

Are We There Yet?

I DON'T CARE TOO MUCH for birthdays-at least not mine. They used to be fun, but today they are harsh reminders that I don't look 30 anymore. Time has passed. The carefree days of youth have been replaced by the pressures of adulthood. We spend our younger years craving maturity, but when we attain it we suddenly realize we don't want the gray hair, the slowed metabolism or the aches and pains that come with age.

We can exercise, eat healthy food and take vitamins, but we can't stay looking like 20-somethings forever. We must accept the wrinkles and the receding hairlines with grace. We have to grow up.

Back in the days of Moses (long before plastic surgery, Bowflex machines or Viagra), the people of Israel rebelled against maturity. Even though the Lord parted the Red Sea to rescue them from Pharaoh, and even after He sent daily manna to teach them to trust, they refused to embrace the new season. They longed for Egypt because it was easier. ("Hey, slavery isn't so bad. There's no responsibility!")

God wanted to take them to a land of promise-a land they were to rule like adults-but they rejected the offer. Instead they chose to doubt God's goodness. They whined like preschoolers and threw themselves into sexual immorality as if they were still teenagers with raging hormones.

As a result of their immaturity they were stranded in the desert for 40 years-wandering in a circle and going nowhere. Those who refused to embrace the responsibilities of walking

with God never saw the lush vineyards of Canaan. The unbelieving rebels were buried in forgotten graves-and if you visit that desert today you won't find any trace of them. They faded into sad insignificance.

The Israelite pilgrims started out with a big charismatic bang. When they left Egypt, Miriam led them in boisterous praise. They clapped, shook tambourines and danced while waving colorful banners. They witnessed miracles. But in the end, an entire generation wandered into oblivion. And they didn't have any photographs, videos or musical recordings to help them remember the good old days.

I wonder how much their story resembles ours.

Those of us who call ourselves charismatics started out with a big bang, too. Back in the 1970s many of us found the freedom of the Holy Spirit and left our staid, traditional churches to discover vibrant faith. We danced. We clapped. We saw miracles. We learned to prosper. But sometime in the mid-1980s some charismatics began to rebel against maturity.

God began to make it clear that the Spirit-filled life is not just about shouting hallelujah and swooning at the altar. We realized we were going to have to get off the floor, develop character, grow our faith and use it to fight devils. We faced the fact that God is looking for a company of mature adults-not whiny, self centered kids-who can transform nations with the gospel.

As we celebrate 30 years of charismatic history with this special anniversary issue of Charisma, I want to make an important announcement: The charismatic movement is over. It

was glorious, but it is time to move on. Those of us who have been drifting in the wilderness must cross the Jordan. We have been wanderers, but we must become warriors.

Charismatic renewal was a glorious phase that introduced us to so much revelation about the Holy Spirit, but we can't camp in that place forever. The goose bumps and the hoopla of the past won't help us on the battlefields of the 21st century, where Jesus' followers must challenge and crush global demonic strongholds.

We are entering a new season—a time of apostolic conquest. I suspect some charismatic people will resist the challenge and stay behind, playing their favorite oldies from 1978 and yearning for the days of manna and quail.

But God's glory cloud has moved, and last year's manna is moldy. Jesus is invading the secular culture, and He is mustering an army of young believers (along with the faithful Calebs and Joshuas) who smell war. Let's run to the front lines and join them.

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