

WHAT THIS IS

A Guide for Those Just Finding Us

You Are Not Here by Accident

Something brought you here. Maybe it was a blog post that said something you had never heard said quite that way before. Maybe it was a conversation, a search, a restless feeling that the Christian life you have been living is somehow smaller than what you were made for. Maybe you are not even sure you are a Christian anymore and you are circling the question from a distance, trying to decide if there is anything left worth entering.

Whatever brought you here, welcome.

The Furnace is not easy to categorize. We are not a traditional church. We are not a Bible study. We are not a small group ministry or a house church in the conventional sense of the term. We are a community gathered around a practice — the practice of the Inner Room — and everything else about who we are flows from that center.

This guide is our attempt to tell you plainly what you walked into: what we do on Sunday mornings, what we ask of the people who stay, and where we believe all of this is heading. We would rather you understand us clearly and decide this is not for you than have you sit in our living room for six months confused about what you are part of.

So. This is what we are.

Part One: What to Expect When You Visit

We meet on Sunday mornings in a home. The room is ordinary — a living room, chairs arranged in a rough circle, someone's children underfoot, coffee available if you want it. There is just a room full of people who have been looking forward to this all week.

When the gathering begins, it begins with sharing.

Not announcements. Not a welcome to first-time guests. Not an opening prayer that sets the spiritual tone before the real meeting starts. The gathering opens with the people in the room offering back to the community what they received during the week in their private time with God — in the Inner Room, which we will explain more fully in the next section. Someone shares something they saw in prayer. Someone else shares a scripture that would not leave them alone. Someone shares a moment of clarity that came in the middle of a difficult week. These reports are simple, unpolished, and real. They are not performances. They are not mini-sermons. They are one person saying to the rest of the room: this is what God gave me, and I think it belongs to all of us.

This takes about thirty minutes. As a visitor, you are welcome to simply receive. Nobody will call on you. Nobody will ask you to share before you are ready. Come and listen. Let the room do its work on you.

From the sharing, the gathering moves into musical worship — unhurried, approximately thirty minutes, with space for the Spirit to move between songs or after the set is finished. The worship is participatory rather than performative. The music rises from within the room itself.

Then comes the Table.

The Lord's Supper is not a ritual appended to the end of the gathering. It is the gravitational center toward which everything else has been moving. Bread and wine, received together, as the body remembers and participates in Christ. The elements are brought to you where you stand. You do not form a line. Grace moves outward from the center.

Following the Table, the gathering enters silence. Five to ten minutes, eyes closed, the whole room together turning inward — entering the Inner Room corporately, asking the Holy Spirit to lead. When the silence breaks, people share what they saw, heard, or received in that stillness. These reports are brief and curated. Not everything received in silence needs to be said aloud. What gets shared is what belongs to the room.

From within that same flow, the shepherd teaches. Not a sermon — not forty-five minutes of prepared content delivered from a podium. A teaching of roughly ten minutes, offered from among the people, often opening into group response as others add what the Spirit has placed in them. The teacher is one voice in a community of voices. His role is to keep the group moving forward — toward the fire, toward the next week in the Inner Room.

The gathering closes with prayer — laying hands on one another, lifting petitions, praying for healing. And then dismissal. Go, or linger and talk. The gathering has done its work.

A note for parents.

Your children are welcome in this room. All of it — the sharing, the worship, the Table, the silence, the prayer. There is no children’s program running in a back room. There is no age-segregated environment designed to keep young bodies away from the worshipping body. We believe children belong in the gathering, and we believe that with conviction.

But belonging in the gathering means participating in it — not merely tolerating it until mom or dad is done.

Your role as a parent in a Furnace gathering is to shepherd your child into the rhythm of the meeting. Point to what is happening. Whisper explanation. Help them settle into the silence. Encourage them, when they are old enough, to share something simple from their own week. A child who is included becomes a child who belongs. The formation that happens in a child who watches an elder kneel to offer bread to their parent, who sits in corporate silence and feels the weight of it, who hears someone share what God gave them in the secret place — that formation cannot be replicated in any curriculum. They are learning what the Church is by inhabiting it. And you are the one who makes that possible.

Part Two: Come Full, Ready to Share

That phrase — *Come Full, Ready to Share* — is the mantra of the Furnace, and it is worth understanding before your second visit.

It is an invitation, not a demand.

