

Learn the Truth About This Life-Changing Ministry

Jesus came to set the captives free, and believers have been casting out demons for thousands of years with two words backed by the power in His name: “Come out.” But one revelation of modern-day deliverance ministry is driving debates in the 21st-century church. It’s called Sozo—based on a Greek word used in the Bible that means “to save, heal, preserve and rescue,” according to *Strong’s Concordance*.

We first see the word *sozo* in Matthew’s Gospel when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear a son and call His name Jesus, and He will “save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). When the Bible refers to Jesus saving people, *sozo* is frequently the word used.

But *sozo* also connotes inner and external healing. The Greek word is found in Scriptures related to God’s healing power, like the woman with the issue of blood who crawled through a crowd to touch the hem of Christ’s garments (Matt. 9:21-22) and the demonized man Jesus set free (Luke 8:36).

Despite the biblical backing, many Sozo practitioners are getting hate mail and accused of spreading New Age deceptions with bad theology—but they’ve also witnessed miraculous results in the lives of believers who were once bound by darkness.

“Sozo is a listening prayer ministry, where we are trained to facilitate an encounter with God for the purpose of healing past wounds, discovering lies or deceptions that hinder you in your faith and bringing you into the truth,” says Bill Kline, Bethel Sozo’s regional director for the Rocky Mountain Region. “We rely upon the Holy Spirit to lead us in every Sozo. Consequently, no two Sozos will be exactly identical or the

same. Since Sozo is not a procedure, and it's not therapy and it's not counseling, we can only describe it as a framework in which we operate with the Holy Spirit."

Why Sozo Works

The average Sozo is an hour and a half to three hours. During a session, the subject is encouraged to connect with members of the Godhead and to deal with any emotional and spiritual wounds. Counseling tools, such as the "Father Ladder" or "Four Doors," may be introduced to get the process started. A person may have one or two follow-up sessions, but Sozo does not use regular meetings over a long period of time.

The Father Ladder helps identify how the subject senses, feels or hears each person of the Godhead, many ideas of which were learned in childhood. The Four Doors is used to find out where access occurred. Once the door has been discovered, forgiveness can be released and the doors closed. The most common doors, according to practitioners, are related to fear, hatred, sexual sin and the occult. Another tool, Presenting Jesus, is used to bring healing from wounds and lies that occurred in one's memories so truth can replace the errors. And the "Wall" is a structure a person has built to protect himself or has allowed another to build for protection.

"There is no typical Sozo session," says Teresa Liebscher, Sozo ministry leader at Bethel Church. "If the person has at least some sort of connection to the Godhead, you could start there and see what wounds they have, what lies they believe. If they don't see or hear Him, OK; most people start with Father Ladder to see what wounds stop that connection from happening."

Kline says at times this is easier said than done.

"The challenge for me personally is not relying on the training and trying to make the training work," he says. "Putting it another way, it's to allow the Lord to do what He

does and not get in His way. It is such a natural human tendency to take training and apply it in a procedural step-by-step kind of way.”

As Liebscher sees it, this lack of structure can make some uneasy or skeptical, but it’s a way to ensure Holy Spirit’s guidance remains the priority. While many deliverance ministries focus on casting out demons or grandiose manifestations, a focus on God rather than demonic forces marks Sozo.

“The reason I love Sozo so much is because it’s gentle, honoring and effective,” says Randy Hill, founding pastor of The Summit Church in Wylie, Texas, and Sozo regional director for Northern Texas and Oklahoma. “It doesn’t demonstrate or show the enemy’s power, it glorifies God. There are not a lot of theatrics, not a lot of acknowledgment of the enemy; it’s all focused on the Lord. We believe what you focus on you become.”

Kline says, quite simply, Sozo works because it creates an encounter with Jesus—and no one has ever walked away from an encounter with Jesus unchanged.

