

Spiritual Trends to Watch in 2012

{jcomments on}

The doom-and-gloom crowd always expects the negative. But behind the troubling headlines, God is working in surprising ways.



Some people are terrified of 2012. Their fear is based on the fact that the Mayans of ancient Mexico mysteriously ended their 5,126-year-old calendar on Dec. 21, 2012—as if they expected the world to end that day.

This stupid hypothesis became the basis for several New Age books and a silly disaster movie, *2012*, in which actor John Cusack avoids meteors and earthquakes just in time to get his family aboard the modern version of Noah's ark (built in China!) before the rest of the world is destroyed by a tsunami.

I'm not worried about 12/21/12 because (1) Ancient Mayans never actually said the world would end in 2012—and even if they did, they didn't have an inside track to God; (2) Domsday predictions have *never* been accurate; and (3) Jesus Christ holds the future in His hands. As long as I'm in relationship with Him, it doesn't matter what happens on earth. I'm secure.

Despite strange weather patterns, global terrorism and the spectre of an economic crash, I'm actually optimistic about where we're headed in 2012. Through my research and travels, I've noticed these emerging trends—some negative, some positive—that will shape our future:

1. Record numbers of Christians will be martyrs. More than 400 Christians die for their faith *every day* around the world, and most of these believers suffer in Islamic countries—although the top hot spot for Christian persecution is the atheist regime of North Korea. Open Doors International says the most dangerous countries for Christians today are: (1) North Korea; (2) Iran; (3) Afghanistan; (4) Saudi Arabia; (5) Somalia; (6) Maldives; (7) Yemen; (8) Iraq; (9) Uzbekistan and (10) Laos (which has a communist government). Persecution will likely increase in African countries such as Nigeria, where a militant brand of Islam is clashing with indigenous Pentecostal Christianity. Let's live in solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters by supporting them in prayer.

✖ **2. The Asian church will take the lead in missionary ventures.** More than 60 percent of the world's population is Asian. China and India alone, each with more than 1 billion people, are set to become the world's powerhouses of evangelism in this decade—and the efforts of the church in those nations and in Singapore, South Korea and Indonesia will eventually overshadow the missionary legacy of the United States. Asian countries not only will fuel church growth in their own regions but also deploy huge numbers of missionaries (both full-timers and "undercover" marketplace missionaries) into difficult mission fields in the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

3. The Arab Spring will thaw resistance to the gospel. Politicians can debate the pros and cons of democracy movements in Egypt, Syria and Libya. Meanwhile, there's no question that the gospel is finding fertile ground in Middle Eastern nations. Many are hearing about Jesus through gospel programming (not the constant begging for money we hear on American TV). Consider that 90 percent of Saudi Arabians have access to Christian programs on cable! While persecution of Christians will continue, there is no stopping the tsunami of the Holy Spirit that is headed for the Muslim world.

4. North America increasingly will be viewed as a needy mission field. The United States now has the largest unchurched population in the English-speaking world. The trend is disturbing: 50 percent of Americans attended church in 1950 compared with 20 percent today. Add this to this mix: There are more internationals studying on American campuses than ever before—more than 690,000. Of the nations that send students to universities here, China, India and South Korea send the most, and Saudi Arabia is seventh. American churches involved in missions need only look in their own backyards for huge evangelism opportunities.

5. The debate over approving homosexuality will take center stage. The Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church USA all have abandoned biblical standards of sexuality in the last few years, and the United Methodist Church is likely to step off the same cliff soon. Evangelical, and even Pentecostal, groups are also flirting with the idea that God approves of homosexual practice. Bible-believing Christians can't continue ignoring this issue. We must discover how to effectively communicate Christ's healing to people who want to overcome same-sex attraction. *Note:* We can't do this until we first get our own sexual house in order.

6. America will experience a church-growth renaissance. Church-growth expert Ed Stetzer says the number of new churches being planted in the United States has now  surpassed the number of church closures. While mainline churches are dying, as many as 5,000 new churches are being started every year in this country—mostly by newer, evangelical networks that offer a nontraditional style of ministry. Stetzer believes that if this movement continues unhindered we could see the same explosion of church growth that the U.S. experienced from 1795-1810, when Baptists and Methodists evangelized America for the first time.

7. The economic downturn in the U.S. will actually be good for

the church. Minnesota pastor John Piper recently listed four reasons why he believes the Great Recession is a blessing in disguise: (1) People tend to be more dependent on God during tough times; (2) During an economic downturn, non-Christians are more likely to see your efforts to reach them as love rather than exploitation; (3) People who need Christ are more ready to hear about eternal life when they are less secure about earthly things; and (4) Christians are more likely to give to missions when they have been awakened to the fragility of material things. Instead of complaining about this economic squeeze, let's welcome the way God can use it to stretch us.

