“Prayer On Fire will be a book that will have a lasting impact on your life. Fred doesn't just write about fire, he craves, longs for, and lives the passion and intensity that fire brings. The church has confused the dust of human effort from the cloud of God's presence. You need to read this book.”


“Prayer On Fire is a wonderful explanation of how the Holy Spirit makes prayer happen in a person and in a church. My prayer life also used to be a duty, a 'flicker' in flame. Then the Holy Spirit touched me, and I could not pray enough. I am so thankful for this book's message and the fruit it will inspire in the church.”

— DR. TERRY TEYKL, founder and director, Renewal Ministries and the World Methodist Prayer Team

“Fred Hartley's book Prayer On Fire is a convicting, encouraging, challenging, Christ-exalting call to a basic long neglected by the West: prayer! If there is a spiritual fiber in your being, it will call you to passionately embrace renewed communion with God and drive away the mechanical routine of voicing but not praying the thoughts of your heart. It will revitalize your spiritual life. It's a must-read!”

— HAROLD J. SALA, PhD., author of Touching God: 52 Guidelines for Personal Prayer; founder and president, Guidelines International

“Fred Hartley has helped us connect with the transforming fire that represents the Holy Spirit's activity in our prayer life. This book will rekindle your longing for a passionate and life-altering prayer life that can move heaven into action.”

— OS HILLMAN, president, Marketplace Leaders and International Coalition of Workplace Ministries
“We stand at the threshold of a nationwide Christ-awakening in answer to over two decades of united prayer across the land. In this remarkable book, Fred shapes our expectations about how this impending move of God will manifest itself, showing us ways to enter into it even now. The hope that springs from the last chapter is by itself worth the price of the book!”

— DAVID BRYANT, founder, PROCLAIM HOPE!; author of Christ Is All!

“Fred Hartley is one of the key prayer leaders that God has raised up for this generation, and Prayer On Fire is a powerful book with a life-affecting message for all of us.”

— DR. PAUL CEDAR, chairman, Mission America Coalition
PRAYER ON FIRE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT IGNITES YOUR PRAYERS

FRED A. HARTLEY III

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To my
full-throttle,
wide-open,
passionate
friend and one and only son-in-law,
Josh
—God couldn’t have given our daughter a
better life partner—
and to your generation of God-seekers,
who refuse to settle for less than prayer on fire.
INTRODUCTION

This book is all about fire.

I want to introduce you to the fire of God’s tangibly manifest presence and show you what happens when this fire takes hold of our prayer lives.

This fire suddenly makes known the invisible God in unmistakable ways. It is a fire that will cleanse and restore; a fire of purity and passion and power; a fire that will rescue broken lives, rebuild marriages, and strengthen moral fiber. This fire starts in heaven and reveals the presence of the living God on earth.

The Bible is full of fire. Stories of people who met God in the fire are sprinkled from the first pages to the final chapters. In each example, God’s people are led to a fresh encounter with God, and their prayer lives are revolutionized. Just consider some initial evidence.

- Abraham met God in the fire. His vision of the smoking firepot and a blazing torch convinced him that his love covenant with God was ratified.¹
- Moses met God in the fire. He was changed in a day, when God spoke to him from the flaming bush.² Later he received the ten laws on a mountain covered with fire.³
- All Israel met God in the fire. They were led through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night.⁴
- David met God in the fire. One day, as he knelt before God in worship, the fire of God miraculously consumed his sacrifice.⁵
• Solomon met God in the fire. When he dedicated the temple with his hands raised to God in prayer, fire came from heaven and burned the offering. God's presence was so overwhelming that the priests were unable to perform their duties.  

• Elijah met God in the fire. When he challenged the prophets of Baal to a showdown at Mount Carmel, the fire of God consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and even the water in the trench.  

• Isaiah met God in the fire. He was never the same once the angel pressed a white-hot coal of God’s holiness against his lips.  