“We should expect that all the time because He’s the same yesterday, today and forever,” Kline says. “A very small percentage of people walked away trying to figure out how to kill Him, but most people walked away yelling and leaping and praising God. That’s what typically happens after Sozo.”

Consider the story of a woman named Anna (the names of Sozo clients have been fictionalized to protect their privacy). Anna was a physical science teacher who drove into Texas from a neighboring state for a Sozo session. She was withdrawn and reticent to change. Through years of teaching, she never altered her curriculum in the slightest because she lacked confidence she could do anything different or more.

Anna met with Hill, who conducted a Sozo with her. The result:

She says she left feeling spiritually changed inside. This change manifested soon afterward during a staff meeting with her school's superintendent. As Anna tells it, the superintendent wanted to expand the school's science program to include a marine biology course. Even though Anna knew nothing about marine biology, she raised her hand and volunteered to handle the new course.

Afterward, she wondered, "Who is this speaking those words?" Surely it wasn't the same woman who had been scared of change for years. She developed the new course within months, and not only did it succeed at her school—the program was expanded and implemented at schools around the country. Anna began even leaving the classroom and taking students on field trips.

"I was never a leader, but the reason I wasn't a leader was because I was believing the lies," Anna told Hill. "Once the lies were broken, I was freed."

Myths and Misconceptions About Sozo

Many misunderstand Sozo ministry. Indeed, you can find pages of internet articles defaming Sozo ministry. Dissenters claim Sozo misrepresents Scripture and promotes the New Age and occultism. Others, seemingly well-intentioned, have questioned where the word sozo appears in the Bible and wonder whether the ministry is theologically sound. But when Sozo is exercised correctly, practitioners insist it can deliver people from spiritual bondage with dignity.

Liebscher has been doing Sozo since 1997 and is familiar with the many criticisms leveled against her work. She says she completely understands where these concerns are coming from—and knows Sozo may not be for everyone.

"What I tell people who write me and voice a lot of this stuff is: 'I understand what you're saying, and if you're uncomfortable with the ministry, please don't do the ministry,'" Liebscher says. "'We want you to be comfortable

with what you're doing, and we think Father God wants you to be comfortable. If this makes you uncomfortable, there are many other great inner healing ministries out there that have lots of fruit and can meet those people's needs.'"

Perhaps the most common myth about Sozo ministry is that it's based on New Age practices. But Liebscher says the critics have it backward: "The New Age stuff stole all of that from Christianity anyway, so a lot of what is going to be happening here with Bethel Sozo and even in Bethel Church is probably going to be viewed—is viewed—as New Age stuff or too close to New Age stuff."

In reality, the resemblance between Sozo and New Age is superficial at best. For one, many of the so-called similarities—visualization practices or guided imagery—are completely absent from true Sozo sessions.

"A big misconception and myth is that we are guiding the images and we're telling them what to see and what to say and what to do. That is definitely not true. We're really working at making that connection to the Holy Spirit so the person is seeing what's going on and we're not," Liebscher says. "There are times that people walked out of our office and didn't have that connection. It would be easy for me to do my own agenda—let me tell you what to see or do, let me tell you what God is saying—but we want you to hear and see. Using our tools, we can help that process, but I'm not here to tell you what the Godhead is saying about you or to you."

Kline says that if anyone is seeing images during a Sozo session, the Holy Spirit must be doing it. Without firsthand experience, she says, the criticism is not just.

"If you haven't had a Sozo, how can you say we're guilty of misusing visualization?" she explains. "We don't use visualization; the Holy Spirit does. He uses your mind to show you things. You have symbols in your brain, things you carry

in your soul that symbolize God or masculinity or femininity, and the Holy Spirit is in the process of sanctifying your symbols and maybe even clearing up some you shouldn't have. We don't ask people to be filled with this image or that. That is just not part of Sozo. I would never do anything like that."

