

## **“Are You on Fire or Burned Out?”**

Acts 2:42-47

*Series: Cliff Notes Week 15 The Church on Fire*

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From coast-to-coast, people watched the ascent of the crew with awe and wonder. Many held their breaths as they faced and surpassed every crucial stage. They were on fire! Up, up, up they rocketed farther than everyone else until they accomplished their mission. So let's cheer for The University of Michigan Men's Basketball Team!

Oh...you probably thought I meant the crew of Artemis II. They did a good job too. In fact, Victor Glover, Christina Koch, Jeremy Hansen and Reid Wiseman set historic milestones and broke important records. It took a lot of fire power to get them up there. 700,000 gallons of fuel generated 8.8 million pounds of thrust to lift them beyond the earth. They travelled farther from earth than any other humans: over 250,000 miles. They are also the fastest humans in history, racing 25,000 mph at re-entry causing their heat shield to reach approximately 5,000 degrees F.

This world-shaking moment reminded me of another fiery turning point in human history. As Linda powerfully preached last week about the first two chapters of the book of Acts I was struck by the similarities of these two transforming moments.

1. As tons of fire lifted Artemis to the heavens, so tongues of fire came down from heaven on Pentecost
2. As Artemis ascended through the skies and descended to joyful celebrations, so Jesus ascended above the clouds and the Spirit descended to joyful praise
3. As NASA sent humans to the far side of the moon, so the Holy Spirit sent humans to the ends of the earth.
4. As NASA sent astronauts of different genders, backgrounds and nations, so God launches the Church with people from different genders, backgrounds and nations.
5. Finally, NASA needed countless workers and complicated technology to complete its mission of going around the moon. It takes billions of people to accomplish God's mission of spreading the Gospel around the world. Yet unlike Artemis it is all powered by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

God wants to set you on fire. He wants to fill you with the fire of the Holy Spirit and change the world. Today in our Cliff Notes Series we look at the next major turning point in God's Story – the launching of this great movement called the Church. This enormous crew is God's primary way to accomplish his purposes on earth. Or to quote those two great theologians The Blues Brothers: “We're on a mission from God.” So what's the mission? What does God want to accomplish through us?

Linda taught us what happened in the opening chapters of Acts. Forty days after Jesus died and rose, He ascended into heaven like Artemis II. After looking up at Jesus I imagine the disciples said, "Great. Now that He's gone what do we do?" Eleven guys against the world. Eleven guys who failed Jesus at every turn. What can they do?

Ten days later, on Pentecost, God gives them the power to accomplish their mission. God sets them on fire and people come to watch them burn. The Holy Spirit descends on them and fills them. Visitors from many nations hear the Good News and three thousand become followers of Jesus. That's the birth of the Church. It is a small example of what God wants to do on a worldwide scale. Before He left, Jesus gave this mission to the apostles and to us:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

A witness is someone who points to something or someone else. You witness the accident and give your testimony so a judge or jury can make a decision. You are not a witness to you but to Jesus. Why do you witness to Jesus? So people can make a decision to find their way back to God. Since the beginning of Cliff Notes, during the time of Abraham, God's mission is to bless the whole world and bring them back home (Genesis 12:1-3). He uses us, the Church, to help them return to God's open arms.

Why don't we, the Church, do this? We have the wrong idea about the Church.

- We think we GO to Church when God wants us to BE the Church.
- We think Church is an hour of the week when it's really 24/7/365
- We think Church is an institution when it's really a revolution
- We think Church is a monument made of stone when it's a movement made of people
- We think Church is a tradition we don't want to change when it's really a living body that is always changing.
- We think Church is a club where we pay our dues when it's really a calling and a cause that demand our lives.
- We think Church is about me and what I get out of it when it's really about Jesus and what I can give to Him.

Jesus says, "I will build my Church and the gates of Hades will not be able stand against it." (Matthew 16:18). The fires of hell are no match for the fire of the Spirit. Unfortunately, from the very beginning, Christians have been holy fire extinguishers. We smother the Spirit's fire. Paul wrote, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire" (I Thessalonians 5:19). Most parents shout, "Don't play with fire." Paul cries, "Burn, baby, burn!"

So why aren't we on fire? Probably because we are burned out. We are over-extended and double-booked. We are stretched and stressed for success. Yet the main reason we are burned out is we don't plug into the power of the Spirit to face life's

challenges. We try to do everything on our own. We run on empty and then wonder why we feel empty. We let the fire of the Spirit die down to just a tiny flickering candle. The Creator of the Universe wants to supply us with all the power we need to live and do His will. So how do we keep the fire burning?

The end of the second chapter of Acts gives us a beautiful picture of what happened when the Spirit set the first Christians on fire.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

This brief portrait of the newborn Church contains a formula that keeps the fire burning. The Fire Triangle tells us a fire requires three elements to burn: fuel – such as paper, wood gasoline, a heat source – matches or the sun's rays, and oxygen. To extinguish the flames, the firefighter takes away one of these three. The Spirit's fire also burns brightest in the presence of three elements. You need all three or the fire will go out. As we look at these three ask yourself, "Which of these three am I doing? Which do I need to add to stoke the fire of the Holy Spirit?"

