

**FIRING  
JESUS**

**GREG STIER**

**WOULD JESUS MAKE THE CUT AT YOUR CHURCH**

## ENDORSEMENTS

You read a good book once. A great book a few times. But a remarkable book becomes an annual pilgrimage that feeds your soul, strengthens your call and clarifies your focus. Greg has written a remarkable little book. Pastors, elders, youth leaders, parents and students should bless themselves by reading *Firing Jesus*.

—Derwin L. Gray, Lead Pastor,  
Transformation Church, Charlotte, NC

*Firing Jesus* highlights exactly why Jesus is described in the Bible as a “stumbling stone” and a “rock of offense”—He’s nothing like the attentive butler and nice-guy genie He’s often been reduced into in a culture that’s in love with spirituality but at war with the “exclusivity” of Jesus. Greg Stier is passionate about Jesus and the person-to-person spread of His gospel, and *Firing Jesus* vividly re-imagines how that “rock of offense” would turn the tables on the complacent power structures inherent in many of today’s churches. If you’re a youth worker, this is a must-read.

—Rick Lawrence, Executive Editor, GROUP Magazine  
Author of *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry*

Greg Stier is a prolific soul winner who without a compromise speaks truth to the hearts of saved and unsaved. This book forces you to look inside yourself, but please don’t just look if you feel the voice of God speaking to you to change. PLEASE change!

—Reggie Dabbs, Motivational Youth Speaker

*Firing Jesus* has the capacity to radically change the way everyone looks at teenagers. I pray that more youth leaders will encourage evangelism as a lifestyle, not a thing-you-do-once-a-year-on-a-mission-trip-or-after-a-youth-conference. This book is a vehicle to drive people to that kind of passionate faith.

—Katie Payne, Student

Dare 2 Share  
Book Preview

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To all the youth leaders who put  
their jobs on the line every day  
by acting like Jesus.

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## THE EMERGENCY MEETING

“Sorry this meeting was so last minute, guys,” Pastor Ryan Coleman apologized as he fumbled with his keys on the front doorstep of Spring Valley Community Church. Three other members of the elder board clustered around him on the chilly March evening. The church secretary, a petite, spry older lady, hurried up the walk to join them, emerging silently from the now ominously dark parking lot.

“No problem,” assured Scott West. “Your message sounded urgent and we don’t get too many emergency elder meetings around here.”

“It is urgent,” Pastor Ryan affirmed. “It’s very urgent.”

“It better be,” joked Pete Fisher. “I had to leave the fire station even though it was on fire.”

All of them laughed, though even a casual observer could see that Ryan’s and Scott’s efforts to join in the humor were clearly forced. Together they made their way into the church’s office area where Pastor Ryan guided them into the smallest conference room.



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“I thought you were working tonight, Pete,” commented Ryan.

“Yeah, there was a mix up. But I’m glad of it, because I wouldn’t want to miss this meeting. Saw it on my iPhone,” Pete responded, holding it up in his large, calloused hands with a smile. “So what’s the big emergency?”

“I’ll tell everyone in just a few minutes. Let’s all get situated, make sure everyone who is gonna show up, shows up, and then I’ll explain what’s happening.”

Pete had the distinct feeling that Ryan didn’t expect—or want—him to be there. This made him all the more eager to find out what was going on.

As they sat waiting for others to arrive, Sam Brooke wondered to himself why they were meeting in the small conference room with only five metal chairs drawn around the small, circular table. After all, there were currently a total of seven elders on the church’s board, counting the senior pastor and executive pastor. Then with the non-voting church secretary who took the minutes added into the mix, meetings typically topped out at eight. But before he asked the question, Sam thought to himself that there was probably some legitimate reason they couldn’t meet in their usual room. After all, more chairs could be squeezed in around the little table. He remained silent.

That was Sam. He liked to give people the benefit of the doubt. He had only been an elder at the church for two years and had a reputation for being traditional, wise and, well, quiet. He didn’t speak much, but when he did, he spoke with a sense of authority. Not from a loud voice, but from a

life that screamed a steady, stalwart consistency. He had lost his wife to cancer three years earlier and had weathered that storm with grace. He was a kind soul who moved with a gentle strength around the church. Kids would flock to him on Sunday morning for their free piece of candy—if they quoted a Bible verse, of course. Though quiet, no elder meeting was ever complete without Sam’s unassuming wisdom and practical insights stirred into the mix.

