

Can Your House Be Haunted?

Evil spirits can possess people—but can they also inhabit places? We looked beyond the sensational to discover what the Bible says.

The Johnsons got a great deal on their home. They soon found out why: It was what some would call a “haunted house”—that is, a place where there was an uncomfortable and negative spiritual presence.

Some people are attracted to haunted houses because they’re different and exciting. Perhaps you’ve seen hotels that advertise: “Stay in our hotel. It has a real ghost!”

A supernatural presence may seem like a plus for people renting rooms, but for the owners of residences that house a demonic spirit, it’s usually anything but fun.

Experiences with demonic spirits in human habitations aren’t new. A 16th century prayer implored God: “From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us!” What makes things “go bump in the night”? There are three possible explanations.

Malevolent Presence of Satan

It could be that demons are present and misbehaving. Sometimes they propel objects at people, move furniture about or make various noises. At other times they create extreme temperatures—generally cold—or nauseating odors, or they may impede one’s ability to pray. Satan can come at us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The demons may have taken up residence for several reasons. One is because they were invited, either deliberately by someone who called on them to come or naively through games such as a Ouija board or tarot cards. Bishop Craig Bates of

the Charismatic Episcopal Church gives an example of the latter, telling of former parishioners who saw an evil presence manifesting as a blue mist descending and ascending their staircase.

The family had been into demonic board games. They rebuked the presence, and it left.

A pastor in Iowa told me about a girl in his church. She was trying to mix Christian commitment with rebellion. She conducted a witchcraft ritual in her home, believing it to be "naughty but harmless." For months thereafter she would awaken at night to see a horrible, ugly creature staring her in the face.

The Rev. Vernon Stoop, longtime executive director of Focus Renewal Ministries in the United Church of Christ, tells the story of a child who got nightmares every night. There was reportedly a "presence" in his room that frightened him. After he had been experiencing the trouble for a while, his parents, who were parishioners of Stoop's, learned that séances had previously been conducted in their home.

Stoop says, "We subsequently prayed through every room in the house, with particular emphasis on the son's room, praying in the Spirit." The son never had a nightmare again.

Harold Hammond, pastor of The Chapel of the Shepherd's Heart in Fairfax, Virginia, prayed for a medical missionary couple having unexplained problems. In prayer he discerned, "Egyptian gods." The wife remembered they had brought home some "tourist trophies," now packed away. "They retrieved them," Hammond says, "and we prayed over these items to break any power and burned them. The problem went away."

Another reason evil spirits may take up residence is because of a curse. Sometimes a curse is placed on a home or other building as revenge for something the occupants have done or as spiritual warfare against believers. Many ministers relate

that satanic leaders have told them, "We are calling Satan down on you."

Finally, demons may be present because of heinous crimes such as murder or rape, or from sexual orgies. When a crime is committed in a place, the demons that attend the evil may linger on.

In the face of a demonic presence, you must take action. Here are some positive steps to take to rid spiritual disturbance from a home, office, church or other place.

First, get right with the Lord and others. Before you talk about Satan, repent of all your sins. Confess them so that Satan has nothing with which to accuse you.

Second, put on your armor. In a riot it's not enough for a police officer to own a bulletproof vest. He has to wear it! Put on the armor of God (see Eph. 6:11-18).

Third, take authority in Jesus' name. Command anything of Satan to leave.

Finally, pray for the place to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

I co-lead New Creation Healing Center in Plaistow, New Hampshire, a place in which we bring together medicine, Christian counseling, massage and prayer to minister wholeness in Christ to the whole person. We find that unless we regularly cleanse the building spiritually, things go wrong and we find it hard to focus on the Lord.

We cleanse it by going through the building commanding any powers of Satan to leave and by asking God's presence to fill the place. Even nonbelievers comment on the sweet spirit in our building afterward.

Additionally, we ask an ordained minister to conduct a communion service. Though Christians differ in their theological understanding of Holy Communion, all Christians

believe that communion celebrates Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who died, shedding His blood to set believers free. Taking communion reminds us and the evil spirits of the power and authority of Jesus' atoning blood.

When we cleanse our building, we also sing praises to God, which encourages the demons to leave.

A Masquerading Spirit

Things may also "go bump in the night" because a demon is masquerading as a person now deceased. The demon gains entrance when a person refuses to acknowledge a loved one has died.

Deacon Dick Lamb, long a leader in charismatic renewal in the Roman Catholic Church on Long Island, New York, told me the story of a woman who asked her husband to come back and visit her after he died. She reported she felt touching sensations in bed and assumed it was her husband honoring her request, but it soon became apparent these sensations were not comforting to her.

Charismatic Episcopal Church Bishop Michael Davidson told me of a Christian woman who had lost her husband. She claimed he "visited me, even putting his hand upon my back—but the experience was 'cold.'"

We can understand the desire of people to hold on to the presence of loved ones now deceased, but it is essential for them to let the loved ones go—to stop setting a place at the table for them, to give away their clothing, to describe them as "dead," not "gone away."

This is why at the graveside I ask people to put dirt on their loved one's casket after it is placed in the grave. It says graphically, "This person has died."

We can recount with gladness what they meant to us. But God

has ruled out séances or any similar attempts at contacting the departed (see Deut. 18:9-12). The New Testament tells us that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (see Gal. 5:20-21; Rev. 22:15).

