your Holy Spirit in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”**

“The critical elements of corporately being filled with the Holy Spirit are simple and biblical:

Relinquish control - One precursor of being filled with the Holy Spirit is surrender.

Receive - Keep in mind that being filled with the Holy Spirit is something we cannot do ourselves. It's not what we do; it's what God does.

Believe - Be sure you are filled. When you are biblically filled with the Holy Spirit, you will know it with absolute certainty. Paul reminded the Christians in Galatia of this all-important element when he asked the rhetorical question, “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?” (Gal. 3:2). Every believer in the New Testament who was filled with the Holy Spirit knew for certain that he or she had been filled with the Holy Spirit.

Be empowered - It is impossible to be inconspicuously filled with the Holy Spirit. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit God will supernaturally manifest His presence all over your life and the life of your church family. This is the hallmark of the church. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8).”

DAY 15 - KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS

“The single distinguishing mark of a Holy Spirit-filled congregation is its unmistakable love of Jesus”

➔ **“When a church family is filled with the Holy Spirit, both casual conversations and worship songs will center on Jesus.”**

“When we and our people are first filled with the Holy Spirit, and God begins to manifest Himself among us, there is a temptation to shift the focus away from Christ and onto the manifestations.”

- “Rather than explaining this distinction, allow me to illustrate it.”

➔ “In August 2013 when the College of Prayer met in the Holy Land, our meetings started at nine in the morning and continued until nine at night with only a ninety-minute break for both lunch and dinner. That would normally have been more than enough prayer, worship, preaching and teaching for even the best of us, but not for them. They met again at ten for prayer and worship that often lasted until two in the morning. As if that were not enough, they then got up at five and enjoyed two more hours of extracurricular praise and worship before breakfast. No one forced any of them to stay up late or get up early or told them they should call for these extra worship time. They were there for one reason: they loved Jesus, and they were hungry for more of Him.”

“Jesus said in reference to the Holy Spirit, ‘He will testify about me’ (John 15:26), and ‘He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you’ (16:14).”

- “In other words, don't glorify the fire; glorify the One whom the fire reveals”

- “Since it is the Holy Spirit's role to exalt Christ in all He does who are we to take the focus away from Christ and to put it on what the Holy Spirit does?”

“Our focus is always on Christ”

“There is no limit to what God can do through us as long as we give Him all the glory.”

Further Questions from Week Three

- 1. Read Acts 2:1-15. What strikes you about this account? What other examples in the Bible can you think of in which people encountered the manifest presence of God?**
- 2. What are some of the contrasts between the manifest presence and the omnipresence of God?**
- 3. Why is it so important to give control to Christ when you are filled with the Holy Spirit? What would it mean for your church family to give your church to God?**
- 4. What does it mean to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit corporately?**
- 5. How can your nuclear family and your small group pray a prayer to corporately receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit? What changes do you expect to see?**
- 6. What is the difference between seeking an experience with God and seeking an encounter?**
- 7. Why is it important to keep your focus on Christ rather than on the specific ways He chooses to manifest Himself?**