Practitioners argue many of the misconceptions stem from third parties who use the "Sozo" name but without any adherence to the principles of Bethel Sozo. These third parties, often founded in foreign countries that lack an organized Sozo program, can do good work but are also difficult to monitor for doctrinal accuracy. Hill says these programs have been urged not to call themselves "Bethel Sozo" programs but to no avail.

"One reason people attack it is because people haven't experienced it, and we have a natural tendency to be afraid of something we don't understand," Kline says. "It is such a different approach to deliverance, and we don't understand it. Most of us in the charismatic world believe deliverance must be: We shout, we call on the name of Jesus, and we call that demon out. No, no, no! Salvation Sozo is focused on the Lord, not demons, because it's what salvation is all about. I did a lot of screaming at demons in the '80s and '90s to no avail. I'd love to go back and apologize to (the people I tried to deliver) if I could."

Or as Hill puts it, "The greatest enemy of the next move of God is the last move of God."

Finally, some believers are simply wary of a potentially extrabiblical ministry. Liebscher says that stems from a misunderstanding of the Greek word *sozo*; Jesus practiced *sozo* ministry to people around Him throughout the New Testament.

"A lot of people are really concerned they don't see the Sozo process in the New Testament," Liebscher says. "But the concept of *sozo*—being saved, healed and delivered—in and of

itself is a great word study. In the 10 lepers story, nine lepers were healed. One of them was made *sozo*—he was made whole.”

What Sozo Does and Doesn't Do

Kline stresses Sozo is not an instant fix and says people who are on medication for health problems should not stop taking their prescription simply because they experienced a Sozo. While healing may come, the process is often gradual.

“The challenge is there are so many hurting people who just want to come in and have you wave a magic wand over them or snap your fingers and just make everything go away,” Liebscher says. “For some people, it’s just so hard for them to understand and receive Father God’s truth. There are times when people just want a magic wand, and I don’t carry a magic wand. It’s up to the four of them—the client and the three members of the Godhead.”

Likewise, Hill says no one can receive Sozo ministry against their will; if the client has no interest in speaking with God, then the session is doomed to fail.

“Sometimes people are encouraged to come get a Sozo by someone else,” Hill says. “They don’t understand it or they’re just going in to placate a friend, spouse or parent. And a lot of times, for those individuals, it’s a challenge because they don’t want to be there and they don’t want help.”

All of the controversy can drown out the success stories, but Sozo ministry would not be gaining momentum after nearly 20 years without spiritual victories. According to Sozo practitioners, physical bodies have been healed of wounds; people have been freed of emotional baggage from sexual assault; and old men from foreign countries where fathers are distant and uninvolved have wept at connecting with their heavenly Father for the first time.

One Sozo attendee, Erik, said, “I feel like the Lord did a ‘house cleaning’ inside of me. I knew I needed to deal with some things—like worrying about my kids—but I had been unsuccessful in dealing with them on my own. I think the Sozo session helped me truly place my trust in God and break partnership with the fear and worry that have been plaguing me.”

And while training Sozo teams in Taiwan, Hill says he got to witness a life transformation in action.

“I had a young lady come there who had been molested by every male in her family,” Hill says. “She was bound up by that. After Sozo, she’s grown. She leads the youth group there. She’s been transformed. She goes to Bible school, and she is a pastor on staff.”

Through Sozo, Kline says he’s been privileged to help others grow in Christ—and to grow himself. Before joining Bethel Sozo, he was on the verge of quitting ministry. Now he’s more on fire for Christ than ever before.

“I have found what I was born for,” Kline says. “I absolutely love doing Sozo. I love seeing Jesus work and set His people free, doing what He came to the planet to do. I am so humbled and honored to be a part of that. ... I am so confident in what God does and can do. If He told me to charge hell with a water pistol, I’d do it. I am just on top of the world and excited about what’s coming the next day: ‘Who am I going to be privileged to see set free?’”

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Matt Moore had a disease that would leave him unable to walk. God intervened. Learn more about the Sozo movement at .