On the other side of the decibel scale was Scott West. He was loud and proud—proud of his charter member status in the church, proud of his successful church construction business, proud of his position as chairman of the elder board, proud of his ability to make things happen. Although he and the senior pastor often clashed, he usually got the best of it. He knew the church constitution better than the Bible, and he knew the Bible better than most. It was his influence that got Ryan Coleman hired in the first place.

Ryan had not been the elder board’s first choice as the executive pastor. Most of the guys still thought he was too young—if 30 is young—and needed some more ministry experience. Sure, he had been a youth pastor for four years out of seminary, but that seemed hardly enough experience to be the EP of a church of 500. But Scott saw in him what he called “a hunger to learn,” which would be important when Ryan took the reins of leadership once Senior Pastor Jonathon Griffith eventually moved on—which Scott intended to make certain was only a matter of time. In reality, Ryan’s “hunger to learn” was really just a moldable nature that Scott “the potter” took advantage of to implement his own agenda at the church.

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Scott was not an alpha dog nearly as much as he was an alpha wolf. When he howled the dogs heeled, the cats hid and most of the other elders peed a little in their pants.

One of the few elders who didn't make lemonade was Pete Fisher. He was equal parts funny and fearless. In his late thirties, he had been a volunteer in the youth ministry for the last five years. He was what some would call an "advocate" for youth ministry on the elder board. A few months back when it was time to find a new youth leader, he'd strongly advocated hiring the current youth guy, JC Davidson. Pete was the one who regularly brought prayer requests from the youth ministry to the bi-weekly elders meeting. If the youth group had to sell burritos to raise money for their annual mission trip to Haiti, Pete brought the salsa, forks and cash. He'd end up buying ten, himself—every time. As a firefighter he was busy when he was busy and free when he was free. He used his free time to mentor teenagers in the group. His shift had got cut short that day because of a scheduling mix up so he, much to Ryan's surprise, was able to make the emergency meeting.

Completing the not-so-complete gathering was Agnes, the sometimes crotchety but always faithful church secretary—she refused the title "executive assistant." She had been on staff long enough to see the rise and fall of the Fax machine. Nobody really knew her age, but she had to be pushing seventy-five. She had, as she loved to remind everyone, lived through the tenure of four pastors at Spring Valley Community Church, including the founding pastor.

Scott pulled Ryan out into the hall and was talking quietly and intensely about something as Agnes and Pete chatted, while Sam listened and smiled.

Finally, Scott and Ryan came back into the room, settling noisily into their chairs as Ryan declared, “Well, let’s get this meeting started.”

Agnes interrupted, “Well, Pastor Griffith isn’t here yet.”

“Agnes,” Scott said drily, “thanks for reminding us of the obvious, but Article 3, Section 24 of the church bylaws states that emergency meetings can be held with or without the pastor, as long as he’s received the same notification about it as the rest of the elder board.” Turning to Ryan he asked, “Didn’t you send that same email you sent to the entire elder board to Pastor Griffith, as well?”

“I sure did,” Ryan affirmed.

Sam uncharacteristically piped in, “That email was sent two hours ago. What did he say when you called him?”

“Um...,” Ryan stumbled, “I couldn’t get a hold of him.” This surprised nobody. Pastor Griffith had a habit of turning his phone off on Sunday afternoons for his post-sermon nap.

“You got a call *and* an email?” asked Pete. “I just got an email and would have missed that if I didn’t have my new iPhone,” He raised it again, but this time not jokingly.

Ryan suddenly turned red with embarrassment. “Sorry, Pete, I must have forgotten to call you.”

Pete was silent, a something’s-not-right feeling rising up in his spaghetti-filled gut.

Elder Jim Simpson’s bulky frame suddenly filled the doorway of the small meeting room.

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“Let me grab one more chair,” Ryan said, jumping up quickly, grateful for the distraction from the awkwardness surrounding Pete’s question.

Fifty-six year old Jim Simpson, an account manager for a large insurance company, was a dependable member of the Scott/Ryan voting block on the church board. Jim rarely deviated from Scott’s and Ryan’s viewpoint on all matters church related. His arrival reassured Ryan that things were still well under control, despite the unanticipated appearance of Pete Fisher at the quickly called meeting.

“Well, regardless of the pastor’s naptime and disregard of an emergency email, we have a quorum, so this meeting must go on,” interrupted Scott.

“I don’t feel comfortable proceeding until we get a hold of him,” Sam quietly, yet firmly, countered.

But before an elder fight could break out, they heard the distinctive squeak of the front church door and the rapid footfalls of Pastor Griffith coming down the hallway.

