

When the Presence of God Drives You to Your Knees

I had never been “under the power” before. Now, looking up at the ceiling of the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, I wondered if this first touch from God was the beginning of revival for me.

It was Nov. 24, 1994. Over 18 years before, Bill, my husband, and I had left Texas and had gone to pastor a church in Pittsburgh with little more than a promise from God that one day a “river” would flow into our lives and out the doors of our church, watering the desert around us.

But after 18 years all we had seen was desert and no water. We had been up and down on a roller coaster of hope and disappointment.

As a steady stream of would-be parishioners came and went, the fear of abandonment only increased our pain. Feelings of failure pervaded our thought lives as we reeled in the wake of church splits. Too many nights I lay awake wondering where we had gone wrong, why had we missed God’s blessing.

Then in 1994, in the aftermath of surgery, I began to suffer from hormone shock. Panic attacks assaulted my already fragile emotions as waves of fear rolled over me. The wilderness had done its work well. I had become desperate for Jesus.

I was too numb from bracing myself against the storms of ministry to hope that this experience on the floor in Toronto was the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s long-ago promise. For more than 20 years since first being filled with the Holy Spirit, I had seen no value in what was happening to me now. I suppose I was among those children who wanted God to touch them but never expected that He would.

I had never fallen or responded outwardly to the Holy Spirit. But now, to my surprise, I was “glued” to the floor, afraid to move for fear of disrupting the sweet sense of His presence.

A flicker of hope leaped within me, along with a new sense that Jesus really loved me after all. I repented of my unbelief, jumped off the banks of apathy and dived into the river. For the first time in nearly two decades, I let God touch me.

The Holy Spirit must have accompanied us home from Toronto. The following Wednesday night my husband called the 60 or so members of our fledgling congregation together.

To our amazement the Spirit’s presence began to hover over our tiny group. Spontaneously, people started to worship and weep as we told them what we had seen and experienced.

Bill promised to pray at the next service for anyone who wanted prayer. He had not been outwardly touched when he received prayer in Toronto. In fact, he had felt nothing.

He knew only what he had seen-hundreds of people, many of them pastors who had literally crawled to Toronto with the same sense of hopelessness we’d had, coming back to life with the hope that maybe, just maybe, this was real revival.

Bill kept his promise at the following service. As he reached out his hand to touch those who wanted prayer, he purposely touched them gently and then put his hands behind his back to avert any conclusions that this was somehow hyped by a heavy-handed preacher pushing would-be receivers.

The presence of God began to fall upon first one and then another of our members. These weren’t strangers, as in Toronto; these were people we had known for years.

Soon the floor of our church was covered with the bodies of people responding to God in the same way we had seen in

Toronto. Only none of them had ever seen Toronto! In fact, most of them had never had any outward manifestation in response to prayer before that day.

The outward signs were only the beginning. Lives began to change. Our once subdued children's pastor was instantly set free from a three-year depression as she drummed her feet on the floor and waved her arms in the air.

One of our congregation's most jovial members stood and wept loudly and openly as the Holy Spirit touched him sovereignly in a service, delivering him from a depression he had kept hidden from all of us.

Almost every member was being touched. Then healing miracles began to happen. Within a few weeks, five people had received documented healings confirmed by radiologists.

For me, however, the greatest miracle was taking place in my own once-cynical heart. I was falling in love with Jesus all over again.

Nearly four years had passed. I received prayer-mostly from ordinary people, not well-known ministers-hundreds of times in big and small churches flowing in this same river of blessing, and the sense of the Lord's presence has flourished in my life. Waves of panic have been washed away by wave after wave of His healing love.

Now the trickle has become a gushing river in my soul. It has carried me into dimensions of His love I never knew existed, as well as into foreign nations and even prisons.

In Spain I saw this river touch a Muslim man, hardened by the bruises of life. He began to shake as the Holy Spirit's presence sovereignly fell upon Him, and He turned immediately to Christ.

In England I watched a teen-age boy, unsaved and skeptical,

fall to the ground under the influence of God's power, then sit up and give his life to Jesus. In prisons, I've seen laughter and spiritual drunkenness overcome once-hardened sex offenders and murderers who have then turned to Christ.

I've seen widows healed of their searing grief. I've seen hopeless addicts gradually restored to lasting sobriety through repeated doses of His soaking love. I've seen deadly tumors disappear both suddenly and gradually under repeated touches of the Holy Spirit.

But while the river is blessing multitudes, others are wondering whether or not it is God. In the beginning I, too, was a skeptic. I ridiculed this precious outpouring, despising the laughter and all I still do not fully understand.

When I saw the river's powerful restorative effects, however, I was faced with a choice. Would there ever be any substitute for that final risky leap of faith?

No. So I jumped in.

I've given myself to practically every expression of His power and love. I've unashamedly made 22 trips from Pittsburgh to Toronto to enjoy the meetings. I've received "soaking prayer" over 500 times, allowing the Holy Spirit to touch me in practically every service I've attended, both here and abroad.

Isn't this extreme? Perhaps. But how would a dying man in a scorching desert react if he suddenly happened upon a pure, deep river? Would you consider his behavior extreme if he threw himself into the waters and began to drink?

Ultimately, I decided that there are no toxic levels of the Holy Spirit. Can anyone, after all, receive too much of Jesus' love, too much of His joy, too much of His peace? Can any of us receive too much of the Father's blessing?

Some ask, "Is it renewal-or revival?" I guess that depends on

how dead you were when it started!

Whatever it's called, I believe this is the beginning of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our generation. "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4, NKJV)-and the river is here!

Melinda Fish *is the author of several books, including The River Is Here (Chosen/Baker Books).*