

Darren Wilson: Filming the Spirit

The Holy Spirit doesn't follow the expectations of man. Darren Wilson learned that lesson firsthand when he spent eight months filming movements of the Holy Spirit for his new documentary, *Holy Ghost: Reborn*.

For instance, Wilson felt the Holy Spirit calling him to go to Brazil while filming. He didn't know why. He didn't know what he was supposed to do there, but he knew he needed to go to Brazil.

Soon the Holy Spirit brought him in contact with Nic and Rachel Billman, missionaries who started a Brazilian street church. Finally, a few days before the trip, Wilson felt the Holy Spirit tell him what he needed to do. They needed to hold a banquet for the prostitutes in their city—to show them the love of God—and sing a song of worship. If they did that, God said, “I will release my Spirit upon these women.”

Darren expected the next great Toronto Revival to take place. But Nic told him, “The Holy Spirit, when He comes, will usually come in the opposite way that you expect Him.”

Wilson said that quote stuck with him long after filming. In a way, it encapsulated an entire year's journey.

These sorts of situations may seem unusual, but Wilson has a rather unusual job. He's a former college professor who became a Christian documentarian. He takes the old film adage “Show, don't tell” and applies it to matters of faith. He teams up with Spirit-filled Christians like Todd White and Robby Dawkins, goes wherever the Spirit leads them, lets his faith shine and then films it.

After eight months of filming his *Holy Ghost* project, Wilson

discovered he had a surplus of incredible footage. He opted to release the documentary in two parts, *Holy Ghost* and *Holy Ghost: Reborn*. Last year, he released *Holy Ghost* to both rave reviews and intense controversy.

In August, Wilson premiered the second part, *Holy Ghost: Reborn*, in 10 cities across the country. Throughout September, churches had the opportunity to exclusively screen the film for themselves. The film officially released on DVD Oct. 20.

From Smoke to Spirit

Not long ago, Wilson would have found following the Spirit on unknown missions around the globe to be ludicrous. When he made his first documentary in 2007, his faith was on shaky territory. Though he professed to love God, Wilson admits that he didn't trust, like or really even know Him. His theology was even shakier.

"My view of the Trinity was very simple," Wilson explains. "Jesus was the cool big brother, the only one of the Trinity you can relate to. ... Then you've got the Father, who just wants to pound you. He's always angry, super-distant, sends His kid to do stuff because He doesn't want to get His hands dirty, and He's always angry at me. If it wasn't for Jesus (saying to the Father), 'Don't hit him!', He'd go into a fit."

Wilson admitted to being scared of God for a long time. He was afraid of engaging with his faith because he was afraid of who was on the other side. He says that even his encounters with Jesus were impersonal—likable Bible verses on a page that lacked any life.

Working on early films like *Finger of God* and *Father of Lights* allowed Wilson to interact with both Father and Son on a personal level. Yet his understanding of the Holy Spirit remained elusive. Wilson laughs when he recalls that, prior to *Holy Ghost*, he thought the Holy Spirit was "like smoke. What do I do with Him? I can't understand (Him) at all."

The *Holy Ghost* project changed all of that, because—for Wilson—the Holy Spirit finally became a person.

“Scripture tells us you can grieve the Holy Spirit,” he says. “You can make Him upset. You can make Him cry. He’s described as being like a dove. Well, the dove is one of the most skittish birds in the world. ... The Holy Spirit is very interesting to me because He’s very timid and shy at points but, at the same time, He’ll break down some walls. He’s not afraid of anything.”

That dual nature is explored in both *Holy Ghost* films. The first film focused on the powerful, wall-breaking aspects of the Holy Spirit. While the first film was controversial, *Reborn* focuses on the gentle, heart-transforming aspects of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelist Todd White, who joined Wilson for some of his *Holy Ghost* travels, says that having a relationship with the Spirit is absolutely crucial for believers.

“The Holy Spirit is not an essence,” White says. “He’s not a wisp. He’s not a vapor. He’s my best friend. And He’s with me wherever I go. We need to be able to walk and be led by the Spirit, but be grounded in the truth of God’s Word, so that we can destroy hell for a living.”

That relationship is key for believers who want to unlock the supernatural, as Wilson would discover during his missions abroad.

Experiencing the Supernatural

At the Spirit’s prompting, Wilson invited evangelist Robby Dawkins and Pastor Bryan Schwartz to accompany him to Thessaloniki, Greece. The trio were evangelizing on the streets at midnight when they met a couple of girls. One girl, Vivian, had an injured arm. Dawkins looked at the girl and said firmly, “Jesus is about to heal you right now so that

you'll know that He wants a relationship with you."

Dawkins says that it was not a prophetic word; rather, he was emulating the model of Jesus and His disciples, who always commanded the body to heal. He says it's always risky to command healing that way, but that Christians have a responsibility to be bold in their faith, regardless of the consequences.

"Too much of the church has been about self-preservation. Self-preservation is the death of faith," Dawkins says. "Jesus said you must be willing to lose your life. Many of us are willing to take a bullet to the head for Jesus. We just don't want to look stupid for Him."