Jonathan Griffith was forty-seven years old. He had been the pastor at Spring Valley for six years now, coming from a large church in California that he had planted earlier in his ministry career. He’d left it only when he’d felt he’d taken the plant as far as it could grow under his leadership. Across his years of ministry he had learned that he was best as an entrepreneurial innovator. He’d sensed in his heart that God was prompting him to turn it over to someone who had a different gift set and could, in his words, “take it to the next level.”

What he'd anticipated when he accepted the position at Spring Valley was a lower stress opportunity to rejuvenate an existing church, sort of an entrepreneurial infusion into an existing community of believers without all the outsized demands that came with a startup church plant—like drafting a church constitution or dealing with zoning issues and building programs.

He had thought this church was ripe for change and that his entrepreneurial gift mix would be a nice match. Making the move to a smaller town and a smaller—although not small—church would be a win/win/win: a win for the church—due to his past experience, a win for him—less craziness and a win for the kingdom—

Or so he thought.

But instead of an easy experience, Pastor Griffith entered a culture that was equal parts poison and passion. This church had some great traditions and some horrible traditionalism. It had some great staff members and some who should have been dismissed years ago. It had some true elders and some, in the words he would only use with his wife, “imposters.”

Pastor Griffith had sought to gently use the sail of salesmanship in elder meetings and the rudder of the pulpit to gently guide the church to a stronger place spiritually and structurally.

It had not worked.

“What’s up gentlemen—and lady?” he said with a wink to Agnes as he walked into the room.

“You got my email?” Ryan asked timidly.

“And his phone call?” Pete asked with a smirk.

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“Yes, to the email and no to the phone call,” Pastor Griffith replied.

Sam seemed shocked. “I didn’t think you checked your email on the weekends, Pastor Griffith.”

“I don’t. Everyone knows that I don’t.” His short, terse reply conveyed his displeasure.

“Then how did you find out about this meeting?” Sam asked.

“I got an emergency text about this emergency meeting from Agnes twenty minutes ago.”

“iPhone,” she said, holding hers up with an almost evil grin.

“Where’s Chris?” Pastor Griffith asked, referring to the remaining missing elder.

“He couldn’t make it,” Scott said flatly.

“Guess he didn’t get a phone call either,” Pete said, inserting one last jab.

Ryan walked across the room, grabbed another metal chair for Pastor Griffith and opened it up with the horrible screeching sound metal chairs sometimes make. As uncomfortable as that sound was, it was not even close to the uncomfortable feeling in the room.

And the meeting had yet to officially begin.

## UNQUALIFIED TO LEAD

*Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.*

**1 Corinthians 1:26-29**

Ryan Coleman was your prototypical former high school quarterback youth pastor turned hipster “real pastor.” It was obvious to everyone, but not stated by anyone, that he was being groomed by the elders to take over the church in the event that Pastor Griffith ever decided to move on. Although



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his square-rimmed glasses and soul patch concerned Scott years ago when Ryan was first hired as the youth leader, his strong seminary training and amazing organizational abilities relieved any latent concerns. Ryan always turned his budget in on time and always stayed within it. Once he had moved into the EP role he had “unflattened” the organization and put all the staff but Agnes under himself. And, of course, he submitted to Pastor Griffith’s lead, while everyone else submitted to his.

Although Pastor Griffith was a much stronger preacher, Ryan used a lot of movie clips and funny stories to bolster his standing with the congregation. The teenagers liked it when he preached, anyway. He was tall, dark, good looking and hand-picked by Scott to be the future of Spring Valley.

Underneath his too-cool-for-school exterior was an ambition that was too-hot-to-handle. He knew that Pastor Griffith was tired of the politics of Spring Valley and had overheard his conversations with his wife on the phone in his office. There were at least three separate occasions in which he had eavesdropped the words, “I’ll give it one more year,” which Ryan took as a green light to his sooner, rather than later, pending position of power.

Over the years, he and Scott had developed an odd couple type of relationship. Like a cobra and mongoose, they did the dance at first. But they eventually settled into a weird partnership, Scott, the conservative middle-aged elder and Ryan the young, driven, hip and politically astute executive pastor.

Although Elder Scott and Pastor Ryan were different in many ways, they both were shockingly the same when it came to running the church. They called it “a sacred business.” They would often quote 1 Corinthians 14:40 to others and each other, *“But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”*

This singular verse was the lens through which they viewed the entire church. From budgets to programs to pulpit to people, it was Ryan’s job to dot the i’s and Scott’s job to cross the t’s. And, when it came to this, they both excelled. Last year they had successfully added Jim Simpson to the elder board, further increasing their influence over the inner workings of the church. Jim could typically be relied upon to rubber stamp their policies, procedures and positions.