• John the Baptizer met God in the fire. He announced, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who . . . will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”  

• The entire early church met God in the fire. On the day of Pentecost they were covered with what appeared to be flames of fire.  

• Paul met God in the fire. It was from a blinding flash of light that God said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Later, the apostle warned, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.”  

• John, on the Mediterranean island of Patmos, met God in the fire. When he saw the exalted Christ, his Lord was on fire from head to toe. Christ’s eyes were like flames of fire, His feet glowed as in a furnace, and His face shone like the sun in all its brilliance.  

• The writer of the book of Hebrews met God in the fire. Point-blank he declared, “Our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”
In each of these examples, the God who is everywhere present and yet normally invisible suddenly and sovereignly chose to make known His breathtaking presence in ways that His people could understand.

Was God present with Moses prior to the burning bush? Certainly. But Moses was not conscious of God’s presence until He spoke to him from the fire.

Was God present with Israel prior to the pillar of fire? Well, of course. But God did not reveal His presence until He appeared in the glory column and the fiery pillar.

Was God present with the early church prior to the flames of fire appearing on every believer’s head on Pentecost? Most definitely. We would all agree there was no way the early church could demonstrate such unity of purpose in such a high-level prayer gathering without the work of the Holy Spirit. But it was not until the fire descended that God’s presence became obvious to all.

As we will discover, God often uses fire to make Himself known. When He does, He empowers His people and expands His kingdom. It all starts with fire.

SEEKERS ON FIRE

I am encouraged to realize how many God-seekers in more recent days have met Him in the fire. Samuel Logan Brengle of the Salvation Army told of meeting God in the fire: “My soul melted like wax before fire.”15

Oswald Chambers, author of the blockbuster devotional book My Utmost for His Highest, declared, “The Holy Spirit must anoint me for the work, fire me . . . nothing but the fire of the most Holy Spirit of God can make the offering holy and unblameable and acceptable in His Spirit.”16
John Wesley said, “I felt my heart strangely warmed.”

Revivalist George Whitefield was known as “the fire-bringer.”

John Calvin called the entire church “the fellowship of the flaming heart.”

Missionary martyr Jim Elliot asked, “Am I ignitable, O God?”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was practically obsessed with fire. He referred to it a whopping 1,168 times in his sermons alone. On at least one occasion, he boldly exhorted pastors, “Your work, brethren, is to set your church on fire.” Again he proclaimed, “Keep up the fire within, and add fresh fuel to give a more fervent heat.” He sternly warned Christians against a lukewarm, indifferent relationship with the God of fire:

> The church of God is like fire, and you cannot say to fire, “You must burn comfortably at the corner of that haystack and never think of going any farther.” “No,” says the fire, “I will burn it all down.” “But there are farm buildings yonder: do not touch those sheds and barns.” The fierce fire is insatiable; it never stops while there is anything to be consumed.

More recently, Jim Cymbala, pastor of the renowned Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York City, cried out in single-minded desperation, “Fill our churches with fresh wind and fresh fire!”

These fire-seekers are not alone. We are becoming a people who are crying out for fresh fire from God. Nothing demonstrates this better than the vast number of new songs calling for fire. If you go online and look up contemporary Christian songs with the word fire in the title, you will discover at least six hundred songs. If you include those that contain fire in the lyrics, the number jumps into the thousands.
Songwriter Matt Redman expresses his heart’s cry in “I Need to Get the Fire Back,” in which he declares, “The embers still remain, but Lord I miss the flame.” David Crowder sings a Matt Redman song, “Let worship be the fuel for mission’s flame.” The contemporary Christian band Shane and Shane sings, “Burn away the dross. Holy fire of God.” Tim Hughes wrote, “Consuming fire, fan into flame a passion for your name.” Charlie Hall sings, “Send us with fire to go love the world.” And Third Day sings, “Yes our God. He is a consuming fire and the flames burn down deep in our soul.” These lyrics represent only the tip of the flame. They speak of a raging inferno of passion for the reality of God’s manifest presence. May this book fuel the same fire in you.

