

I Was a Devout Cessationist; Then This Happened

When we decided to keep our church open at the onset of the government-mandated lockdowns due to the COVID breakout—out of necessity and caution—we started meeting in the parking lot, and we never could have imagined what God was actually doing.

A historically devastating tornado had just ripped through Nashville, Tennessee, the week before, and it obliterated large portions of our community in Mount Juliet.

At that time, Global Vision Bible Church was still meeting in our 300-seat chapel, which was the same building we used as a sanctuary for the homeless. We had a very small campus at the time, and it was honestly all we had to work with. We knew there was no way we were going to cancel church, nor would we curtail our emergency response efforts, so we decided to hold services in the parking lot and kept the chapel open to the people in need of sanctuary or supplies.

When the COVID mandates were first handed down, we honestly weren't trying to be defiant. We were simply standing in obedience to God for the sake of the hurting and homeless in our community, so we had no choice but to push back. No mandate of man was going to stop us from obeying the Lord. We immediately realized that the Lord had set our church apart to stand firm while most others bowed to the powers that be, and we absolutely would not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25)—come what may.

When Resurrection Sunday brought a heavy downpour, and folks chose to stand out in the rain (which was a beautiful sight to see), I realized we needed to provide them with some cover, so we got a big tent that seated a whopping 650. We honestly thought there was no way we would ever fill it, but on the

first Sunday—boom!—standing room only. We tried to ride it out with that size tent for about a month, but there were just too many people showing up.

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And we pressed on, eventually moving up to the 1,250-seat red-and-white striped “circus tent” made iconic by the global news media. It was honestly the only tent of that size that we could quickly acquire at a price we could afford.

By the time we extended the red-and-white tent to seat 1,550, I thought we would never need another tent. That thing felt bigger than Noah’s ark, and I honestly believed the crowds would soon start growing weary of all the scrutiny while meeting outside. The summer temperatures were in the high 90s, we could hear the roosters crowing next door, the police were showing up every week to deal with protestors, media cameras were everywhere, and the traffic and parking situation had become a nightmare. It was often overwhelming. I just could not see how we could possibly sustain all of it, so I took my prayer life to another level, and things began to break in me.

One day I was in my office being still before the Lord, and He started working on me in ways I never could have imagined.

Before this moment, even while the church was growing in biblical fashion, every time things would look like they were getting ready to break loose in the Spirit, I’d sheepishly hold it back. Without realizing what I was actually doing, I’d quench it. I’d be like, “No, uh-uh. I’m not allowing wildfire to break out in my service.”

In my office on that momentous day, as I looked out the window, God shocked me with the first open vision of my life.

When I looked out the window that day and scanned up the

hillside, at first, I saw nothing but woods, but suddenly a clearing appeared—and on it was a massive white tent, twice the size of the former red-and-white one. It was a stunning sight, and it was as real to my eyes as the big circus tent. At the time I wasn't at all interested in expanding the tent again. I loved that tent, but I couldn't un-see what the Lord was showing me. So, I called the tent guys and said, "God told me to buy a big white tent that seats 3,000 people and to put it in the woods."

To God be the glory, it all happened. We went from a 300-seat chapel to a 650-seat tent to a 3,000-seat tent in just over a year, and we have baptized more than 8,500 converts in a horse trough—because the gospel still works and the Lord still speaks.

At the time I had all the arguments against signs and wonders firmly in hand, and deliverance ministry wasn't even an afterthought, as I had predetermined it all to be nothing more than foolish hyped-up "charismaniac" nonsense. But then God said, "I'm going to remove your denominational lenses, and I'm going to show you what the Bible really says." He poured out His Spirit on me and our church (Acts 2:17).

The Vision Confirmed What God Was Already Saying

Our journey into deliverance started during a service just before the tornado tore down our tent. We were baptizing folks as we always do, and things were moving along beautifully—until the unthinkable happened. As embarrassing as it was, had it not happened, we wouldn't be where we are as a church today.

A grandmother jumped into the baptismal pool, and to my surprise she had an 8- or 9-year-old girl in her arms. I've never performed a double-dippin' baptism before, but I could see in Grandma's eyes that she was dead earnest in her intent. She wanted me to dip them both at the same time, and I wasn't

going to embarrass that precious lady in front of the church or the folks on the livestream. I could sense there was something deeper going on, and I knew at the very least that Grandma was carrying a burden for that little girl.

As I put her down into the water, Grandma went under nice and smooth, but the little girl put her hands on both sides of that baptistery, lifted herself up and manifested a full-blown cat right in church, screeching and all. In that moment, I realized the little girl was manifesting a demon. She was hissing and even put her fingers out like claws. In all my years of ministry all around the world, I'd never seen anything like it.

At that moment, I was afraid of the little girl and what she might do next. She looked 10 feet tall and bulletproof. So we eventually helped Grandma and the little girl climb out of the tub, and I just tried to return to dipping folks as if nothing happened. I kept thinking in my head, "That didn't happen, that didn't happen." Oh, but it happened!

That night things got serious in my house. As we lay in bed, Tai started weeping and said, "How could we not know how to help that little girl? We pastor a church—a big church, a successful church—we've got bestselling books, podcasts and 3 million followers on the internet, but we can't even face a demon in an 8-year-old child?" We cried long and hard. Then we held hands and prayed about it and continued praying about it every night for two weeks, always weeping before the Lord.

We were praying about things that would risk all that the Lord had built during this amazing season of growth and revival, so it was a daunting time. Through it all, we learned that deliverance ministry will get practical quick and will suddenly show you what you have been missing in the Spirit—once you truly open your eyes. {eo}



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