

REVIVALISTS BECOMING FATHERS

Revivalists Becoming Fathers: Bill Johnson (5/15/05)

This morning I'm actually going to speak a similar message that I spoke this last Thursday night, which was during the School of Ministry retreat. I can't duplicate what took place that night; it wouldn't be appropriate, actually. It was a commissioning meeting and the anointing that was there had a specific twist for the people that were there. But there's something that continues in my heart for this day that I can't shake off.

Let me give you just a little bit of a setting so that more than just the School of Ministry students will know what I'm referring to and talking about. We are in a season of accelerated growth. How many of you have heard that word before? You may have heard it a hundred times in the last five or ten years. It's just a season of accelerated growth. We see it in the sciences and in technology.

There's a principle that we read in Scripture in 1 Corinthians 15 that says, "First the natural, then the spiritual." Things have to be applicable in the natural realm for them to be validated as true. For example, the Bible says, "If you say you love your God who you can't see and hate your brother that you can see, then you're lying." Your love for God has to be measurable in your love for people. There are lessons that are experienced in the natural realm that are immediately transferable into spiritual truths and realities. One of the most significant is the subject of fatherhood. Now, just for clarification, when I mention fatherhood, we're not just talking about men being fathers, but men and women. The whole issue of fatherhood and motherhood in the Kingdom of God is really a crucial subject on the heart of God.

I have had a sense that has been on my heart for a long time. About eighteen months ago, I had a word from the Lord that was as close to audible as you can get without it breaking the sound barrier (if you know what I mean). It was so distinct and so clear that when I look back I wonder if it was audible. It was one of those unique moments; I've had very few of those in my life. He spoke and He said, "It's time to give attention to sons. It's time; it's time to turn the attention towards those that you are raising up." Now, it's not as though we haven't been, yet there's an emphasis and a priority that I believe I am supposed to declare.

This morning I'm going to talk for a while. I feel like I'm supposed to, actually, make declarations over us as a house because the Lord is looking to raise up spiritual mothers and fathers at a dimension that we've never known or seen before.

When God created the world, Satan fell from heaven and darkness covered the planet, we know that the Lord put Adam and Even in the garden He had created. He created them as a mother and father because their assignment was to have children, who would have their own children, going on from generation to generation. Eventually, through their obedience to the Lord, they would be able to subdue everything that's outside of that garden until the powers of hell are broken and destroyed. God easily could have done it by Himself, but He chose to do it through those made in His image that had chosen to love Him and to be worshippers. The context is set so that the beginning of God's program on the planet started with a mom and dad, with "fathers." Now, what I'm going to talk about today applies obviously in the home, but

my concern is not the home right now. I always want the home to be happy and healthy. My focus this morning is not your family, husband, wife, children; my focus is really the role that we have to be spiritual mothers and fathers on the earth.

The problem is that we tend to compare ourselves among ourselves and, so then we have a lot of generals. Kris gave a statistic at the end of the first service that I've never heard before, but it's absolutely stunning. If one person sees a crime, there is a 97% he or she will call the police. If two people see it, 87% will call. If ten people see it, it goes down to 14%. The more people that get involved in the circumstance, the less personal responsibility people take for what's happening. Which shows us, the more the church grows, the easier it is for people to hide from responsibility. It should be the opposite. How many of you know the Kingdom of God is opposite of the kingdoms of this world: you die to live, you give to receive, and you humble yourself to be exalted. It's just the way the Kingdom works.

Here is one tremendous example on how this thing works: everyone in this room has some capacity to father and mother someone else spiritually as long as you're a born-again believer. When I talked to you about comparing ourselves, this is what happens: we have so many generals in the family that it's easy for people to think, "Well, when I know as much as they do, or I have as strong an anointing as they have, then I'm really going to extend my tent and really disciple and help people." The tragedy is that I could take most any person in this room with me on a trip, plant you in a foreign field where they don't have the luxury of the spiritual wealth or the inheritance that you live in day after day after day, and in that setting you would discover the storehouse that God has made you. When I put you over your head, you'd begin to draw from things that you never knew were there. We pray better when we're in over our head.