**Stepping Into the Fire**

As we step into the holy ground of your inner self and talk about developing an authentic, relevant prayer life where you welcome His presence into your everyday world, I want to make a few commitments to you.

*I will be vulnerable.* I am a fellow seeker with an intense passion to know Christ better. I have made plenty of mistakes and have wrestled with my lukewarm heart. I will roll up my sleeves and share what I’ve learned in my journey.

*I will be biblical.* I don’t have all the answers, and I won’t pretend to. The Bible, however, does provide answers, so we’ll look at Scripture—and plenty of it.

*I will be encouraging.* Without apology I call you to seek Christ with all your heart—with the throttle wide open. While it is wrong to seek a particular experience with God, it is not wrong to seek an encounter with God. In fact, God loves it when we seek Him. There is only one way to seek Him and find Him and that is to seek Him with
our whole heart. My goal is to lead you to a fresh encounter with the white-hot presence of God.

*I will be respectful.* When it comes to Word-and-Spirit theology, there is a wide range of preferences. I will show respect and sensitivity to our various traditions. Before we are done, we will even discover that many of our traditions were actually born in the fire.

More than a manual or a textbook, this book is a manifesto. It is a rallying cry to experience a robust, relevant prayer life that will fill you with flaming wonder as you encounter the tangible presence of God. I want the fire of God’s presence to burn in my life, in my local church family here in metro-Atlanta—and in your life. Allow me to introduce you to prayer on fire.
CHAPTER ONE

GOD ON FIRE

Sometimes we forget that God is fire.
We confuse him with fireplaces and fireworks.

ERWIN McMANUS

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about Safe? ’Course he isn’t safe.
But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

C. S. LEWIS

God is a consuming fire.

THE BIBLE

Prayer is what we do. It is our initiative to meet God, whether we are asking for favors, singing in celebration, or crying out in distress. Regardless of what shape or size it comes in, prayer is our effort to engage God.

Fire, on the other hand, is what God does. It is God’s initiative to meet us. Fire comes when the self-revealing God chooses to give us a glimpse of His character, His activity, His purposes, or His presence. We experience fire when He takes the paper-thin membrane that separates heaven and earth in His hands and tears it from top to bottom, enabling us to look inside and giving us the privilege of seeing Him firsthand. Point-blank, fire is the manifest presence of God.
Because prayer is what we do, and fire is what God does, prayer on fire is what happens when what we do and what God does slam together. It is when God’s initiative toward us meets our initiative toward Him. Prayer on fire happens when the Holy Spirit gets His hands on our prayers and turns our common, ho-hum, everyday lives into a showcase for His extraordinary presence. As we will discover, prayer on fire is what God-seekers have experienced throughout biblical and church history and right up to this present day.

DESIRE ON FIRE

Let’s face it. Most of us are all too familiar with fireless prayer. How many times have I lamented, If only I could fix my prayer life! Yes, I want to see answers to prayer, but even more important, I want to know Christ. I want to know the reality of His presence in my daily prayer and worship times. Yet prayer has often made me feel like a loser. And I find I am not alone.

Although we are sincere, many of us have had it all backward when it comes to prayer. We are prone to start with what we do—our techniques, our postures, our patterns, our efforts, our self-discipline. We have tried to generate our own prayer lives. Consequently we are bone-tired and empty inside. Surely our prayers ought to be a source of refreshment, yet too often they have become a source of exhaustion.

A recent survey of more than a thousand pastors and Christian leaders from a broad spectrum of the body of Christ asked, “What is your greatest perceived need?” They gave an almost unanimous answer. The single need that stood far above all others was for consistent, passionate prayer. One leader lamented, “We do pretty much everything at church but pray. Our focus is horizontal, not vertical.” It is as if prayer has become the Achilles’ heel of the modern church.
On one of his first audiotapes, “Managing Your Money,” Larry Burkett told of a famous Chinese pastor who shared his gripping message in megachurches across the United States. At the end of this pastor’s tour, his interpreter asked, “What impressed you most about the church in the United States?” He promptly replied, “The thing that impressed me most about the church in the United States is how much they can do without God.” *Ouch!* I thought as I listened. The truth hurts.

