

“Becoming irresistible to the Holy Spirit as a church”

Holidays are a good time for pondering and for reflecting on what we have seen God doing and asking Him what He is about to do.

As I reflected on 2011 I found myself being extremely grateful for the mission team and attitudes that make up Ranui Baptist Church. So many people in this church family give so much humble service to the church and to the community and make such a big difference.

I also felt a bit of sadness in that a lot of people left west Auckland and our church and went to live in other countries and other parts of NZ in December of last year and, for me church is family, and so there is a bit a grief I feel there, even though they are all still going to church in the new towns.

Looking back though at our life together in 2011, what stood out to me most were three things:

1. While I have been to many great Pentecostal churches, my greatest Holy Spirit experiences were experienced in this church last year. I enjoyed worship more than I have ever had before. I was hit by the wind of the Holy Spirit in services multiple times. I smelt the fragrance of God’s presence for the first time.
2. Secondly, out of the whole movement of Baptist Churches in NZ (and some of them are huge) once again RBC had the most baptisms of any church. Now that is both good and bad news as churches in the West cross-denominationally are not seeing many salvations that stick.
3. The third reflection I have of last year was something Carol Dawson one of our elders said to me. As you know this community and our newer Christians have huge needs, and this family works hard really to meet them. As a result sometimes our church life gets a bit messy and difficult situations do arise.
Carol said this; “I believe our church is a healthy church because we are outwardly focused.”
And as I look at who we are as a fellowship as a team fully aware of all our struggles I think we are a healthy church that God is blessing.

With those three reflections in mind I have considered 2012. Now the elders have some exciting strategies, the trust have some exciting strategies, getting rid of our mortgage is going to open up some life changing ministry opportunities and we are down to around \$60,000 now.

But the bigger focus for me or at least the one that shapes all the others is this.

I want us to be a church family that the Holy Spirit cannot resist.

I want us to be a church that is irresistible to God and therefore whenever people have anything to do with us they will continually encounter God and be changed.

While there Holy Spirit is always with us, He is closer than our hands and feet, the reality is that there are certain things that God just loves in a church and when these characteristics exist, the presence of God increases and the anointing that heals and sets people free increases also.

James 4:8 “When we draw near to God, he draws close to us.”

This year there will be plenty of good strategies and programs that God will use to make His name known through us, but undergirding that I want to suggest to you that we cultivate a culture that attracts the life transforming presence of God.

I want to describe for you 4 characteristics that will help us become HUGELY attractive to the Holy Spirit; four characteristics that will make us irresistible to the Lord.

How do we become a HUGE church in the eyes of God?

1. HUNGER FOR GOD’S PRESENCE

I think that it’s good to want to run good programs and professional looking events but if the presence of God is not there, what have we achieved that the world cannot achieve and what will really change. People change when the presence of the Holy Spirit is moving. Therefore our greatest concern in whatever program or event we are running should be what pleases Father and to hunger after His presence in that service or ministry.

The first trait of an irresistible church, a church that God loves to bless is one that hungers for His presence. How do I become more like Jesus? How do I receive more of His character and the fruit of the Spirit in my life; love, joy, peace, patience and kindness (Gal 5:22-23)? That happens as I am continually filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).

I can make you laugh, I can make you think, I can impart to you lots of practical information, but unless God is at work in you and upon you as I speak, all I have done is entertain you or lecture you. Nothing really changes.

Programs in the church can help people practically, they can impart skills, be fun times – but if God is not present, working through it all – then what is the point really?

More importantly than great facilities, or great productions, or cutting edge programs or big budgets is the presence of God. As we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. And when God’s manifest presence is resting on a meeting or a congregation or a church, people change and the community becomes impacted.

Whatever you are doing in the church or in the community in His name, let’s all hunger for His presence. And God will find us as a church irresistible.

2. UNDERSTAND WHO WE ARE AS A PEOPLE

You and I may talk about our meetings together as going to church. You and I may talk about the building as the church or the denomination as the church or the world wide movement of Christianity as the church.

The Bible uses lots of pictures to describe 'the church'.

Rev 21:9-10 the church is the spotless bride of Christ.

2 Timothy 2:3-4 describes the church as soldier of Christ.

1 Peter 2:9 describes the church as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."

1 Corinthians 12 describes the church as the body of Christ on earth.

We are told that the church is a unique group of saints, who have available to them the resources of Heaven, we all have our part to play, our calling, our ministries to fulfill, we are all co-laborers with God, who collectively have a unique calling and purpose – that is, primarily to reach the lost with the good news about Jesus.

