

Bill Johnson: Naturally Supernatural

For decades, maybe centuries, the church has gathered weekly around a sermon. Our reasons are noble: We value the Scriptures and know that our lives are to be anchored in truth. But the study of the Scriptures is meant to launch us into an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ.

In that moment of connection, we obtain life. Without encountering the One to whom Scriptures point, we are a people to be pitied. As Jesus told the Pharisees, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40).

Nearly every leader wants revival in one way or another, and many want healings, deliverances and miracles. *But it's hard to have the same fruit as the early church when we value a book they didn't have above the Holy Spirit they did have.*

That statement is *not* intended to get us to put less value on Scripture. That would be a great mistake. I simply point to the fact that without the Holy Spirit, the Bible is a closed book. The Bible was written in such a way that only those in relationship with God have ongoing access to its mysteries. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see truth. Jesus is the truth we long to understand. Jesus Christ is perfect theology.

The church camps around the sermon; Israel camped around the *presence*. Learning to recognize, treasure and carry this presence is at the heart of the Christian life. Recalibrating our hearts to this supreme value affects everything.

Encountering God

I don't know any leader who would deny that our greatest treasure is God's presence. Yet to *camp around the presence of*

God in our personal lives, as well as in our corporate gatherings, means He is the reference point for all that is said and done—something like due north to the compass. God's presence may be central in theory for many of us, but it is time for it to also become so in practice. It must be measurable.

We know instinctively that our encounter with God is what changed us. For some, it was a "road to Damascus" experience—extreme and hard to miss. For others it was much more subtle, like the internal realization of God upon them that made repentance possible. At that point, they were forever changed. We owe the people we serve an encounter with God, and for that to be a consistent outcome of our ministries, we must be full of the Holy Spirit. Fullness is measured in overflow.

Many have stopped short of a divine encounter because they were satisfied with good theology. I became painfully aware of this truth in 1987 when I attended a John Wimber Signs and Wonders Conference. Of the many conferences I had attended through the years, this was the only time every teaching I heard was one I had already taught. Even some of the illustrations were the same as mine. It was eerie. I left somewhat discouraged, as I became aware that I had good theology, but they had fruit for what they believed. People were set free just as when Jesus ministered here on earth. Painful as that lesson was, I discovered I had to learn to put a demand on what I believed. Encounters with God were essential. Living a lifestyle of risk would be required to get me where I wanted to go.

Cultivating Awareness of God

The cultivated awareness of His presence is vital. To be truly effective, this awareness should be learned when there is no ministry. It is to be developed in the context of relationship, not performance/ministry. What we learn when no one is watching will qualify us to lead His people when

everyone is watching.

Too many cry out to God for gifts, breakthrough in meetings and fruitfulness in evangelistic campaigns, but show little zeal for the Holy Spirit outside of ministry. He is to be encountered, experienced, known, followed and affectionately embraced. To show passion for God only in ministry is *professional intimacy*. And we have a name for those who are intimate as a profession.

Consider Jesus' times on the mountaintop alone. The Father declared before Jesus had done anything: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). He had already found pleasure in the heart of His Father outside of the context of ministry. We have the same opportunity to capture the heart of the Father just because of our delight in who He is. The ministry that comes out of His acceptance is far greater than the ministry that works for His acceptance. Love serves from favor, not for favor.

The Dove That Remained

When Jesus was baptized in water, John the Baptist said, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him" (John 1:32). The Holy Spirit, Himself, who inspired the Scriptures, described His relationship with the Son and the Son's relationship with Him with these words, "And He remained upon Him." This is significant because it implies that there was never any reason for the Holy Spirit to withdraw from Jesus.

We know that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. But it's my conviction that He doesn't always rest upon us. Jesus wants us to know how to be a people upon whom the Holy Spirit will rest continually. I put it this way to our people: "He is in me for my sake. But He's upon me for yours." The Spirit of God rests upon a person (both in the Old or New Testament) to impact that person's surroundings.

“And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the *heavens parting* and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove” (Mark 1:10, emphasis added). The phrase, “the heavens were *parting*,” employs the same word used to describe the tearing of the veil of the temple and the splitting of rocks around Jerusalem, both in response to the death of Christ (see Matt. 27:51).

What happened at Jesus’ baptism was a violent act, not a passive wispy parting of clouds. It is the initial answer to Isaiah’s prayer, “Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!” (Is. 64:1). The heavens were *torn* open at Jesus’ baptism, and the Holy Spirit came down. When the Holy Spirit was released upon the church in Acts 2, it was equally a testimony to that open heaven.