Suddenly, in that environment, you'd find yourself ministering at an anointing level that you did not know existed. You teach things you did not realize you knew, and it's not just God speaking what to say into your ear, He's reminding you of what's already been planted in you. This is very important because as long as we stay in a place where we compare ourselves with our heroes, then we're never going to do anything. We just sit back and wait for them to do and it have an 87% to 14% deal. Fewer and fewer people respond with personal responsibility. We can take almost anybody in this room, plant you in a certain environment, and you'd be stunned by what came out of you to not only change individuals, but also families and cities! You carry something in the Lord that must be given away; every person has a responsibility to father. So here we have the beginning of God's plan with Adam and Eve. The whole thing was focused around fatherhood and motherhood to raise up children who will raise up children, who will raise up children that will expand the boundaries of this garden until the entire planet is back under God's rule. That was the plan, but how did He plan to do it? It did it through a father and a mother.

When the Lord chose Abram and renamed him Abraham, brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and sent him to a place where he would be the father of a nation, He spoke to him. First of all, his name means "extraordinary father," "father of nations," "father of many." The Lord said that Abraham would be a blessing to every nation in the world. Then in Genesis 12 He went even further and said not only every nation, but every family on the planet! Now, that's an extraordinary promise to have one man create a domino effect of blessing so that every single family on the planet could be affected by this one person's life. We've got to rethink the value

of an individual and what one individual can do. Your name may never be remembered—that's not important. The effect is what's important. Is there a domino effect from what God has done in you? Have you faithfully deposited and released that to the people around you, the people that God has given you influence over?

You see, there's a day coming when we will all stand before the Lord. I don't pretend to know how it's going to happen, but I see the tribes of Israel that existed in the Old Testament. I see tribes in the body of Christ that are very similar. I see the people of God standing there before the throne under their tribal banners. There's a tribal thing over this city that's glorious. It's not a divisive thing and there's not one that is better than the other. It's realizing who you're called to be, who you're called to be related to and then thriving in the uniqueness of that assignment. It is never in competition, but complementary to the other tribes.

I have such a deep respect and love for the church leaders around this city that all I want to do is complement what they're doing and they complement what we're doing. I just see us standing underneath this tribal banner, thousands upon thousands upon thousands. When you stand there, you'll be able to look into the eyes of one of those that you spent years with, and you'll see the price that they paid. You'll also meet some that you've never seen before, but you'll know them, not just by a word of knowledge, but you'll know them because you'll be able to tell who led them to the Lord. It was that friend of yours and the grace that's on his or her life that affected that person's life. You'll know them as a spiritual descendent of your friend. It's going to be a unique moment, because we will stand there before the Lord celebrating His goodness, celebrating our uniqueness, and the faithfulness to the call that every person embraced. But here's the hitch: you and I've been given an assignment to reproduce. Reproduction is one of the most normal things in the world. If married couples don't have children, it's either because there's no intimacy, there's some sort of physical obstruction, or they have no vision, which is called "birth control." Spiritually speaking, there are a lot of churches on birth control. The responsibility to reproduce who we are cannot wait. You've heard people say that the only people qualified to have children are grandparents. They've had enough experience and now they know what they're doing, yet all you need to be is a day older than the one you're working with. As we raise up a generation to go after God, we just need to be a step ahead. This idea of trying to reach a status before we pour ourselves out to disciple and raise up people is really a tragedy and a shame because there's so much richness in you that has to be reproduced.

Judson Cornwall gave an illustration some years ago that I really liked. He was a pastor at the time and they were building a sanctuary and church facility. He wasn't a carpenter or builder, but he wanted to help. They knew he didn't know much, so they said, "Well, just cut all of these boards to be six feet long." So, he's got this whole stack of lumber there and he takes the tape measure and measures out six feet. He cuts the boards to be six feet. Then instead of using the tape measure, he just uses the six foot board and puts it on top of the next board, and he marks it right along the edge and cuts the next board. Then he takes the newly cut board and puts it on the next one. All the builders are going, "What a dummy." By taking the freshly cut board each time, every newly cut one is about an eighth-inch longer than the previous one. After you've done about a hundred boards, you're getting seven and eight-foot boards instead of six.

