

Have You Pinched Yourself Lately?

Last week I spent six days in Durban, South Africa, with a dynamic congregation called His Church. The members come from all kinds of backgrounds: White Afrikaan believers, black Zulus, Indians, and immigrants from Congo, Malawi and Mozambique. When we gathered last Sunday, it was obvious that the intensity of these people's love for each other was only surpassed by their passion for praising God.

My eyes welled up with tears as I entered into worship that morning. I was witnessing a miracle. I had read enough about South Africa's painful history to know that blacks, whites and Indians have not always loved each other like this. In the days of apartheid, which was not dismantled until the 1990s, society was rigidly segregated—and so were South Africa's churches.

Now, the Holy Spirit has broken down those walls. I had to pinch myself to make sure this was not a dream.

I was in awe.

I thought to myself, I actually get to see this! I am witnessing something that Christians in previous ages never even imagined.

But as profound as that moment in Durban was for me, I should be pinching myself every day. If you are a Christian, you should be continually astounded by what God has done for you and how He is working around you. Consider just a few of his mind-boggling blessings:

1. You have been forgiven. If you're a Christian, you carry absolutely no guilt for your past sins. There are no marks on your record. Like a criminal who was released from death row,

you have been declared not guilty, and you no longer face punishment. When you wake up every morning, you should pinch yourself as you realize how merciful God was to pardon you!

2. The Father has adopted you. Adoption is a foreign concept in many cultures. There is not even a word for adoption in some languages. Yet God loved you so much that He brought you into His family, called you His child and shared His eternal inheritance with you. Have you taken time to ponder what that means?

3. You can read and treasure God's Word. There are still many people today who do not have the Bible in their language. There are others who live in countries where Bibles are restricted. Do you realize how high a price was paid by previous generations so you could have the Bible now? Do you read it with a sense of grateful humility?

4. You have continual access to God's presence. In the days of the Old Covenant, people who worshipped the true God could only do it from a distance. They stood outside the door of the temple while priests made sacrifices for them. You should pinch yourself now! Because we live in the New Covenant era, every born-again Christian can approach the throne of God with confidence.

5. The Holy Spirit lives inside you. Before Jesus came, the Holy Spirit only "came upon" certain people—prophets, kings or special messengers. And even those people ran the risk of losing the Spirit's presence. But today, because of Jesus' atonement, He has caused His Spirit to abide in us forever. The Spirit lives in you 24/7, praying for you, refining you, refreshing you, empowering you and leading you deeper and deeper into God's truth. Shouldn't you be in awe of a God who does that?

6. You can enjoy God's house and His people. Jesus said when we gather together, His presence is there. He dwells in His

congregation. Yet many Christians have given up on the church because they got hurt, or because pastors weren't perfect. But do you realize that the church is a miracle? It is the living body of Christ, and until He returns it will be the place where God accomplishes His purposes. Don't miss that profound blessing!

7. You get to experience the Holy Spirit moving all around you. When I preached in one Zulu congregation in South Africa last week, more than 30 people were baptized in the Holy Spirit. I had to pinch myself again when I witnessed this! The Holy Spirit is moving in profound ways today. Churches are growing rapidly in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America, and many new churches are being planted in the United States. Instead of focusing on the negative trends you see in the media, you should stand in awe that we live in a day that ancient prophets longed to see.

8. You are going to heaven. No matter what pain, sickness, disappointment or trial you face during your short time on Earth, you are going to step into an eternity where there is no darkness, no death and no tears. When this life is over, you are going to live forever. It will take an eternity to comprehend a God who would treat us so mercifully.

Please take time to ponder God's marvelous, mind-blowing love. Pinch yourself and be reminded that the truths we read in the Bible are not just words on a page or dry doctrinal concepts. They are living realities that should shake you to the core and produce the purest form of wide-eyed, awestruck worship.

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