Prayer without God’s presence leaves us scrambling to see how much we can accomplish as we try to make up for what God is not doing. It is all too easy to conclude that fireless prayer is normal. This is tragic. Because this kind of prayer is all some of us have experienced, we have mistakenly concluded that it’s all there is.

In many ways we are at a precipice. Will we settle for second-hand information about God, or will we rediscover prayer on fire and, thereby, come to know His tangible presence? We have heard the stories and read the books about mighty moves of God in the past, but have we been touched by the fire? It is not an overstatement to say we are currently experiencing a prayer crisis that is as serious as the AIDS epidemic in Africa. We recognize the need, but we don’t know what to do about it. As AIDS attacks the body’s immune system and makes it impossible to resist a simple virus, so fireless prayer leaves us anemic, vulnerable, and disease-ridden. Fireless prayer is the blight on the body of Christ today.

The word the Bible uses in the book of Revelation for fireless Christianity is *lukewarm*. This word picture from Jesus’ message to the early church at Laodicea should work well in our Starbucks culture. “Serve us our coffee fresh, robust, full-bodied, and piping hot!” we request. Well, God doesn’t like warmed-over people any more than we like a warmed-over brew. He wants our lives to be passionate, hot, aromatic, full-bodied. “Because you are lukewarm—neither
hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth,” Jesus warned.5

The human spirit becomes lukewarm when it has not recently been exposed to the white-hot presence of the living God. It becomes lethargic, anemic, and bored. A lukewarm heart breeds listless worship, casual commitment, and duplicitous obedience. Fortunately God does not give up on the lukewarm. Instead He offers us a cure: a fresh encounter with the blazing presence of the risen Christ. In fact, He invites us to welcome His presence. “Here I am!” Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”6 To put it another way, God’s answer for the lukewarm heart is prayer on fire. It happens when God comes and manifests His presence to us.

SOULS ON FIRE

This afternoon I received an e-mail from one of my favorite people, Josh. He is my one and only son-in-law. “I have one request,” he said in his typical straightforward manner. “Can you pray that the Lord would set me on fire?”

Yikes! I thought with admiration, what a bold request!

I paused, took a deep breath, and considered his words again. I thought of another huge request he had presented to me two years earlier: “May I have your daughter’s hand in marriage?” (If you knew how protective I am, you would know how much guts that request required.) But he was asking for something that, I would dare say, is even bigger: He wanted me to ask God to set him on fire. You see, Josh is not interested in a mere intellectual understanding of fire. He doesn’t want God to set his marriage on fire or his career on fire. That would be good, but he takes it one step further: He wants God to set him on fire.
“Pray that the Lord would set me on fire!” is one of those ultimate, no-turning-back requests. And it represents the heart cry of an increasing number of desperate God-seekers who are tired of mediocre prayers and lackluster worship.

What about you? Does your soul echo this desire for the fire of God’s glorious presence to penetrate your life? Are you tired of luke-warm prayers? Are you hungry to know Christ better and better? If so, I have good news for you. If you are a Christ-seeker and desire a more relevant prayer life, God is already at work in you.

The Bible plainly says, “There is . . . no one who seeks God.” It even says, “All have turned away. . . . There is no fear of God before their eyes.” This means that, left to ourselves, we lack the slightest motivation to pursue Christ. Therefore, if we are motivated to know Christ better, God is at work in us. Even if we are painfully aware of our ineffective prayers, the very fact that we want to do something about them shows the preliminary handiwork of God. In a sense, the desire for fire is the promise that fire will indeed follow. It’s as if God takes the wood, hay, and stubble of our inadequate efforts to pursue Him and sets them on fire with His glorious presence. We may not yet see the fire of His presence, but at least there is smoke. And where there is smoke, you know what is about to happen!

