

Don't Be Afraid to Let Holy Spirit Move

Last weekend, I preached at a church that meets in a big lecture hall on a university campus in Perth, Australia. Most of the congregation at Zion Praise Harvest Church consists of students from Singapore, China and Malaysia. Some of them met Jesus for the first time while in college.

The whole experience at Zion was refreshing for me, mainly because most of the people in the service were young enough to be my children. But I was also blessed because the pastors, Patrick and Joyce Chen, wanted the Holy Spirit to move in the service. In fact, Patrick told me I was welcome to take a longer time to invite people to the front of the auditorium for prayer after my sermon.

And that is exactly what happened. Dozens of young people came to the stage, asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit. God showed up and touched them all in a deep way. One young man buried his head in my chest and sobbed because God was healing his emotional hurts. Another young girl came to me after the service and shared that God had delivered her from deep shame.

If your church allows this kind of freedom for ministry, you are blessed—because many pastors today are afraid to allow the Holy Spirit to move. We've put the Spirit in a box. We have a long list of seeker-friendly rules these days, telling us that: 1) American churchgoers only want a 60-minute church experience; 2) the only “cool” way to do church is to offer three songs, a short TED Talk and video announcements on a big screen and 3) altar calls or extended prayer times will scare people away.

People need the reality of God's power. My prayer lately has been that we will stop being so worried about how the Holy

Spirit will show up or show off. We should stop being so afraid of people's reactions. Here are seven practical things we can do to encourage the freedom of the Spirit in our churches:

1. **Teach about the Holy Spirit often.** The Holy Spirit was rarely mentioned in the church I grew up in, so we never expected Him to do anything. Yet He is described in the second verse of the Bible as "moving" upon the surface of the newly created world (Gen. 1:2), and He has one of the last messages in the Bible (see Rev. 22:17). He moves and He speaks throughout the Scriptures! But we must invite the Spirit to move and speak in our churches by giving Him the place He deserves.
2. **Leave room for altar ministry.** A church without altar ministry is like a hospital without a maternity ward. New life often begins at the altar—whether it is salvation, healing, prophetic ministry or the impartation of a fresh anointing. Today many churches that offer multiple services often skimp on ministry time because they are focused on herding the 10 a.m. group out of the sanctuary to get ready for the 11:30 a.m. crowd. Multiple services are fine, but we are crowding the Spirit out of the church if we don't schedule time for people to respond to the message.
3. **Have small groups where people can use the Holy Spirit's gifts.** It's not practical for everyone to prophesy or exercise other spiritual gifts in a large congregation. But if people are plugged into small groups, there will be opportunities for believers to encourage one another in supernatural ways. And people are more comfortable stepping out in faith in front of 10 people than they are in front of 3,000.
4. **Train people in prophecy, healing and Spirit-led ministry.** Many pastors clamp down on spiritual gifts

because a few fanatics with inflated egos like to pull the church into weirdness. But in our effort to protect the sheep from “charismania,” let’s not pull the pendulum to the other extreme by forbidding the gifts of the Spirit. The genuine power of God will flow if we teach people the difference between authentic anointing and strange fire.

5. **Offer “teaching moments” to explain the gifts of the Spirit.** I’ve been in churches where Brother Herschel or Sister Agnes prophesied in such a harsh, condemning tone that everyone in the church let out a collective groan. Their “words from God” had the same effect on the congregation as fingernails on a chalkboard. We cannot ignore these moments and move on. When the Corinthians mishandled speaking in tongues and prophecy in the first century, the apostle Paul used their mistakes as an opportunity to teach about how to use gifts properly. We should do the same.
6. **Expose your church to healthy ministries that flow in the anointing.** God not only gave the church pastors—He also gave evangelists, teachers, prophets and apostles (see Eph. 4:11). Yet many churches today know only pastors. We need life-giving traveling ministries because God sends them to win new converts, heal the sick, unleash prophetic power, train leaders and impart new vision in congregations. We should not be afraid to open our pulpits to the ministry gifts God has raised up to bless the church.
7. **Give time for testimonies of God’s supernatural power.** Nothing raises the faith level of a congregation like someone’s raw experience with God. If a man was healed this week in your church, let him shout it from the housetops. If an infertile couple got pregnant, let them tell about the goodness of God. Stories of supernatural intervention trigger a holy expectation in everyone—and

God gets the glory for His miracles.

We should be willing to pray, "Holy Spirit, come." Let's fling open the doors and allow the Spirit to have His way. Instead of being afraid of what He might disrupt or whom He might offend, let's rather fear what our churches would be like without Him. {eoa}