The problem is that the Gospel that we see and live today has been using that model for about two thousand years. We've got a model that's about eight feet longer than what it ought to be and that's why God's been chipping away at this thing to bring us back to an authentic gospel. Then when we measure, it's measured according to the measuring rod that He gives us and not the measuring rod of lives that didn't work. It's one thing to reinvent the wheel. It's another to reinvent a square wheel. Think about it. We keep mimicking lives that don't work. Paul said, "Follow me as I follow Christ." His point was, "You mimic my life. I'm going to mimic Him. Let's keep the standard all the way down." So if Paul accurately mimics Christ, and Timothy accurately mimics Paul, then Timothy is copying Christ. This isn't that complicated. Here's the assignment: every person in the house has a privilege and responsibility to raise up children according to your place in God.

So Adam and Eve started as a mother and father. Abraham was the father of nations. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is called the Everlasting Father in the book of Isaiah. This goes on into the New Testament. The whole issue of discipling and raising up others is one of the biblical mandates of every person. The great prize on that day is not going to be given to someone who gets the most people healed, or even the most people born again. The real test is, "What did I do with what I was given?" I'm very thankful for my heritage, and I'm very thankful for what the Lord has given me through my family line. However, there are a lot of people that think wrongly about this. They think, "You know, when it comes to reward, Bill's got such a head-start. He's fifth generation pastor, he's got so much going for him." No, the reward isn't based on what I was given; it's based on what I did with what I was given. The reward needs to be important to you because one day it will also be the most important thing to you. There will be nothing else of value to you in that one moment. Suddenly, in that one moment, wood, hay and stubble, silver, gold and precious stones are really going to look different. You're going to wish there's a whole bunch more of this and a whole bunch less of that.

So here's the privilege and responsibility: How is it that we fulfill this commission that the Lord has given us? How is accelerated growth possible? It's possible simply because of the ability to reproduce ourselves. Martin Scott gave us a word about two years. He said, "We need to start turning our attention towards not just giving birth to sons and daughters, but giving birth to mothers and fathers." Literally, our intent with people is that they would reproduce. This is huge. Think about it. The Lord calls us to mimic Him, and then turn and find others that will follow you. That's not a self-centered thing. In fact, as soon as it gets self-centered, your kingdom falls apart. But the Lord has commissioned us to pour out our lives into other people. The challenge that He has given is to give away everything you get. You know, I'm gone a hundred and forty days a year from the place that I love the most, which is right here. The reason I'm gone is because there's a responsibility to give away what we have. It takes that many days to give it away. You only get to keep what you give away. The way you stay current in the things of the Lord is that you pour yourself out for someone else's sake. Everyone in this room is the best Christian that somebody knows.

If I can take you back to Adam and Eve in the Garden . . . I know that they blew it when they sinned and it broke up the assignment that they had been given in the same way that God had intended, but what if they wouldn't have sinned? Their success would have been measured by them having children who were taught to be parents themselves. Because no matter how many children they would have had, it wouldn't have been enough to cover the globe with the rulership of His delegated ones. It would only happen if they raised up children that in the

process learned to be parents who would have children, raise them up to be parents who would have children, etc. Do you understand what I'm trying to say here? The whole point is that we must think in terms of pouring our lives into people so they can be parents themselves and reproduce the grace of God that's on their life.

We're going to look at two portions of Scripture. Go first with me to Malachi 2. We're going to read a passage of Scripture here that's a little bit different. It's actually a verse that's a very pointed verse on marriage, but there's a principle in here I'd like to steal for this subject today. Verse 15 of Malachi 2: "But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring." I think this is so incredibly profound. He said, "Didn't He make them one?" What is he talking about? Husband and wife. The two become one flesh. He said, "Now isn't He the one that made them one?" Yeah. "And He gave them a measure of His Spirit?" Yeah. "So why did He do it?" He wanted Godly offspring. Why did God take two people and make them one? Why didn't He just make them really good associates, remaining two and working together really well? He decided to make them one because He knew that in their unity, He would have the greatest chance for a Godly offspring. Are you guys getting this? The context for healthy reproduction is unity. You may not think of this in terms of discipling, discipling nations and raising up people after Christ, but one of the healthiest things you can do is love the person you're sitting next to. It's to make sure that you're void of offense and that we wake up every day with the intention of forgiving whoever offends us. Somehow, by extending that very practical aspect of the Christian life and living relationally free of offense in a loving, supportive and encouraging environment, spiritual health explodes.

