

The Radical Revivalists

After almost 15 years, Bethel Church continues to thrive amid a revival culture that has produced not only countless miracles, but also a youth movement now expanding into stadiums

Melissa Roberts

can't remember a time when it wasn't revival at Bethel Church. Since she was 4 years old, the only kind of church gatherings she's known have featured an atmosphere of extreme spiritual hunger, passionate worship and supernatural encounters with God.

The now-16-year-old barely flinches when worshippers collapse around her during a service as the Holy Spirit spontaneously moves without anyone touching anyone. She hardly bats an eye anymore when she hears of people being declared cancer-free the week after she laid hands on them. And recently she didn't gawk in amazement as a massive tumor disappeared from a baby's forehead while she prayed for healing.

It's not that Roberts isn't excited by seeing God's power on display—far from it. It's just that in Redding, Calif., the unusual has become the norm. Roberts is among Bethel's first generation to grow up entirely in this revival atmosphere.

"This is all I've ever known," she says.

"It's normal to me. When other people are reacting to it, I just wonder

why they're so amazed because I'm so used to it."

For outsiders, however, it's hard to not

be astounded at how God has established a culture of revival at Bethel

that's lasted almost 15 years and transformed a small-town, former

Assemblies of God church into a global hub of "radical revivalists."

Today, at least among Roberts' age group, the revival's fruit is on full

display via Jesus Culture—an exploding youth movement that serves as a

microcosm of the bigger Bethel story.

The Burning Ones

Bethel's leaders dream big. In this

revival setting, it's hard not to, given the regularity with which God

has turned visions into reality here and the empowering culture senior

leader Bill Johnson has created. But sometimes, even Jesus Culture

director Banning Liebscher has to shake his head at how God has

exponentially grown what began as a simple youth ministry.

First launched in 1999 as a local youth

conference, Jesus Culture gradually expanded over the next few years

through its blend of soul-searing worship music and signs-and-wonders

street ministry. The concept was relatively simple: Provide a setting

where teens burning with passion for God wouldn't just encounter Him through worship, but would also be empowered to release miracles in their local communities.

But then a video of Jesus Culture worship leader Kim Walker-Smith singing "How He Loves Us" showed up on YouTube, and almost 5 million views later, Jesus Culture became *the* new worship scene. Suddenly pastors and worship leaders around the world were referencing it as a new model for how worship should look. The events began to grow exponentially in size, as did the sales from live recordings such as *We Cry Out*, *Your Love Never Fails*, *Consumed* and the most recent, *Come Away*.

Other ministries thrust into such a level of instant recognition could've easily altered their primary mission to accommodate the growing structure. But for Liebscher, Jesus Culture's vision of raising healing revivalists has been the same since Day One—and unless God drastically redirects the ministry, will stay that way for years to come.

"I'm not interested in just being a worship movement," he says. "I'm not interested in just doing one-night worship events or selling albums. We love doing all that; we love seeing people get lit up for Jesus through worship, but that's not it. ... The

Lord's given us a mandate to raise up emerging leaders who will be in every part of society—media, education, politics, business—to find them now and to walk with them for the next 30 years."

Liebscher believes God is marking an unprecedented number of young revivalists today who will fully abandon themselves for the cause of establishing His kingdom: "They're finding out: 'This is what I was born for; I'll give my entire life for this. Jesus is to be given the nations of the earth, and I'm going to give everything to see the nations transformed for Him.'"

The recent surge of youth drawn to the movement attests to this rise of called-out revivalists. As a result, Jesus Culture will gather in a stadium for the first time later this summer. The Aug. 3-5 conference at Allstate Arena in Chicago fulfills a vision Liebscher and others—including prophets such as Lou Engle and Cindy Jacobs who have served as the movement's mothers and fathers—have had of stadiums overflowing with revivalists burning with the Holy Spirit's fire. Engle even called Jesus Culture the second wave of The Call, which in 2000 drew almost 400,000 teenagers and young adults to Washington, D.C.

"It's not just people showing up to hear some good music," says Chris Quilala, a Jesus Culture worship

leader

who's been part of the movement since he was 13. "We want people to encounter God's presence obviously in worship, but we also want them to really taste what signs and wonders are and realize that God wants to touch them—and that they can take this out in their cities."

Risky Business



As monumental as the August event may be for Jesus Culture, it's also indicative of Bethel's overall culture, which thrives upon core values such as risk, honor (particularly between generations), confrontation and empowerment. With 18,000-plus seats to fill in a state more than 2,000 miles away, Liebscher admits moving to the stadium level is risky: "I'm really encouraged with what the Lord's doing, but I don't live in fantasy land; I'm not naive as to how much influence we do or don't have. I'll take a risk and I want to dream, but this has got to be God."

