

How to Create an Atmosphere That Attracts God and People

Although I hope every Christian experiences a genuine encounter with the manifested presence of God, I also realize that a supernatural encounter alone isn't enough to ignite true revival in a church, a city or a nation. Encounters with His presence change us, but there is a bigger picture and a greater purpose behind it all.

Our God, "who desires all men to be saved," wants more people to come to Him through Jesus Christ, and that brings us to the subject of revival (1 Tim. 2:4). But what is true revival?

Some say all you need for revival is for God to show up. I've also heard revivalists say in previous years, "Give me a crowd of people, and I'll give you revival."

Real revival, however, is when both God and man show up at the same time in the same place. That can happen only when you have enough credibility in the human realm to make man feel comfortable and enough credibility in the divine realm to make God feel comfortable.

We know that Mary and Martha managed to make Jesus feel totally welcome in their house in Bethany. They did it by successfully juggling two seemingly conflicting priorities: Mary entertained His divinity while Martha entertained His humanity.

It was through the careful accommodation of two realms that Mary and Martha made their house in Bethany a meeting place where God and man came together in an atmosphere of hospitality and worship. As far as I know, it is the only house mentioned in the New Testament that became a habitual resting place of Jesus (see Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-11).

There was something right about Mary and Martha's place that drew God through the door. It seems the Bethany model for turning divine visitation into divine habitation is the only way to bring the humanity of your community into contact with the divinity in your house.

We must do whatever it takes to become a Bethany kind of church, a Bethany-hearted people and a family marked by genuine love and hospitality. Each one must learn how to chase God while serving man—how to worship divinity while also serving humanity.

Striking a Balance

The church is usually a little unbalanced because it is constantly torn between the practical and the spiritual. Most local bodies are either socially active or spiritually passionate.

Very seldom do you find a church that manages to be both. When you do, you have found a very unusual environment where both God and man are comfortable. It is the kind of place where true revival is most likely to break out.

If God is comfortable there, then that church has credibility in the heavens. If the church body is actively compassionate about humanity, then it enjoys credibility on earth.

God is searching for modern "houses of Bethany" that have credibility in both realms. Christ's cross depicts the divine balance we all seek, where compassion for humanity on the horizontal plane of our lives intersects with passion for divinity on the vertical plane of eternity.

I've been around some people who exhibit an unusual ability to perceive spiritual truth and reveal a deep understanding of God's ways and nature. Yet the same people can hardly relate to "normal" people.

It is very difficult to be around super-spiritual people. The problem is they don't have credibility in the human realm because they seem to care little whether people live or die, prosper or perish. They see others as bothersome distractions from their personal pursuits.

The church has always wrestled with the extreme attraction of intimacy with God to the exclusion of everything else. The ascetic school of thought held that the highest service to God was done in total isolation from all worldly distractions.

But if you know Him, you should make Him known. If God put something in you to pass on to others but you separate and segment yourself from society so that you never touch anybody, what good are you? (See Matthew 5:13.)

You can worship God all day long, but He may be trying to tell you, "I would really like to see some of the glory I poured into you released and sprinkled over someone else. You are My hands and feet on the earth, so carry My presence with you into the world of men."

You will know you have credibility with man when you can call for humanity to come to your house for a visit and the response is, "We can trust them. Why? Because they fed us when we were hungry, and they clothed us when we were cold. They sheltered us when we were in need, and they cared for us when we were sick. They even visited us in prison when no one else cared whether we lived or died." (See Matthew 25:31-46.)

Passion Should Beget Compassion

Some churches never affect their communities. They've given the people who live in them a distinct impression that says, in effect, "That church couldn't care less about us. All they care about is God, and He doesn't seem to care about us, either, or the folks who claim to be His people would show it."

Churches that lack the basic fruit of God's love in action have no credibility with their communities because they have no works to back up their words. Credibility really matters.