Let me warn you at this point: Be careful not to confuse fire with a human emotion or with what is often called passion. Coaches tell their players to “fire up!” A romance novel talks about burning with passion. But as I use the term fire, I am not talking about excessive emotion or even honest, pure-hearted, spiritual passion. Such passion in the human soul is often the result of our spirits encountering the flaming presence of God’s Spirit. The soul—made up of the mind, will, and emotions—does become zealous and passionate when it glows with the fire of God, but that will be the topic of another book. This book is not about our soul’s passionate response;
it is about the Holy Spirit's passionate initiative. I am not in any way challenging you to rev your spiritual engines, crank up your emotional fervor, or work yourself into a fever pitch. God forbid!

So then, where does the fire that ignites our prayer lives come from?

THE SOURCE OF FIRE

Plain and simple, prayer on fire is the work of God the Holy Spirit. True prayer is not only the work of man; it is also the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible often shows how the Holy Spirit is responsible for generating effective prayer.

At a watershed moment in their lives, the disciples caught Jesus praying. They were blown away to watch a man so skilled at His craft. Something about the way He prayed was so radically superior to anything they had seen in the other religious people that they immediately pleaded, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus grabbed the teachable moment with both hands, giving them a prayer pattern, a prayer picture, and some prayer promises. But He saved the best till last. He didn’t give them the real punch line until the end of His discourse: “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

In a sense Jesus answered, “Okay. You want to learn to pray? There is only one way. You must ask the Holy Spirit to come and teach you. He alone will make it possible for you to pray the way I do.”

The apostle Paul also understood Spirit-generated prayer. He knew that the only way he could get his prayers off the ground was with supernatural assistance. He was well acquainted with his inadequacies in prayer when he wrote, “We don’t know how to pray as we ought.” He went on to express that he was equally familiar with the incredible ability of God’s indwelling Spirit to help with this chronic
weakness: “but the Spirit himself intercedes for us.”\textsuperscript{11} It is no wonder that when Paul called Christians to prayer, he told them not to muster up their own prayers, but to “pray in the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{12}

The Holy Spirit is both a flaming Spirit and a praying Spirit. This means that if we have a problem with the relevance and authenticity of our prayer lives, the real problem is with our relationship with God the Holy Spirit. This pattern of Spirit-generated fire and Spirit-generated prayer is much more than a coincidence; it encapsulates the essence of a revolutionary principle that runs straight through the Bible: \textit{All effective prayer is generated by God the Holy Spirit and leads us to a fresh encounter with God.}

\subsection*{God’s Fiery Presence}

The real scandal of lukewarm prayer is that it forfeits the knowledge of God. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not suggesting that when we are lukewarm we lack all knowledge of Christ, but we do settle for a superficial acquaintance. The problem is complicated by the fact that we often fail to recognize the profound difference between God’s everyday omnipresence and His manifest presence.

God’s omnipresence—the fact that God is everywhere present—is celebrated in Psalm 139:7-8:

\begin{quote}
Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
\end{quote}

We don’t need to pray for God’s omnipresence; everyone on the planet is already experiencing it. What we want, however, is His \textit{manifest} presence. And for that we must pray.

A. W. Tozer pointed out the distinction: “The Presence and the
manifestation of the Presence are not the same. There can be one without the other. God is here when we are wholly unaware of it. He is manifest only when and as we are aware of His Presence.”13 Tozer borrowed this helpful distinction from the English Puritans and the German Pietists before them. Both the Puritans and the Pietists longed continually to experience God’s life-transforming presence. In fact, if they did not encounter God tangibly, at times they would cancel all other church activities and devote themselves to focused corporate prayer, asking God to make Himself known conspicuously. They wanted to experience conviction of sin, repentance, purity, and the effects of walking in vibrant spiritual intimacy with the risen Christ.