Indeed, under the Bethel umbrella few things are gained without risk. Every day—whether in weekend services attended by almost 3,000 people or on weekdays at the 1,400-student School of Supernatural Ministry—someone echoes the mantra: If you want to see the Holy Spirit's power at work, you have to step out into

unfamiliar territory.

“Risk is one of the essential elements necessary to see God move supernaturally among His people,” Kris Vallotton, senior associate leader, explains. “Risk was written into the very nature of creation when God refused to childproof the Garden. Many churches, metaphorically speaking, cut down the second tree in the Garden and call that sanctification. But it’s difficult to be ready for the jungle when you train in the zoo. If you want to experience signs, wonder and miracles, you have to step over the line and take a risk. Miracles rarely happen in the comfort zone.”

For this reason, every Jesus Culture event features street ministry where students venture into malls, restaurants, grocery stores and coffee shops to follow the Holy Spirit’s direction and pray boldly for strangers. One of Bethel’s main evangelistic ministries involves “Treasure Hunts,” in which three to five people ask the Lord for words of knowledge, write them on a “treasure map,” follow the clues to a location and then pray for their ultimate “treasure”—a complete stranger who’s usually astounded when team members prove the encounter couldn’t have been devised. (Many strangers have been saved or healed from this.) Even Bethel’s introductory membership class involves newcomers boldly

praying for
people on the streets.

It wasn't always this way. Kevin Dedmon,
who leads the Treasure Hunt outreaches, remembers how the
early days of
revival at Bethel were often contained within church walls.
Though
powerful testimonies of salvation and healing were shared
regularly in
corporate services, they rarely featured "outside" accounts.
That
changed one Sunday during a worship service when Johnson asked
strictly
for testimonies of healing outside the church—and from that
point on,
people accepted the unspoken challenge to take the revival
into their
communities.

"Bill raised the bar with testimonies,"
Dedmon says. "Instead of telling people they had to, he did it
with
testimonies—and it gave everybody an appetite to want to go
and do it.
That became the new standard. It was vision-casting through
testimonies."

Have You Failed Today?

Bethel has seen extraordinary results by
cultivating risk-taking believers. Johnson prefers not to
publicly
report major miracles until they're verified, but he says it's
rare for a
week to pass without multiple reports of people healed from
deafness,
blindness, cancer and various other sicknesses and

disabilities.

Yet what sets Bethel apart from many churches that accentuate the healing ministry is the room its leadership publicly leaves for failure.

“We are not, by any stretch of the imagination, batting a thousand,” Vallotton says. “Amid the supernaturally charged atmosphere at Bethel, there are still people who leave without their miracle. Despite this, we continue to press in to the Lord for wisdom. Jesus healed everyone who came to Him and then said, ‘Greater works shall you do when I go to be with the Father.’ We still have a long ways to grow to meet the standard that our Savior died to obtain.”

Without downplaying the role of faith, the soft-spoken Johnson will frequently address this “other” side of healing from the pulpit with refreshing honesty. He’s also quick to counter the number of healings and other impressive statistics with a sobering reminder. “When this thing first broke out here, we lost 1,000 people,” he points out, referring to the mass exodus that occurred when he became senior pastor in 1996. “But I’d go through that any day of the week over and over again, because we got healing in exchange. It’s never been about how many people. The significance is important, and

significance isn't measured in fame. For us, significance is impacting the culture. That's our target."

Globe Trotters and Changers



If cultural impact is Bethel's measuring stick, it's clear the church is growing where it counts. Redding was once considered a mere Northern California truck stop and dubbed one of the worst places to live in California; since revival hit, Bethel has become a major force in a now-flourishing area and works closely with city officials to help the community continue to improve. The church and its schools send hundreds of students into the city each month to assist with upkeep, help to feed those living in poor neighborhoods, work with multiple schools and even throw block parties for children in various communities.

But it's the national and even global impact Bethel is making that has many of its leaders just as excited.

With its extension into cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth and Seattle, Jesus Culture is strategically targeting regions to raise the next generation of revivalists. Meanwhile, Bethel teams—from short-term mission teams to counselor groups that teach the church's specified Sozo and Shabar inner-healing programs—leave Redding almost weekly to minister

in countries across the globe. Global Legacy, Bethel's apostolic relational network, connects hundreds of revival leaders worldwide. And countless leaders under the Bethel umbrella have itinerate traveling ministries that, in recent years, have taken them everywhere from Fortune 500 boardrooms and Hollywood studios to royal palaces and presidential offices—with Bethel members literally counseling those who shape the nations of the world.

Vallotton sees this increased sphere of influence as a natural byproduct of revival: "To us the word *revival* means 'God's ability to superimpose His superior Kingdom supernaturally into every person's life and into every realm of society until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God.' ... A few years ago, the Lord taught us to live with a 100-year vision. He instructed us that we were to give up our ministry and embrace a legacy. From that day on, we began to consider how today's decisions would affect our children's children's children, and we decided it was our responsibility to leave a generation that we'd never see a world in revival."