What it means is simply this: the gathering is only as deep as what the people in the room have been doing during the week. If we have been spending time in the Inner Room — in that place of private, unhurried communion with God that Jesus described in Matthew 6:6 — then we arrive on Sunday carrying something. Something we saw, heard, or received in the secret place. Something that belongs to the whole body. We come full because we have been with God, and we come ready to share because what He gives us in private was never meant to stay private — for the most part.

What is the Inner Room?

Jesus said: *go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret* (Matthew 6:6). He was not giving practical advice about finding a quiet corner of your house. He was pointing to something deeper — a literal interior location within the human person where communion with the living God is available, immediate, and transforming. Not a method. Not a

technique. A place. A place that is already within you, already prepared, already inhabited by the Father who waits there for you in secret.

The Inner Room is the heartbeat of everything we do. The gathering on Sunday morning is where we share what we found there during the week. It is not a substitute for personal encounter — it is the community expression of it.

Learning to practice the Inner Room takes time. For many people formed in more activist church cultures, stillness before God feels unfamiliar at first — unproductive, uncertain, sometimes even unsettling. That is normal. We are patient with the process because we have all been through it. The depth of the gathering grows as the depth of each person's private practice grows. There is no shortcut, but there is grace for every stage of the journey.

Which brings us to the grace note.

Life gets full. Seasons get hard. There will be weeks when the Inner Room felt impossible to access — when the silence felt like nothing but silence, when the demands of work or family or grief crowded out everything else. Nobody here is performing. Nobody arrives having had a perfect week of deep, unbroken communion. We come as we are. The mantra is an aspiration and a posture, not a performance standard. What we ask is simply that you keep returning to the secret place, that you keep showing up, and that when you have something to share — however small or unpolished — you offer it to the room.

A simple, quiet report is as welcome as a dramatic one. *I sat with Him and did not receive anything in words, but I felt held* is as valid a contribution as a vision or a prophetic word. We are building a culture of honest encounter, not spiritual performance.

Going deeper.

The theology behind the Inner Room runs deeper than this guide is designed to carry. If you want to understand the scriptural and historical foundations of what we practice — why we believe the Inner Room is a literal place within the human person, how it connects to the great contemplative tradition of the church, and what it means to build a community around it — we have written about it at length.

Return to the Inner Temple is the most accessible entry point. The *Paradigm Shift* series traces the full theological architecture from its foundations. Both are available on Amazon.

We also invite you to subscribe to The Furnace Blog at blog.thefurnacecf.org and follow along with the unfolding conversation. Our weekly newsletter highlights the written work across our blogs and keeps you connected to what God is stirring in the community between Sundays.

Start wherever feels right. Come back with questions. We love this conversation.

Part Three: What It Means to Belong

There is no membership class at the Furnace.

There is no form to sign, no doctrinal statement to initial, no volunteer roster to add your name to on your third Sunday. Belonging here is not an event you attend or a status you achieve. It is a gradual deepening — a slow, organic process of becoming known and knowing others, of finding your place in the rhythm of the gathering, of discovering that the community has quietly become something you cannot imagine your week without.

That process takes time. We are not in a hurry.

What we are building here is not an audience. It is a family. And families are formed not in moments of formal commitment but in the accumulated weight of ordinary time together — shared meals, shared burdens, shared laughter, shared grief. We eat together. We pray for each other outside of Sunday mornings. We know each other's children by name and each other's struggles by heart. We show up when things fall apart.

If you stay, this is what you are staying for.

There are things the community asks of those who make it their home. They are not many, but they are not small.

The first is the Inner Room discipline. Not perfection — we have already talked about grace. But a genuine, ongoing commitment to spending time in the secret place during the week. This is the root from which everything else grows. A community of people who are not practicing the Inner Room individually will not have anything to bring to the gathering collectively. The depth of what we experience together on Sunday mornings is a direct reflection of what each of us has been doing in private during the week. This is the one thing we ask you to protect above all others.

The second is presence. We gather every Sunday. Life will occasionally make that impossible — travel, illness, the unpredictable demands of family. But chronic absence is not just a personal loss. It is felt by the community. A small gathering notices when someone is gone. Your presence is not incidental to what happens in the room. It is part of what makes the room what it is.

The third is the willingness to be known. This one is harder than it sounds. Many of us have spent years in Christian communities where we were visible but not known — where we attended faithfully, served reliably, smiled consistently, and remained fundamentally alone. The Furnace is trying to be something different. That requires a specific kind of courage: the willingness to share what you actually received in the Inner Room, even when it feels small, even when you are not sure it means anything, even when you cannot find the right words for it. A half-formed impression. A single sentence that would not leave you. An image that came in the

silence and stayed. These are the things that belong to the room — and offering them, imperfectly and honestly, is how a community of people who have been with God becomes a community that knows one another at the level that actually matters.