How do you minister in cases such as this? You lovingly but firmly encourage people to move on with their lives, letting the deceased go. Having a memorial on the anniversary of the loved one's death is one way of transferring the honor and respect from an inappropriate holding on to an honoring of the one who is now departed.

You tell the survivors that what they are experiencing is the presence not of loved ones but of masquerading spirits. "But he knows the details of our marriage," a widow might object.

Though evil spirits don't know everything, they do know some things, and if they've been assigned to monitor you they know a lot about your loved one and your relationship.

Frequently God will allow Christian loved ones to appear once, just after their death, to assure survivors that they are now made whole and in the presence of God. This is good and of God. But such appearances, when they happen, are singular occurrences.

The woman Davidson described was not having this type of God-encounter; she was dealing with a masquerading spirit. "We bound the spirit after the wife renounced trying to communicate with the dead," Davidson says. "She never had another encounter, and joy filled her home."

The key is that you command the spirit to leave until it does. Sometimes, however, the spirit is not a masquerading loved one but someone else.

The Rev. Bill Blomquist, now of Texas, tells of an incident that occurred when he and his wife lived in Colorado. Their house's previous occupants told them that a little girl would

walk around the house dressed a certain way. They themselves had seen her.

One night, the Blomquists and some Christian friends who were with them sensed evil in the house, especially in the basement. One of the guests went to a corner of the basement and picked up what looked like an old rag. It was a little girl's dress, like the one the previous owners had seen on the "ghost."

"We had the discernment that the real girl had been molested down there," Bill Blomquist told me, "and perhaps the demon had integrated the girl's trauma into itself as it roamed around the house. After this time of prayer and praise we never had a visit from the 'ghost girl' again."

Whether the demon is masquerading as a loved one or as someone else, we do not have to suffer this experience. We take authority in Jesus' name and command the spirit to depart.

The Unquiet Dead

Many Spirit-filled pastors and Bible teachers throughout the church speculate that a third reason for unquietness in a place is the presence of the souls of unsaved people who died without being commended to the Lord.

They believe their souls are trapped here until someone tells them to go to God for their eternal fate. They're not demons trying to harm us or spirits trying to enter into a relationship with us, but souls seeking our help to be freed from being trapped on earth.

In my years in the inner-healing ministry I have worked with numerous women who were troubled with psychological and spiritual ailments. In some cases they had delivered a stillborn child or committed abortion.

Often the remains of their children had been discarded without

their naming the child or commending him or her to God. In such cases, when we've named the child and commended him or her to God using the same prayers I use for deceased adults, significant healing has taken place. (In the case of abortion the sin also has to be acknowledged and repented of and God's forgiveness has to be asked.)

Spiritually mature Christians with a gift of discernment can sense there is a presence in places such as battlefields. Retired professor Walter Barge told me that as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam he was aware of presences as he flew over certain places. He later discovered each was a battle scene where many had died.

British missionary surgeon Dr. Kenneth McAll was once asked to minister to a man hospitalized with incurable cross-dressing, gender-confusion issues. He researched the family history and discovered the man had a twin sister who was stillborn.

The family never thought a funeral would be necessary for one who was born dead, and the surviving brother was never told of her existence. After the discovery, McAll had a funeral performed for the sister. Some days later the mental hospital called saying the man had suddenly changed and was ready to be taken home.

In his book *Deliverance From Evil Spirits* highly renowned healing leader Francis MacNutt tells us to "set the wandering souls at rest." But I'm cautious theologically so it took a firsthand experience of the unquiet dead for me to admit that this theory might have some validity.

Years ago I was ministering in Florida. Florence, a gracious, intelligent widow heard me speak about the believer's authority over darkness. She went to her pastor, the Rev. Bob Doing, with her story.

For years she had seen an Indian man standing at the foot of her bed each night. He was not threatening and did not speak.

She told him to go away, but he didn't. In her bathroom was a woman kneeling, combing the hair of a little girl, and with another child standing nearby.

"How do I get rid of them?" she asked. Her home was in Lehigh Acres, Florida, a new town carved out of the high glades over which the Calusa Indians had roamed. We theorized that long before Florence and her husband built their home there, the Calusa family she had been seeing at night had come to a tragic end.

We went to her house and performed a funeral from her church's book of services for the Indian family. The encounters ceased. Her pastor concluded: "I learned the wisdom the church gained through the ages is right for yesterday and today and forever."

Some Christians may object to the theory that unsaved souls must be commended to God. Their first response will be, "Where's that in the Bible?"

The truth is, as Pentecostals and charismatics we experience many things in our church services and supernaturally that are of God but are not spelled out in Scripture. Where do we find in Scripture, for example, the practice of having altar calls? What about the experience of receiving gold fillings in one's teeth during a spiritual meeting?

Though we must not believe or practice anything that is forbidden in Scripture, many things that are of God are not specifically cited in His Word (see John 20:30). We must approach anything that Scripture neither mandates nor forbids with openness and humility.

Others may hypothesize that these "trapped souls" are really demons pretending to be lost souls. Yet several people have told me that when they use a funeral service, they get results—though performing exorcisms or commanding in Jesus' name don't solve the problem. Commanding a demon to leave will

not change things if there is no demon to dispel.

Remember: The theory about trapped souls is simply that—a theory. But you will neither violate a commandment of God nor summon evil spirits if you conduct a funeral for a person who has died.

As believers, we don't have to put up with things that go bump in the night. We can, in Jesus' name, take authority over them—whatever their cause—and ask God to fill the places His people inhabit.

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