8. Look for a radical reformation to occur in charismatic/Pentecostal churches. Younger leaders are rejecting old paradigms of event-driven, money-focused sensationalism that tainted our movement. Churches that insist on basing their ministry values on exotic manifestations, media showmanship and the prosperity gospel will become irrelevant to an audience starved for authenticity. Expect to see more embarrassing scandals in our movement in 2012, both moral and financial. The Holy Spirit is cleaning house and removing the cancer of immorality and greed that has been spreading behind closed doors among high-profile leaders. These scandals will rock the largest media ministries in the country and redefine the spiritual landscape. But in the end, the exposing of sin will produce a fear of God and a return to accountability, integrity and holiness.

9. Denominations will be redefined. Younger leaders today are uncomfortable with the rigidity and uniformity imposed by denominations. They place a high value on relationships and aren't attracted to wasteful or needless structures. In order to keep younger ministers on board, some Pentecostal denominations will ditch old wineskins and change tired policies. The emphasis will shift from strict hierarchy to team-based leadership, and from impersonal organization to organic relationships. Denominations that don't make this

vital shift will shrink and become irrelevant.

10. Many megachurches will stop trying to grow bigger and will instead branch out. Wise pastors are realizing that bigger is not always better. Unless the people in large churches are equipped for ministry, they will simply warm seats without actually becoming mature disciples. In this next season, forward-thinking leaders will start building *horizontally* rather than *vertically*—by planting small churches out of their larger congregations. The shift will be from big to small, from impersonal to personal, and from a corporate business model to a relational family model. (A return to New Testament Christianity is possible!)

11. Disasters will continue, but Christians will often be the first responders. In the United States in 2011 we had wildfires, droughts, a record-breaking blizzard, a hurricane that tore through New England, killer tornadoes that wiped towns off the map and a weird earthquake that damaged the National Cathedral. President Obama declared more disasters in 2011 than any year on record, and the cost had already topped \$35 billion by September. Some weather experts blame global warming while others insist these patterns are cyclical. Whatever the reason, our priority is helping victims. Organizations including Samaritan's Purse, Convoy of Hope and Somebody Cares—along with thousands of local churches—will show the mercy of Christ when disaster hits.

12. Expect a supernatural surprise. Throughout the history of the church, God has often broken into our routines—and our negative circumstances—to bring spiritual revival. In response to the prayers of a remnant of believers, God invaded history during the Great Awakening, the Welsh Revival, the Azusa Street Revival and the Jesus Movement. This really is our only hope. Our generation has never witnessed a revival. We must cry out to the Lord for another divine visitation. If He surprises us with a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 2012, negative trends will be reversed in an instant and

history will be forever altered. That's what I'm living for.

J. Lee Grady was editor of Charisma for 11 years. Today he directs The Mordecai Project, an international outreach focused on confronting the abuse of women. He is the author of several books, including *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale*.

12 Global Hot Spots

The Holy Spirit is working in places you might never expect



China. Nothing in the history of missions rivals the success story that is China. Mao Zedong tried to wipe out Christian faith in the 1970s when there were only 2.7 million believers. Today, the most conservative estimate is that China had 75 million believers in 2010. A few years ago the greatest growth was among rural “house churches.” Today Christianity is also growing in China’s major cities, and charismatic renewal has infiltrated state-sponsored churches.

India. Despite language barriers, tribal divisions and violent attacks by Hindus, indigenous church-planting movements have flourished all over India in the last 40 years. Fifteen years ago in Andhra Pradesh, a woman who heard a gospel radio broadcast, asked if someone could plant a church in her remote village. Within the first year after a pastor came, the church had 75 converts. After a church building was constructed in 1994, this church planted 125 churches with a combined membership of more than 5,000. This type of growth is occurring throughout India today.

Iran. Despite crackdowns on church gatherings, arrests of pastors and confiscation of Christian videotapes and other materials, Iranian believers are finding increased openness to the gospel in this stronghold of Shiite Islam. The leader of one indigenous ministry says, "Everyone we share the gospel with wants to become a Christian." His ministry actually considered limiting outreach until it could obtain more Bibles and train workers to handle the overwhelming response.

Ghana. International Bible Worship Center started in 1991 as a home Bible study with 12 people in Accra, Ghana's capital. The church grew to 5,000 by the year 2000; today it exceeds 30,000. The pastor of the church, Sam Korankye-Ankrah, grew up in a polygamous family with 24 children. Today, Ankrah and his wife, Rita, lead a multifaceted ministry that is addressing the physical and spiritual needs of a country that could be one of the first African nations to break the cycle of poverty and corruption.

Brazil. This nation of 203 million is experiencing an economic boom during a global recession. It is also in the midst of a Christian awakening. Pentecostal churches have been growing exponentially since the 1970s, as have Baptist, Presbyterian and Nazarene groups that have adopted Pentecostal practices. If Brazil can avoid the traps of greed and moral scandal that crippled American charismatics, it could become a spiritual superpower.