Come as you are. Stay as you become.

Part Four: Where We Are Going

We are small right now. Intentionally, unapologetically small.

A handful of people in a living room is not a consolation prize for a community that has not yet figured out how to grow. It is the right size for what we are trying to do — and it is the form that every significant movement of God has taken at its beginning. The Upper Room held a hundred and twenty people. The early church met in homes. The Celtic communities that carried the fire of the gospel across Ireland and into Europe began as small bands of men and women gathered around a common practice and a common Lord.

We are not waiting to become something. We are already something. And what we are is a seed.

From homes to a city.

The Furnace grows the way fire grows — by spreading, not by accumulating. When our gathering reaches a size where the intimacy that defines it begins to strain, we will not look for a larger room. We will divide — half remaining, half moving to a new home in a new neighborhood or a new part of the city. Both groups carry the full DNA: the same rhythm, the same practice, the same fire. Both will grow. Both will divide again. Two cells become four. Four cells become a community large enough to dream together about something more permanent.

The goal was never to remain a house church indefinitely. The house is the seed form. The vision has always been larger.

Toward a building unlike any you have attended.

When the community has grown to the point where pooled resources make it possible, the Furnace moves toward a permanent gathered space. Not a traditional church building with a stage and a sanctuary designed for passive observation. Something that looks and feels like nothing most people have attended before.

We envision a warehouse — open, industrial, unadorned. Four walls. Four screens. The congregation standing inside a continuous immersive environment of image and lyric that wraps the entire room. No stage. No front or back. The Table of the Lord at the center. The teacher

moving among the people. The elders carrying the bread and cup outward to the congregation where they stand.

The gathering in that space follows the same rhythm as the gathering in the living room. The building does not change the model. The building is designed to say, in physical form, what the model has always believed — that there is no performer here, no passive audience, no hierarchy encoded in the architecture. There is only the body of Christ, gathered around its Lord.

We have written the full vision out. You can read it at thefurnacecf.org/vision.

Beyond Canton.

The arc does not stop here.

We believe the Inner Room model — the gathering rhythm, the fire that grows by dividing, the vision of a space with no stage and no front — belongs in every city. Not just Canton. Not just Ohio. We are actively working toward a network of Furnace communities across the nation, each one autonomous, each one gathered around the same practice, each one carrying the same fire to a new place.

If something stirs in you when you read that — if you find yourself thinking less about visiting and more about building — we want to hear from you. There is a page on our website for exactly that conversation: thefurnacecf.org/start-a-furnace.

But for now, for most of you reading this: come on Sunday. Sit in the circle. Listen to what people bring from the secret place. Let the room do its work on you. That is where it begins. Expect to be changed, transformed, made more like our Christ.

The Door Is Open

You are welcome here.

Not when you have your theology sorted out. Not when your prayer life is consistent and your Inner Room practice is well-established and you feel ready to contribute something worth sharing. Now. As you are. With whatever you are carrying right now — the questions, the doubts, the weariness, the hunger you cannot quite name.

The fire is already burning. It has been burning for a long time. And there is room for you in it.

We will not pretend this community asks nothing of you. It does. The Inner Room discipline is real. The commitment to presence is real. The vulnerability of sharing what you received in the

secret place — imperfectly, honestly, week after week — is real. We are not a community you can attend passively and remain unchanged. That is not a warning. It is an invitation.

Come full when you can. Come empty when you must. Come back either way.

If you have questions — about the Inner Room, about what we believe, about what Sunday mornings look like, about whether any of this is for you — we want to hear from you. Reach out at thefurnacecf.org/connect. We will talk.

If the theology is what you need first, start with The Furnace Blog at blog.thefurnacecf.org. Subscribe and follow the conversation. Our weekly newsletter will keep you connected to what is being written and what God is stirring in the community.

If you are ready for the books — for the scriptural and historical foundations that undergird everything we practice — begin with *Return to the Inner Temple*. The *Paradigm Shift* series follows. Both are available on Amazon.

And if something in you has been stirred not just to attend but to build — if you find yourself wondering whether something like this could exist in your city — visit thefurnacecf.org/start-a-furnace. That conversation is one we are actively inviting.

But the simplest next step is the oldest one.

Come on Sunday. Sit in the circle. The door is open.