The heavens are open! For the believer, most closed heavens are between the ears. We were *born again* into open heavens and cannot afford to think otherwise. We make a mistake whenever we think that the oppression over our city is over us as well. It isn’t. When we think non-biblically, the enemy becomes empowered by our unbelief. But a believing church, one that camps around the presence of God, will always help to define the nature of the world that they live in.

While open heavens may not yet cover our cities, we do not usually get increase in kingdom realities if we ignore or abuse what we’ve been given. For example, we generally don’t receive an increase of favor or finances unless we have been faithful with what we’ve been given. So it is with open heavens. What exists over me can exist over my city through faithfulness and radical obedience. It’s time to train the church to steward our greatest treasure: Holy Spirit—the evidence of an open heaven. When we treasure the Spirit, more will come.

As the church learns to live with an awareness of God’s presence upon us, we influence the atmosphere of the world

around us, not only through our witness, but also through our presence. We broker the reality we are most aware of into our surroundings. Jesus modeled this after being awakened by His disciples in a life-threatening storm. He stilled the storm with a rebuke and the declaration of "Peace, be still!" (Mark 4:39). What enabled Him to sleep in the storm also calmed the storm when it was released from Him—peace. His internal reality became His external reality.

The Jesus Lifestyle

Jesus lived under an open heaven. No power could come between the Father and the Holy Spirit upon Him. What was provided for Jesus is also provided for us. He set the stage for a lifestyle that was to be manifested globally by those who follow Him.

The impact of both the open heavens and the presence of the dove upon Him became evident quite quickly. A woman noticed something intangible, something without definition. Her sickness drove her to the desperate act of touching a man in public, though she was "unclean." In desperation, she touched His clothing and became well (see Matt. 9:20).

Jesus never taught about this secret to the miraculous, either before or after her miracle. Obeying a command did not heal her. She simply noticed the ways of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus and cooperated. The grace environment that surrounded Jesus invited people to explore. She was healed when she responded to an opportunity that no one else could see. However, once she experienced her miracle, her story spread.

By the time we get to the end of Mark 6, *everyone* who touched Him was made well. Even then, He never taught on the subject. He just lived as an open invitation for all to seek the One who desired to be found.

This adds an interesting insight to the possible effect of every believer who desires to live as Jesus did. The Holy

Spirit upon us is accessible by others. People were healed as Peter's shadow passed by. Our shadow always releases whatever overshadows us. Peter had learned to host Him well.

Pay the Price

To claim that the treasure of His manifest presence has priority over everything else must become evident in the price I am willing to pay to give Him honor, while maintaining such presence. While the Spirit was given without measure, what we possess is often different from what is in our account. We have the measure of *presence* that we are willing to jealously guard.

We must place the manifest presence of the Lord in our non-negotiable column. It's hard to know whether the presence of God is really a priority until, to protect it, I've suffered the misunderstanding, ridicule and rejection that come with the territory.

Many have asked for the secrets to ongoing miracles or a meaningful prophetic culture that builds instead of tears down. The No. 1 most overwhelming key to opening up the supernatural as a lifestyle is becoming a true worshipper, in and out of the corporate gathering. This, combined with a devotion to the study of Scripture, has prepared us for the miracle lifestyle more than any other element of the Christian life.

The Secret

This equation is really quite practical. His presence comes in increasing measure in our worship. Beyond the songs, and even contemporary worship culture, are rich discoveries awaiting the tenderhearted. Of late, the glory of God has begun to fill the air. At times this happens with unexplainable external manifestations of His presence. Other times it's just an overwhelming awareness that He is in the room.

For those tempted to remind me that He is always with us,

I understand and believe that. There are just times when the increased manifestation of presence upon us is beyond reason. And I will not interrupt that to preach. If that means we go home without a sermon, so be it. If it means we're together for hours, no problem. Of course this cannot be an excuse to skip the privilege of teaching the Word. We just need things we don't understand, can't control and can't explain. Such is the life of following Jesus.

Sometimes His presence comes with a specific purpose that must be discovered. "And the power of the Lord was present to heal" (Luke 5:17). My responsibility as a leader is to find out why He is present. While it's challenging, it's not complicated. Liberty is the overriding evidence of His presence among His people (2 Cor. 3:17). If increasing freedom is not the result of our gatherings, we have reason to question whether we are fully engaging the presence of God.

My personal routine looks like this: I cry out to God in private and take risk in public. When the breakthrough I long for isn't happening, I go back to God in the secret place. It truly is the ongoing encounter with the presence that enables us to live like Jesus did.