Ray Comfort said this:

"If God's primary purpose for the saved were loving fellowship, he would take believers immediately to heaven, where spiritual fellowship is perfect, unhindered by sin, disharmony, or loneliness. If His primary purpose for the saved were the learning of His Word, he would also take believers immediately to heaven, where His Word is perfectly known and understood. And if God's primary purpose for the saved were to give Him praise, he would again, take believers immediately to heaven, where praise is perfect and unending. There is only one reason the Lord allows His Church to remain on earth; to seek and to save the lost, just as Christ's only reason was to seek and to save the lost.' As the Father has sent me", He declared, "so also I send you."

Unbelieving groups run food banks, run children's programs, offer counseling and budgeting advice, they have op shops and toy libraries and youth programs etc, etc, etc.

It's great for us to be involved in all these practical ways of helping people – but a church that is irresistible to the Holy Spirit understands who she is. Primarily everything we do has to have at its heart our identity that is we are here for a short time to seek and to save the lost. There won't be any unbelievers in heaven. Now is our chance, now is our time, to speak the truth and love people into His kingdom. An outwardly focused church, and missional church is irresistible to God because that is where His heart is at also.

How do we become HUGE in God's eyes? How do we become irresistible to the Holy Spirit?

We collectively cultivate a hunger for His presence.

We understand who we are, we are not a support group, we are not a social service agency, and we are not a performing arts team or a school for life skills. First and foremost we are a called out group of people whose primary purpose it so to seek and to save the lost.

Thirdly, a church that is irresistible to God is one that practices

3. **G**RATEFULNESS

The Lord loves inhabiting the praises of His people. He loves to be around a group of people who are continually giving thanks.

One of the first scriptures I ever learnt as a young boy was this

Philippians 4:6 Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God.

Another one is

Ephesians 5:4 Don't use dirty or foolish or filthy words. Instead, say how thankful you are.

I don't pretend to fully understand it but I know that God is pleased with and draw to people who are always grateful for what they have and for what they get. God wants our words to be full of thankfulness.

It is actually possible not to worry but to be a person that is giving thanks in all situations. The reason that is possible is because you have proved the faithfulness of God in the past, because you believe He is really good and will work all things together for the good of all of those who love Him, you know that in your heart of hearts and so when you face a real challenge, you can honestly say Lord I am grateful that you are going to come through for me.

I have witnessed to the fact that people with grateful attitudes hear the voice of God easily, are healthier and happier people.

When I am trying to describe the 5 great purposes for live to a seeker or a new Christian I never use the words 'to worship God' the reason is that people usually have a far too narrow or distorted understanding of what worship means. Instead I tell them that one of the 5 great purposes for living is to learn to be grateful to God for even the small things. One of the characteristics that the Holy Spirit finds absolutely irresistible in a church is this attitude of gratefulness.

Finally one of the characteristics of a church that make it HUGE in the eyes of God is it;

4. **E**NJOYS UNITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

I believe that unity is a gift that the church worldwide is given. When you meet another believer even if you can't speak his or her language you just seem to naturally love them. The Holy Spirit in you recognizes that God is in them also and you just feel a bond.

But unity however needs to be intentionally preserved and protected, and that takes a lot of love and commitment.

Churches are full of Godly passionate people, this one is passionate about children's evangelism, another may be passionate about overseas mission or worship, yet another may be passionate about getting a deep understanding of the scriptures, yet another may be passionate about helping the elderly who are lonely. Even though we are on the same team, when there is a variety of passions it's reasonable to expect that we won't always agree or appreciate where each other is coming from.

Every healthy church that is reaching the lost will have problems.

The issue is not do we all agree on everything? We won't. Is everyone behaving to the same standard? Never! The issue is, when we do disagree, is there enough love for the Lord's family in us to want to work it out in a Godly way straight away such as following the Matthew 18 principles that hang from the fishing rod in the foyer for example.

I am always impressed when I find a young family with a tidy home. When you look at their house you might be tempted to think that no one lives in the rooms and it's always tidy. Of course that wouldn't be true. It's just that the people or the mum in that household is committed to making it right when it gets messed up.

It's a Godly thing as Proverbs 12:16 and 1 Corinthians 13:5 say to overlook an insult or to forgive certain wrongs. It's a Godly thing when you are upset to value the relationship so much that you sort it out rather than walk out the door.

Jesus said in ***Matthew 5:23-25 So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person then come back and offer your gift to God.***

Psalm 133 is well known to most of you. To God it is a most attractive thing, an irresistible thing, when His kids live together in harmony.

Church, I believe that we are a people with skills and we are welcoming and very caring of our community. But this year in all that we do I pray that we will become HUGE in God's eyes, irresistible to heaven.

Because we Hunger for his presence in all that we do.

Because we Understand who we are and what we are here for.

Because we have an attitude of Gratefulness about us and

Because we Enjoy unity in our relationships. We enjoy and are determined to maintain Real, Christian community.