"Why did He make them one?" You know that husbands and wives are one, but did you also know that you are united with Christ? Did you know that you are united with other brothers and sisters? The Bible says we are members of one another. The similarities are striking. Why would God make us one? It's because He wants Godly offspring. The reason He made it possible for us to live in perfect harmony and peace is because the most natural byproduct of that is good and godly offspring.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2. We'll read one more portion. Verse 1 and 2: "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." There's a cycle here that I already illustrated with the cutting of the boards. If we use the exact same measurement for every board all the way through the project, then the building is precise. The house of God must be precise. It's the precise representation of Christ. To represent Him, it must be precise. The authentic Gospel has certain evidences, certain things that come along with it where God says, "Amen," to the correct message or to the correct lifestyle. There are certain demonstrations of the presence, glory, power and love of God that are evident and seen in the authentic Gospel. So, God is whittling us away from boards that are way too long back to an authentic Gospel. That's what He's been working on. He's been working to close the distance from how you and I live on a day-to-day basis that is way better than it used to be. We're seeing more happen than I've ever seen before, but still there's a distance between how I live and how Jesus lived, and the result of His life and the result of my life. Yet, He was the One who prophesied and promised there's a day coming when we would do greater works than these.

So, we come down to this. Last week I talked to you about passion and we ended the service with a statement that went something like this: If your Christian life is known for its discipline, you will be admired. But if it's known for its passion, you'll be contagious. Fathers and mothers need this one element to make them continuously successful in discipling and raising up other people. Passion is one of the most absolutely necessary elements of the Christian life. It's tragic when Christianity is reduced to discipline. I'm not opposed to discipline. Discipline is kind of like a backstop that catches stray pitches so you don't have to chase them for a mile. It keeps it within the playing field. Discipline is a good thing. It's an important aspect. It's like the tracks that the train "passion" rides on. It gives it a direction and a focus. Yet, discipline by itself is a tragic picture of the Christian life. People who are more disciplined than they are passionate have a very hard time reproducing themselves, because when you reproduce by discipline, you try to get others as disciplined as you are. You know what? People with passion discipline themselves. A man with only discipline makes decisions through his day, "Well, I'm not going to do that, I'm not going to do this. I'm going to put my time here; I'm going to put my time there." He works so hard to say "yes" to all the right things.

A person with passion just crosses off a whole bunch of options: "Don't have time for that, don't have time for that." Why? "Because I'm burning right here. Why in the world would I want to do that? It's not that that's evil; it's just that I don't have enough time. I don't have enough of my life to spare. Everything I've got is needed for this one thing that I burn for." You show me somebody like that and I'll show you somebody who's contagious and reproducible.

There's a shift going on in this realm of fathering. We call it "revivalists." We've tried to lay out a ten-year vision, and one of the passions that we have is to raise up thousands of revivalists, who are people that burn. Yes, you have the character, discipline, and demonstrative power, but most importantly, they burn with a holy passion. Those people are easy to reproduce because they're contagious. They're also scary. I either become like them, or I get run over by them.

Thirty-some years ago when I was struggling, the thing that turned me around was that I met people my age who were passionate for Jesus. It just wrecked me forever. I honestly have never, ever recovered. I remember just getting exposed to them when I was nineteen or twenty years old. They had a passion I didn't know anything about. Anything. I hadn't seen it in anybody my age. They just burned. I have been forever ruined. I have never lost the fire since that moment of stepping into it. It jumped on me. It was on them, and I was in the way! I can tell you the truth: it's so much more fun to be driven with fire than it is to be driven by self-will and good intentions.

