

# The Holy Spirit Ignites a Church



A first-hand account, written by Pastor Jim Visbeek, about an ongoing move of God in his small church whose members started praying through the resource *Pray the Word for Your Church*.

## Background Information

I was asked to give a short history of what the Holy Spirit has done in my life, the lives of the leadership of our church, and the lives impacted by our people using Tiece

King's powerful book *Pray the Word for Your Church: 31 Prayers that Seek God's Purposes and Power*. I am so grateful for the gift of this book to the church at large. I hope you are encouraged by our story.

First, let me give you a few connection points. I serve with my wife, Janet, with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) as an intentional interim pastor in the Northwest. Because of the C&MA's kingdom perspective, they gave me permission to serve a non-affiliated church near my home in Lynden, Washington: Victory Christian Fellowship (VCF).

This story of what God is doing is still unfolding, including health challenges, God providing a building for the church, God introducing me to some key men and women of prayer, and a new vision for VCF and the community. While each of these events could demand a separate story, the most incredible story is how *Pray the Word for Your Church* has changed our church.

## **The Story Begins**

Janet and I decided to attend the C&MA's National Council week in Long Beach, California in May of 2015. In making our plans, we didn't really look too closely at the event schedule and booked our flights and accommodations a day early. When we went to check in, we learned that the meetings did not start until the next evening, however, there was a daylong prayer emphasis with sessions on many different ways to engage in prayer, both personally and corporately. These classes were connected with Harvest Prayer Ministries.

While they were all valuable sessions, I was intrigued by a session taught by Tiece (Ty) L. King who described her journey in prayer and how her church had grown in a deeper understanding through prayer, especially with prayers focused on Scripture. Out of this journey, she had written a series of

books on the theme *Pray the Word!* All of us in attendance were given a free copy of her newest book, *Pray the Word for Your Church*.

This encouragement was exactly what I needed to take home to a young church going through change and challenge.

Janet and I committed to pray through *Pray the Word for Your Church* for the month of June. Then I asked my elders to do so in July, followed by the expanded leadership in August. In September, I purchased an additional 25 books and opened up the challenge to the entire church (about 100 attenders). I quickly purchased another 25 books, and then more books in groups of 10 or 15. We also began sharing our experiences with the book in our 7:00 am Saturday prayer time.

I can't say anything significant happened during these initial months. But when we came to the end of September, especially with so many folks not getting their books until later in the month, we challenged the church to pray through the book again in October.

### **The Holy Spirit Brings the Increase!**

Our church meets in a building that houses several ministries, including New Way and Great Expectations, which provides housing for abused women and women who choose to keep their babies instead of having abortions. The first week of October, a young mom living in this ministry's facility, asked to meet with me to explain how to become a Christian. This was the first confession of faith I was aware of since I had come to VCF. The following week, two additional young women decided to follow Jesus. The third week, another woman asked to be helped in re-committing her life to Christ. In November, a young nurse I had met in the hospital recommitted her life to Christ. She then brought her fiancée who did the same a few weeks later.

We also began to sense a change in our church toward prayer. The 7:00 am prayer time became a precious time of celebration and renewal for those attending faithfully. Ruth, an older woman who had struggled in her Christian walk, started attending VCF and was in her words, "loved into the family." She then had a vision of a having a "house of prayer" in her home, only a block away from our facility.

Ruth began opening her home on Tuesdays and Thursdays for anyone who needed to pray or to be ministered to with prayer. While it started modestly, more than a few times, I was asked by Ruth to come and help someone struggling with his or her faith or a challenge. Sometimes no one comes, but she continues to keep her "house of prayer" open.

As this call to prayer continued to expand, Ruth also incorporated into the house of prayer an initiative of "Praying for Prodigals." This has expanded to include more than 50 prodigals, and the list of first names only is updated regularly. Last spring, we celebrated the first one on the list surrendering his life to Jesus and being baptized. Boy, was that a rush!

