

Don't Slam the Door on the Holy Spirit—Invite Him to Move!

This past weekend I preached at a growing church in Lake City, Florida, about an hour west of Jacksonville. For several weeks the pastor, Chris Jones, has been taking his congregation through the book of Acts—chapter by chapter—because he wants to create a culture of hunger for the Holy Spirit.

Jones is aware that many new people have joined his church who come from various denominational backgrounds. Some have never had the personal experience of an infilling of the Holy Spirit, or they have never seen the gifts of the Spirit in operation. He invited me to share my testimony of how I received the baptism of the Spirit when I was a teenager and to pray for people to go deeper in the Spirit's power.

I'm thankful that this young pastor wants his people to go beyond shallow Christianity. Many church leaders today are afraid to allow the Holy Spirit to move. We've put the Spirit in a box. But because Jones encouraged his people to break free from fears or religious traditions, everyone in the Lake City church seemed wholeheartedly open. At a special Sunday night service, dozens of people came to the altar to receive the baptism of the Spirit, while others wanted a fresh refilling.

This should not be a once-in-a-decade event. People need the reality of God's power. My prayer lately has been that we will stop being so worried about how the Holy Spirit will show up or what He might do. Do you want this freedom in your church? Here are six practical things you can do to open the door wider for a revival of Pentecost:

Teach about the Holy Spirit often. The Holy Spirit was rarely

mentioned in the church I grew up in, so we never expected Him to do anything. Yet the Bible is full of stories of people who did supernatural things because the Spirit worked through them. We must stop ignoring Him. Invite the Spirit to move and speak in your church by giving Him the place He deserves.

Leave room for altar ministry. A church without altar ministry is like a hospital without a maternity ward. New life often begins at the altar—whether it is salvation, healing, prophetic ministry or the impartation of a fresh anointing. Today many churches that offer multiple services often skimp on ministry time because they are focused on herding the 10 a.m. group out of the sanctuary to get ready for the 11:30 a.m. crowd. Multiple services are fine, but we are crowding the Spirit out of the church if we don't schedule time for people to respond to the message. Don't be in such a hurry to end a service that you quench the Spirit.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches stopped having altar ministry because of the need for social distancing. But God is not limited by a virus! I've seen healings happen recently when I prayed for people on a Zoom call. And the most dramatic miracle I ever witnessed in my own ministry happened when I prayed from the stage for a woman in the back of the auditorium! You do not have to touch a person physically to see a miracle.

Have small groups where people can use the Holy Spirit's gifts. It's not practical for everyone to prophesy or exercise other spiritual gifts in a large congregation. But if people are plugged into small groups, there will be opportunities for believers to encourage one another in supernatural ways. And people are more comfortable stepping out in faith in front of 10 people than they are in front of 3,000.

Train people in prophecy, healing and Spirit-led ministry. Many pastors clamp down on spiritual gifts because a few fanatics with inflated egos pulled the church into weirdness.

But in our effort to protect the sheep from chaos, let's not swing the pendulum to the other extreme by forbidding the gifts of the Spirit. Paul told the Corinthians, "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:39b), and he told the Thessalonians, "Do not despise prophecies" (1 Thess. 5:20). If we shut down the gifts, we are essentially telling God that we can run our meetings without Him.

Expose your church to healthy ministries that flow in the anointing. God not only gave the church pastors—He also gave evangelists, teachers, prophets and apostles (see Eph. 4:11). Yet many churches today know only pastors. We need life-giving traveling ministries because God sends them to win new converts, heal the sick, unleash prophetic power, train leaders and impart new vision in congregations. We should not be afraid to open our pulpits to the ministry gifts God has raised up to bless the church.

Give time for testimonies of God's supernatural power. Nothing raises the faith level of a congregation like someone's raw experience with God. If a man was healed this week in your church, let him shout it from the housetops. If an infertile couple got pregnant, let them tell about the goodness of God. If a teenager led another student to Jesus, let him share his story. Testimonies trigger a holy expectation in everyone—and God gets the glory for His miracles.

Pentecost is May 23. As you prepare for that big day on the church calendar, lift your hands in surrender and pray, "Holy Spirit, come." Instead of being afraid of what the Spirit might disrupt or whom He might offend, let's rather fear what our churches would be like without Him. Let's fling open the doors and allow the Spirit to have His way. {eo}

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