Emboldened, Dawkins and Schwartz prayed over Vivian several times. The pain began to vanish right away. Within 30 minutes she had full use of her arm again.

Schwartz remembers clearly her amazement: "You could see the impact. She was like, 'Why wouldn't everybody want to hear this good news?'"

Wilson hasn't only been filming people who are following the Holy Spirit; his films have prompted many viewers to follow the Spirit themselves.

Schwartz, pastor of Renovation Church in Lafayette, Colorado, says he could see the impact on his congregation: "From the moment we showed *Finger of God*, some pretty radical stuff started happening in our church in Denver."

Miracles, healings and the supernatural are available to every believer through the Holy Spirit. But are they growing more frequent? Many Christians have observed a rise in supernatural activity in recent years.

Wilson agrees with them—though he doesn't necessarily think the increase heralds the end times. He believes there's a different reason for this rise in supernatural activity: "As

wickedness and evil elevate, the spirit and power of God is going to elevate too. ... God is pouring out His Spirit in unprecedented ways because we're going to need it."

Bill Johnson, senior pastor of Bethel Church and a collaborator on *Holy Ghost: Reborn*, agrees that recent times have seen a darkening of the spiritual landscape. Some suspect the end times may be upon us. But Johnson doesn't think believers should be scared of the darkness. In fact, he sees it as an opportunity.

"Some of the darkest times are supposed to be our greatest times," Johnson says. "So if we just feed ourselves on the bad things that are happening, man, it's easy to get depressed and just want to go to heaven. But if we recognize the hour that God has given us and the opportunity ... this is just a brilliant time to be alive and be able to serve people."

White takes the same approach in ministry. He's no stranger to darkness and doesn't fear it. When the *Holy Ghost: Reborn* production crew came across a mob marching at the Vatican, White jumped right in and started ministering to the crowd.

"Jesus wouldn't be inside of places that are all rosy and quiet and peaceful," White says. "Jesus would go into a real loud and crazy situation and would bring peace because He's the Prince of Peace."

So whether the world is in the end times or not, believers should stay positive and peaceful, holding onto the promise of Romans 15:13: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

The Future of Faith Films

Holy Ghost is Darren Wilson's most successful film to date, but the documentary also attracted significant controversy upon release.

"Holy Ghost, without question, is the most controversial movie I've ever made," Wilson says. *"There's no neutral."*

He thought hardline cessationists would simply avoid the film, but they saw it—and attacked it. YouTube videos, even longer than *Holy Ghost*, are dedicated to disproving every frame of the documentary. Wilson simply sighs and says to those video makers, "You have way too much time on your hands."

Even so, he's tried to weigh their criticism and address a few of their concerns in *Holy Ghost: Reborn*. Rather than dazzling the audience with the supernatural, *Holy Ghost: Reborn* examines how and why the Spirit can change lives.

At the same time, Wilson knows that the message has to take a back seat to the viewer experience. Otherwise, he's not making a film; he's making a sermon with visual aids.

"The biggest problem with Christian films is it's all about the message," Wilson explains. "The message is No. 1 and the entertainment is second or third, where in reality if you're in the entertainment business, entertainment has to be your top priority. Otherwise, no one's going to stick around long enough to hear your message."

He says that goal manifests in the small details of his craft. Pacing, music, scriptwriting, cinematography and the balance of humor and heart can make the difference between entertainment and boredom.

As more Christians reach Hollywood and start making feature films, Wilson has seen improvement. More importantly, he's seen genuine storytelling and emotional honesty in recent Christian films.

"There's something in there that reaches people because they can relate to the honesty of the story and storytelling," Wilson says. "If you just be honest, people will forgive you. They'll forgive your poor technique if you're telling a good

story.”

All of his storytelling skills and emotional honesty will be put to the test with his next film. Wilson’s next as-yet-untitled project will tackle the issue of homosexuality. He already knows that the controversy from that project will dwarf anything he heard about *Holy Ghost*.

Despite the controversy, Wilson knows the topic is incredibly important for the church.

“Do you believe that Jesus is who He says He is and the Bible is true? Because if you do, we have to stand up and we have to stand up in love,” Wilson says.

The Opposite Way

After much planning, the night of the prostitutes’ banquet in Brazil arrived. The song of worship started. The cameras were rolling. Wilson waited for people to start dancing and writhing and speaking in tongues.

None of that happened. Instead, the women started to cry all around him.

Wilson was taken aback, but Nic explained how it made perfect sense: “Do you remember what I said yesterday? How He’ll come in the opposite of what you’re expecting? ... Think about what love has been for these women. It’s violent. It’s forceful. It makes them do things they don’t want to do.”

So the Holy Spirit embodied a different kind of love: gentle, personal and kind. He comforted them. Two of the women were so moved by God’s love that they left prostitution for good and now work alongside the Billmans’ ministry.

Even after months of filming the Spirit’s activity, Wilson was amazed once again by God’s power: “What these women do is the most intimate act, but it’s also the least intimate act. Yet He comes and hits them with true intimacy. It blew my mind all

over again.”

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Catch a sneak peek of the Spirit ministering to prostitutes and murderers in Brazil in a trailer of *Holy Ghost: Reborn* at [.](#)