So here's the deal: everybody in this room has a challenge. Find a group of people to share your heart with. You'll see the eyes burn of the ones you pour yourself into. One of the tragedies of Christian life is we don't know the difference between outreach and relationship-building. In outreach, I minister to everyone and anyone. Their condition or problems don't matter to me. I'm just going to serve them. As you can imagine, we work with people that get saved one day, but are totally backslidden the next. That cycle just goes on forever! Still, we're just going to love them anyway.

I remember hearing a story on KBIP probably twenty years ago, on "Unshackled." A man who was an alcoholic on the streets came into a rescue mission and got saved. He did that

seventeen times. He came in and did fine for a few weeks, but then went out and fell away again. However, the eighteenth time it took. Now the guy runs a rescue mission himself! I thought, "Man, what a great story. That's the reason we just keep loving people no matter what."

So, I'm going to pour myself out for anybody and everybody. That's what I want to do. However, when it comes to relationship and discipling, just look for the faithful. I'm telling you, there is wisdom in finding the faithful. You say, "Well, what about the others?" If you get enough of the faithful going in one direction, they'll create a draft. They'll suck in innocent bystanders who are drawn into this fire saying, "I've got this fire too! What is it? I'm ready to take a bullet for something! What is it for?" I'm serious, it happens. I've watched this for years. You just get enough people, pour yourself into the faithful, and suddenly there's a movement. It's called, "Godly Peer Pressure." It's the right way to live. Suddenly a movement begins with people that have poured themselves out for the King and for one another. It's not a cliquish or closed group; it's just we've poured ourselves out and we've built a relationship with the faithful.

Who was Timothy? He was the faithful son to Paul. Paul said, "Now, you do what I did to you. Find the faithful and pour into them. And then they'll find the faithful." What are we doing? We're cutting the board at the same length every time, so that over the next hundred years, if the Lord Jesus doesn't return, instead of deforming the Gospel by boards that were cut improperly, we give an accurate representation of who Jesus is. It's fatherhood; it's motherhood. It's who we are. It's giving a clear picture of a fire that burns in us and doing whatever we can simply to give it away. It's the privilege of every believer. In fact, it's not just the privilege, it's the responsibility. It's going to be important on that day. Trust me; it's going to be important that there are multitudes of people that are your spiritual offspring, those who will carry the grace that has been on your life.

Each of the four Gospels has a flavor to it that is according to the writer of that Gospel: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Their personalities, values, and priorities are seen in each. They were not in opposition to Kingdom values, simply original. Matthew's concern was for the Jews, so he would not write "the kingdom of God," but "the kingdom of heaven," because using the name of God so frequently was an offense to the Jews. The first miracle he recorded was about touching a leper. Why? Because to the Jew, that was the most offensive thing possible. You don't touch a leper because you become unclean. Yet, Jesus touched the leper and what happens? The leper becomes clean. So, we have uniqueness in each.

Mark was written to the Romans. It was the "businessman's gospel." The word "immediately" is in there many times because he doesn't sit and talk about a lot of ideas; he just takes you from one scene to the other. There are no genealogies. He didn't have time but thought, "Just know He came and was born. That's all you need to know." Mark just has a flavor to it.

You've got the same thing with Luke. Luke's attention to detail, sicknesses, diseases, and women, in particular, is unique to him. Why? He's a doctor, and his identity permeated what he wrote. It's called scripture, anointed by God, yet it has Luke's flavor to it.

Then we have John, the mystic. He gave a genealogy, "In the beginning was God." Here's John in the heavenlies with an eagle that's soaring about. He presents a gospel that takes place in

just a few days. The others covered three-and-a half years. John's got chapters on fourteen hours! It's bizarre. He's a mystic and his personality shone through.

