

Don't Underestimate the Supernatural Power of Conversion

The

testimony of a former drug dealer from Ohio reminded me this week of the priority of evangelism.



Shannon McNeal: A total transformation

When my new

friend Shannon McNeal was just a little boy, his older brothers put him in a washing machine, turned on the water and sat on the lid to trap him inside.

Another time they taped him in a cardboard box and threw it down a flight of stairs to see if he would survive. And once they put him in the kitchen oven, turned it on and blocked the door with a chair while he screamed.

Shannon's

mom wasn't around to stop the brutality. A single mother, she worked long hours at a Ford automobile plant in Lorain, Ohio, near Cleveland. Her husband had walked out on the family when Shannon was 2, leaving the three fatherless boys to fend for themselves.

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and the
trendiest prophecies—that we forget true conversion is the
greatest miracle on
the planet.”

Without any
boundaries, Shannon’s brothers began dealing drugs as young
teens, and they
threw wild parties in their house while their mother was at
the factory. Then a
male relative exposed the boys to hardcore pornography. When
Shannon was just 6 he was forced to watch pornographic videos;
before he had even reached
puberty he was expected to act out what he had seen with
neighborhood girls.

By the time
Shannon became a teenager he was drinking, abusing drugs and
hanging out with
members of the Bloods, a popular gang. The pain and confusion
caused by abuse
turned him into a ticking time bomb. He was angry and
insecure. It was only a
matter of time before he would get in trouble with the law. He
finally landed
in a state penitentiary for a drug-related crime.

As is often
the case for guys like Shannon, the abuse that marred his
childhood continued
while he was in prison. Because he is bi-racial (his
mother is white, his father black), he was caught in the
middle of the fray
when racial tensions flared. During his 18-month
incarceration, a fight erupted
and a white inmate stabbed him in the back with a toothbrush
that had been
sharpened into a weapon.

Amazingly,
Shannon survived the childhood abuse, the gang violence, the prison fights
and—a few years later—two serious car wrecks, one that sent his head through a
truck's windshield. After his last brush with death, a friend invited him to Freedom House in 2006.

Everything
changed.

“I walked
into that church and I felt love, and I knew that was what I had been looking
for,” Shannon told me last weekend. His wounded heart was healed—not only by
the message of Jesus but also by the love of the Christians who didn't judge
him for his mistakes.

“I had tried
everything else to fix the person I was destroying,” Shannon said, “so I
decided to give the ‘God thing’ a chance. I slowly started realizing God's love
through the people from my church that He led me to, and through the drastic
changes He was making in me.”

I spent time with Shannon
this past weekend when I was preaching at Freedom House, a church located in Amherst, Ohio. He's happily married now, he's starting a
business and is beginning to mentor troubled youth. He and his wife have a
young daughter. Every door to his past is closed. He's forgiven the
people who abused, neglected or rejected him. He's a totally

new man with a
bright smile, a servant's heart and a loving nature.

I'm sharing
Shannon's story because many of us in so-called Spirit-filled
churches have
forgotten the raw power of conversion. Sometimes we get so
caught up in the
hoopla of charismatic gifts—chasing the latest glittering
manifestations and
the trendiest prophecies—that we forget true conversion is the
greatest miracle
on the planet. Jesus Himself told us that it is only by the
power of the Holy
Spirit that someone can be born again (see John 3:5-7).

How I wish
we pursued that miracle as passionately as we chased glory
dust or goose bumps
or spooky revelations. The devil is perfectly happy when we
become preoccupied
with spiritual sideshows. As long as he can lure us away from
our primary
mission of evangelism and discipleship, we really aren't a
threat to his
kingdom. But when people like Shannon McNeal are translated
from darkness to
light, their testimony sends hell into a panic.

Rescuing the
lost has always been our mandate, but too often distractions
pull us so far off
course that we become religiously busy but spiritually
fruitless. Of all the
manifestations of the Holy Spirit available to us, conversion
is the most
precious—and the most powerful. In this fresh season of
renewal I pray you and

your church will reclaim it.

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