“Meeting come to order!” All the small talk stopped with that bellow from Scott.

“We are here to discuss the position of JC Davidson as the youth pastor here at Spring Valley and I propose we terminate him immediately,” said Scott, mentally bracing himself for the storm that was about to hit.

“What!?!” yelled Pete. “You can’t be serious!” His veins popped out from his flexed, muscular neck.

“I’m very serious,” countered Scott, leaning toward Pete with a well-practiced scowl.

Standing to his feet Pete barked, “This is ridiculous! How dare you call a last minute emergency elders meeting because you have a vendetta against JC.”

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“It’s not just me,” said Scott. “I mean,” he backpedaled, “well, I don’t have a vendetta, but I do have several reasons he should be fired. And I’m not alone.”

Still standing tall with his rugged hands clenched into giant fists frozen by his side Pete yelled, “Why couldn’t this wait for our regular elders meeting? What’s so important that we had to meet tonight?”

“I’ll get to that, but—Ryan can back me up on this—it’s serious,” Scott pushed back.

“It is,” affirmed Ryan.

“Was there some kind of moral failure with a teen or something?” asked Pete, backing down a bit.

“No, nothing like that, but it is serious,” Ryan said coolly.

“What is it?” Pete demanded sitting back down in his chair, folding his rippling forearms across his chest.

“Well, there are many reasons, but the straw that broke the camel’s back happened last night. I just learned about it this morning. That’s why you got the email so late. It wasn’t politics or a ‘vendetta’ but JC crossing an uncrossable line,” said Scott. “But, before I talk about the proverbial final straw, I want to talk about the rest of the bale that’s led up to this unfortunate meeting.”

Pastor Griffith sat in stunned silence. He knew that both Ryan Coleman and Scott West had a personal grudge against JC ever since he hired him over their protests. He also knew that with an additional elder absent from this emergency meeting, there was no chance there would be enough votes present to oust JC tonight. Assuming these were all just trumped up charges—and he was ninety-nine percent sure

they would be—there was no way that either he, Pete or Sam would cast a vote against JC. It would break out as a three-to-three tie. So if it came down to a vote, it would have to wait until a real elders meeting with everyone present and not this kangaroo court.

This was exactly the kind of politics that had been wearing on Pastor Griffith for the last few years. The machinery of ministry and politics of procedures was beginning to wear him down...and out. The rigid focus on SOPs—“Standard Operating Procedures”—had drowned out the SOS of the community around their church that so desperately needed God. Pastor Griffith had been waiting for God to turn the light from yellow to green so that he could step on the accelerator and leave the leadership of Spring Valley to those who so clearly wanted it.

“I’ve made a list of reasons for termination which I’ll have Ryan pass out now,” Scott instructed as Ryan complied. “Each of these reasons individually, could conceivably be dealt with, but collectively they paint a broader picture of rebellion in JC’s heart that culminated last night.”

“I don’t see any fireable offence on the list,” said Sam quietly.

“As I stated, in my opinion these are collectively fireable offences,” countered Scott. “But the biggest reason is not on the list. I’ll conclude with that one.”

Pastor Griffith unknowingly rolled his eyes at Scott’s penchant for the dramatic. Pete saw it and winked at him.

“Well, let’s start at the top. Quite simply, JC is unqualified to lead in the role of youth pastor at Spring Valley. He has

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no formal seminary training and came straight from the construction business into the role of youth pastor here. No offense, Pastor Griffith, but if he hadn't framed your house and come to us with your strong personal endorsement, we would never have even given his resume a second look, let alone him," ranted Scott.

"To be honest, Scott," Pastor Griffith said, "he knows the Scriptures way better than me. I was astonished by his theological depth, as well. I think that in his case, his theology comes out of the vast amounts of time he spends in God's Word and it hasn't been filtered through a series of seminary professors. He actually has the book of Romans memorized word for word. I don't. Do you, Scott?" he asked with a slight smile on his face.

Pete tried to catch his laugh in his throat but it catapulted into the room. He was clearly enjoying the awkward moment.

Scott ignored the personal question and rebutted. "Well, this is no Bible quiz team, Pastor. This is the church. It takes organizers not verse nerds to lead. Without formal training in seminary how truly qualified could he be? I don't care how many books of the Bible he has memorized."

