

Don't Quench the Spirit in the Next Move of God

Last weekend, my wife and I helped lead a retreat for ministers in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. I knew most of the couples who were joining us, but I was surprised to learn that one of the attendees was Sally Fesperman, a leader (with her late husband, Jay) during the early days of the charismatic renewal of the 1960s and 1970s.

Sally is 88, but she is as bright-eyed and energetic as any 20-something I know. She loves to talk about her relationship with Jesus, and she shared many stories about the early days of renewal when thousands of Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians and Presbyterians were discovering the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Sally brought back so many memories of the mid-1970s, when I was filled with the Spirit as a teenager.

While in the mountains God spoke to me from Isaiah 35 about another wave of the Holy Spirit that is coming soon. He told me, from verse 6: "Waters will break forth in the wilderness." I have never been more convinced that God is going to refresh us again with a sudden outpouring of His presence and power. I was so excited about this promise that I asked Sally on Friday morning to pray over us, and to prophetically pass the torch of renewal to the younger generation.

I wept when Sally prayed over us because I am desperate to see revival. However, by Saturday I was sobered by the responsibility of receiving this torch of renewal. That's because I know that when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the American church more than 40 years ago, we mishandled this precious gift.

I believe God will visit us again soon, but we must prepare now to avoid the mistakes of the past. Here are five ways we

mishandled the outpouring of the Spirit in the last season:

1. We exploited it. The first attempt at quenching the Spirit's power in the New Testament church was made by Ananias and Sapphira, who were full of greed (see Acts 5:1-11). The same thing happened to the charismatic movement in the 1980s, when prosperity preachers with dollar signs in their eyes showed up to merchandise the Spirit's anointing. Swaggering evangelists in white suits and Rolexes began pushing people to the floor and convincing crowds to dig into their wallets to give in "miracle" offerings. And so began the slow but steady sell-out. We didn't realize the greed was driving us farther and farther from the Spirit's blessing.

2. We fabricated it. In the early days of renewal, charismatic leaders had a sense of holy awe when they prayed for people. They didn't want to do anything to grieve the Spirit. But somewhere along the way, some ministers realized they could fake the gifts of the Holy Spirit and still draw a crowd. Charlatans began hosting charismatic sideshows, complete with faked healings, spooky stage drama and mesmerizing manipulation. God's holy anointing was replaced by mood music and a quivering voice. Anybody with discernment could sense that the Spirit's sweet presence had exited the building.

3. We corrupted it. In the early charismatic days, I cut my spiritual teeth on meaty messages from firebrands such as Judson Cornwall, Leonard Ravenhill, Corrie Ten Boom, Keith Green, Derek Prince, Joy Dawson and Winkey Pratney. They preached regularly about the fear of God. Their messages demanded holiness. But if you fast-forward to today, you will find that much of the preaching in our movement has been reduced to drivel. It is sad that people can attend a "Spirit-filled" church today and never hear a sermon explaining that fornication is a sin. It is sadder that we have preachers in our pulpits who shamelessly flaunt sexual sin under the banner of a cheap grace message that will actually send people to hell.

4. We denominationalized it. When the Holy Spirit fell on certain groups in previous decades, their leaders assumed that the blessing of God was an indication that they were “special.” Some denominations even taught that all other Christians would one day come under their group’s banner—because they believed they had elite status. Sectarian pride might sound spiritual, but it is still pride. And don’t ever think that nondenominational church networks are immune to this virus. There are trendy new groups today that claim to have a corner on truth. Their subtle message is, “We are better.” Don’t let this smug attitude quench the Holy Spirit.

5. We professionalized it. In the early days of charismatic renewal, there was a sense of childlike wonder as people discovered the power of the Spirit for the first time. The meetings were Christ-centered, the sermons were solidly biblical and the fellowship was deep. We could sing *They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love* because we felt a deep bond with each other in the Holy Spirit.

But it didn’t take long to replace the genuine sense of New Testament *koinonia* with something colder and less inviting. We began emphasizing titles. We discovered slick marketing techniques. Churches and their budgets grew. Then a funny thing happened on the way to the megachurch: We lost our simplicity. We turned church into a business. We stopped being relational and we became professional.

I’m not against growth, megachurches or marketing. The Holy Spirit can produce and direct all those things! But if we sacrifice the freshness and warmth of relationships on the altar of professional Christianity, we may discover the Holy Spirit has withdrawn from our ministries.

May the Lord help us to cultivate an atmosphere that attracts His presence rather than repels Him. May we be ready to receive the baton as a younger generation embraces the promise of another move of God. Come, Holy Spirit!

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