Ethiopia. Since the deposing of Ethiopian dictator Haile Selassie in 1974, evangelicals have grown from 5 percent to 20 percent of the population. Mainline Christians from Lutheran and Orthodox backgrounds have been swept up in Pentecostal revival movements in recent years—and this has fueled huge church-planting initiatives.

Guatemala. At least 24 percent of the country's population is evangelical, and churches are pushing farther into unreached areas where indigenous people are trading their superstitions

for faith in Christ.

Romania. What this Eastern European nation lacks in economic strength is offset by its spiritual passion, especially in the western cities of Oradea, Cluj-Napoca and Timisoara. Many of the Pentecostals in this country are leaving old traditions and embracing a more relevant, charismatic faith and planting vibrant churches—and their sights are set on sending missionaries to the nearby Middle East.

Pakistan. Although it is a dangerous place to be a Christian, the small minority of Pakistani believers is aggressively evangelizing their nation. Many of them report that the Holy Spirit is working miracles that end up bringing Muslims to faith in Christ.

Kazakhstan. There were no known Christians in this former Soviet republic in 1990. Today there are 15,000 believers, and they are spreading their faith from more than 100 healthy congregations. All this is taking place against a backdrop of Islam—since about 53 percent of Kazakhs are Muslims.

Singapore. This tiny, prosperous nation is emerging as an Antioch of the East—a strategic base for both missionary sending and funding. Members of Trinity Church, one of many megachurches in the nation, give more than \$6 million a year to missions.

Indonesia. In the world's largest Muslim country, Christianity is growing so fast the government tries to hide statistics. *Operation World* says evangelicals have grown from 1.3 million to 13 million since 1960. *Time* magazine recently called what is happening in Indonesia “a religious revolution.” And Christians in the Banda Arc province say Muslims are much more receptive to the gospel since the 2004 tsunami that devastated the region.

12 Spheres of Renewal in the USA

The Holy Spirit is working in fresh ways in many sectors of the church



As we enter this new year, pray that the Holy Spirit will spark renewal in all the varied segments of the American church. Use this as your guide:

1. Independent charismatics. It's been more than 40 years since the charismatic movement began. Today many networks of charismatic churches are growing, but others have aged or become locked into religious ruts. Pray for fresh vision.

2. Classical Pentecostals. This group includes the Assemblies of God, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), the Foursquare Church and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. Pray that leaders will trade in old wineskins and sacred cows in order to reach the younger generation.

3. African-American charismatics/Pentecostals. Black churches are positioned to powerfully impact America's inner cities, but some are out of touch with young people. Pray for visionary leaders to emerge in the Church of God in Christ and other groups.

4. Spirit-Sensitive evangelicals. Powerful young communicators such as Francis Chan, Mark Driscoll, Steven Furtick and Craig Groeschel have inspired a nontraditional church-planting movement in our nation. Pray these leaders will build solid churches that are committed to evangelism.

5. Mainline denominations. Many faithful believers provide a witness for Christ inside Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Baptist churches. Pray they will be renewed

and encouraged. Pray also that Catholic churches will be open to another wave of the Holy Spirit's renewal.

6. Apostolic/prophetic movement. Many charismatic churches in the 1990s began specializing in prophecy and emphasizing apostolic governance, and they place high priority on reforming society. Pray the Holy Spirit enables them to reach many in the secular arena.

7. Immigrant Charismatics. Hispanic churches are the fastest-growing segment of the American church—but Spanish-speakers are just one category of immigrants. God is bringing Asians, Middle Easterners, Africans, Brazilians and other nationalities to this country, and they are intensely passionate. Pray they will effectively reach their local areas.

8. Word-Faith movement. This segment of charismatic Christians enjoyed a huge following in the 1980s, rallying around leaders such as Kenneth Hagin Sr. and Kenneth Copeland. The movement has aged today, and many affiliated churches are refocusing their priorities on outreach. Pray for renewal and revitalization.

9. Messianic/Zionist movement. These churches began as a mission to reach Jews with the gospel, but non-Jews who are interested in the Hebrew roots of Christianity now make up a larger segment. Pray these churches will achieve their original mission.

10. Media charismatics. Many Christians today—including older believers who can't go to church—find their faith connection in television preachers. Others who live in remote areas are connected by Internet to various ministries. Pray that these media ministries will offer solid, biblical teaching.

11. Revivalist movements. Mike Bickle of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Mo., Lou Engel of TheCall and Bill Johnson of Bethel Church in Redding, Calif., are just a

few of the leaders calling for radical Holy Spirit revival in America, and their message has particularly inspired the younger generation. Pray that these movements stay on track and fulfill their mission.

12. House church movements. Many Christians in the United States have left larger churches to meet in homes. Some do this to find genuine relationships they lacked in formal churches. Pray that these house churches will be effective in evangelism and outreach.