Before the pastor could counter, Scott continued, "On the other hand, take a look at Ryan over here. He went to seminary first and got his MDiv. We then hired him to be the youth pastor. Over the four years he was in that role here we saw the numbers grow. The families of this church were really happy with him. We even had families join our church because their kids loved the youth ministry so much. My own son, Chase, spent his entire youth ministry experience up until JC arrived,

under Ryan's leadership. To be honest," Scott continued, "he misses Ryan as the youth pastor. He's always telling me how things have changed for the worse under JC's leadership."

Agnes pounded away on her laptop as Scott talked on and on. With his every word her finger pounds seemed to get louder and louder. She liked JC. She thought that every pastor should have, in her words, "a little dirt under their fingernails" before they go into ministry. And JC had plenty of it. His radical ways of ministry reminded her of a young Billy Graham who refused to do crusades that were not racially integrated back in the day when segregation was the norm. Her discontent with Scott's "agendetta" was getting louder with every click of the keys, until Sam gently put his hand on her shoulder and used his eyes to point to her keyboard. Agnes was old, but sharp. She got the message and dialed it back from a ten to a six on the laptop decibel scale. But that was the best she could do to contain her outrage.

Ryan took the baton from there. "Guys, it's not about me and my former role as youth pastor. And it's not just that he's unqualified to lead. It's that he chooses the unqualified to help him."

"He chose me," said Pete in a voice that sounded strangely like Clint Eastwood in *Dirty Harry*.

"I meant teens. He chooses unqualified teens to lead," said Ryan, backpedalling faster than a Mormon at Lee Strobel's house. "For instance, just two months ago, a girl named Maggie came to youth group after JC and Brandon, you know, Brandon Dempsey, the quarterback, bumped into her at a Starbucks—literally. I guess Brandon spilled his hot

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drink on her arm and she screamed in pain. JC knew that the coffee wasn't that hot, after all, Brandon had three-quarters hot coffee and one-quarter cool cream in his Venti cup. After apologizing profusely, JC saw that her coffee soaked sleeve was showing what was underneath her white shirt sleeve—cuts.”

“Cuts?” asked Sam. “What’s that?”

“Cutting is, well, it’s hard to explain, ’cause it’s hard to understand,” Ryan said, floundering a bit, trying to find the right words. “Some teenagers today use a razor blade to cut themselves, most times on their torso or legs, but sometimes on their arms, too.”

“Why would they do that?” asked a stunned Sam.

“Depression, self-hatred, anger, angst, sin, Satan or any combination of the above,” responded Ryan with a true and sincere sadness in his voice. “It broke my heart to talk to these teens. Many of them don’t even know why they cut. They just know that somehow that pain of the razor blade let’s a deeper pain escape.”

“So JC sees the cuts through her sleeve and then what,” asked Scott impatiently, wanting Ryan to get back on point.

“Oh yeah, so he, Brandon and Maggie get into this conversation that lasted two hours. Brandon actually ended up missing his soccer practice as a result. But, at the end, she took the step of faith,” said Ryan.

“Yeah, that’s a firing offense, for sure,” said Pete sarcastically.

“Nobody is saying that, Pete. Of course, that’s a good thing. And her coming to youth group is a good thing, too,” Ryan

affirmed. “But she shouldn’t be accepted into the leadership circle of youth group so quickly. Within four weeks, JC had her leading worship for the group.”

Pete rose to JC’s defense. “Maggie has a beautiful voice. She sings with reckless abandon, with eyes pointed upward, like nobody’s in the room but her and God. It’s like a perfume bottle that breaks open and fills the room whenever she sings.”

“And you can still see the scars on her arms when she lifts her hands up to praise Him,” Scott interrupted.

“Maybe,” Pastor Griffith said calmly, turning his piercing blue eyes on Scott, “Maggie is non-verbally teaching our teens that they don’t have to hide anything in the presence of God. We all have scars, Scott, and too many times we try to put on a fake front as we try to cover them up.”

“Not literal ones!” Scott pushed back. “JC should make sure those scars are healed up before he puts her in a leadership position! He may be ‘non-verbally’ communicating to the teenagers that it’s okay to cut as long as you have a good singing voice!”

Pete raised his voice again, “Scott, you should come to youth group sometime before you pass judgment.”

“Well, Ryan’s gone many times and he’s told me what’s going on there,” Scott countered.

Pete shot back, “Yeah, he’s come many times. I get the feeling he’s been coming to make a mental list of all that he doesn’t like about JC so he could report it back to you. Thank you for confirming that, Scott!”



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“Pete,” Sam interrupted, “we are the elders of this church and we do have a responsibility to make sure that things are being done by the book.”

Sam’s gentle rebuke calmed him down. But it was increasingly clear to Pete that Maggie was more qualified to lead worship than Scott was to lead the elder board.

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