The first action is to **Love God in Worship and Prayer.**

They devoted themselves...to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe...Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts...praising God. Acts 2:42-43, 46, 47

Too often we treat worship like it's a Yelp review. "Music was a 6. Prayers get an 8. Message was a 2. I didn't get much out of it." We often do the same with prayer. It's only worth doing if we get results or answers. Don't be a passive critic. Put your whole self into worship and prayer. Jesus said the first and greatest commandment is

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Matthew 22:37

The first Christians didn't treat worship as a weekly duty they had to do. It was their heart's desire. They devoted themselves to communion (the breaking of bread) and prayer. Everyone was filled with awe because *every day* they met for worship. You don't need to come to this building every day. Make your whole life a prayer to God. On Sunday, we start worship together in here and continue worshipping God out there. Worship and prayer are the main ways we express our love for God. The Lord is delighted when you love Him all day long.

Years ago, my daughter Kristin lived with her husband Bryan in North Carolina. When my birthday arrived, I was a little sad that she wouldn't be with us. Three days before my birthday, Lisa walked in the door...with Kristin. I was completely surprised to see her. She had a meeting in Manhattan and stayed over to celebrate my birthday. The next morning we had breakfast before she flew home. We talked about her work and my work and their new apartment. It was a great gift. She didn't want anything. She didn't need anything. She just wanted to be with me.

Nothing on earth is more precious to me than the love of my family. And if that is the way I feel when my children spend time with me, how much more joy must our Heavenly Father feel when we spend time loving Him through worship and prayer. Tell Him about everything in your day. Thank Him for everything. Place it all in His hands. Ask yourself, "Am I worshiping the Lord weekly with other believers?" and "Am I praying daily?"

The second action is to **Grow in Grace in a Growth Group.**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship ... all believers were together. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" Acts 2:42, 46

From the beginning the best way to devote yourselves to the Apostles' teaching is with a small group of believers. Notice, the first Christians met in their homes. They had no church buildings. They learned the apostles' teachings in small home groups.

It's been fifty years since I gave my life to Jesus and forty years since I became a pastor and in all that time I have been part of a Growth Group. I can say, without a doubt that Christians start to grow in grace when they study God's Word, pray together and support one another in a Growth Group. It is not too late to join a group. Better yet, we encourage everyone to start a group with your friends, neighbors, or coworkers. You do not need to be an expert. The Discovery Questions are easy to lead, and they help believers and skeptics to learn how to be like Jesus. Ask yourself, "Am I part of the Body of Christ?" and "Am I member of a Growth Group?"

The third action is **Share with Others by Giving and Serving.**

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Acts 2:45

Once you start to grow in grace, your attitude begins to change. Instead of living for yourself, instead of grabbing and taking, you start giving and serving from the heart.

This is what I see happening around the world. I am a Trustee of the Outreach Foundation. We work with 60 mission partners in over 50 countries. Last Monday and Tuesday, at the Spring Board Meeting, I heard amazing stories of the Church serving in dangerous places under the constant threat of persecution.

- The President of a Seminary in the Ukraine is sending pastors to minister to their people, some of whom are on the front lines of the war

- A Pastor is training the leaders of underground house churches in China.
- Iranian Christians say, when the war is over they will return to share the Gospel.
- People like Seber Banda are bringing health, clean water, schools and churches to nations in Africa like Mozambique and Zambia.

You are partners with them. Through your gifts you are giving them fuel to spread the Gospel despite the opposition and persecution which tries to stamp out the fire.

And I see amazing ministry going on around me at Woodside. People are serving in so many ways. Our Adventure Club kids made Easter Baskets for families at Urban Promise in Trenton. Those who attended the Women's Retreat gathered a mountain of clothing and gave over \$1200 in gift cards to those living at a Women's Place. Teams are going to Bristol to raise the walls you built in our parking lot for a Habitat for Humanity house. Another team went to feed those on the streets in Kensington with Cast Your Cares. A third team went to Trenton to serve over 500 meals at TASK. The Dominican Republic Mission Team left Saturday to build homes and provide supplies for the community of El Batay. Soon our youth will partner with those restoring communities in Appalachia and the Bahamas.

But there is always room for more servants. We need disciples who share stories about Jesus with our young people in Sunday School, Adventure Club and youth groups. We need disciples who will open the door and welcome people with joyful smiles. We need disciples who lead worship on the stage or behind the scenes. We need disciples to start new Growth Groups. We need disciples to take part in REACH, Deacons, Habitat, TASK, Urban Promise, Cast Your Cares, the Dinner Ministry, Recovery Ministry, Prison Ministry, Code Blue, A Women's Place, Nursing Worship services and mission trips. And you can put a smile on a child's face by making a Pillowcase on May 2 with Ryan's Case for Smiles.

Love God, Grow in Grace, Share with Others: are you doing one, two or all three? If you are missing one, my challenge to you is to do whatever it takes to add it. If you do all three, the fire of the Spirit will grow and spread.

Artemis II Astronaut Victor Glover is on fire for Jesus. At the last moment before the Integrity capsule passed to the dark side of the moon and entered radio silence, Victor share with millions of listeners around the world this crucial message:

As we get close to the nearest point to the moon and the farthest point from Earth – as we continue to unlock the mysteries of the cosmos – I would like to remind you of one of the most important mysteries there on Earth, and that's love. Christ said the greatest command was to love God with all that you are – and to love your neighbor as yourself.

He recently said, "We need Jesus—whether on Earth or circling the moon." Let's love God, grow in grace and share with others so the fire of the Spirit will burn brightly even on the dark side of the moon.