This pursuit is worth the payoff. As Tozer pointed out, “If we cooperate with Him in loving obedience, God will manifest Himself to us, and that manifestation will be the difference between a nominal Christian life and life radiant with the light of His face.”14

What makes this experience of God possible is God’s passion to make Himself known to us. Without a rock-solid understanding of this aspect of God’s character, even the most zealous seekers will eventually come to a screeching halt. God is even more eager to make Himself known than we are to know Him. As I have already noted, He was seeking us before we started seeking Him. Again, to quote our friend Tozer, “Our pursuit of God is successful just because He is forever seeking to manifest Himself to us.”15

I was first introduced to God’s manifest presence when a friend and I sought Him in prayer in a most unlikely place.

FIRE IN THE BASEMENT

I was listening to Bob Dylan music with my friend in his basement. We were talking about sports, school, God, and girls. All of a sudden he turned to me and said, “You wanna pray?”
Huh? I thought, Pray?! Where did that come from? What a wild idea!

“Sure, why not!” I replied. Before I knew what was happening, he was on his knees. I figured, Why not? If we’re going to pray, let’s go for it!

Before my knees could hit the floor, he started, “Jesus, You are so awesome! It’s so cool that we can just talk to You like this.” His eyes were closed, but he was smiling.

“Yeah, God,” I jumped in, “we know You are right here with us; we just want to worship You right now.”

“I love You so much, Jesus,” my friend continued without missing a beat. “You are so much bigger than a rock star, so much more powerful than the president of the United States, so much more understanding than a parent, more helpful than a coach . . .”

“Jesus, You are more dependable than a girlfriend,” I added. None of these thoughts had ever before come to our minds. They were fresh and real and alive. “God, You are awesome!”

Back and forth we prayed. Ideas were popping. There was nothing religious about our prayers; we were just talking to the One who knew us thoroughly and loved us passionately. We lost track of time. It seemed as if heaven stood wide open in front of us and we were able to look inside. We felt small, contrite, and humbled; yet at the same time privileged, honored, and invigorated.

Forty-five minutes later we got up off our knees and looked at each other with wide-eyed wonder. As we flopped on the couch, we took a deep breath and agreed that we had never experienced anything like that. Like moths drawn to the light, we had feasted our eyes on Jesus, deeply admiring His character, His virtues, His excellence.

I had previously said a thousand prayers, but this was prayer on fire. I had read my Bible and done what was expected of me as a Christian, but on that night Christ blew me away. I did not speak in
an unknown language nor was I in some heightened emotional state. But for the first time in my life I caught a glimpse of the glory of God, and from that moment on I was branded. I have never since wanted to settle for anything less than the manifest presence of God.

SEEKING FIRE

The fire we encountered is more than a good idea or the latest novelty for a curious generation. As we will discover, God loves to reveal Himself to His seeking people.

Since high school I have been privileged to experience the fire of God’s manifest presence hundreds of times. In my private prayer life, in my family, and in my public ministry, I have seen God dramatically show up. As pastor of a church in metro-Atlanta and president of the College of Prayer, which trains pastors and Christian leaders on four continents in prayer on fire, I have learned firsthand how God makes Himself known. I have learned what fans the flame of God’s holy presence and what quenches it. While I take my responsibilities as a teacher seriously, let me assure you that I cannot set your prayers on fire. I can’t even set my own on fire. In fact, it would be entirely inappropriate for me to try. God is self-revealing, and only God the Holy Spirit can open the eyes of our hearts, ignite our spirits, and empower our prayers.

As with the early disciples, it is a watershed moment in our lives when we genuinely ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus answers our sincere request in much the same way He answered His first-century followers: He points us to the Person of the Holy Spirit. The better we get to know the Holy Spirit, the more relevant and effective our prayer lives will become. In the following pages, more than simply gaining information, we will discover that true prayer flows out of an intimate relationship with God.
Get ready to step into a different time zone. We will momentarily flash back three millennia to gain a fresh look at former God-seekers who stood on the holy ground of God’s manifest presence as they learned firsthand about prayer on fire.