

JOHN WIMBER: Beer-Drinking Musician Underwent Life Transformation

John Wimber's story represents the quintessential testimony of a changed life. A beer-drinking professional musician before his 1963 conversion, Wimber went on to lead hundreds to Christ and teach numerous Bible studies.

While Wimber formed the house church that became the Anaheim (California) Vineyard, the Association of Vineyard Churches remained a modest handful of congregations until he assumed its leadership in 1982. Today there are more than 1,500 Vineyard congregations worldwide, about a third in the U.S.

The association maintains an international publishing arm, with its worship songs helping thousands of churches experience intimacy with God.

A one-time Quaker whose pastor tried to discourage him from speaking in tongues after his Holy Spirit baptism, Wimber later taught a course on signs and wonders at Fuller Theological Seminary.

This advocacy stemmed from his belief that such gifts as healing, prophecy and tongues can transform people and should be a natural part of life.

Wimber emphasized that these powerful gifts should occur in the context of evangelism, which Pentecostal historian Charlie Self sees as the most significant aspect of Wimber's legacy. "I would describe him as both an evangelist and a pastor with theological depth," says Self, a professor at Evangel University. "Wimber said if the church is on her mission, she should expect miracles to accompany that mission. It wasn't that everything he did was new; it's that he made it

conversational. He made it part of the church.” Ironically, although Wimber believed in supernatural healing, he died of cancer in 1997 at 63. However, Self says his passing helped many charismatics acknowledge they have to be open to both joy and lament.—*Ken Walker*