

## How to Set a Church on Fire.

### Acts 4:31-33

*“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. 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. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”*

There is a story about an atheist. Not a bad man – he just had no interest in a church. Besides, in this small town there was only one church and it was cold and dead. Nothing more than a social club.

One day the church building caught on fire. This was in a time when the whole town ran toward the fire to help extinguish the flames...**including the atheist!** Someone yelled: “hey, this is new for you, it’s the first time we’ve ever seen you running to church!” He replied, “this is the first time I’ve ever seen this church on fire!”

My desire is that in Akron, Ohio, no one will ever be able to say that they have never seen a church on fire! I want West Side to be that church! Most of us have had the sad experience of being in a cold, dead church, with no enthusiasm. They sing but are just going thru the motions because their heart is not in it. That situation is magnified when the church in question once was a church on fire for God.

Jesus warned the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2 to repent or He would remove their candlestick. Those who focus only on what they used to be, aren’t that anymore and never will be! I’m tired of hearing what the church used to be – let’s talk about what it **CAN BE again**. If we Focus on the past we ruin the present and destroy the future! Some say, what we need is some new converts, that’ll set the church on fire! No, what the church needs is some fire, and there will be people converted!

Charles Spurgeon said: **“to put new converts into dead churches is like putting live chicks under a dead hen.”**

In Gen. 22 God told Abraham to take his son, Isaac to the mountains to become a human sacrifice. They arrived at the location, and Isaac still did not realize that HE was going to be the sacrifice. Isaac knew there had to be 3 things to have a sacrifice: wood; fire; a lamb. v. 7 ***“And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”*** 4,000 years later, as we look at many churches and we can invert the question and ask, “we have the wood, we have the lamb, but where’s the fire?”

wood—cross of Calvary

Lamb—Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God

But, where is the fire?

I read Flavil Yeakley’s “Why Churches Grow”. He said his statistics show that on average it takes 40 Christians 1 year to bring 1 person to the Lord!!! WHY? Yeakley said because “we lack fire – in our hearts.”

Yeakley went on to say, “If we could freeze the world’s population, so no births, and no deaths, and if churches of Christ kept converting souls at the current rate, it would take 4k years to win the world to Christ!”

So, what are the characteristics of a church on fire for God? Open your Bible to the fourth chapter of Acts. Here we have an example of an on-fire church. A church that’s on fire for God is:

### **Provided with Power From God**

v. 8 Preachers

v. 31 The people

We need God’s power to fulfil God’s purpose...we need God’s power, alone. We can’t depend on man-made excitement to get the job done like programs, promotions or publicity.

Nor will repetitive, empty, full of fluff worship stir the people into an emotional high that will lead to teaching the lost about Jesus. One of the reasons denominational worship is filled with emotional music, pleas and preaching is they **don't have the truth about salvation**. They must appeal to the emotional side of man. Nothing can substitute for the **power of the Holy Spirit working in a church**.

I've made this comment in some places only to be immediately challenged that the **HOLY SPIRIT DOES NO WORK TODAY IN THE PROCESS OF CONVERSION!!** I've often wondered about those who believe the Bible teaches this. What is the Holy Spirit doing right now? I've asked that question of many gospel preachers and I'm told that the Holy Spirit works only through the word. Now, I agree that the Holy Spirit is not lurking about waiting for an opportunity to jump into someone that wants nothing to do with God! But I also believe that when a person studies the word of God and is asking, seeking and knocking, the Holy Spirit is free to work in and on that individual. I know the person that is baptized is given the gift of the Holy Spirit. What is that exactly??

Listen to Paul in 1 Cor. 2:4-5. ***“and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*** Paul says, I'm not depending on my wisdom, or flamboyant sermons, or tear-jerking illustrations, or even funny stories. I count on the power of God.

Our text begins in verse 31 saying, ***“when they prayed!”*** These brethren prayed earnestly it appears.

When we were preaching in Virginia Beach, a young woman came to me and said simply, **“Mike I'm praying for you to preach boldly and turn this bunch of Christians into a fire for the cause of Christ. We have been lukewarm for a few years now and I want that to stop. I am praying for God to convert the lost through your preaching.”**

When God is working, and decisions are being made today - you can mark it down - somebody paid the price and was earnest in prayer!

That church in Virginia Beach had gone from one preacher to another. When I arrived, I was told they had been stuck with one bad preacher after another. I knew these preachers, all of them. These men weren't the problem, but they could have been the solution! Rather than preach what needed to be preached they became frustrated and just moved on.

While that young woman had been praying, so had I. I was in a bookstore and found a book about converting the lost. That book had mostly nonsense in it, but the author made one statement that made the price of the book worthwhile. He said, **“we will start having conversions the minute we give up on self and commit to the power of God.”** My first sermon there was “Resting on Self – Or Embracing the Power of God.” As memory serves me, that first Sunday morning nine people came to the front to repent and recommit themselves to God. Let me tell you what happened. We arrived in August of 1990. There were 63 in attendance that first Sunday morning. We left there in March 1994 and the church had grown to 175 with more than 40 conversions. Tell me the Holy Spirit does not work in a church that goes to work for God!! Prayers to God were being offered by the church and by individuals and God heard those prayers and lit a fire in the hearts of the members of that church. God's power filled that congregation and they are still on fire today.

Can you remember the first time your child wanted to pour milk in their cereal...saying, “I can do it myself!!” Well as a parent you know they can't – they are not ready yet. Our Father will allow us to be obstinate and unyielding if we choose, but like that child, we usually will make a mess of things. The second point that an on-fire church will have”

### **Equality of Position**

v. 24 all in one accord

v. 32 all of one heart and one soul

I once read a story about a lost child in a field of tall grass. The child was about 18 months old. The entire neighborhood turned out to find the child but to no avail. A former soldier spoke up and said, let's all join hands and go through the field again. They then found that child.

I believe West Side is on fire for God. There is tremendous excitement about what we are trying to do in our community and in the kingdom. We have a common goal so the best method is to join hands in equality and unity where nobody is anybody but everybody is somebody! There are 3 critical mistakes members can make:

**1. Magnifying Our Importance.**

**2. Minimizing Our Importance.**

**3. Misplacing Our Importance.**

Having a servant's heart – thinking of what is best for this congregation and for God's kingdom will keep our church strong and on fire.

We have decisions ahead. They will have the ability to threaten unity. We are looking at small groups; changing our service times; adding more elders and deacons. All these things can create waves on an otherwise calm surface. But remember in the first century they had persecution and constant change and challenge. The outcome?? The church thrived and grew.

Let's all be praying for the Elders. For the preachers. For the deacons. For the work here at West Side. Let's all dig deep for the courage to maintain the calm no matter our personal feelings.