Nearly two decades ago, my good friends Bart and Coralee Pierce went to Baltimore to start a church. Bart said the Lord told them, "If you will take care of the ones nobody wants, I will send you the ones everybody is after."

Pastor Pierce started ministering to the drug addicts, the gutter people and the down-and-outers whom nobody else wanted. Miracles soon followed, and things began to improve in the city. Before long, the up-and-outers started coming too.

When people see you are compassionate toward humanity, they quickly realize they can trust you because you have earned credibility in their realm by backing your words with works.

Until the church comes to the place where divine passion and human compassion meet, there will be a credibility erosion. Nothing is accomplished when we merely point out the problems of our communities without providing solid solutions. I've devoted most of my energies in the last few years to creating hunger for God's presence in the church, but I am painfully aware that we will fail if our increased passion for God does not produce increased compassion for man.

Jesus established a precedent for valuing godly action at least as much as gatherings and principles of godly living. Twice in the Gospel of Luke, He answered rebukes from religious leaders for healing people on a religious day when they thought He should devote Himself to purely spiritual activities (Luke 13:15-16).

In the sense that Mary and Martha are a team, it is true that helping the hurting is as much an act of worship as anything else. How can we expect people to accept our offer to supply food for their souls if they can't trust us to provide food for their bodies?

If you lose your ability to be compassionate toward man, your ability to be useful to God in the world is limited, no matter how passionate you become toward Him. Why? Because it takes both Mary and Martha to entertain divinity and humanity together under one roof.

God wants to fellowship with humanity, and humanity desperately needs to fellowship with divinity. Our lives and our churches become the meeting ground at the point where passion and compassion meet in God's name.

Humanity is blindly searching for its lost spiritual heritage and home. Some churches have learned how to create a place where man can rest, and a few have even learned how to create a place where God can rest.

But God is looking for a place where divinity and humanity can rest together. It's up to us to restore the Garden of Eden and make our churches a place where God and man can walk and talk together.

Jesus Was Spiritual and Practical

We cannot overlook the human factor in our corporate pursuit of God's presence. There are many Christian leaders who have the ability to lead people deeply into the realm of the Holy Spirit.

The problem is that many of them fall into the disjointed parade syndrome. They get so far out in front of the God-chaser parade that they leave the people behind.

Jesus was always aware of the practical needs of His followers. He took it upon Himself to cook the disciples a fish barbecue on the shore (John 21:3-13).

At least twice, Jesus' consideration for the humanity of the crowds following Him into wilderness areas caused Him to interrupt His teaching to tend to their physical fatigue and

hunger. Each time He had them sit down while He arranged a miracle to feed thousands using fish and a few loaves of bread (Matt. 14:19-21; 15:35-39). Jesus understood that it takes Mary's passion for divinity and Martha's compassion for man to create the proper atmosphere where God and man can sit down together.

It is nearly impossible to take people into God's presence when their stomachs are growling and the temperature is 130 degrees. Things will change quickly if you erect a shelter to block the sun, give them a place to sit and feed them.

I'm convinced God wants us to be normal and supernatural at the same time. In my opinion, the house of Mary and Martha presented a perfect blend of the two.

Together, the two sisters made Jesus feel perfectly comfortable under their roof. The blend was simple: Mary entertained His divinity while Martha entertained His humanity.

It is nearly impossible to tell a family about God's love when they are shivering in the cold without dry clothing or coats. The church is surrounded by hurting humanity, and every need is an opportunity for miraculous ministry.

We serve a Master who plainly said He did not come to cure the whole, feed the full or heal the healthy (Matt. 9:12-13). If we make it our aim to accept and recruit only the whole, the full and the healthy, then we may miss the one visitor we need more than any other—Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, if we dare to chase God while, in practical ways, serving others, including the unlovely and unwanted, we are certain to see this one visitor enter our presence. He will feel comfortable in our midst because He is unashamedly attracted to human need and spiritual hunger.

Read a companion devotional.

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