In the winter of 2016, Tina Miller, herself a woman of prayer as well as a writer, came to me with an expanded vision. She wanted to start a more aggressive prayer ministry she called "Prayer Seals," modeled after the US Navy Seals (Sea, Air, and Land). After approval of our leadership, she had T-shirts made for "uniforms" and created a battle manual. There are no meetings, Tina just provides regular prayer updates for those who sign up. The prayers of these intercessors are heavily focused on spiritual warfare on behalf of those who are struggling, and for the many woman at New Way and Great Expectations.

In the spring of 2016, the elders asked me to find another resource or book to keep the focus on prayer. They thought that *Pray the Word for Your Church* might have run its course

or had become too familiar for people. So, I purchased and read quite a few books on prayer. However, I came to the conclusion that because of the way we used the book, its popularity, and because new people were coming to the church who had not prayed through it yet, I recommended that we keep emphasizing it.

Around this time I was in a coffee shop in town when I overheard someone talking about some incredible church in town that prayed. Eavesdropping on the conversation, I learned that people were talking about our church being a praying church. Somehow they were hearing from others that lives were being changed. That blew me away.

I shared with my pastors' accountability group what God was doing and how *Pray the Word for Your Church* had been a catalyst. Several of their churches began to implement it.

In the spring and summer of 2016, we had several baptismal services celebrating new and re-commitments to follow Christ. This also sparked more commitments and baptisms into the fall months. I could list quite a number of people who have been impacted by the ministry of VCF, which I believe is a direct result of concentrated prayer.

Throughout 2016 up to now, many new folks began to attend, each with needs and challenges. In many we could see a gradual change in their heart and commitment level to Jesus. However, we have also sadly seen some fall back into their old, destructive behaviors and we continue to hold them up in prayer.

## **A Final Story**

There are so many individual stories I could share of encouragement, and a few of discouragement too, just to be real. But VCF and many of us have a holy anticipation of what

the Holy Spirit will continue to do.

Let me close by sharing just one more story. Early in the process, Karen started *Pray the Word for Your Church* and felt compelled to invite her friend, Molly, to church. Molly found something uniquely different about VCF. Molly was surprised by a church where “no perfect people were allowed” and by the freedom she saw in our relationship with God and with each other. Due to her church background growing up, Molly never felt good enough for God. But at VCF she heard week after week, month after month, a message of God’s love and joy, and she committed her life to Christ.

A few months after following Jesus, Molly invited her friend, Val, previously a drug dealer, to witness her baptism. Val had seen the change in Molly and she came to the service. Val found the people so kind, loving and non-judgmental (her words). After attending church and an Alpha course over the next year, she accepted Jesus as her Savior and was baptized exactly one year after Molly was baptized. Now Val is bringing her daughter and friends who need Jesus, and Molly is leading a Bible Study mentored by Tina Miller.

And so the “holy anticipation” continues up to today.

Now, you might say, “Really Jim? All because of the book *Pray the Word for the Church*?” I would answer, no, not because of the book itself, but because of the power of the Word of God, which Ty King has so Holy Spirit shared. It has been the single central part of what has happened at VCF. Using that resource started an anticipation and confidence in people who were being obedient to the Word of God to pray.

By the way, my favorite day of the month is the 11<sup>th</sup>, which in Ty’s book is “Praying for Pastors.” On this day, I often feel the rejuvenation and power of ministry and encouragement from our people and from the Holy Spirit. People have also told me that the preaching is a whole lot better since we began

praying.

Thank you, Ty, for helping God's kingdom in our little town, in our little church, in ways that everyone can see is coming from Him, Who gets all the glory and honor!

Pastor Jim Visbeek

Jude 24-25

*Pray the Word for Your Church* is available in quantity discounts to make it affordable for any church to put it in the hands of their people. Why not start praying through this powerful resource for your church today.