

3 Keys to Sustaining Revival 20 Years After the Toronto Blessing

This week marks the 20th anniversary of the Toronto Blessing, a powerful renewal of the Holy Spirit that has significantly impacted the world and is producing sustained spiritual fruit to this very day. So what's the secret? Is it possible for **revival** to go beyond a few years, a season or even a single generation and be carried into the future with increased momentum? Toronto reveals that yes, such a reality is truly possible.

I love reading stories of revival because they show me how available it is. Toronto is a perfect example of this. For the most in-depth and personal accounts on the birth of this powerful outpouring, I encourage you to read *The Father's Blessing* by John Arnott and *There Is More* by Randy Clark. Reading it in their own words, you will see that God was not responding to the cries of spiritual supermen but hungry hearts desperate to experience a "new normal."

What Was So Special About Toronto?

John Arnott puts it this way in his book: "Many people have asked me what led to this outpouring of the Father's blessing. They want to know, *Why Toronto?* Why us? That's something I'd like to know, too."

Before the **Toronto Blessing**, John and Carol Arnott were burned-out pastors, desperate for a fresh touch from God. They had gone as far as they could in their own strength. The majority of their ministry emphasis focused on dealing with demons, overcoming the darkness and fighting the devil, "instead of receiving more of the Holy Spirit's presence and power as a main emphasis."

This approach is prevalent in many Spirit-filled churches today, where instead of focusing more on Jesus and embracing the move of the Holy Spirit, we seem to always be dealing with the devil or fighting some demon—as if we are fighting to achieve victory. The truth is that we fight from a place of *received* victory. Embracing this perspective shifts everything and is one of the transformative truths that have emerged out of the Toronto Blessing.

So what made Toronto special? Does God pick and choose regions to bless or not bless? Or is there a common denominator that attracts an invasion from heaven? The common denominator was hunger. John and Carol were hungry enough to expose themselves to what God was doing in other places around the world through other people. They were not becoming conference junkies; they were desperate to catch a glimpse of what they longed to experience as normal in their lives, in their church and in their region.

This culminated with a powerful impartation that they received from Claudio Freidzon in Argentina. It would be tempting to look at someone like Freidzon, whom God had been using powerfully in South America to establish a culture of revival, and conclude this man was some kind of spiritual giant. Not so.

Read his book, *Holy Spirit, I Hunger For You*, and you will quickly discover that Freidzon, like John and Carol, was another spiritually hungry person that pursued the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, no matter what it cost.

Heaven Breaks Out

John and Carol went on to invite Randy Clark to minister for a series of meetings up in Toronto. At the time, Randy was pastoring Vineyard Christian Fellowship in St. Louis. The Arnotts heard that Randy's church was experiencing a powerful move of the Holy Spirit and that people were powerfully

touched by God as he ministered.

Humorously enough, John Arnott recounts, “Randy and I were in fear and trembling hoping God would show up in power, but uncertain about what would happen. We were not exactly full of faith—but God was faithful anyway.”

This tells me that God responds to our desperation and hunger, even if there is uncertainty and faithlessness on our end. He is overjoyed by humble hearts that simply desire Him! It immediately makes me think of what Jesus said in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3, NIV). Those with hearts that are humble and hungry are truly positioned to experience the power of God’s kingdom.

The result is now history. On Jan. 20, 1994, the power of God fell on the 120 people who were gathered at the Thursday night meeting in the Toronto Airport church. The immediate fruit was incredible. It has been noted that “by the end of 1995, 600,000 people had visited Toronto from almost every nation on the planet.” In addition, “There were over 900 first time conversions in the renewal’s first year,” H. Vinson Synan wrote in *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition*.

While this is all very exciting, it is most significant to note that the revival has been continuing and even increasing in global momentum. Churches and ministries across the earth trace some of their “roots in renewal” to the Toronto Blessing, such as Holy Trinity Brompton in the U.K.; Bethel Church in Redding, Calif.; and Heidi and Rolland Baker of Iris Ministries.

So why is Toronto still continuing after 20 years—and why do I believe it will be a vital stream in the revival that never ends?

Three Keys to Sustaining Revival

1. Revival is not personality-driven; it is God-focused.

Toronto was not about Randy Clark or the Arnotts. It was not about any of the speakers who preached from their pulpit. It was about a radical corporate hunger for God that transformed a little warehouse church in Canada to a center for historic outpouring. Are we hungry for God? Not breakthrough. Not blessing. Not keys to improving our lives. Not even manifestations of revival. How much do we simply want to know and experience God and see Jesus receive *all* the glory?