With such a far-reaching perspective, it's obvious Jesus Culture—despite its impressive reach among young people these days—is just a sliver of the larger vision to

emerge from
the unique revival culture found in Redding.

“We don’t really see the revival that
we’re in as a youth-generation revival at all; it’s a
multigenerational
revival,” Dedmon says. “Our 4-year-olds go out and heal the
sick and
prophecy and have encounters with God. And some of our seniors
get out
with Jesus Culture and jump up and down with their grandkids.
... That’s
the beauty of this culture. Jesus Culture doesn’t have any
more appeal
than the nursery—it really doesn’t. It’s not that we devalue
it in any
way. It’s more like, ‘That’s *amazing*—and you should see our
nursery, or you should see our intercessory time.’”

Wherever and in whatever age group the
revival is most evident at Bethel today, Johnson takes
satisfaction in
seeing a community still committed to ushering in God’s
kingdom purposes
through hungry, burning hearts.

“We have to have people who are burning,
who can display the works of Christ—the purity and power both,
not
elevating one over the other. They have to work in tandem,” he
says.

“That’s what Jesus Culture and Banning are doing. He’s hit the
purity
thing hard; he’s hit the miracle thing hard. They’ve got
people who have
never done anything in their lives who’ve come to a meeting,
prayed for
a blind person and eyes are opened. That’s bizarre—but that’s

the life
that we do here at Bethel.”

Marcus Yoars is the editor of *Charisma*. Though he’s fellowshiped with hundreds of churches around the world, his visit to Bethel Church in March proved to him why it’s one of a kind.

To watch videos with worship and teaching from Bethel Church, visit

History’s Greatest Hour

Why this new breed of revivalists is so significant

By Banning Liebscher

In 1999, Wesley Campbell visited Bethel Church and quoted several statistics that began to open my eyes to understand the hour in which we are living: 

- The world's population didn't reach 1 billion until 1804.
- In 1960, 156 years later, that number tripled to 3 billion people.
- In 1999, 39 years after that, the world's population doubled to 6 billion people.
- There will soon be more people alive on the earth than the total number of all who have ever lived.

Along with the world's exploding population, the work of God is increasing with exponential growth. Campbell also shared the following statistics of the global Christian population:

- In 1999, one-third of everyone who had come to Christ since He ascended had done so in the previous 10 years.
- Each week, an estimated 1 million people accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- There will soon be more believers alive than everyone in history who has ever been saved.

This is inarguably the greatest hour in history, and you're invited to participate in the most monumental move of God the world has ever seen! This invitation isn't just for those in "full-time" ministry.

The new breed of revivalist emerging in

the earth today will not only stand behind pulpits, but will also step into every realm of society. For too long, the church has only validated those who enter into traditional church ministry and not realized that God wants to use every believer to turn the nations to Him.

At Jesus Culture conferences, this is one of our missions—not just to raise up preachers, but revivalists who are CEOs of multibillion-dollar companies; mothers who start up homes for unwed mothers; social workers who change how we care for our children; politicians who make laws that reflect the counsel of the Lord; judges who extend God's justice in the earth; and screenwriters who write movies that compel us to action for good.

There are more than just preachers among us; there are white-hot revivalists who will transform culture through resuscitating every realm of society.

You Say You Want a Revolution?

Bethel's rising generation of revivalists isn't afraid to give

the naked truth about sexual purity

Mention terms like *masturbation*, *STD* and *porn*  from most church pulpits and you'll likely encounter a sudden hush, followed by people squirming in their seats. But at Bethel, a growing ministry wants to get the church at least talking about such taboo topics of sexuality.

"If we don't, *someone* will," says Shelly Gibbs, director of Moral Revolution, a purity movement not content to offer pat answers when it comes to sex. "The world is screaming its message with pornography, crazy movies and magazines, and everything between—and the church isn't really saying anything. We just want to start talking about the issues."

To be fair, Gibbs and Moral Revolution founder Kris Vallotton are doing more than talking; their vision is to establish a radical counterculture of purity amid today's sex-saturated secular society. Birthed out of Vallotton's book by the same name, Moral Revolution involves an online community, website, telephone hotline, conferences and local accountability groups. In April the ministry partnered to launch a Christian dating service called On Day Six.

“We want to change mindsets,” Gibbs says. “Our whole thing is that actually, sex is good. God created it, you just need to learn to manage it—how to manage your appetite, how to save yourself, what that looks like, what’s the value in that.”

Established in 2009, Moral Revolution works closely with Jesus Culture, providing resources and leading breakout sessions during conferences.

“How can you create a culture of revivalists who are walking in purity? What would that look like?” Gibbs asks. “Moral Revolution is part of answering those questions. We share similar vision with Jesus Culture, working toward a goal of leaving a legacy for generations to come.”

For more information, visit [moralrevolution.org](#).