When I say, on that day you'll stand and notice the spiritual offspring, it's because the Lord is not offended by your Godly personality influencing the flavor of your anointing. One of the first vision things I've ever had in my life was when I was in Weaverville and I'd only been there for a about a year. I was back in my office praying before Sunday morning service. I was kneeling in my office and praying for what would be happening that day. As I was kneeling there, I had my hands raised and was just worshipping the Lord. I learned early on (I'm indebted to my dad for this) that you get a whole lot more done just by worshipping Jesus than you do by striving and trying to figure everything out. So I'm just worshipping the Lord and I had this picture come into my mind of taking a crown and putting it on His head. Now, the crown that I saw was a mirror-finish gold crown, nothing in it, just this flat gold crown. That's why I believe it was from the Lord because that's not what I would have pictured. I put this on His head in my worship, and when I moved my hands away. I was bummed because I could see my fingerprints on that mirror-finish. This is exactly what I thought, "Oh, my humanity tarnished my worship." Then I looked again and each fingerprint turned into a jewel.

The uniqueness of your gift, your grace, that which flows through your life, that which is undefiled by sin and personal agendas, that thing that just is you is treasured by Him. I hear young, passionate people pray ridiculous prayers sometimes. You don't have to be young to pray it. You can pray it when you're eighty. I've heard, "Oh God, none of me and all of you." No, He had none of you before He made you. He didn't like it. That's why He made you. How about all of you covered by all of Him? That's the real deal right there. There's uniqueness to your personality, your gift and your grace, and it's valuable to Him. He made every one of us just a little bit different so that you're the only "you" that's ever been born. You have a flavor of grace flowing through your life that no one else has. We were made in the image of God, correct? Do you know that every individual in this room represents an aspect of His nature that no other person ever created could represent? There's actually a part of His nature that is seen in you that will never be seen in another person. You are that unique. We were not cookie cutters that were stamped out and made in His image. Because of His extraordinary nature, there's enough of Him to go around so that everyone could be made in His image representing a different aspect of His nature. Each could never be duplicated. So I believe on that day you'll stand and spiritually see somebody you've never met, yet you'll know them by the Spirit. They'll look just like that friend of yours that you had coffee with week after week after week. You can say, "Oh, you're John's son, aren't you? He must have led you to Christ because you look just like him." There's that fragrance of grace.

See, whether you realize it or not, every person in this room is being trained to recognize and know people by the Spirit. I pray for that day to accelerate for us because in this day and age, we know people in the flesh and it really restricts our expectations of each other. Allison, one of our students, said she loves to hear prophecies given to other people. She loves to hear other people's words. Kris asked her why and she said, "Because then I know how to treat them as they're becoming, not as they are." Think in terms of what God's doing in them. We did that with our children when they were very, very small. We always spoke to them in light of who they were becoming not with their restrictions.

It is a great privilege to reproduce ourselves. Every person here is valuable before the Lord, and what you carry is unique and valuable. There's a flavor in your life that's worth pouring into somebody else. It's a flavor of uniqueness with your experience and insight—it has to be spread around!

This morning I just want to announce to you that the time of fathering and mothering has come. It's time to rise to the call and the responsibility to pour ourselves out. It should never be to get a name or a title. I couldn't care less about any of that. Somehow, we just have to give away everything we have. My heart burns so much to see the church equipped to do this. It's just what we think about. When I go out and travel, speak at a conference, or whatever I'm doing, I have a lot more fun telling your stories than in telling mine. In fact, generally, I'll share four or five of your stories and only one of mine. There's something about fatherhood that delights in the children's successes. Brothers compete, but fathers delight in their kids excelling. Both of my sons' athletic abilities were so amazing to me. I loved athletics in school. I played baseball quite well and football and basketball as well. My goal was to play professional ball. I batted .482 and thought that was tremendous, but when my son Eric came along and batted .586, beating my score, I was the happiest person I knew. I was in the crowd with the camera filming.

Brian would hit a home run as a freshman on the Varsity team. We'd get it on film and I'd be in the stands going, "Whose son is that? Whose boy is that? Mine!" There's none of the attitude that says, "Man, he just whooped my record. He got more home runs than I did." No, instead it's, "Yeah! Whose son is that?" Every game, from little league on, I'd go, "Whose kid is that? Who's the father of that child? This is amazing!" Wouldn't it be nice for you to speak into somebody's life, your name never known until heaven, yet that child becomes the next Billy Graham? In heaven, all their offspring will have your flavor!