2. Revival is sustained in a culture of testimony. When we recognize that as God freely gives to us, we are called to freely give to the world, we become catalysts to carry revival. What have we been freely given? Our story. Our testimony. This ranges from our salvation experience to a healing, deliverance, restored marriage, victory over addiction, encounter in God's presence and the like.

Our testimony is what we offer the world. As we talk about what God has done for us, our words release new options to the people listening. They may have never heard that God is a loving Father. They may have never known that Jesus still heals today. There is a good chance that they have not been introduced to the Savior whose blood made complete atonement for all of their sins. By sharing your testimony, you introduce new options to other people, and along with those options, faith is released.

Testimony declares that the same God who moved for you can also move for anyone else, since God is no respecter of persons. This is one of the key factors that birthed Toronto, as the power of God started to be released as Randy Clark shared testimony of how the Holy Spirit so dramatically transformed his life.

From that moment until today, testimony is a key cultural component to the Toronto Blessing. As people would get up to testify, the power of God would powerfully hit them and

inevitably fall upon the entire congregation. When testimony is communicated from generation to generation, people are constantly talking about and listening to stories of God's mighty acts. This reminds us that Jesus is alive and that the Holy Spirit wants to continue to release His power today—through us!

3. Revival is sustained when people practice true repentance. Revival dies without repentance. This is not God's will. Repentance is the key to living in the sustained, lasting fruit of spiritual outpouring.

There are two dimensions to repentance. One, we must confront the chasm of our sin. This confrontation produces true godly sorrow as we recognize the level of disagreement between our lives and what God has made available. Too many people, however, preach a version of repentance that lives in the place of godly sorrow but never gets out. If we never graduate beyond sorrow, we will not embrace the fruit of repentance.

Sorrow over sin is not designed to produce depressed, condemned believers. It awakens us to the chasm between what we are presently experiencing of God and what He has truly made available. The chasm causes us to confess and repent for our sins and pursue God with greater passion. As a result, we begin to experience the river of God. Signs, wonders and miracles start to break out. Healing—physical and emotional—flows in an intense measure. People are dramatically touched by the power of God. We celebrate and enjoy all of this. Toronto surely did. However, the reason why Toronto is still continuing today—on a global scale—is because those who were there embraced the second dimension of repentance. This involved the leaders embracing a “new wineskin.”

Read the testimonies, and you will constantly see people experienced godly sorrow over sin. However, as the “new wine” of the Holy Spirit was being released, the leaders had their ears bent toward heaven, humbly asking God, “What changes do

You want us to make in our lives and in the way we do church because of this outpouring?" This is absolutely fundamental if we want to see revival outlive a single generation, region or people group. We must be willing to also repent for embracing a certain system or structure over the Holy Spirit.

This is not a call to chaos; it is a return to organic Christianity, where rather than taking all of our cues from the latest, greatest gimmicks or church-growth strategies (many of which are good), we look at how the Holy Spirit has been moving and ask, "How do we continue to host His manifest presence among us?"

Recently, I published an article posing the question "Is it wrong to pray for revival?" The responses were varied and interesting. One response perplexed me, as the individual seemed convinced that revival was not sustainable. It all depends on how you look at it. The Arnotts did not beg God for something, as if He was some austere heavenly Father, making His kids squirm. Not at all.

The Arnotts sought nothing new to come out of heaven. Rather, they looked at how the Holy Spirit had already been moving, concluded that if the same Holy Spirit who moved powerfully through Kathryn Kuhlman and Claudio Freidzon was also inside of them, He could release the same measure of outpouring in Toronto. This birthed a radical hunger within them to return to a new normal kind of Christianity—something so old, it would be considered "new."

Revival exposes us to what normal looks like from God's perspective. The outpourings that we call revivals, whether they are initiated by spiritual hunger or pure divine sovereignty, are exciting yet sobering summonses for us to recalibrate this thing called Christianity to God's standard.

Toronto is a powerful example of hungry, imperfect people who simply bent their hearts and ears toward heaven. As a result,

they have something truly extraordinary to celebrate 20 years later—not just a memorial to some memory of the “good ol’ days” but a powerful testimony to something that started in 1994 and is continuing today, with no signs of slowing down.

Larry Sparks is author of the books *Breakthrough Faith* and *Breakthrough Healing*. He also founded *Equip Culture Media*—a ministry that empowers believers with the tools and resources they need to live victoriously through the supernatural power of God. Larry serves as director of curriculum resources for *Destiny Image Publishers* and hosts *Life Supernatural*, a weekly radio program that features bestselling authors, emerging filmmakers and key ministry leaders. He lives in Florida with his wife and daughter. Follow him on Twitter @LarryVSparks. Subscribe to his weekly blog at .