

What is the Secret to Childlike Faith?

In the fall of 1994 the Toronto Blessing had been going on for nearly a year, and the reports coming out of the meetings had finally overcome my skepticism. Realizing something of historic proportions had been loosed in an Ontario congregation—then called the Toronto Airport Vineyard Christian Fellowship—I booked flights for January, and within a few months my associate pastor and I were making our pilgrimage into the bitter cold of a Canadian winter.

As a hardcore skeptic, my associate didn't believe that anything he had heard about Toronto could be genuine. But when we walked through the doors of that vast exhibition hall, the power of God's presence blew him off his feet. For the entire week I saw him in just a couple of modes: doing snow bunnies flat on his back on the floor or being carried to the hotel shuttle like a hopeless drunk.

Six nights a week, week after week, the revival broke all the rules. Most of the preaching bored me to tears. No superstar leaders lined people up to push them down.

Other revival streams sprang up in the years that followed. For a time Christians in many places were tasting the glory of God in this way.

Something Began to Change

Then something began to change. The focus shifted, not all at once, but so gradually that most of us didn't notice. The church moved from purity of devotion to God and the freedom of mutual ministry by ordinary people to exalting our spiritual heroes—those we recognized as leaders in the movement. Many of us shifted from flowing easily in the Spirit to seeking ways to make the Lord move and to generating His presence with

methods we had learned.

In the spring of 2008 the Lakeland Revival was in full swing, with thousands of people gathering nightly in the Central Florida town for what was billed as a healing revival. Some leading voices had prophesied that it would be the one to sweep the world and change everything. My skeptic's smoke alarm started to beep.

My wife and I had been watching some of the meetings on *GOD TV* and questioned what it was that people seemed so worked up about. We just didn't sense the anointing that was supposed to be there.

Finally, we decided in May to make the pilgrimage to Lakeland for a firsthand look. Perhaps 3,000 people filled the tent. Up front, next to the platform, a few worshippers exhibited behavior consistent with manifestations of the Spirit. Nothing much seemed to be happening anywhere else in the auditorium. My wife and I felt even less of God's presence in person than we did from watching the meetings on television.

Sensing something profoundly wrong in the meetings, I returned home to tell my people, prophetically, that the whole thing wouldn't last the summer.

Less than three months later, on the sixth of August, it all ended when Todd Bentley, leader of the revival, departed and later was found to have been involved in serious moral compromises.

Looking to Spiritual Heroes

The first years of the Toronto revival saw a wonderful innocence in which ordinary people ministered the extraordinary power of God with no single, great leader on the platform doing it for everyone. It was the era of the body of Christ, and Jesus alone got to be the superstar.

In recent years, however, we've lost much of that early innocence as we have looked once more to the spiritual hero on the platform.

For many of us, what began with a selfless focus on delighting in the Lord has moved into seeking inner healing and other remedial "spiritual technologies" for all the wrong reasons. Do we want to prophesy for the Lord's sake, or just to be part of the supernatural experience or, worse, recognized?

This subtle shift in focus on so many fronts has created a growing sense of disappointment in an increasing number of people. The same sense of disappointment is gradually taking root in the so-called seeker-sensitive churches, which have not been part of the flow of revival. Even there, hearts are crying out, "There must be something more than this!"

The Self-Fulfillment Fallacy

I grew up in the great Charismatic Renewal that revived people in every major denomination and connected them for the first time with the living Christ. In movement after movement God poured the fine wine of heaven into a flawed cultural vessel that eventually leaked it away.

It's the vessel we baby boomers constructed so long ago. Both in and out of the church we created and catered to a culture focused on self-fulfillment, prosperity and having an experience. We became a "me generation," the opposite of a culture founded on the selflessness of the cross.

A Return to a Childlike Faith

The answer to our hunger comes not from a focus on receiving from God. A growing number of believers are coming to understand that the balm to soothe our growing ache focuses not on what we are getting or receiving but on what we're becoming.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly. John 1:12 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God." I see a developing movement focused on impartation of the nature of the Father in character, disposition, heart and spirit. It is a time of conformity to "the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). It has nothing to do with religious legalism or performance and everything to do with transformation of character from the inside out until we have the Father's heart as our own.

We're not living for an experience. We're living for oneness with our Father through our Savior Jesus Christ. There lies the substance we long for: intimacy with the Father through Jesus.

When people saw Jesus, they saw the Father. In the midst of accelerating numbers of scandals and moral failings involving prominent Christian leaders, isn't it high time people saw the nature of the Father revealed in His sons and daughters?

What are we becoming? Signs and wonders are not the goal. Well-being is not the focus but rather the outcome. Prosperity is not the pursuit but the gift of a loving Father and the fruit of integrity. Glory must not be the longing of our hearts. It is instead God's response to a people who have become intimate with Him at the level of heart and character.

Everywhere I go I hear it in ordinary believers and in a growing number of leaders and teachers. We're returning to the innocence, the wonder and the simplicity of the cross and the selfless nature of Jesus exhibited there. It's a freshened hunger—and out of hunger great movements are born.

R. Loren Sandford *is an author, musician and the senior pastor of New Song Church and Ministries in Denver, Colorado. He has a bachelor's degree in music and a master of divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary.*

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